THE INVISIBLE LEVER
A Profile of Leadership and Management Talent in Education

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ABOUT THE AUTHORS
Education Pioneers mobilizes and prepares a national network of talented leaders and managers to accelerate excellence in education and transform our education system into one that equips all students with the skills they need to thrive in college, career, and life. Through the organization's Fellowship and Alumni programs, Education Pioneers increases the talent supply of top leaders in education to improve the leadership capacity in key education organizations—such as school districts, charter school organizations, and nonprofits—and to advance our goal to make education the best-led and -managed sector in the U.S.

More information about Education Pioneers can be found at www.educationpioneers.org.

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THE INVISIBLE LEVER: A Profile of Leadership and Management Talent in Education

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TRANSFORMING SCHOOLS AND CLASSROOMS ISN’T A NEW IDEA. WE’VE BEEN HARD AT IT FOR DECADES, WITH LIMITED PROGRESS AND MUCH STILL TO DO. IF WE HOPE TO DO MUCH BETTER GOING FORWARD, EFFORTS TOWARD REFORM WILL NEED TO BE MATCHED WITH SERIOUS ATTENTION TO THE WAYS SCARCE TIME, TALENT, TOOLS, AND MONEY ARE USED IN SCHOOLS AND DISTRICTS.

Yet the vast majority of the nation’s 14,000 school districts and state education agencies have operated with remarkably little attention to the crucial district staff who manage the realities of education delivery and who can help educators make better use of limited means.

Indeed, when push comes to shove, much school improvement seems to boil down to finding more great school leaders and teachers, and then asking them to find their way through the frustrating webs of rules, routines, and bureaucratic inertia that have stymied a generation of improvement efforts.

Yes, we need more great teachers and school leaders, and to better support the ones we do have. But that’s only a start. We also need policies that put educators in a position to succeed. We need smart approaches to transparency, accountability, choice, teacher evaluation, and the rest. In stops and starts, reformers have worked over the past two decades to promote those policies (though some efforts have been a lot smarter than others).

But we need a third thing—state and local leaders able to take advantage of new policies and provide great educators and school leaders with the tools, flexibility, and support they need to succeed. In Cage-Busting Leadership, I argue that tackling this problem requires leaders in schools, systems, and states who are focused on making far better use of time, talent, tools, and money—and “The Invisible Lever” helps to offer a vision of how to do just that.

On this third count, in particular, we have a pretty dismal track record. Those working in areas like HR, IT, accounting, or the general counsel’s office have long been dismissed in districts and state education agencies as those folks working in “operations” (as opposed to the “real educators” in instruction). Those marginalized in operations have drawn scant interest from education leadership gurus, schools of education, or the reform community.

The cost has been immense. Education Pioneers is one critical player to help us do better. And in “The Invisible Lever,” they start to share some of the key lessons they’ve learned over the past several years.
The report offers three findings, and I find each cause for optimism—and each deserving of the thoughtful treatment it gets in the pages ahead. They are:

**FINDING 1:** A new wave of managers and leaders is stepping forward to address the significant need for skilled managerial talent in public education—but many more are still needed.

**FINDING 2:** Although running excellent school systems and education organizations is incredibly challenging, the sector offers significant management opportunities in general and for leaders of color.

**FINDING 3:** More than ever, education leaders and managers must have sharp analytical skills so they can work effectively with both business and student outcomes data to make important strategic, operational, and instructional decisions.

It’s long overdue that these issues receive the kind of careful consideration we’ve long lavished on instructional questions. And it’s long past time that we move beyond the hoary notion that school improvement is either about instructional leadership or attention to these critical questions, and acknowledge that any sane strategy of improvement will necessarily encompass both.
A central theme runs through the heart of every single debate about public education: how will we get from here to there? How will we move from a school system that clearly isn’t living up to our expectations and students’ needs, toward one that prepares all our children for the future?

No matter the “how,” the common thread is “we.”

As a public service, education is powered by its people. Who are the people who will carry out this important work? And how do we prepare and support those individuals? What knowledge and skills do they need, and how can we ensure that they will be able to impart that knowledge and those skills to the students—and to the teachers and administrators and other staff—who need them?

Fundamentally, the heart of education reform lies in figuring out how to organize and manage the incredible skills and dedicated work of educators in a way that gives our children the optimal chance of success. With so much of our society resting on the foundations of childhood learning, public education simply must get this human endeavor right. Put another way:

**We owe it to our children to transform education into the best-led and -managed sector in the U.S.**

This management challenge is what we at Education Pioneers call the “invisible lever” in education reform: behind-the-scenes work that is valuable because it shapes education policy, culture, and instruction, and affects students and teachers. The need for such educational talent is great—not just in classrooms, but also in administrative offices and boardrooms, where decisions are made about policies, resources, curriculum, and so forth. These roles, and the people in them, are crucial in optimizing the way our nation’s human-powered, service-oriented education system is organized and maximizing its impact. Skilled leaders and managers support educators and other staff to be as effective as possible, allowing them to achieve outstanding outcomes for students and making the most productive use of the limited public dollars available to them.

