

GROWING LEADERS

POWERED BY MAXWELL LEADERSHIP FOUNDATION

2026

**SUPERINTENDENT
RESEARCH BRIEF**



THE FIVE PRESSURES EVERY SUPERINTENDENT IS MANAGING RIGHT NOW

And the One Investment That Addresses All Five

Career &
College Readiness

Educator
Retention

Test & Assessment
Scores

Student Engagement
& Behavior

Federal & State
Funding

A NOTE TO DISTRICT LEADERS

You Already Know the Problems. This Brief Connects the Dots.

If you're a superintendent, you are navigating at least five distinct pressure systems simultaneously — and each one is being driven by years of compounding data. Career and college readiness benchmarks are declining. Educator attrition is straining your pipeline. Student engagement and behavior are absorbing resources that should be going to instruction. Test scores are plateaued or falling at the low end. And federal funding that districts came to rely on is contracting. What this brief argues — backed by the most current national research — is that these five pressures are not unrelated. They share a common root. And they respond to a common type of intervention. We are not asking you to add another program. We are asking you to consider whether what's missing from your district's infrastructure is intentional, values-based leadership development — built into the school day, not bolted onto it.

72%



of HS grads feel only **moderately**, slightly, or not at all ready for life after school (YouScience, 2025)

53%



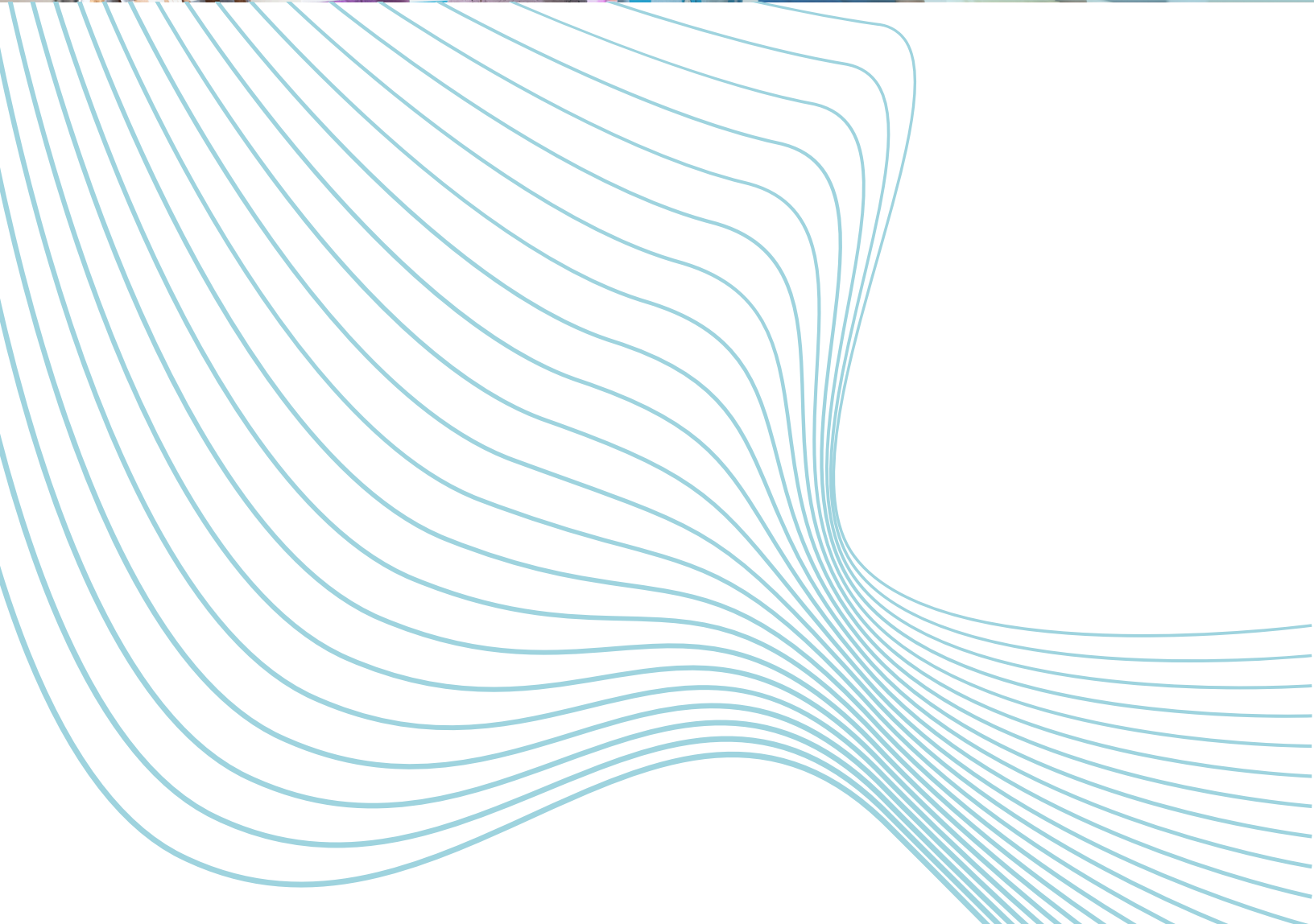
of U.S. teachers reported **burnout in 2025** — down from 60% but **still more than double other** professions (RAND)

