

Advancing Principal Leadership in Urban Schools (A-PLUS)



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Our Goal

Our goal is to **support school and district leaders in creating exemplary urban schools**: schools that achieve outstanding academic results for every demographic group of students. We understand the importance of setting realistic and attainable goals. We also know that it is difficult to generate energy and commitment when the prize is little more than mediocrity. Based upon studies of the nation's highest performing urban schools, our A-PLUS program helps leaders develop systems and structures that make outstanding learning outcomes realistic and attainable. Through our National Excellence in Urban Education Awards, we see dozens of urban schools across the country achieving ambitious goals. We are proud to say that we have supported some formerly low-achieving schools as they have pursued and achieved their goals. We want to help more schools achieve outstanding learning results for every demographic group they serve.

Intensive Partnerships with a Few Districts

We enter into only a few partnerships with districts. We are a small organization and we know that we are most likely to make a positive difference if we expend the quality and quantity of effort necessary to support each partner districts in making outstanding academic gains. **We accept partnerships with districts that are truly committed to generating excellent achievement gains.** For example, we expect districts to be willing to examine policies critically and provide flexibility when those policies do not work to improve learning results in A-PLUS schools. We expect districts to work with us to ensure that A-PLUS schools develop positive cultures and climates, implement challenging academic curricula, utilize effective instructional strategies, and demonstrate an ethic of continuous improvement. We expect districts to expect a lot from A-PLUS principals, from NCUST staff, and from their own district leadership. In turn, we commit to working with those districts over time to ensure great results.

District Level Support

We support district administrators by helping them create high-achieving schools that can serve as models to other schools in their districts. We work closely with district administrators to build upon existing district programs and initiatives and to develop systems and structures that will accelerate the growth of A-PLUS schools. Our efforts build district capacity, while simultaneously building the capacity of principals and schools. We invite, encourage, and expect district-level supervisors of participating schools to participate actively in A-PLUS activities. Our impact is intensified and accelerated when district leaders play an active role. Without active district involvement, our chances of influencing excellent student outcomes are minimized.

School Level Support

Our services are focused upon small groups of three or four schools within a district. We call these groups A-PLUS Networks. A district might have one or more networks of A-PLUS schools. Minimally, we meet with each network once a month on the campus of one of the network schools. The meeting locations rotate among the network schools. At each meeting, **we engage principals in discussions of indicators related to school climate, curriculum, and instruction, with a focus on continuous improvement.** These data-rich conversations are designed to help principals make clear, measurable progress toward excellence and equity.

Principals are challenged to set specific targets or goals and develop strategies for pursuing their goals. NCUST executive coaches facilitate the network by keeping the focus on measurable changes. **We also engage principals and district personnel in an “instructional rounds” process** during which we observe classrooms to identify the extent to which instruction is consistent with the best practices of high-performing urban schools. Those instructional rounds help principals determine how to refine their strategies so that instruction is more likely to lead to the school’s specified goals. In addition, NCUST coaches lead A-PLUS leaders on visits to observe and study high-performing schools in other cities.

Being a principal is hard work. Being a principal of an A-PLUS school is even more challenging, because it requires a constant willingness to identify, collect, and analyze data; a commitment to inspire, engage, and lead others to improve practices; and an openness to constructive criticism, lessons from research, and best practices of high-performing schools. Especially, **principals must commit to spending a substantial time in classrooms.** True instructional leadership starts where instruction happens: in classrooms. Simultaneously, we commit to providing principals support, utilizing all we have learned from the best practices of high-performing urban schools.

Which Schools Are Right for A-PLUS?

We are interested in working with urban schools where large percentages of students meet low-income criteria and school leaders (working in collaboration with district leaders) are able to articulate specific, ambitious learning goals. We want to work with school and district leaders who are willing to work with us to pursue those ambitious goals, in ways that utilize lessons learned from some of the nation’s highest performing urban schools.

Costs:

Costs vary depending upon the intensity of services, travel costs, and the various ways in which we might customize the A-PLUS program to district needs. NCUST is not a profit-making entity. Our costs are often substantially less expensive than other organizations. We enjoy designing tailored programs that work within a district’s fiscal realities. In some cases, we have engaged in contracts that provide 10 months of service for as little as \$12,000 per school. In other cases, we are providing much more intensive support at a substantially greater cost.

Next Steps:

Contact us! We look forward to answering your questions and exploring how we might support your improvement efforts.