Such leaders and managers are urgently needed not only in the public school districts that educate the vast majority of our children, but also in the other organizations that make up the broader educational ecosystem: charter school operators, regional and state agencies, research firms, nonprofits, educational technology companies, associations, foundations, policy advocates, and more. While the work that teachers do inside a classroom directly influences student learning, a wealth of others influence the way that
schools and classrooms are run, along with the policies and resources that set the context for teaching and learning, the support services and technological tools that are available, and so forth.

The quality of our talent influences the student outcomes schools are able to achieve. The impact of teacher quality on student achievement is well known, but research has also found that school leadership—often defined as the principal of a school but increasingly used to describe roles ranging from lead teachers to central office managers and district executives—is the next most important school-related achievement factor. Researchers who reviewed evidence on school leadership for The Wallace Foundation posit that effective leaders have the potential to “unleash latent capacities” in organizations and in the people they manage, and that they can create the necessary “synergy across the relevant variables” that leads to significant improvement in schools.1

What’s true at the school level is also true at the organizational level, such as in a school district or charter school organization. “Skilled management is the single most important determinant of organizational success,” notes Thomas J. Tierney, chairman and co-founder of the nonprofit Bridgespan Group and former chief executive of corporate consultancy Bain & Company.2 Managers coordinate work within and across schools, and so must be able to think beyond the day-to-day needs of individual students and teachers in order to organize time and resources in ways that meet the needs of an entire community or region.

The need for talented managers is well understood in the private sector. There, effective leaders are prized for their ability to contribute to the bottom line. Many of the most successful businesses operate sophisticated leadership development programs charged with perpetually grooming their next generation of managers and executives. Studies of leadership development in business have mapped the hierarchy of roles that people move through. In “The Leadership Pipeline: How to Build the Leadership-Powered Company,” professor Ram Charan and human resources executives Steve Drotter and Jim Noel show how people start as individual contributors and move up into management and leadership roles. In addition to the technical knowledge and expertise that employees gain over time, they explain, each ascending position demands new skills and values that must be taught and supported.

Modeled on those findings, Education Pioneers has developed its own framework for educational roles. At the lowest level are positions that require an employee to manage only themselves and a set of project timelines and deliverables, followed by positions that begin to build management skill by managing one or more colleagues. We define “significant management responsibility” as roles with even more accountability—and that demand more in the way of skills and experience. These higher level
management roles include managing other managers, managing a specific functional group or department, managing across multiple functions and groups, and ultimately managing an entire organization.

Education Pioneers aspires to transform education into the best-led and -managed sector in the United States. Since 2003, Education Pioneers has been working to help the sector grow the managers and leaders it will need, and partnering with a range of organizations to maximize the impact of those leaders in the field. We begin by recruiting and placing talented future leaders, managers, and analysts into districts and organizations for 10 summer weeks, 10 months, or one year. We also position program alumni for successful careers in education by connecting them with high-impact positions in more than 180 ambitious partner organizations in 16 cities across the country. Finally, we provide ongoing training and support to ensure that our fellows achieve their greatest possible impact not just in a summer or a year, but over the course of a long and productive career in education.

In this report, we will share our findings about our program alumni, the work they are doing in the field and what their experiences tell us about leadership and management in public education.

![General & Specialist Leadership & Management Path Diagram]
IN FALL 2012, EDUCATION PIONEERS CONDUCTED A SURVEY OF ITS 1,600 ALUMNI AND RECEIVED RESPONSES FROM MORE THAN 1,300 OF THEM (AN 85 PERCENT RESPONSE RATE). THESE ALUMNI REPRESENT A SIGNIFICANT AND FORWARD-THINKING SEGMENT OF EMERGING EDUCATIONAL MANAGERS AND LEADERS WHO GUIDE THE WORK OF PUBLIC SCHOOLING IN SCHOOL DISTRICTS AND OTHER ORGANIZATIONS.

We asked these alumni a variety of questions about their Education Pioneers experience and current work, including employment sector, organization type, and position details. While we focused the majority of our analyses on those alumni who work within education, we did ask alumni working outside of education to categorize themselves as working in either the “public sector” (including non-education nonprofits as well as government agencies) or the “private sector” (such as non-education consulting firms, corporations, or law firms). To develop a fuller picture of how their backgrounds might relate to their current work, we combined those results with other information we have about our alumni, including their previous professional experiences and graduate school degrees.

