

KIPP: Leadership Coaching



WHAT COACHING MAKES POSSIBLE:
An Impact Analysis of KIPP's Leadership Coaching Program

March 2026

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Preface: A Note on How We Tell This Story

The KIPP Leadership Coaching Impact Analysis is guided by the [ROOTED Impact Framework](#) — a human-centered approach to understanding what coaching makes possible. ROOTED positions impact not simply as something to prove, but as something to learn from and steward over time. This orientation matters because the most meaningful effects of coaching are often not captured in a single metric. They live in how a leader shows up, how a team is shaped, and how a school culture shifts — over seasons, not snapshots.

The case for coaching is not unique to KIPP. Research from the International Coaching Federation confirms that organizations with strong coaching cultures consistently outperform those without — demonstrating greater success at large-scale strategic change, higher employee engagement, and stronger retention.

Coaching-related activities account for half of the most effective change management practices reported by leaders and employees alike, and 44% of high-performing organizations formally budget for coaching culture as a strategic priority ([ICF, Creating an Impactful Coaching Culture, 2022](#)). These findings hold particular relevance for KIPP, an organization navigating ambitious transformation toward 2030 while asking its leaders to hold both urgency and complexity at once. A coaching culture is not a luxury in that context. It is a necessary infrastructure.

This report focuses primarily on data collected from 2020 to the present — a period that begins with the COVID-19 pandemic and the complex leadership challenges that followed, and represents one of the most demanding eras for school leadership in recent memory. While the program has historical data that predates this window, this period offers the most relevant lens for understanding coaching's current contribution and future potential. It is also the period in which the value of individualized, relational support — the kind that coaching uniquely provides — has become most visible.

Throughout this report, coaching is described as a meaningful contribution to leader growth within a broader leadership development ecosystem — not as a sole cause of any single outcome. The findings are honest about both what the data confirms and where it remains directional.

The leaders whose words appear in these pages spoke candidly about what coaching made possible for them — and where they believe it could go further. What they shared — in interviews, in surveys, and in [video testimonials](#) — has the power to expand and deepen the impact KIPP is building toward 2030 and beyond.

This impact analysis report reflects the story of 18 years of leadership coaching at KIPP. My hope is that it serves as a record of what this professional development offering has made possible, and an invitation to resource and sustain it even more intentionally as KIPP moves toward 2030.

Deepest gratitude to every leader who participated in a survey, conversation, or reflection about the role of KIPP's Leadership Coaching Program.

The Strategic Opportunity: Why this Analysis Matters Today

KIPP's ability to deliver on its 2030 commitments depends on the strength, stability, and longevity of its leaders. Four learning questions guide this inquiry into what leadership coaching has made possible, and how to leverage it more fully as an integrated strategy toward 2030.

[KIPP's 2030 priorities](#) place instructional excellence and measurable student outcomes at the center of the network's future. Achieving these goals depends not only on strategy and curriculum, but on the leaders responsible for implementing change consistently across schools and regions over time. The KIPP 2030 Plan identifies principal retention as an explicit network anchor measure — a recognition that student outcomes depend on the consistency and stability of the leaders responsible for delivering on that vision. Building this kind of stability requires deliberate cultivation — a commitment to investing in the people closest to the work. As Brené Brown writes, "Developing core stability and functional strength in organizations means investing in people, because for an organization people and our connection to each other are the strong ground." That ground — internal stability, self-awareness, values-based anchorage — is what allows leaders to remain steady, courageous, and connected when navigating uncertainty and leading significant change. Leadership Coaching is a support structure that builds that ground.

The evidence for this strategy lives in the voices of the people leading the work. As one senior network leader interviewed reflected: "You can have the perfect academic strategy. If the people cannot influence and impact each other, it doesn't matter if you have a perfect plan if the people can't deliver it. As the stakes rise, so should our efforts to build our people's capacity. Part of that capacity is technical, but part of it's adaptive." That capacity is inseparable from wellbeing. Workplace wellbeing — defined simply as how we feel at work and about our work (Ward & De Neve, 2024) — shapes how leaders show up, how long they stay, and how effectively they build the people around them. Leadership Coaching is a direct investment in that wellbeing — and through it, in the strong, stable ground the network depends on.

The strategic opportunity, then, is a coaching model that is — as one senior stakeholder described it — both "human-centered and system-aware." One that does not compromise the relational, identity-affirming core of coaching while also serving as an active connector across KIPP's One KIPP framework. Within that framework, coaching lives most naturally in the Build Capacity pillar — but its power is amplified when it operates as a throughline: helping leaders understand and internalize the bar, develop the skills and mindsets to meet it, and sustain the adaptive capacity to grow through accountability. This impact analysis study documents what has already been made possible through KIPP's investment in Leadership Coaching, and where it can go further.

What We Set Out to Learn

Four learning questions shaped this inquiry. Together, they are designed to surface not only where coaching has had the greatest impact, but what conditions make it most effective, how it fills a distinctive role in the broader leadership development ecosystem, and what leaders themselves believe it has made possible over time.

- **LQ1:** Who is KIPP's Leadership Coaching Program best positioned to serve, and at what points in a leader's journey does coaching have the greatest impact?
- **LQ2:** What aspects of the coaching experience most contribute to leader effectiveness, well-being, and retention?
- **LQ3:** How does coaching uniquely support leaders in ways that other supports cannot — while strengthening those existing systems?
- **LQ4:** What do leaders perceive as the long-term value of the program, and what makes it a sustained, worthwhile investment over time?

Methodology: How We Listened

This analysis draws on six years of survey data and more than 20 in-depth interviews — examined together to build a picture of coaching's impact that is both evidence-grounded and human-centered.

This analysis used a mixed-methods approach — integrating quantitative patterns with qualitative insights to build a comprehensive picture of coaching's contribution to leaders' growth, retention, and practice. Survey data identifies trends at scale. Interviews illuminate what those trends feel like in practice and why they matter. Neither is sufficient alone. Together, they allow us to make claims grounded in both evidence and human experience — consistent with the [ROOTED Impact Framework](#) guiding this work.