22%



of all **K~12 students** were **chronically absent** in 2024~25 — still far above pre-pandemic levels (RAND / AEI)

Every district that has reduced school discipline, improved attendance, and improved the classroom climate — while also seeing gains in teacher satisfaction — has done so by investing in developing students' internal leadership capacity: their ability to manage themselves, make values-aligned decisions, and build positive relationships. The research doesn't just suggest this. It demands it



1 Career & College Readiness

Students are graduating without the foundational capabilities employers and colleges actually require

Career and college readiness has long been a stated priority of K–12 education. The 2025 national data reveals a troubling reality: readiness is declining, not improving. And the gap that matters most is not academic — it is the gap in leadership, character, and professional capability.



FINDING 1A

72% of Graduates Don't Feel Ready

YouScience 2025 Post-Graduation Readiness Report (n=500+, Classes of 2021–2024)

- Nearly 72% of high school graduates report feeling only moderately, slightly, or not at all prepared for life after high school
- Just 35% of the Class of 2024 enrolled in a four-year college — down sharply from 55% in 2019
- 77% say they would have been more engaged in school if they had better understood their strengths and career options
- 50% say more work-based learning would have helped; 45% wanted more career counseling and guidance
- Of those who went to college, 42% have already changed their major — many more than once

FINDING 1B

The Leadership Competency Gap Is the Widest Deficit

YouScience 2025 Post-Graduation Readiness Report (n=500+, Classes of 2021–2024)

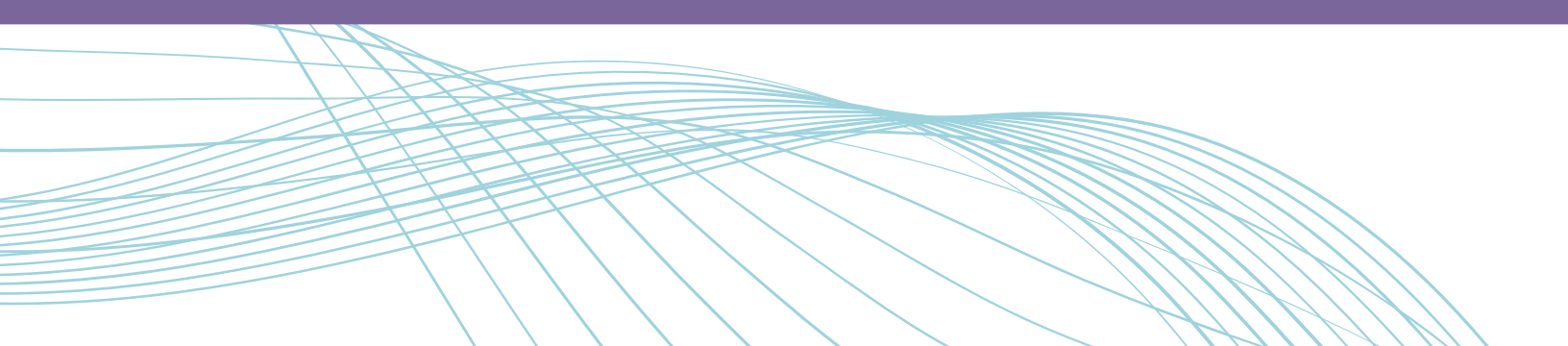
- For leadership and professionalism competencies, the employer-graduate proficiency gap exceeds 30 percentage points (NACE)
- 84% of hiring managers say most high school graduates are not prepared to enter the workforce (U.S. Chamber/College Board, 2025)
- 80% of hiring managers say today's graduates are less prepared than previous generations • Only 38% say it is easy to find candidates with the right skills
- 94% of hiring managers prioritize critical thinking and problem-solving; 96% say financial literacy is essential — both are leadership formation outcomes, not content knowledge
- The positive effects of career-connected learning are greatest for students from historically disadvantaged backgrounds (Bain & Company, 2024)