We found encouraging data showing a significant number of our alumni are choosing to work in education. We also found that many more are needed. Although public education is sometimes considered a difficult place to build a career and make a difference, these bright managers and emerging leaders are finding that it is a worthwhile, rewarding sector in which to apply their knowledge and skills.

We acknowledge that these respondents are only a small subset of today’s emerging talent pipeline, made up only of those who have chosen to apply to Education Pioneers and who were in turn chosen to participate in our selective programs. However, we believe that their experiences tell an important story about the current direction of education leadership.
FINDING 1: A new wave of managers and leaders is stepping forward to address the significant need for skilled managerial talent in public education, but many more are still needed.

For decades, we’ve known about the teacher shortage, in which a generation of teachers would retire just as a surge of public school students enters the system, leaving millions of vacancies. That trend turned out to have its most dramatic implications in urban and rural schools serving low-income students, which struggle to hire high-quality and highly qualified teachers, and in subject areas like math, science, and special education. More recently, much has also been made of the shortage of school principals, with forthcoming retirement for some and frequent turnover among the rest—not to mention the need for thousands of new leaders to operate the anticipated needs of new charter schools.

But far too little research exists on the behind-the-scenes talent that helps guide schools’ policies, operations, and instruction inside the central offices of districts and charter school management organizations. Even less is known about the number and type of managers and executives needed to run the education ecosystem’s myriad public agencies, nonprofits, companies, foundations, associations, research firms, and advocacy organizations.

These non-school roles are critical. They require people to manage enormous budgets, manage a diverse workforce, and orchestrate complicated processes designed to do something incredibly wide-ranging and ambitious: prepare students for success in college, career, and life. Consider this: public education employees are responsible not only for educating, but also for spending an enormous quantity of public tax dollars. The 6 million or so people employed by K-12 schools and agencies manage close to $600 billion in public revenues. The average large school district has more than 10,000 employees, serves more than 100,000 students and manages a budget of more than $1.3 billion per year. And of course, the stakes are high: those employees are charged with preparing the next generation of children for success in the world. That’s some mighty managerial responsibility.

The talent needs for some non-school roles are well defined, such as the demand for district chiefs, where hundreds of new superintendents are needed every year across the country’s 14,000 districts given their typically short tenure and 15 percent annual turnover, according to the American Association of School Administrators. But below that level, the need fragments into a bewildering array of organizational types and roles. For example, one report warns that if state agencies are asked by the federal government to take on more responsibility for school improvement, “it is likely that many states will find
it difficult to meet those expectations at their current staffing levels.” Further, the number of education nonprofits has been on the rise over the last decade, with at least 55,000 of them operating as of 2005 and likely employing at least 2 million people. The number of education technology companies is also growing: in the first 11 months of 2012 alone, investors backed 56 companies—many of them seed- or early-stage organizations with ambitious growth plans that will need talented managers and executives.

There are many more leaders needed outside of schools to make the most of what happens inside those schools. Among districts and charter school organizations alone, Education Pioneers estimates that there are more than 40,000 such management roles, with 37,000 of them spread across the country’s 14,000 districts and nearly 4,000 across about 300 nonprofit and for-profit education management organizations. To arrive at this estimate, we analyzed non-school staffing levels within several districts and charter management organizations, including the proportion of positions with significant management responsibility. It is easy to see how the number of managers needed to fill these roles might grow significantly in the years ahead, given the combination of senior-level retirement and regular turnover inside these organizations, ambitious growth among high-performing charter school organizations, and continued efforts to improve student achievement by enhancing program quality across the board.

We expect the need for talented managers and leaders is even greater among the vast array of organizations created to support K–12 schools, including the growing number of educational technology companies and the even larger sector of education nonprofits. A 2006 Bridgespan Group analysis projected that the entire nonprofit sector would need roughly 640,000 new senior managers over the next decade, and 80,000 new senior managers per year by 2016, taking into account the sector’s growth and job changes or retirement by existing leaders. “To put this challenge in context,” wrote Bridgespan author Thomas Tierney at the time, “attracting the required number of managers will be equivalent to recruiting over 50 percent of every MBA graduating class, at every college and university across the country, every year for the next ten years.”

Fortunately, there is a growing interest among business school students and other graduate students in putting their skills to work in the social sector, including in education. For the last decade, Education Pioneers has been actively recruiting the strongest of these emerging managers and leaders from graduate schools into public education. From 2008 to 2013, Education Pioneers has attracted more than 17,000 applications for 2,000 fellowship positions, including many applicants who worked in the private sector or in other fields prior to graduate school. The competitive nature of the program allows us to be highly selective: in 2013, we will admit just under 10 percent of these accomplished applicants—comparable to the admissions rate at a competitive Ivy League university.
Chicago Public Schools (CPS) was one of the school districts we analyzed to understand the leadership and management staffing needs. CPS serves more than 400,000 students with a non-school staff of 1,200. We estimate about 350 have significant management responsibilities.
We will place these emerging managers and leaders on the front lines of education in 180 partner organizations, including forward-thinking districts, innovative charter school organizations, growing nonprofits, and other education organizations.