The qualitative core was a series of in-depth one-on-one interviews conducted between January and March 2026 with 25 stakeholders — including current and former coaching clients, managers of coached leaders, regional leaders, KIPP Foundation senior leaders, and program alumni. Conversations were guided by the four learning questions and structured to surface both affirmations of impact and honest reflection on opportunities for expansion, growth, or adaptation. Interviews were transcribed and analyzed thematically through a collaborative sense-making process involving the coaching team and key thought partners — a deliberate choice to ensure that interpretation remained close to the people and context the data represents.

The survey analysis draws on six years of annual coaching client impact surveys — mid-year and end-of-year cycles from SY2019–20 through the current school year — capturing leader perspectives on growth, confidence, effectiveness, retention intent, and equity-aligned practice. This six-year window is one of the most methodologically significant features of this work — and it was chosen intentionally. Beginning with the COVID-19 pandemic and the complex leadership challenges that followed, this period represents one of the most demanding eras for school leadership in recent memory. It is also the period in which the value of individualized, relational support — the kind that Leadership Coaching uniquely provides — has become most visible. Examining trends across this window allows patterns to be understood not as isolated snapshots, but as sustained evidence of coaching's contribution during the moments that mattered most. Additional sources include historical retention analyses spanning 2015 to 2020 and a comprehensive review of the literature on leadership coaching in educational settings.

Where the data allows, findings are examined across race, gender, role, and years of experience — not as a secondary filter, but as a primary lens. [The ROOTED Impact Framework](#) holds that impact cannot be fully understood without understanding whose experience is being centered. Together, these methods shaped what you will find in the pages ahead.

What is Coaching?

Leadership coaching is a structured developmental partnership designed to expand how leaders think, lead, and grow. The beliefs that anchor KIPP's approach to coaching have been in place since the program's founding — and they remain the heart of the work today.

[The International Coaching Federation](#) defines coaching as "partnering with clients in a thought-provoking and creative process that inspires them to maximize their personal and professional potential." This definition captures the essential nature of coaching — it is a partnership, not a prescription. It is forward-looking, not evaluative. And it is designed to unlock what is already possible in a leader, not to fix what is broken.

Coaching is most powerful when it is responsive to where a leader is in their journey. Research consistently shows that coaching's impact shifts across the leadership lifecycle — from identity formation in emerging leaders, to adaptive problem-solving in new principals, to renewal and recalibration in veteran leaders navigating sustained complexity. This lifecycle lens shapes how KIPP's Leadership Coaching Program is designed and how it is delivered. For a deeper exploration of the research foundation informing this program, read the comprehensive literature review prepared by Dr. Wheda Carletos, full-time KIPP Leadership Coach, to compliment our impact analysis work [here](#).

The following core beliefs, developed by Dr. Linda Belans, founder of KIPP's Leadership Coaching Program, have guided the program's approach since its inception — and continue to shape how coaches show up with leaders today:

- Coaching enables the development and thriving of leaders, which cascades to development and thriving for students.
- Coaching occurs within a relationship based on mutual respect and trust.
- Coaching is strengths-based. Coaches continuously see the higher self of the leaders they partner with, elicit strengths, and assist leaders in leveraging those strengths to find their own solutions and grow.
- Coaching is collaborative. Strong coaching interactions include curiosity, non-judgmental questioning, and active listening — marked by authentic dialogue between coach and leader.
- All States of Being intersect with all forms of coaching. Regardless of the tools or protocols being used, coaches integrate the States of Being throughout.
- Coaches consider both the adaptive and technical needs of an individual when developing them.
- All coaching happens through an equity lens — with coaches leveraging cultural competence, awareness of their own identities and biases, and attention to power dynamics and the stories and voices being elevated or marginalized.
- Strong coaches model continuous learning, staying abreast of new research, resources, and best practices from inside and outside of KIPP.

Historical Arc - From Pilot to Network Program

KIPP Leadership Coaching has been part of the network's fabric for 18 years — growing from 20 leaders to nearly 200, through budget pressures, leadership transitions, and a global pandemic.

KIPP's Leadership Coaching Program has been part of the network's leadership infrastructure since 2008 — growing from an initial pilot of 20 leaders to nearly 200 leaders today. During that time, the program has provided sustained support to leaders navigating the complexity of school leadership through periods of network growth, leadership transitions, budget pressures, and even a global pandemic.

The program was founded by Dr. Linda Belans, whose research and doctoral dissertation on the [States of Being framework](#) shaped both the program's launch and the coaching philosophy the team continues to practice today. In the late 2000s, as KIPP expanded and prepared its first wave of successor leaders, coaching was embedded in several national leadership programs, including the Fisher Fellowship, the Miles Family Fellowship, Successor Prep, and AP-focused Leadership Team cohorts. Leaders who participated often described coaching as one of the most formative elements of their development. As one program leader who helped build the early model recalled, "The way it was introduced was as a really caring support to leaders — and leaders very quickly saw it as a benefit that they wanted, and they wanted it on a continuous basis." In 2008, the program formally launched with approximately 20 leaders, and demand spread quickly as principals, regional leaders, and Foundation staff began seeking coaches of their own.

As the network grew, the program expanded alongside it — serving more than 120 leaders by 2015 and reaching a peak of 280 leaders by 2024. Today, the program serves 191 leaders, including KIPP Foundation senior leaders and Noble Charter Schools principals. What has sustained the program across 18 years is consistent: leaders find the experience valuable and continue to seek it out. As one school leader wrote at the close of the 2019–2020 school year, "The coaching this year is a big part of why I stayed for the year and why I am coming back next year. I had some dark moments, and knowing I had someone on my side, ready to push me, is what gave me the confidence I needed to show up."

Across 18 years, three program leaders have carried this work forward — Dr. Linda Belans (2008–2015), Pam Moeller (2015–2023), and Dr. Philonda Grant (2023–present) — each of whom stewarded the work with deep commitment to the leaders it serves, the mission it advances, and the craft of coaching. Together, they represent a continuity of care and commitment that is itself a testament to what this program has always stood for.

The Coaching Program's Mission and Vision

KIPP's Leadership Coaching Program is built on a clear conviction about how leaders grow. This section describes the program's mission, model, and the investment it represents in the leaders who make KIPP's 2030 commitments achievable.