Source: NACE 2024 Student Survey (n=20,482); U.S. Chamber of Commerce & College Board New Hire Readiness Report 2025 (n=500 hiring managers); Bain & Company Alumni Early Career Outcomes Survey (2024, n=2,619)

What This Means for Your District

Your students' ability to get and keep good jobs after graduation is a primary accountability metric for your board, your community, and state officials. The research is clear: the gap is not in what students know. It is in who students are becoming. Communication, values-alignment, initiative, and professional self-management are the outcomes employers are measuring — and they're the outcomes academic coursework alone cannot produce.

RESOURCE CONNECTION iLead builds the four competencies employers rank as most deficient: self-management, relational intelligence, values-based decision-making, and leadership initiative — integrated into the school day without adding burden to existing staff.



2

Educator & Faculty Retention

Teacher attrition is reshaping the instructional pipeline — and school culture is the lever no one talks about enough

Teacher shortages are no longer a future risk. They are an active operational reality in nearly every state. The 2025 national data reveals a system under structural strain — and while compensation remains part of the equation, the emerging research points to something superintendents can more directly influence: school culture, student behavior climate, and the sense of professional purpose that keeps educators in classrooms.

FINDING 2A

1 in 8 Teaching Positions Is Unfilled or Filled by Uncertified Teachers

*Learning Policy Institute Teacher Shortages 2025 Factsheet + RAND
State of the American Teacher 2025*

- At minimum, 411,549 teaching positions across the U.S. are either unfilled or filled by teachers not fully certified for their assignments — representing approximately 1 in 8 of all teaching positions nationally
- Every state and the District of Columbia reported teacher shortages in more than one teaching area in 2024–25
- Shortages are deepest in special education (45 states), science (41 states), and math (40 states)
- 16% of teachers intend to leave by the end of 2024–25, down from 22% in 2024 — a sign of modest recovery, but still representing approximately 270,000+ departures projected annually for the next three years
- 62% of teachers reported frequent job-related stress in 2025 — nearly double the rate of comparable working adults (RAND)

Source: Learning Policy Institute Teacher Shortages 2025 Factsheet (June 2025); RAND State of the American Teacher 2025 (n=1,419); Schools That Lead 2025

FINDING 2B

Student Behavior Is the #1 Driver of Burnout — Not Just Compensation

*Arizona Department of Education First Formal Teacher Retention Study, 2025 +
RAND/AASPA Research 2024–25*

- Arizona's first formal teacher retention study (2025) found that burnout, lack of respect, and student behavior issues ranked HIGHER than salary as drivers of educator departure
- Over 14% of Arizona's educators left the profession in 2024–25 — more than 8,600 people; over 4,000 positions remained vacant
- Research shows educators are 62% less likely to leave when they feel engaged in a positive school culture (Gallup, cited by AASPA 2025)
- K–12 teachers are the #1 most burned-out profession in the U.S.; 44% report feeling burned out often or always (2024)
- Schools with systematic engagement and clear behavioral expectations see measurably lower teacher burnout and turnover (AASPA, 2025)
- RAND research links student absenteeism levels directly to teacher job satisfaction — teachers in high-absence classrooms score significantly lower on every well-being measure

Source: Arizona Dept. of Education Teacher Retention Report 2025; RAND State of the American Teacher 2025; AASPA How to Avoid Teacher Burnout 2025; Gallup Educator Engagement Research 2024

What This Means for Your District

The research is unambiguous: the variable most within a superintendent's control that predicts whether teachers stay is school culture. Not salary alone. Not benefits. Culture. And school culture is shaped primarily by how students behave when adults aren't watching. Districts that have reduced disciplinary incidents have consistently reported improvements in teacher satisfaction, retention, and professional engagement.

ILEAD CONNECTION Texas Region 18 ESC districts implementing iLead saw a 25% reduction in out-of-school suspensions and a 23% reduction in in-school suspensions year-over-year. Fewer disciplinary incidents means better school culture — which means teachers stay.