These leaders and managers show a commitment to education beyond their graduate school internships: a majority of Education Pioneers’ alumni are choosing education careers once they graduate. Over 70 percent of our employed survey respondents indicated that they are working in the education sector. These include nearly all (more than 90 percent) alumni with master’s or doctorate degrees in education, and the vast majority (more than 80 percent) of those with PhDs or master’s degrees in public policy, as well as over half of those with a master’s in business or juris doctor (law) degrees.

Forty percent of our alumni who are employed in education work for an organization that operates schools, either a district or a charter school organization. Beyond that, these alumni work with a diverse ecosystem of organizations that serve schools and students. Nearly half work for some type of education support organization, which range from foundations to consulting firms to think tanks to education technology companies. Fewer than 10 percent of alumni work for state or federal education agencies or to support children outside of school, such as in early childhood education, after-school, or summer school programs.
As for the roles they occupy, our alumni are often working at the analyst, manager, or director level. These positions tend to require 5–15 years of experience, which is where our partner organizations tell us they most need talent. Like the organizations they work for, the specific job responsibilities and titles for these alumni vary dramatically (see graphic), with “strategy,” “program,” and “operations” appearing a bit more frequently than other terms.

Our alumni are clustered in the urban areas where our programs operate. While there are some general trends, we have found that the types of leadership and management roles in education vary somewhat by geographic region. This is driven by the prevailing local business environment and culture, and by the state and local policies that influence public education, including funding formulas, charter school laws, and state efforts to turn schools around. For example, about 20 percent of our alumni in Boston hold strategy and planning roles, which reflects the local demands of the school district as well as of the prevalence of high-performing nonprofits and consulting firms. Meanwhile, about that same proportion of our alumni in the Washington, D.C. area work in policy or advocacy, striving to change or otherwise influence government. And in the San Francisco Bay Area, where venture capital firms and philanthropists have fostered a culture of innovation and entrepreneurship in education, a significant percentage of our alumni are forging their own path by creating new organizations.

Efforts to address leadership development in education must take into account local context as well as organization type. For example, we’ve found that school districts often need managers and leaders who can improve current performance, while charter school organizations are looking for people skilled in building organizations that can achieve excellent results at scale.
Education Pioneers highlights the leadership and management needs in K-12 public education and brings in talent to address those needs from across a range of relevant sectors, including business, law, public policy, and education. Over the last decade, hundreds of fellows have worked with our partner organizations and the experience has influenced them to remain in education once their graduate work was complete.

One of the most notable examples is Kristin Richmond, one of the founding entrepreneurs behind the successful Revolution Foods enterprise. Richmond began her career in investment banking, and while she had pivoted into education prior to joining Education Pioneers, she used her summer fellowship at Leadership Public Schools to refine her understanding of school operations—including setting up a meal plan for two new schools. That experience allowed her to really understand the economics of creating healthy, sustainable meal options, and she’s now extended that knowledge to more than 800 schools that are customers of Revolution Foods, with 50 million meals served across the country to date.

Likewise, the top finance and operations roles at many charter school organizations have been filled by Education Pioneers alumni. These leaders apply their private sector experience to ensuring that these growing organizations are backed by a strong operational infrastructure, and have chosen to pursue productive careers in education over more traditional opportunities in business.

For example, Rich Billings had been an economic consultant and then a high school teacher before joining Education Pioneers in the summer of 2006, looking to make a bigger impact on a sector he’d always been drawn to. After a summer with Envision Schools followed by a full-time finance and strategic planning job there, Billings became Chief Financial Officer at Rocketship Education, where he helped lay the groundwork for the organization’s planned expansion across and beyond San Jose, California. He is now Chief Financial Officer at Charter School Growth Fund, which is focused on supporting the replication of successful charter schools nationwide.

For Salomé Portugal, a career in the education sector was her first choice. She served as a teacher for nine years in the San Francisco Bay Area, where she implemented and coordinated AVID (Advancement Via Individual Determination), a college readiness program. Later, she returned to Harvard University’s Graduate School of Education to pursue a master’s degree and study research and policy focused on quality urban education for Latina/o, African American, American Indian, and other marginalized students of color. As an Education Pioneers Graduate School Fellow in 2008, Salomé worked at New Leaders, where she helped to develop a schedule, curriculum, selection process, and assessment tools for a leadership program to develop young teacher leaders in urban schools. Now serving as New Leaders’ Director of School Leadership Development, Salomé continues her work with education leaders, policies, and strategies to advance urban students of color.
SALOMÉ PORTUGAL
Director of School Leadership Development
New Leaders
Education Pioneers Graduate School Fellow, 2008
FINDING 2: Although running excellent school systems and education organizations is incredibly challenging, the sector offers significant management opportunities in general and for leaders of color.