Thriving school communities do not happen by accident. They are built by leaders who know how to lead themselves, lead people, and lead toward results with intention, integrity, and care. KIPP's Leadership Coaching Program cultivates this kind of leadership across the network — strengthening leaders from the inside out by identifying and affirming their strengths, unpacking their identities, challenging their beliefs and patterns, and growing their agency and confidence to lead as their full, authentic selves. At the heart of that work is a single conviction: that leaders already carry within them the strengths, wisdom, and capacity they need to lead well. Everything the program does — how coaches show up, how relationships are structured, how growth is supported — flows from that belief. Our mission and vision makes it concrete:

Leadership Coaches walk side-by-side with leaders, centering and leveraging their core strengths, unpacking and affirming their identities, challenging their beliefs and patterns, developing their awareness and skills, and growing their agency and confidence to lead as their full, authentic selves. So that, one day, KIPP leaders reflect, develop, and co-create equitable systems and school communities where all adults and students can thrive.

Anchored in [KIPP's Refreshed Leadership Competency Model](#), the program is designed to reinforce both the technical and adaptive dimensions of leadership — with particular depth in the adaptive capacity that allows technical strategy to land and endure. Principal retention, leadership development pipelines, and the consistent execution of instructional strategy all depend on leaders who are grounded, growing, and sustained in their roles. Organizations that invest in coaching cultures retain more talent, develop more adaptive leaders, and build greater capacity to sustain change — a commitment KIPP's Leadership Coaching Program has held for 18 years ([ICF, Creating a Coaching Culture, 2022](#)). A comprehensive review of empirical research conducted as part of this analysis finds that the impact of coaching is developmental and cumulative — strengthening leaders' thinking and skills throughout their entire leadership journey ([Carletos, 2026](#)).

Leadership Coaching and Management: Distinct Roles, Shared Purpose

Leadership Coaching and management serve distinct but complementary roles — strengthening both the technical and adaptive dimensions of leadership across the network.

Leadership Coaching and management serve distinct but complementary roles — strengthening both the technical and adaptive dimensions of leadership across the network. Tony Stoltzfus, in *Leadership Coaching* (p.21), argues that both advice-giving and coaching have importance and value — the question is not which matters more, but what each is uniquely positioned to do.

Effective leadership development systems do not rely on a single form of support. They intentionally combine multiple structures that build different dimensions of leadership capacity. At KIPP, leaders grow through a range of supports: managers who provide observation and feedback, regional teams who develop technical expertise, and professional learning that strengthens instructional and operational practice. These structures are essential because they help leaders build the knowledge and skills required to meet the organization's expectations for leadership.

Leadership coaching plays a distinct role within this ecosystem. Unlike managers or supervisors, coaches hold no authority over a leader's evaluation, performance, or career trajectory. Coaching relationships are confidential, non-evaluative, and grounded in a core conviction: that people already have within them what they need to solve their own problems — the coach's role is to create the conditions for that capacity to emerge. What coaching produces is distinct: change that is realistic, sustainable, and owned by the leader (English, Sabatini Swann, & Berman, *Professional Coaching: Principles and Practice*, p.345).

One stakeholder described effective leadership as requiring both the "plumbing" and the "poetry" — the technical systems that make schools function and the adaptive leadership that enables people to bring those systems to life. Coaching's most distinctive contribution lives in the adaptive dimensions. As Elena Aguilar argues in *Arise: The Art of Transformational Coaching* (p.35), transformation and sustained change happen when coaching attends to behaviors, beliefs, and ways of being — attending to each of these elements present within the leader, not just skills and actions. Leading self, leading people, and leading toward results each require this depth — and coaching creates the conditions for leaders to develop it.

KIPP leaders themselves recognize this connection. In the SY2025–26 Mid-Year Coaching Client Impact Survey, approximately 95% of leaders agreed that coaching helped them develop skills and beliefs aligned with the Leadership Competency Model. This finding reflects what research across sectors has consistently shown: organizations that integrate coaching alongside technical development see stronger leadership effectiveness and organizational performance. Coaching functions as connective tissue — helping leaders translate learning into practice and sustain growth over time.

As one senior leader summarized, "The adaptive paves way for the technical." [KIPP's 2030 priorities](#) require both. When coaching and management work in their own lanes — each doing what it is uniquely designed to do — leaders are better equipped to deliver results, build strong teams, navigate complexity, and sustain themselves in demanding roles. That is the shared purpose this system is built toward.

What The Program Offers Today and Who It Serves

KIPP Leadership Coaching is designed to meet leaders where they are and grow them from the inside out — delivering personalized, strengths-based coaching across roles, regions, and levels of the network.

KIPP's Leadership Coaching Program is designed to meet leaders where they are and grow them from the inside out — delivering personalized, strengths-based coaching across roles, regions, and levels of the network. Today, KIPP's Leadership Coaching Program is a full-scale internal coaching program operating on a fee-for-service model — providing transformational leadership coaching to leaders across the network. The program is anchored in four core areas of development — deepening identity-rooted leadership, enhancing leadership effectiveness and systems stewardship, strengthening the capacity to develop and empower others, and supporting thriving and sustainable leadership. Together, these areas reflect a holistic vision of what it means to lead well in a complex, mission-driven organization.

Leadership coaching is personalized and delivered through a consistent cadence — usually bi-weekly — grounded in a confidential relationship between the leader and their selected coach. The program's approach is intentionally non-directive: coaches do not prescribe solutions or evaluate performance, but instead create the conditions for leaders to think more clearly, access their own wisdom, and lead from a place of genuine agency. This design reflects a growing body of research and practice — grounded in the principles, articulated by scholars like Elena Aguilar and Nancy Kline, that the quality of a leader's thinking determines the quality of their leadership.

The [program's current roster of active coaches](#) is highly experienced and diverse — most of whom are current or former successful KIPP school and organizational leaders themselves. They bring a wide range of identities, leadership backgrounds, and deep organizational expertise to their work with clients.