3

PRESSURE 3 OF 5

Student Engagement, Behavior & Chronic Absence

Disengagement and idleness are driving district KPIs in the wrong direction across every grade level

Student engagement is the precondition for every other outcome districts are measured on. When students are not engaged — when they are absent, disengaged in class, or filling the void of unstructured time with behaviors that require administrative response — every other district initiative loses its effectiveness. The 2024–25 data makes this connection impossible to ignore.

FINDING 3A

22%

of All Students Were
Chronically Absent
in 2024–25

RAND American School District Panel, November 2025 + American Enterprise Institute, 2025

- Approximately 22% of all K–12 students were chronically absent in 2024–25 — defined as missing 10% or more of the school year
- In roughly half of urban school districts, more than 30% of students were chronically absent — far higher than rural or suburban districts
- 1 in 4 students do not believe being chronically absent is a problem — a cultural shift that district leaders must actively counteract
- Four in ten district leaders ranked reducing chronic absenteeism as a top-three challenge for 2024–25 (RAND)
- Chronic absenteeism in 2024–25 remains far above pre-pandemic levels of approximately 15%
- 11 of 12 district leaders interviewed by RAND speculated that “a cultural shift has occurred, whereby more students and families see school as optional” — and that chronic absenteeism will not improve without making schools more engaging

Source: RAND American School District Panel Report, November 2025; AEI 'Lingering Absence' Report, June 2025; Education Week Chronic Absenteeism Research, August 2025

FINDING 3B

Idleness and Disengagement Directly Drive Behavioral Incidents

NCEED / Panorama Education / AERA Research 2024–25

- Research consistently links student idleness and disengagement — unstructured time in school without clear purpose or belonging — to increased behavioral incidents and disciplinary actions
- Students who lack a growth mindset, a sense of belonging, and relational connection to school adults are most likely to disengage and engage in behaviors that require administrative response
- Panorama Education's 2025 SEL data shows that students without a sense of school belonging are significantly more likely to be chronically absent and behaviorally disruptive
- U.S. schools implementing values-based character curricula are reporting 45% reductions in aggressive behaviors that result in disciplinary actions (Growing Leaders / iLead data, 2025)
- AERA 2024 research links self-regulation deficits — the inability to manage one's own emotions and impulses — directly to the behavioral incidents consuming the most administrative time in K–12 schools

Source: NCEED Chronic Absenteeism & Engagement Research, July 2025; Panorama Education SEL Data 2025; AERA Annual Meeting Research 2024

The Attendance-Achievement Spiral

Attendance Works (2025) research demonstrates that schools averaging 10 days of absence see proficiency rates drop from above 80% to below 20% in both math and ELA. Absenteeism doesn't just affect absent students — it affects all students in the school. The disruption from students missing and returning creates churn that prevents teachers from setting and maintaining classroom norms, degrades instructional pacing, and reduces learning time for every student in the room.

The intervention that addresses this spiral is not an attendance policy. It is a culture shift — one in which students feel that school is a place worth showing up for, and where the adults in the building have the relational tools to pull disengaged students back in.

What This Means for Your District ???

Solving behavioral issues and chronic absenteeism through enforcement alone has a ceiling. The research shows that sustainable improvements in both metrics come from building student ownership, belonging, and internal leadership capacity. Students who believe they have a role to play in the life of their school show up. Students who have developed self-leadership skills fill idle time with initiative rather than disruption.

ILEAD CONNECTION iLead's implementation data shows a 25% reduction in exclusionary discipline in Texas districts after two years. U.S. schools report a 45% reduction in aggressive disciplinary behaviors. The mechanism is direct: students who develop self-leadership have less idle energy and more constructive ways to engage.

4

PRESSURE 4 OF 5

Test & Assessment Scores

Academic recovery has stalled — and the data points to non-academic variables as the primary differentiator

The 2024 NAEP results — the most comprehensive national academic benchmark — delivered a sobering verdict: academic recovery from pandemic-era declines has stalled, achievement gaps are widening, and the lowest-performing students are reading at the worst levels in 30 years. But buried in the data is a finding that points toward an unexpected solution.