It’s no secret that public education is a challenging field that has only gotten more complex over the last century. Public schools are responsible for teaching an increasingly large and diverse population, and educating students to a high level. Those without a college degree find themselves entirely shut out of an increasing number of jobs and careers, not to mention earnings: people with a bachelor’s degree earn 84 percent more over a lifetime than those with just a high school diploma, which translates to roughly $1 million in additional income. The consequences of educational success or failure, of course, reach far beyond those individuals—to their families, their communities, and to our society and economy as a whole.

We’re also asking our schools to do an important job with relatively few public dollars and, consequently, relatively few people. This tall order is only going to get taller in the years ahead, warns U.S. education secretary Arne Duncan. “For the next several years, preschool, K–12, and postsecondary educators are likely to face the challenge of doing more with less,” he says, encouraging educators and administrators “to explore productive alternatives to old ways of doing things.” Yet at the same time, as we’ve heaped enormous responsibility on our schools and districts, many lack faith that our schools and districts will get the job done. A recent Gallup poll found only 29 percent of Americans having a “great deal” or “quite a lot” of confidence in public schools—just a third of the 75 percent who have such faith in the military, and a record low for schools in the nearly 40 years that Gallup has been asking the question.

But where there is challenge, there is also great opportunity. Our alumni survey results indicate that many education organizations are willing to provide young managers and budding leaders with significant management responsibility. More than half of our alumni working in education manage people in some way: individual colleagues, other managers, or groups. Nearly a quarter have responsibility for managing other managers, a function, multiple functions or an entire organization; this includes the 10 percent of our alumni in education who are entrepreneurs, leading a startup organization (often small but growing) that they have founded.

The conventional wisdom is that management opportunities abound in the private sector, particularly within large corporations and consulting firms. However, we found that our alumni in the education sector actually have higher rates of management responsibility, and of managing more significant levels of work, than their peers in other sectors.
Compared with alumni in the private sector, such as those working for a corporation or law firm, alumni in the education sector are twice as likely to have high-level management responsibility (managing managers or entire functions, groups, or organizations) and are four times as likely to manage a group. Compared with alumni in the public sector, such as government agencies or nonprofits outside of education, alumni working in education are roughly one-and-a-half times as likely to have high-level management responsibility and three times as likely to manage a group.

These trends—high rates of employment and significant management responsibility—also hold true for our alumni of color in education. Our analysis found that across both race and gender, our alumni working in education have earned comparable levels of management responsibility. With about a quarter of all our alumni working in education managing at higher levels, just over 20 percent of black alumni do so, and just under 20 percent of Latino alumni do.

Moreover, our alumni of color in education fare better in that sector than they do in private sector roles. Compared with their peers in all other sectors, a greater percent of Latino alumni in education manage at high levels, while black alumni in education find their management level roughly similar to that of their peers in the public sector but far greater than their private sector peers (none of whom manage at high levels there). This may indicate that education seeks and supports talented managers and leaders of color—which could help encourage more young black and Latino leaders to pursue careers in education.

Education Pioneers is committed to bringing diverse leadership into education management. Today, superintendents of color lead just 6 percent of districts, and only about 12 percent of school board members are black or Hispanic. Education Pioneers strives to bring those percentages closer in line with the increasing proportion of public school students of color (nearly 40 percent of whom are black or Hispanic) by helping to create a talent pipeline of future managers and leaders of color. Nearly one-third (29 percent) of Education Pioneers alumni are black or Latino. After their fellowships, these alumni of color accept jobs in education at the same high rates as we see with our overall alumni base—70 percent of all Education Pioneers alumni work in education, including 76 percent of black alumni and 71 percent of Latino alumni.
ALUMNI IN EDUCATION HAVE SIGNIFICANTLY MORE RESPONSIBILITY THAN THOSE IN OTHER SECTORS

Note: Managers are defined as all employees with direct reports; “Senior Managers” are defined as those managing other managers, groups, functions or entire organizations. Source: 2012 Education Pioneers Alumni Survey
ALUMNI OF COLOR ACHIEVE SIGNIFICANT MANAGERIAL RESPONSIBILITY IN EDUCATION SECTOR

BLACK & LATINO MANAGERS (ALL LEVELS)

- **50%** in Education Sector
- **44%** in Private Sector
- **44%** in Public Sector

BLACK & LATINO SENIOR MANAGERS

- **20%** in Education Sector
- **4%** in Private Sector
- **19%** in Public Sector

Note that most alumni work with more than one type of data, and the survey encouraged listing all types of data used.
EDUARDO BRICEÑO
Co-Founder & CEO
Mindset Works, Inc.
Education Pioneers Graduate School Fellow, 2006
In the education sector, an increasing number of districts and education organizations look to create more dramatic—and rapid—change for underserved students. That’s led those organizations to empower young, capable managers with greater amounts of responsibility.