The program serves individuals in school-based academic roles (e.g., Deans, Assistant Principals, Principals), regional academic roles (e.g., Principal Supervisors, CAOs, CSOs, Executive Directors/CEO/Regional Superintendents), operations leadership roles (e.g., finance leaders, talent leaders), Noble Schools Principals, and the KIPP Foundation. Access currently varies by region, shaped by budget and organizational priority — a reality this report addresses directly in its findings and recommendations. The program offers subsidies for Principals in Residence and Directors of Leadership Development, and awards [Pam Moeller Coaching Equity Access Scholarships](#) each year to further reduce financial barriers across the network.

Coaching Suite of Offerings

KIPP's Leadership Coaching Program has historically offered both 1:1 and community/group coaching services. Beginning in SY2026–2027, the next chapter of the program includes an expanded suite of offerings: 1:1 coaching, group coaching, team coaching, and on-demand professional development related to leadership coaching. This expansion reflects a deepened commitment to meeting leaders where they are — across roles, contexts, and moments in their growth. It is directly informed by the findings and recommendations that follow — a deliberate alignment between what the evidence reveals and how the program will show up for leaders going forward. The goal is a coaching ecosystem that is more responsive, more differentiated, and built to grow alongside the leaders it serves.

Key Findings

This section presents findings organized around eight themes — who benefits most from coaching, how it develops leadership capacity, how it supports retention and sustainability, and where access remains uneven across the network. The evidence behind each finding spans six years of client impact data surveys, in-depth interviews, and historical retention analyses.

KIPP's 2030 priorities depend on leaders who can carry complexity — who can navigate uncertainty, build culture, sustain themselves, and bring others along. Across stakeholder interviews conducted between January and March 2026, six years of client impact survey data (SY2019–20 through the current school year), and historical retention analyses, eight patterns emerged. Together, they tell a consistent story about what coaching cultivates — and what becomes possible when leaders are truly supported.

Finding 1: Leadership Coaching Is Especially Critical for High-Potential Leaders

Coaching is most impactful as a developmental investment for high-potential leaders— not as remediation.

Coaching is not remediation — it is an accelerator for leaders whose foundation is already strong and whose adaptive capacity is ready to be developed. Research from the Center for Creative Leadership confirms that development-focused coaching is most effective for leaders who already have strong technical skills — and that its impact extends beyond the individual, rippling outward to influence team and organizational performance. KIPP leaders describe this pattern directly. Leaders new to a role name coaching as the space that helped them work through imposter syndrome, build confidence in their seat, and navigate the learning curve of a transition. Leaders further into their journey describe coaching as what keeps deepening their practice. Program alumni surveyed confirm this pattern — 86% identified entering a new leadership role as among the moments when coaching felt most impactful. As one leader shared: "I am still finding my footing, but feel so much more capable having the time and space to ask and answer hard questions about the type of leader I am versus the type of leader I want to be."

A focused analysis of client impact survey data tell a consistent story: leaders report meaningful gains in confidence, leadership mindset, and adaptive capacity — regardless of role, region, or experience level. That growth deepens further when leaders have the space to process it — a need that becomes more acute as roles become more senior and more isolated.

Finding 2: Leadership Coaching Is Critical in High-Isolation Roles

The more senior the role, the more critical and irreplaceable the coaching partnership becomes.

As leaders move into more senior roles, the complexity of their work increases while the number of people they can process it with decreases. This isolation is a reality of educational leadership for some — and coaching is one support designed to address this directly. A senior leader interviewed named it plainly: "The higher you get, the fewer mirrors you have that really are pushing in the way a coach can." Another senior leader described what the absence of that space cost her: "Not having someone to process all the chaos with that wasn't also in the chaos... it didn't allow me to build the balcony perspective I needed to continue to see past it, to continue to see the bigger picture and what I wanted for myself as a human in building excellent schools for black kids." Leadership coaching holds what no other structure does for senior leaders — a safe space to make meaning of

their vision, honestly examine what might be blocking it, and practice leading with the excellence and care their communities deserve. The survey data across multiple years reflects this. In the EOY SY2021–2022 Coaching Client Impact Survey, 100% of leaders agreed or strongly agreed that coaching helped make them a more effective leader — a pattern that holds with particular force for those navigating the most senior and most isolated roles. That isolation is not just about access to feedback — it is about the weight of leading without a place to put it down.

Finding 3: Leadership Coaching Stabilizes Leaders in High-Pressure Roles

Coaching does not remove the weight of leadership — it creates the conditions to carry it.

Leaders across the network described the weight of their roles as a constant — one that does not diminish with experience or tenure. What coaching provides, they said, is not relief from the work but a structured space to process it. A senior leader interviewed described the logic plainly: "Leadership coaching is probably the only thing that we have to mitigate against that, to be honest with you. The work is the work." Part of what makes that weight so acute is the nature of the change leaders are being asked to lead. As one senior Foundation leader observed, there is a meaningful difference between leading change you initiated and leading change that arrived from above: "It's a whole different change management when you're sitting in your seat and somebody comes in and says we're going right — and I need you to lead the team to go right." That kind of complexity — carrying a direction you didn't choose while bringing others along — is precisely what no technical training prepares a leader for.

Coaching is one of the few structures designed to meet leaders inside that complexity — and help them lead through it. What leaders gain from that space is not relief from the demands of the role, but the capacity to meet those demands more clearly. In the SY2025–2026 Mid-Year Coaching Client Impact Survey, one leader described what that looks like in practice: "Leadership coaching has taught me the importance of slowing down, creating space to think strategically, and being more rational rather than reactive. I find myself approaching challenges with more clarity and information, therefore creating a better experience for my team, my staff, and me."

What leaders describe gaining from coaching is not the absence of pressure — it is the capacity to remain present within it. Research and lived experience confirm what leaders themselves name: that capacity is the foundation of thriving, retention, and sustainable well-being at work.

Finding 4: Leadership Coaching Develops Adaptive Capacity That Technical Training Cannot Produce

Technical training provides tools. Leadership Coaching supports the capacity to execute with excellence and consistency.