FINDING 4A

Reading Scores Are at Historic Lows for Low-Performing Students

*NAEP 2024 Nation's Report Card (Released January 2025) + NPR
September 2025*

- 30% of fourth graders scored proficient or advanced in reading in 2024 — down from 32% in 2022 and still below pre-pandemic levels
- 34% of eighth graders scored 'below basic' in reading — the largest percentage in NAEP's 32 years of reading assessment
- 40% of fourth graders scored 'below basic' in reading — the highest in 20 years
- 8th grade science scores fell 4 points since 2019; 12th grade math and reading scores fell 3 points (September 2025 NAEP)
- "Scores for our lowest-performing students are at historic lows — continued declines that began more than a decade ago." — Matthew Soldner, Acting Director of IES, September 2025
- The gap between highest- and lowest-performing 8th grade math students is now the widest in NAEP's entire testing history

Source: NAEP 2024 Nation's Report Card (released January 2025); NPR Nation's Report Card September 2025; FutureEd NAEP Analysis, February 2025; Hunt Institute NAEP Analysis, 2025

FINDING 4B

Absenteeism and Non-Academic Factors Are the Hidden Variables in Score Gaps

NAEP 2024 Survey Data + IDRA / Attendance Works Research 2024-25

- NAEP 2024 survey data shows that students who missed three or more days of school in the testing year performed significantly lower than students who did not — across all demographic groups
- Nearly one-third of 12th graders reported missing three or more days of school in the month prior to testing in 2024 — up from 2019
- IDRA 2025 analysis concludes: "Policies that keep students in school and funnel targeted investments to students who need the most support can close national gaps"
- The Education Recovery Scorecard identifies widespread chronic absenteeism as a 'key driver of stalled progress,' especially in high-poverty districts
- States that have seen meaningful academic recovery share a common thread: they invested in both instructional quality AND attendance/engagement infrastructure simultaneously
- Social-emotional learning and character development interventions consistently show measurable gains in academic engagement and test performance (AERA/RAND, 2024-25)

Source: NAEP 2024 Nation's Report Card Survey Data; IDRA NAEP Analysis 2025; Education Recovery Scorecard; AERA Research 2024

The Inconvenient Truth in the NAEP Data

Districts and states spent billions in ESSER funds on tutoring, curriculum adoption, and instructional coaching. And the NAEP scores are still largely flat or declining. What the data increasingly suggests is that academic recovery cannot be achieved by academic intervention alone. The non-academic variables — whether students show up, whether they feel a sense of belonging, whether they have the self-regulation to engage with instruction — are determining academic outcomes. You cannot test your way to achievement. You have to develop the student.

What This Means for Your District ???

If your district's test scores are not recovering, the first question is whether the students most at risk are consistently present and consistently engaged. Every day a student misses is a day of instruction lost. Every disciplinary incident is time out of the classroom for a student who is already behind. Building the foundational conditions for academic achievement requires building students' capacity to show up and engage — and that is a leadership development question.

ILEAD CONNECTION By reducing exclusionary discipline by 25%, iLead implementation in Texas districts recovered 17,311 instructional hours in a single year — hours that went directly back to academic instruction. Presence precedes performance.



5

PRESSURE 5 OF 5

Federal & State Education Funding

The funding environment has shifted structurally — districts must demonstrate measurable outcomes to protect what remains

For five years, ESSER relief funds allowed districts to expand programs, staff, and services in ways that would not have been sustainable under normal budgets. That era is over. ESSER III funds were obligated by September 2024. Simultaneously, the federal budget landscape has shifted toward sharp reductions in Title I and other foundational program funding, while state legislatures are facing their own fiscal pressures. Superintendents who managed through abundance must now build a sustainable model in scarcity.

FINDING 5A

ESSER Is Gone and Title I Faces Historic Cuts

*K-12 Dive / Center on Budget and Policy Priorities / Education
Resource Strategies 2024–25*

- ESSER III — the largest round of federal COVID relief funding at \$121.97 billion — was fully obligated by September 2024. The fiscal cliff is here.
- In 2024–25, districts began implementing cuts to staff, arts programs, summer enrichment, and student support services to compensate for ESSER expiration
- The House Appropriations Committee advanced a proposal in September 2025 to cut Title I funding by 26% and the overall Department of Education budget by 15% for FY2026
- The 12 states most exposed to federal education funding risk — including Alabama, Mississippi, South Carolina, Texas, and North Carolina — are concentrated in the South, where federal dollars represent the highest proportion of total education revenue
- The Trump administration temporarily withheld \$6.2 billion in Title I, Title II, Title III, and Title IV funds in 2025 before releasing them following legal action, creating “budgetary chaos” in districts nationwide

Source: K-12 Dive ESSER Fiscal Cliff Coverage 2024; Center on Budget and Policy Priorities Feb. 2024; Education Resource Strategies Federal Funding Risk Analysis 2025