For example, Jared Henderson began his career at the National Aeronautics and Space Administration in research and operations, then worked as a management consultant both before and after his graduate work and Education Pioneers fellowship at the Community Partners Initiative. Today, as a senior vice president for regional operations at Teach For America, Henderson manages eight executive directors across eight states (who in turn are responsible for another 140 staff and 1,500 corps member teachers) and a $35 million budget.

Meanwhile, the very first person to accept an Education Pioneers fellowship, Marisa White Bold, has also taken on increasing levels of responsibility since working with Aspire Public Schools as a fellow in summer 2004. While working in the office of accountability for the New York City Department of Education, she oversaw an annual budget of nearly $40 million and managed two managers as well as four others who managed outside contractors that provided services to the district. Now Chief of Staff for the Implementation and Support Unit focused on state-level reforms at the U.S. Department of Education, Bold focuses more on policy development and implementation than on ongoing management. However, she is part of a core leadership team of six people that manages nearly $60 billion in federal grants—including the high-profile Race to the Top program—as well as another $75 million in federal contracts.

Many of Education Pioneers’ alumni of color have achieved significant success in education. For example, Butch Trusty worked in business development for Edison Schools before his Education Pioneers fellowship and at The Bridgespan Group as a consultant after graduate school, but now oversees a significant grantmaking budget as Program Director for Education at the Joyce Foundation in Chicago.

Other alumni of color have chosen to pave their own career paths, by creating their own companies and nonprofits. Alexandra Bernadotte, who founded college-success platform Beyond 12, is tracking the post-secondary progress of more than 19,000 college students. She was chosen as an Ashoka Fellow by a prestigious social entrepreneurship program. Former investment banking analyst and venture capitalist Eduardo Briceño co-founded Mindset Works, which offers curriculum and training for teaching students how to exercise their brains, and recently delivered a TEDx talk on the relationship between our understanding of our own intelligence and our success.
FINDING 3: More than ever, education leaders and managers must have **sharp analytical skills**, so they can **work effectively with both business and student outcomes data** to make important strategic, operational, and instructional decisions.

One indisputable trend in public education is the shift toward more evidence-based and data-driven decisions. Here, education followed sectors like medicine in trying to improve outcomes by conducting research on prospective programs and reforms and then measuring the impact of those changes on student achievement over time. In education, this trend really took hold in the 1990s with the establishment of state standards, as well as assessments designed to make sure schools helped students master those standards. The No Child Left Behind Act of 2002 put it starkly: to avoid sanctions, schools and districts must not only make broad progress, but also progress with disaggregated subgroups of students to ensure that, well, nobody was left behind. That kind of disaggregation demanded that schools, districts, and states fine-tune their data systems so they could not only report student results but also track progress along the way.

"As districts and schools have looked for strategies to help raise achievement, the use of data to predict and enhance student performance has emerged as perhaps the dominant improvement strategy," says a U.S. Department of Education study on the use of data. More importantly, the active use of data at the school and district levels has been linked to improved student achievement. Look no further than the urban districts that have won the $1 million Broad Prize over the last decade, nearly all of which credit some of their success to regular analysis of student and school data. Today, schools, districts, and other education organizations use a vast array of data to do everything from budget planning to determining student groups to improving teacher performance.

Of course, using data well requires not just sophisticated systems, but also people who are trained to work with data to make nuanced decisions about what data to collect—and to know what to do with the information. Education isn’t alone in grappling with “big data”: a McKinsey study found that smart use of data could create significant value by increasing the productivity of the public sector and reducing expenditures, but that greater analytic and managerial talent will be necessary:

> We project a need for 1.5 million additional managers and analysts in the United States who can ask the right questions and consume the results of the analysis of big data effectively. ...The key sets of talent that will be in increasingly short supply are deep analytical talent to execute big data analyses; managers and analysts who know how to request and consume big data analyses; and supporting technology personnel to implement big data.
Note that most alumni work with more than one type of data, and the survey encouraged listing all types of data used.
Recognizing this need in education, Education Pioneers has been working to increase the data capacity of its partner organizations by connecting them with rigorously trained “analysts” who often bring a business background to their assigned data-focused projects for 10 months. Our summer and yearlong graduate school fellows often manage data-intensive projects as well.