Across interviews, leaders drew a clear and consistent distinction between what technical training builds and what coaching builds. Technical training provides tools, frameworks, and known solutions — the *what* of the work. Leadership coaching develops the capacity to use them well — to lead people through change, navigate uncertainty, and execute with both excellence and care. Leaders described coaching as most valuable precisely where technical training reaches its limit — in moments where there is no known solution, and the leader must find a new one. One named what coaching makes possible at that level: "It really is about how does a leadership coach help me internalize and free up space in my brain to be able to apply my best self and my best

thinking to the work at hand — what I've signed up to do, for as long as I want to do it." Senior Foundation leaders responsible for academic strategy name the same gap. As one reflected, "Our model is a very technical model. I do see the role for both — for a different kind of coaching model that looks at the whole leader and understands who they are as a person and what they're dealing with."

KIPP's 2030 plan is technically sophisticated, and its execution depends on leaders who can bring people along, influence across lines of authority, and lead through the complexity that implementation always surfaces. Stakeholders across multiple interviews described a network that is well-resourced on the technical side and underinvested in the adaptive — and as KIPP's ambitions grow, so too must its investment in the leadership capacity required to deliver them. Leadership coaching is not a supplement to that strategy. It is what allows that strategy to land.

Finding 5: Leadership Coaching Shapes Leader Identity and Mindset — Not Just Performance

Leadership Coaching shapes how leaders see themselves — and, in turn, how they lead others.

Across survey data and interviews, leaders described coaching as the space where they did the most personal and enduring work — examining who they are, how their identities and values shape their leadership, and what it means to lead as their full selves. In the EOY SY2024–2025 Coaching Client Impact Survey, one leader named what that space made possible: "My coach consistently pushes me to liberate myself from the confines of other people's perceptions of who I should be and allows me to be who I am. That in turn has helped me be the leader that I am and the leader my organization needs me to be." Another leader interview described the alignment that coaching cultivated: "Coaching helped me stay rooted in my purpose while navigating real challenges, and it pushed me to lead with both vision and intention. That alignment has made my leadership more authentic, focused, and impactful."

Across six years of survey data, this pattern holds with remarkable consistency. In the SY2023–2024 End-of-Year survey, 97% of respondents agreed or strongly agreed that coaching supports them in leading as their full, authentic self — a figure that reflects not just satisfaction with coaching, but the depth of the identity work leaders describe doing within it.

Data from the program's first full-scale Manager Impact Survey (SY2025–26, n=39) adds an external lens to this finding: managers of coached leaders observed shifts in groundedness, values-alignment, and confidence that are visible in how their direct reports show up in the work. As one Chief People Officer observed, her direct report's "self-possession and confidence in advocating for organizational change has increased, grounded in her sense of expertise and authority over her realm of responsibility." A Deputy Regional Superintendent described the shift in even more foundational terms — coaching had helped her direct report "see herself as a long-term systems leader, not just a campus problem-solver."

For some leaders, that work reshapes not just how they lead but what they believe is possible for themselves. In a survey of program alumni conducted this spring, one leader reflecting on three years of coaching shared: "The work centered my ownership in my own development — no longer waiting for feedback cycles or external validation, but actively advocating for the skills, support, and stretch opportunities I needed to grow... Through that process, I was encouraged to apply for the Deputy Regional Superintendent role and ultimately promoted

into it. Coaching didn't just improve my performance; it transformed how I see myself as a leader." Another named the deeper shift that made that kind of growth possible: "Leadership coaching has supported me with understanding my own power. This year, I had to do a lot of unlearning of skills that no longer serve my people or me well. Leadership coaching has helped me understand those deficits and adjust to align more with my authentic self."

Being seen changes what leaders believe is possible. That shift — from doubt to ownership, from performance to purpose — is not incidental to KIPP's 2030 strategy. It is what makes that strategy executable.

Finding 6: Leadership Coaching Sustains Leaders From the Inside Out

Leadership coaching provides a structured space for leaders to navigate complexity, make sense of their realities, and uncover the conditions that make thriving — not just surviving — possible.

Leadership coaching provides a structured space for leaders to navigate complexity, make sense of their realities, and uncover the conditions that make thriving — not just surviving — possible. The conditions of school leadership are demanding by nature — and what leaders need is not relief from those conditions, but the clarity, grounding, and agency to meet them on their own terms. As one senior leader described: "What hasn't changed is the amount of weight in the work that you are expected to absorb and carry." Coaching does not remove that weight. What it does — over time and through consistent relationship — is help leaders navigate complexity, make sense of their realities, advocate for what they need, and uncover the conditions that make sustainable leadership possible. A director of leadership development named what that makes possible: "When that load gets lessened, you're willing to stay in the role for longer... Coaching helps stop the noise — the background noise that distracts you when you're trying to do your core job."

In the SY2025–2026 Mid-Year Coaching Client Impact Survey, one leader described what that looks like in practice: "Leadership coaching has taught me the importance of slowing down, creating space to think strategically, and being more rational rather than reactive. I find myself approaching challenges with more clarity and information, therefore creating a better experience for my team, my staff, and me." Another described coaching as the practice that keeps her grounded: "Coaching has given me dedicated time to reflect on my practice and reconnect with my purpose. It has helped me slow down, name my strengths, and lead with more confidence and clarity."

The data across multiple years reflects this clearly. In the EOY SY2024–2025 Coaching Client Impact Survey, 97% of leaders agreed or strongly agreed that coaching supports their well-being and helps them sustain and thrive in their leadership. In the MOY SY2025–2026 survey, 89% agreed or strongly agreed that coaching makes them more likely to remain in their current role. Leaders who are grounded, clear, and sustained in their roles do not just stay — they lead with greater depth, build stronger teams, and grow the people around them. That is what thriving leadership looks like in practice.

Finding 7: Leadership Coaching Creates the Conditions for Thriving — And Thriving Leaders Stay

Leadership coaching supports the conditions for thriving — and when leaders are truly thriving, retention follows.

Thriving — as defined within [KIPP's Leadership Competency Model](#) — is characterized by growth and development, successful progression toward goals, and opportunities to flourish and leverage strengths. Leadership coaching is a developmental approach that enables the cultivation of these mindsets and behaviors.

Leaders name this connection directly and consistently. In the EOY SY2024–2025 Coaching Client Impact Survey, one leader described what coaching made possible: "Leadership coaching has played a significant role in supporting my thriving as a school leader. Through coaching, I've had a consistent space to reflect, set intentional goals, and process complex challenges in real time. It's been a key lever in helping me progress toward my leadership goals while staying rooted in my values." Another described the same experience: "Leadership coaching has been instrumental in supporting my thriving this year. It provided a space for deep reflection, pushed my thinking, and helped me clarify my priorities amidst complexity. Through consistent partnership, I was able to navigate challenges while staying anchored in my values."