FINDING 5B

Measurable Outcomes Are Now the Prerequisite for Funding Defense

Learning Policy Institute / McKinsey / District Budget Research 2024–25

- Districts that can demonstrate measurable improvements in KPIs — discipline reduction, attendance improvement, teacher retention, assessment gains — are significantly better positioned to defend budgets against state and federal pressure
- Title IV-A (Student Support and Academic Enrichment grants) and Title II-A (educator quality grants) explicitly fund programs that improve student behavior, school climate, and teacher development — exactly the outcomes iLead produces
- Programs with independent outcome data (such as TEA-sourced iLead KPI datasets) are far more defensible in funding conversations than programs with anecdotal or self-reported results
- ESSER funds were meant to accelerate academic recovery — yet NAEP scores show limited gains, fueling Congressional scrutiny of how districts used funds and what they have to show for it
- McKinsey's 2024 superintendent survey found that student behavior and absenteeism are now in the top five spending priorities — meaning the districts solving those problems are capturing available funding, while others are spending reactively on consequences

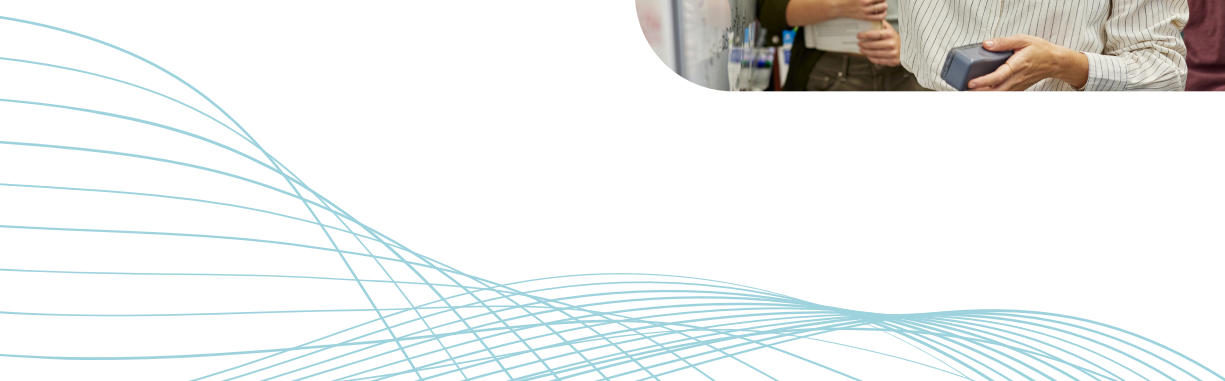
Source: Learning Policy Institute 2025; McKinsey ESSER Survey 2024 (n≈500 superintendents); K-12 Dive Federal Funding Coverage 2024–25; New America Education Policy Analysis 2025

| What Districts Can No Longer Count On | What Districts Can Control |
|--|---|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Sustained ESSER supplement funding• Reliable Title I levels• Federal funding stability year-to-year• Adding programs to solve behavioral issues• Replacing teachers without losing institutional knowledge | <ul style="list-style-type: none">• School culture and student behavior climate• Instructional hours recovered through discipline reduction• Measurable KPI improvement tied to program adoption• Teacher retention through positive school environments• Evidence-based program selection with TEA-verified outcomes |

What This Means for Your District ???

In a contracting funding environment, every dollar must produce documented results. Programs that improve multiple district KPIs simultaneously — behavior, attendance, teacher satisfaction, and assessment engagement — are the programs worth protecting. Programs with independent, government-sourced outcome data are the programs worth defending. Superintendents who can point to measurable improvements are the ones who keep their budgets.