This focus on data often carries forward into their careers: nearly 60 percent of our alumni working in education described their roles as analytically focused and noted that they make regular use of data. Alumni reported that nearly half of their data analysis focuses on academic performance, such as student achievement, teacher effectiveness, and college readiness; and half focuses on core business data such as finance, human resources, and operations. Many use multiple types of data.

Not surprisingly, student achievement data is the most frequently used type of data, with 21 percent of data use in this category, followed by operational, financial, teacher effectiveness, and human capital data. Alumni report that they use student achievement data across all types of roles and organizations. Alumni with business degrees report they use more business data—related to finances, operations, and human resources—than outcomes data. And alumni in organizations that bear ultimate responsibility for educating students (e.g., districts and charter management organizations) are the ones who report they use the most types of data.

The future of data use in education may well lie in the increasingly sophisticated synthesis of both operational and performance data. Several years ago, scholar Rick Hess criticized school systems that overemphasized student data without sufficient attention to detailed operational data about hiring practices, financial details, and more. “A system in which leaders possess that kind of data is far better equipped to boost school performance than one in which leaders have a palette of achievement data and little else,” he warned. “Student achievement data alone only yield a ‘black box.’ They illustrate how students are faring but do not enable an organization to diagnose problems or manage improvement.”

Indeed, as the Data Quality Campaign points out, it is imperative to link data systems and analyses so that we might better understand “the return on investment of policies, programs, and interventions.” That kind of sophisticated work demands leaders and managers who can not only manipulate an Excel spreadsheet but can also harness data to determine whether policies, resources, people, and tools are achieving their desired impact.
Education Pioneers alumni report that they are using a wide range of data on a regular basis.

As a Regional Director for Growth and Sustainability at KIPP (the Knowledge is Power Program), Kaya Stone works with the staff and boards of 22 KIPP schools. Like other regional leaders at KIPP, Stone and his team use the organization’s Healthy Schools and Regions Framework and related data to assess whether the organization is meeting its student achievement, talent, and financial goals as they plan for growth and ongoing operations.

Education Pioneers alumna Kelly Woodham Shields is now a fellow with the Strategic Data Project, a program housed at Harvard University’s Center for Education Policy Research that partners with districts, charter school operators, and state education agencies to bring research and data analysis to bear on their policies and strategies. Shields is working in Baltimore County Public Schools to design metrics that assess the district’s progress on its new strategic plan, and is researching how data can inform the design of the middle-school experience.

In some cases, our alumni perform complex analyses with many different kinds of data so that they and their employers can determine how best to allocate resources productively in education.

For example, alumnus Will Hobart is the manager of alternative programs that serve drop out, expelled, and court-involved students in Chicago Public Schools. Hobart manages six others and a combined annual budget of $8 million, serving approximately 1,400 students annually across eight sites. Hobart and his team work regularly with a district “data strategist” to analyze their outcomes relative to their goals, both within their ongoing programs as well as with two state-level grants, to ensure that the district is doing right by students with the money they spend.

At the state level, alumnus Christopher Ruszkowski runs the Teacher & Leader Effectiveness Unit for the state of Delaware, which oversees human capital and educator support for $30 million of the state’s Race to the Top grant. Working with the Harvard Strategic Data Project, Ruszkowski and his 17-person team are developing surveys and data systems to capture and share information about the state’s educators. In addition, Ruszkowski’s unit has ensured that all contracts with outside vendors for Race to the Top work include metrics-based outcomes among their key deliverables. This will allow the state to examine not only the overall results of their Race to the Top grant spending, but also to understand the educational return on those investments.
THE WORK TO TRANSFORM EDUCATION INTO THE BEST-LED SECTOR IS AN IMPORTANT CHALLENGE. IN THIS REPORT, WE HAVE BEGUN TO OUTLINE THE DIMENSIONS OF THE CURRENT NEED FOR MANAGEMENT AND LEADERSHIP TALENT IN THE EDUCATION SECTOR. IT IS CLEAR THAT A GREAT NUMBER OF LEADERS AND MANAGERS WILL BE NEEDED TO RUN EFFECTIVE EDUCATION AGENCIES, ORGANIZATIONS, AND COMPANIES IN THE YEARS TO COME. IN SHARING DATA ON THE PROGRESS AND IMPACT OF EDUCATION PIONEERS’ ALUMNI, WE HOPE TO RAISE AWARENESS ABOUT THE POTENTIAL FOR THE SECTOR TO LEVERAGE THIS TALENT AND SET THE STAGE TO ADDRESS THIS NEED AT SCALE.

We are encouraged to see so many of our talented alumni contributing to the education sector, and assuming great responsibility for the programs and resources that shape our children’s future. But that will not be enough.