In the MOY SY2023–2024 survey, 77% of coached leaders agreed or strongly agreed that they experience thriving at work — and, the historical data suggest, thriving is what drives retention. Leaders name coaching as a consistent support for their thriving — and they also name what gets in the way: organizational instability, unclear priorities, and insufficient manager development. Thriving is an ecosystem condition. Coaching is one structure within that ecosystem — and leaders name it as one they return to, rely on, and credit with keeping them grounded in the work.

The historical data makes that signal visible. Coached school leaders from 2015–2020 were retained at significantly higher rates at every tenure milestone — at three years, at five years, and among leaders who served six or more years. That pattern is consistent and worth honoring. The more recent picture is more layered. Cohort analyses from 2023–24 and 2024–25 show coached leaders retained at rates slightly below the network average — a pattern the program is actively examining as an invitation to look more closely, ask better questions, and learn.

What neither data set can fully capture is why. When leaders were asked in SY22–23 about their retention decisions, their answers were honest and varied. Some were leaving because of circumstances no program could have changed — a role eliminated, a health crisis, a family that needed to move. Others were choosing to remain because of students they weren't ready to leave, work they hadn't finished, and in some cases, a devotion to mission, a manager relationship, or a meaningful partnership with their leadership coach.

The conditions that make thriving possible are not equally available to all leaders across the network — and that gap has consequences. Retention follows as a natural expression of a system that invests in and ensures leaders — at different stages and lifecycles — thrive. What the data invites is a continued commitment to understanding what thriving requires for each leader — and investing strategically.

Finding 8: Uneven Access to Coaching Creates an Organizational Equity Gap

Access to leadership coaching varies widely across the network—and where it is absent, leaders and communities bear the cost.

Across this analysis, the impact of leadership coaching is consistent. Access to it is not. Whether a leader receives coaching—and whether they receive it at all—is shaped less by need than by geography, regional budgets, and the degree to which decision-makers believe adaptive leadership development is worth investing in. Some regions have made sustained investments that make coaching broadly available across leadership levels. Others have not, leaving leaders in comparable roles with dramatically different levels of developmental support.

A senior talent leader interviewed named the underlying condition that determines whether coaching can function as intended: “In order for coaching to offer you all that it needs to offer, you have to have the conditions where learning and growing and evolving is celebrated.” Where those conditions do not exist—where coaching is viewed primarily as a luxury, a budget line, or a last-resort intervention—leaders may technically receive coaching, but not in the form or duration required for it to have meaningful developmental impact.

Stakeholders described the consequences of this dynamic clearly. One senior leader noted what often happens when budgets tighten: “If you're in tight budget circumstances, you may cut your own support first.” A regional talent leader described what she sees on the ground: “I recommend that you have a manager, a coach, and a therapist, period. And if you miss one of those three, you're probably not your full self.” She recalled what happened when her region eliminated coaching from its budget: leaders—most of them Black—either left the organization or began reaching out informally for the kind of support that had once been structured and sustained.

This access gap also has a clear equity dimension. [The 2021 Equity and Belonging Themes report](#), authored by KIPP Leadership Coaches, documented that some Black and Latinx leaders reported having to advocate for coaching and development support—and in some cases being denied or overlooked when they did. Leaders from historically underrepresented groups, who often navigate the most complex identity and organizational terrain, are among those most likely to lose access when budgets shift. One leader described personally funding her own coaching after regional support ended, unwilling to lose the one structure that had made her tenure sustainable.

The structural reality behind this pattern is straightforward. Because regions bear a portion of the cost, access becomes discretionary. One regional leader explained the implication plainly: “If that funding went away, even in a well-resourced region, we wouldn't be able to offer it for the length of time that we do. It would have to come out of school budgets—and then you'd have people opting out.” Another leader described the reinforcing cycle this creates: “There are people in positions who have never experienced this kind of coaching, so they don't know or see the value in it.” When leaders have not experienced coaching themselves, they are less likely to advocate for it. Over time, the access gap compounds.

What this analysis makes visible is not a failure of individual regions, but a structural invitation for the network. If leadership coaching functions as the evidence suggests—a developmental support that cultivates thriving, sustains leaders, and strengthens the conditions required for KIPP's 2030 priorities—then access to it cannot

remain dependent on discretion alone. Ensuring equitable access to leadership coaching is not simply a programmatic question; it is a leadership development and equity strategy for the network as a whole.

Strategic Implications and Recommendations

This analysis surfaces four strategic recommendations for how KIPP invests in, deploys, and sustains leadership coaching going forward.

The findings in this analysis are consistent and clear. Leadership coaching cultivates adaptive capacity, sustains leaders through the weight of their roles, shapes identity and mindset, and—when leaders are thriving—strengthens retention. What the findings also make visible is where the program has more to give. The four recommendations that follow identify the conditions under which coaching can deliver its fullest impact across the network.

4 Strategic Recommendations

1. Prioritize Coaching at High-Leverage Leadership Transition Points
2. Establish a Standard of Care That Treats Coaching as a Retention Strategy
3. Ensure a Coherent Leadership Development Ecosystem
4. Leverage Coaching Learning Loops as Organizational Intelligence

1. Prioritize Coaching at High-Leverage Leadership Transition Points

In her book [From Onboarding to Everboarding](#), Amber Watts introduces a concept that reframes how organizations think about talent development. Everboarding — a combination of "onboarding" and "evergreen" — positions learning as continuous rather than episodic, and supports all talent management structures from acquisition to succession planning. Leadership Coaching is a form of everboarding. As KIPP moves into the execution of its 2030 priorities, this recommendation calls for both prioritizing coaching at high-leverage leadership transition points and sustaining it as a commitment to every individual within the organization.

Across interviews and survey data, leaders most consistently identify coaching as critical during leadership transitions and the early years of a new role. Leaders stepping into expanded responsibilities describe coaching as the space that helps them make sense of the role, navigate complexity, and sustain themselves in the work.