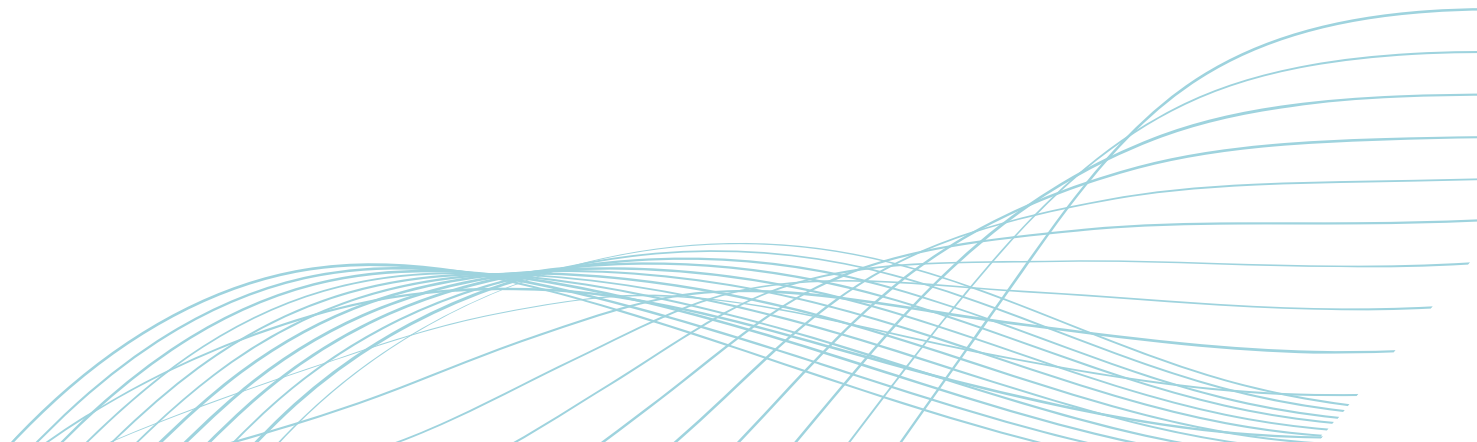
ILEAD CONNECTION iLead's discipline and engagement data is verified by the Texas Education Agency — not self-reported. That distinction matters in every funding conversation with a state official or school board. And programs that address behavior, attendance, and career readiness simultaneously are defensible against Title I, Title II-A, and Title IV-A funding streams.



Five Pressures. One Lever.

The five pressure systems every superintendent is managing in 2025 are not independent. They are interconnected – and they respond to the same type of investment. The research across workforce readiness, teacher retention, student engagement, academic achievement, and funding accountability all converges on a single finding: districts that develop students' internal leadership capacity measurably improve outcomes across all five domains.

| PRESSURE | ROOT CAUSE | WHAT CHANGES WHEN LEADERSHIP IS DEVELOPED |
|--|--|--|
| Career & College Readiness | <i>Leadership competency gap</i> | Students graduate with self-management, communication, and values-alignment – the skills employers actually rank as most deficient |
| Educator Retention | <i>Student behavior driving burnout</i> | Better school climate reduces administrative burden; teachers stay 62% longer in engaging cultures (Gallup) |
| Student Engagement & Behavior | <i>Lack of belonging and self-regulation</i> | Students with leadership identity show up, engage, and channel initiative constructively instead of disruptively |
| Test & Assessment Scores | <i>Absenteeism + disengagement gaps</i> | 17,311 instructional hours recovered in one district year through discipline reduction alone; presence drives performance |
| Federal & State Funding | <i>Programs without defensible KPIs</i> | TEA-verified discipline reduction and multidomain KPI improvement makes every program dollar defensible |



Proven Outcomes Across All Five Pressure Areas

A K–12 values-based leadership curriculum from Growing Leaders, powered by Maxwell Leadership Foundation

iLead is not a supplementary add-on. It is a system-driven implementation model that combines K–12 curriculum, digital platform, student assessment, and educator professional development into an integrated infrastructure. Its outcomes are not self-reported — they are documented by independent state-level data.

1

68%

Career & College
Readiness

of U.S. senior boys in the iLead program reported an increase in their choices connected to good character. 1 in 4 11th grade girls in SC reported increased initiative to lead.

2

70%+

Educator
Retention

Pilot-to-multi-year adoption conversion rate — districts adopt because teachers and administrators report measurable improvements in school culture and workload within the first year.

3

45%

Student Engagement
& Behavior

Reduction in aggressive behaviors resulting in disciplinary actions reported by U.S. schools using iLead. 25% reduction in out-of-school suspensions in Texas Region 18 ESC districts.

4

17,311

Test & Assessment
Scores

Additional instructional hours recovered in Texas Region 18 ESC districts in a single year through discipline reduction — equivalent to 2,473 fewer days students spent out of classrooms.

5

TEA

Funding Defense

iLead's outcomes are verified by the Texas Education Agency — not self-reported. Independent, government-sourced data makes every funding conversation stronger.