More efforts will be needed to strengthen the leadership pipeline from within education, and to bring in people and practices from beyond education. We are proud to be a part of the Activate ED initiative to supply top talent to the education field, alongside The Broad Center and the Strategic Data Project. We applaud the efforts of organizations that seek to bring talent into education, such as Teach For America, TNTP, EnCorps, Troops to Teachers, New Leaders, and the NYC Leadership Academy. We also appreciate those programs that seek to develop greater levels of leadership among existing educators and leaders, including Leading Educators, School Leaders Network, and the Pahara Institute.

More employers will need to focus on management training and leadership development, as well as on developing specific skills like data analysis. That will mean investing more time and money.

And finally, much more fine-grained research will need to be done to understand the scale and scope of the leadership and management gap in education, the specific skills and knowledge that will be needed, and the best way to enable educational managers and leaders to drive student achievement and teacher productivity.

Ultimately, pulling the “invisible lever” of leadership and management talent will be a collaborative effort. Education Pioneers looks forward to continuing to partner with emerging leaders and education organizations to ensure that the sector that educates our next generation is led and managed skillfully.
“Give me a place to stand and a lever long enough, and I will move the world.”

ARCHIMEDES

AT EDUCATION PIONEERS, WE BELIEVE THAT STRONG LEADERS AND MANAGERS ARE THE MOST POWERFUL LEVER FOR TRANSFORMING PUBLIC EDUCATION.

One vital part of this lever is very visible. We can easily see and understand the importance of having effective teachers and outstanding principals working with students at the school level. We must continue to focus on building a strong pipeline of school-level leaders.

At the same time, we must recognize that school-level leaders operate in an environment that is shaped—for better or for worse—by individuals who operate in less visible roles outside the school building. Having exceptional leaders and managers in these roles (e.g., running school systems, leading education organizations, designing and implementing policy) is essential to building a high-performing ecosystem that attracts, develops, and retains great talent at the teacher and principal levels, and that supports these leaders in educating all students at high levels.

Leaders and managers of school systems and organizations are often overlooked and undervalued. The consequences for students of such oversight are real and devastating. For years, we have failed to adequately build the pipeline of talented leaders and managers required to fundamentally shift the performance of the education sector. The result is an overwhelming need for more quality leaders and managers to transform the sector and realize the potential of all our nation’s students.

We must change this pattern and invest in the talent needed to leverage large-scale, systemic change for our nation’s underserved students. Recognizing this need led me to found Education Pioneers in 2003, and has motivated our team, board, partners, and
supporters to build a talent pipeline to realize our vision of making education the best-led and -managed sector in the United States.

In our first decade, we built a national network of talent that is 1,600 strong. This report shines a spotlight on several important insights we've gained from the work experience of our alumni. We've seen that (1) skilled managerial talent can have a huge impact in public education, and that many more outstanding people are still needed; (2) our alumni in education gain significantly more management responsibility than those working in other sectors, and this career acceleration holds true for our alumni of color; and (3) sharp analytical skills are increasingly needed by leaders and managers to make smart decisions using both business and student outcomes data.

What this report can’t fully capture is the joy that comes from doing this incredibly meaningful and important work. I’ve seen it on the face of Alexandra Bernadotte as she lights up when telling the story of how coaching provided through Beyond 12 helped a first-generation college student overcome a difficult transition during her freshman year and get on track to graduate from college. When I think of her and so many other pioneering leaders and managers that experience the great challenges and even greater rewards that come through their commitment to this work, I’m reminded of the ancient Greek definition of happiness: “The exercise of vital powers, along lines of excellence, in a life affording them scope.”

I know that thousands of people reading this report have experienced this type of happiness by working to provide all students with an excellent education that prepares them for success in life, work, and citizenship. I challenge all of us to do more to help other strong leaders and managers join this all-important cause, using their skills to unleash the potential of our nation’s students. It is within our collective power to attract and support talented leaders and managers, the most powerful lever in creating the great American schools of the future.


9 Estimate based on education nonprofits (not including higher education nonprofits) making up 18 percent of all nonprofits, and applying that percentage against the number of people employed by nonprofits (12.9 million, according to the Nonprofit Almanac 2008 from the Urban Institute, cited above—see http://www.urban.org/publications/901164.html).


11 Source: Education Pioneers analysis.

12 Analysis was limited to 501c3 organizations with revenues of at least $250,000, excluding those operating in health care and higher education, and defined an organization’s leadership as the executive director plus six roles that typically report directly to the executive director. Tierney, Thomas J. “The Nonprofit Sector’s Leadership Deficit,” The Bridgespan Group, March 2006. http://www.bridgespan.org/getmedia/96be2563-f182-44db-bc18-797c493ebf69/Leadership-Deficit-White-Paper-pdf.pdf.aspx


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