Leadership transitions represent moments of heightened organizational risk and opportunity. The way leaders experience their early years in a role often shapes their effectiveness, leadership identity, and decision to remain in the position. Aligning coaching with these moments ensures leaders receive support precisely when expectations, scope, and isolation increase most rapidly. Leadership Coaching, as one senior KIPP Foundation leader noted, meets leaders at precisely the right moment — when they are "really being stretched... in a way that everyone deserves the space to really sharpen and clarify their thinking."

Priority access to coaching should be aligned to key transitions into high-pressure, high-accountability leadership roles across the network, including:

- Leaders in the first three years of a new leadership role
- Leaders moving into the principal seat
- Founders launching new schools
- Leaders stepping into senior roles with expanded responsibility and isolation

[Alumni survey data from Spring 2026](#), capturing reflections from former coaching participants, reinforces a consistent pattern: coaching is most impactful during leadership transitions and moments of challenge, with 100% of respondents identifying these periods as the most meaningful point of support. Currently, access to coaching during these moments is inconsistent and often depends on informal networks or regional capacity. A transition-informed deployment framework would ensure leaders are connected with a coach early in the transition — before the weight of the role outpaces the support available to carry it.

Investing in the Whole Ecosystem

A leader does not thrive in a vacuum. The ecosystem around them — the managers, the regional leaders, the Foundation partners — shapes what their leadership can become. That is why this recommendation extends beyond transition points. It is a commitment to developing every individual proximate to principals, so that the conditions for their retention, effectiveness, and thriving are built from the inside out.

Developing those closest to principals is not a supplement to principal development. It is what makes principal development stick. The academic and operations leaders who surround principals — who support them, challenge them, and shape the conditions they work within — are part of the same ecosystem. When those leaders are coached and developed, principals are more likely to stay, grow, and lead well.

The Foundation is uniquely positioned to make this possible. By centralizing and consistently resourcing Leadership Coaching across the network, coaching stops being a regional variable and becomes a shared infrastructure — one that connects leaders to each other, to the Foundation, and to a common language of growth and reflection. As such, we are committed to continuing to provide Leadership Coaching to those in academic and operations roles across both the KIPP Foundation and the network — ensuring that every individual proximate to principals is being developed and supported, and that the conditions for principal retention, effectiveness, and thriving are built from the inside out.

This recommendation reflects careful thinking about what the Foundation is uniquely positioned to do — and what the network most needs. Centralizing Leadership Coaching is not an overreach. It is one of the most efficient and high-leverage ways the Foundation can build capacity, connect regions, and ensure that the leaders closest to principals are developed and sustained. The program's breadth is not a distraction from the Foundation's role — it is an expression of it. Principal retention and effectiveness do not live in a single role, but in the ecosystem surrounding it. We believe that investment is worth protecting, and worth resourcing well.

2. Establish a Standard of Care That Treats Coaching as a Retention Strategy

When leaders are asked what keeps them in their roles, leadership coaching surfaces consistently. In SY2024–25, 95% of leaders agreed or strongly agreed that coaching makes them more committed and prepared to remain in their current role. Yet access to coaching remains deeply uneven across the network. One senior leader interviewed named what is missing:

"I think getting back to a shared vision of what does it mean to have a standard of care for all leaders? What do all leaders get and how do they get it? Right now it just seems extremely varied... We care about people staying in our organization and doing really good work, but I don't know if there's a strategy tied to it."

When access depends on regional budgets or a manager's belief in the value of coaching, the program cannot reliably deliver what the evidence suggests it can.

Establishing a network-wide standard of care would clarify expectations and ensure more equitable access to leadership coaching across the network. Such a standard would define four core elements:

- **Who receives coaching** — Principals-in-Residence, Principals, Principal Supervisors, and senior regional leaders — including DLDs, EDs, CAOs, and CSOs — should have access to coaching as a baseline expectation rather than a discretionary regional benefit.
- **When coaching begins** — Coaching should be embedded at key leadership transition points, including a leader's first year in a new role, the move from school-based to regional leadership, and during turnaround or founding school assignments — moments when isolation and adaptive demands are highest.
- **Cadence and duration** — Practice points to the impact of a bi-weekly coaching cadence sustained for at least two full school years to build the trust and continuity that make coaching effective.
- **How access is funded** — Subsidies, scholarships, and additional investments should ensure equitable access so that coaching availability is never determined by regional budgets or a school's financial circumstances.

Coaching, treated as a standard of care, is both a retention strategy and a long-term investment in the kind of leadership KIPP's mission requires.

3. Ensure a Coherent Leadership Development Ecosystem

Leadership Coaching is most powerful when it functions as part of a connected leadership development system. Across interviews, stakeholders described a period in KIPP's history when the elements of the leadership lifecycle — onboarding, coaching, development, retention, and succession — operated together as a coherent whole. Over time, reorganizations, program sunsets, and shifting priorities loosened those connections. One leader reflected on what was lost and what remains worth reclaiming:

"I think leadership coaching is also something that has been a KIPP differentiator. The way in which KIPP has done it — where it is an internal function, it's an internal team, and it's this piece that we invest in — the way in which it's historically been baked into the fabric of KIPP is just different than what I've seen in other places. And I think that is something for us to really celebrate and highlight and really talk about more. It's almost like a reminder of — this is a big piece about who we are."

That identity is worth protecting — and worth rebuilding around. Leadership coaching serves a distinct purpose, grounded in a confidential, strengths-based partnership that enables leaders to reflect, adapt, and grow. What coherence requires is clarity about how coaching sits alongside performance management, formal learning, pipeline development, and regional support — and how each strengthens the others while preserving the integrity of each structure.

Rebuilding this coherence will require clearer articulation of KIPP's leadership development operating model — defining how leadership coaching, formal learning, performance support, and shared learning loops work together to strengthen leader effectiveness. An expanded measurement approach will further support this alignment by surfacing patterns and insights that inform continuous improvement across the system.

Recent partnerships within the KIPP Foundation demonstrate what becomes possible when leadership coaching is intentionally integrated into broader talent and development structures. The Principals-in-Residence and Directors of Leadership Development programs are two of the clearest examples — with over 90% of participants in both programs receiving leadership coaching as part of their experience. That integration is intentional: when adaptive growth and technical skill-building reinforce one another, leaders enter and grow into their roles with greater clarity, confidence, and readiness.