Texas Education Agency Independent Verification: Region 18 ESC (December 2025)

Based on K-12 districts with two years of iLead implementation. Source: iLead Positive Character Traits Dataset, Texas Education Agency. Released December 2025.

| Discipline KPI | 2024 | 2025 | Change |
|---------------------------------|------------|---------------|-----------------------------|
| In-School Suspensions (ISS) | 7,919 days | 6,088 days | ↓ 23.12% (-1,831 days) |
| Out-of-School Suspensions (OSS) | 2,577 days | 1,935 days | ↓ 25.0% (-642 days) |
| DAEP Placements | 584 | 503 | ↓ 13.87% (-81 placements) |
| Instructional Hours Regained | — | +17,311 hours | 2,473 fewer days × 7 hrs |

TEA Conclusion: December 2025

"The data strongly indicates that the iLead program is a key driver in improving the K-12 learning environment. The ability to reduce exclusionary discipline by 25% demonstrates a powerful and positive shift in school culture and student engagement."

Conducted in partnership with: Texas Education Agency, Region 18 Education Service Center, Growing Leaders, and Maxwell Leadership Foundation.

Program Scale & Adoption

1.7M+

U.S. students impacted to date



8.6M+

Global students impacted
(program to date)



40

Countries where iLead
is being used



269,920

Teachers trained globally,
program to date

889

Active U.S. schools using
iLead in 2026



70%+

Pilot-to-multi-year district
adoption rate



What Implementation Looks Like in Your District

iLead is not a pilot program asking you to take a risk. It is a proven, system-driven model that begins with a clear district entry point, equips your educators, and produces measurable KPI outcomes within the first year of implementation.

Year 1

Entry-level implementation.

- Selected schools, pilot cohort, or district-wide roll-out depending on district size.
- Curriculum integrated into existing structures.
- Baseline KPIs established.
- Educator professional development provided.

Year 2

Measurable outcomes emerge.

- Discipline data, attendance data, and student leadership indicators tracked and reported.
- TEA-level verification available for participating Texas districts.
- Most districts see significant discipline reductions by end of Year 2.

Year 3+

System-wide culture shift.

- 70%+ of pilot districts renew for multi-year adoption
- iLead becomes embedded school culture infrastructure, not a program with an expiration date.

How iLead Works

- Curriculum-integrated — designed to work within existing school structures without adding to teacher workload
 - Values-based and nonpartisan — applicable across public and private K-12 settings, across ideological and community contexts
 - Educator professional development included — teachers are equipped and coached, not just given materials
 - Digital platform + student assessment — tracks leadership development outcomes with measurable data points
 - Independent outcome verification available — TEA-sourced data available for Texas districts; district-level KPI tracking standard for all implementations
 - Scalable from single school to statewide — currently active in 88g U.S. schools across 40 countries
-

The Next Step Is a Conversation, Not a Commitment

Our Implementation Advisors work specifically with district leadership teams to understand your current KPI landscape, identify where the research in this brief applies most directly to your context, and outline what an iLead implementation could look like in your district.

This is not a sales call. It is a 30-minute diagnostic conversation with a professional who has helped districts like yours navigate exactly the five pressures outlined in this report.

Connect with an iLead Implementation Advisor

[GrowingLeaders.com](https://growingleaders.com) | [MaxwellLeadershipFoundation.org](https://maxwellleadershipfoundation.org)

Sources cited in this report include: YouScience 2025 Post-Graduation Readiness Report; NACE 2024 Student Survey and Job Outlook 2025; U.S. Chamber of Commerce & College Board New Hire Readiness Report 2025; Bain & Company Alumni Early Career Outcomes Survey 2024; Cengage Group 2025 Graduate Employability Report; RAND State of the American Teacher 2025 (n=1,419) and 2024; Learning Policy Institute Teacher Shortages 2025; Arizona Department of Education Teacher Retention Report 2025; AASPA Teacher Burnout Research 2025; Gallup Educator Engagement Research; RAND American School District Panel Chronic Absenteeism Report, November 2025; AEI Lingering Absence Report 2025; Attendance Works Policy Brief 2025; NCEED Chronic Absenteeism & Engagement Report July 2025; Panorama Education SEL Data 2025; AERA Annual Meeting Research 2024; NAEP 2024 Nation's Report Card (January 2025 and September 2025); FutureEd NAEP Analysis 2025; Hunt Institute NAEP Analysis 2025; IDRA NAEP Analysis 2025; K-12 Dive ESSER Coverage 2024–25; Center on Budget and Policy Priorities 2024; Education Resource Strategies Federal Funding Risk Analysis 2025; New America Education Policy 2025; McKinsey ESSER Survey 2024; TEA iLead Positive Character Traits Dataset, Region 18 ESC, December 2025.