The Fall 2025 principal convenings reflect a deepening partnership with KIPP's Formal Learning team. This collaboration builds on earlier structures in KIPP's leadership development model, when coaching and formal learning were more explicitly connected. Reestablishing this alignment has proven both natural and strategic. A full professional development session on transformational coaching — designed and facilitated in partnership with the Formal Learning team — drew strong attendance and reflected a clear demand from principals for this kind of integrated developmental experience.

Manager feedback, as detailed in the [Spring 2026 Manager Impact Survey Round-Up](#), highlights a critical opportunity within this system: while coaching impact is strong, visibility into that impact is not always consistent. Managers consistently observe meaningful growth in their direct reports, yet many express a desire for greater alignment and shared understanding of leader development priorities. This gap points not to a limitation of coaching itself, but to a need for stronger coherence across the leadership development ecosystem.

Strengthening alignment across coaching, management, and formal development structures will ensure that coaching's impact is not only experienced by individual leaders, but fully integrated and amplified across the system.

One of the most concrete mechanisms for achieving this alignment is the Trio Call. Trio Calls bring together the leader, their coach, and their manager to align developmental priorities with organizational goals while preserving the integrity of the coaching relationship. As one leader described, this structure allows leaders to walk away “feeling heard, seen, valued, aligned to their strengths.”

Making Trio Calls a consistent and intentional practice across the program — rather than an optional add-on — represents one of the most immediate and actionable opportunities to strengthen coherence across the leadership system. More broadly, the partnerships, integrations, and structures described in this section are not new ideas for KIPP, but a return to something the organization has done well before. The opportunity now is not to reinvent the model, but to reestablish it with greater clarity, consistency, and intention — ensuring that coaching is fully connected to the systems that shape leader development, effectiveness, and retention.

4. Leverage Coaching Learning Loops as Organizational Intelligence

Capturing the stories and impact of leadership coaching has always been central to the purpose of KIPP's Leadership Coaching program. Over time, the program has done this through several efforts — including the [Six-Year Principal Project](#), [the Coaching Letter](#), and ongoing client impact surveys. Each effort reflects a commitment to surfacing the lived experiences of KIPP's leaders and being responsive to what those experiences reveal.

The next opportunity is to deepen the way the network learns — not just from coaching impact data, but from the lived experiences leaders bring into every coaching conversation. What coaches hear on the ground is organizational intelligence — a window into the conditions that support or undermine leader thriving across regions. The question is how to honor it, learn from it, and act on it.

Organizations that invest in understanding the broader conditions that support worker well-being are better positioned to retain talent, sustain performance, and build resilience over time. Coaching impact data is one part of that picture. When leaders name what helps them grow — and what gets in the way of workplace wellbeing — those insights become organizational intelligence about the conditions leaders need in order to thrive.

At the same time, coaching's defining feature — confidentiality — shapes what the program can and cannot surface at the organizational level. The opportunity is not to compromise that boundary, but to build learning structures that work within it. Concretely, this could include:

- Retention tracking by coaching cohort to understand how coaching duration and intensity relate to leader persistence.
- Manager-informed indicators of adaptive leadership growth assessed at regular intervals.
- Anonymized pattern-level reporting that allows coaches to surface systemic themes — including the conditions that support or detract from leader thriving — without compromising individual confidentiality.

Elements of this work are already reflected in the [program's refreshed measurement plan](#), which is designed to strengthen the tracking and understanding of coaching impact across the network over time. Building stronger learning loops would also align with broader national calls to strengthen workplace well-being. The [U.S. Surgeon General's Framework for Workplace Mental Health and Well-Being](#) emphasizes that organizations must intentionally create conditions that support connection, growth, and belonging at work — and that the well-being of workers and the health of organizations are deeply connected. Leadership coaching is one mechanism through which KIPP can build those conditions for the leaders responsible for carrying the mission forward.

Taken together, these recommendations position leadership coaching not as a standalone support, but as a strategic investment in the leaders responsible for carrying KIPP's mission forward. By prioritizing coaching at key transitions, ensuring equitable access, strengthening alignment across leadership systems, and building stronger learning loops, KIPP can sustain one of the organizational differentiators that has historically set the network apart.

Conclusion

"Coaching dwells on sacred ground as people trust us with stories they rarely have the luxury of offering to anyone else. They look to us to guide them through the challenging labyrinth of urgent school leadership."

— Dr. Linda Belans, *States of Being* (p. xxi)

KIPP has long operated from a core belief: leadership is the lever. What happens for children in classrooms is inseparable from the quality of the leaders who shape the systems, culture, and conditions around those classrooms. That belief is not rhetorical — it is structural. It has shaped how KIPP has built schools, invested in talent, and pursued impact from the beginning.

Leadership coaching is one of the clearest and most enduring expressions of that belief. For nearly two decades, it has provided leaders with a confidential, relational, and developmental space to think more clearly, lead more effectively, and sustain themselves in demanding roles. This analysis confirms that its value is not anecdotal or episodic. Across six years of survey data, historical retention analyses, and stakeholder interviews, the pattern is clear: leaders who receive coaching remain longer in their roles, grow more deeply in their leadership, navigate complexity more effectively, and sustain themselves in the work over time.

The significance of these findings extends beyond the coaching program itself. They speak directly to KIPP's ability to deliver on its 2030 commitments. Ambitious goals require more than strong strategy — they require leaders who can carry complexity, influence others, navigate adaptive challenges, and remain grounded in the work over time. Leadership coaching is one of the few investments across the network intentionally designed to build exactly that kind of capacity.

The leaders who will carry KIPP's 2030 vision forward are already in the system. They are leading schools, guiding teams, navigating transitions, and making high-stakes decisions every day. This report is an invitation to meet those leaders with the level of support the moment requires.

Leadership coaching has been part of the solution at KIPP for 18 years — through seasons of growth, challenge, and transformation. As KIPP Foundation moves toward its [2030 Strategic Priorities](#), the Leadership Coaching Program is a strategic investment in the leadership strength, stability, and sustainability required to carry the mission forward.

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