

# LEADERS

*for America's Schools*

TRAINING,  
RECRUITING,  
& SELECTING  
PRINCIPALS  
FOR SUCCESS

by  
Larry Lashway



ERIC Clearinghouse on Educational Management  
College of Education • University of Oregon

# LEADERS

for America's Schools

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by  
Larry Lashway

2003



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College of Education • University of Oregon

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**Leaders for America's Schools: Training, Recruiting, & Selecting  
Principals for Success**

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The ERIC Clearinghouse on Educational Management (ERIC/CEM) closed on December 31, 2003, as the result of restructuring within the U.S. Department of Education, less than a month after editing and formatting of this book were completed.

These circumstances made it impossible to produce a print edition. We have taken steps, however, to ensure that this electronic edition and all the other print and electronic products of the former ERIC Clearinghouse, including books by Edwin Bridges, David Conley, Lawrence Picus, and other works by Larry Lashway, are still available.

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## ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

This project began as a revision of Mark Anderson's original monograph on principals published by the ERIC Clearinghouse on Educational Management in 1991 (*Principals: How to Train, Recruit, Select, Induct, and Evaluate Leaders for America's Schools*). While it has gradually taken a somewhat different form, it nonetheless is built on the foundation established by Dr. Anderson; even after a decade of dramatic changes in education, his work remains perceptive and highly relevant. However, all responsibility for any errors or misconceptions in the current document is mine alone.

Because of the imminent closure of the ERIC Clearinghouse on Educational Management, this book is the last of several works of information analysis on issues of school leadership I have written for the Clearinghouse. Once again I have appreciated the strong support of the Clearinghouse staff, from Director Philip Piele to the behind-the-scenes production team. I owe a special debt, as usual, to Associate Director Stuart Smith, whose unfailing patience, tactful guidance, and editorial hand have kept me on track through a long process.

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# Introduction

When nineteenth-century educators were asked to articulate the essentials of good schooling, they often resorted to a favorite aphorism: “As is the teacher, so is the school.” It was their way of saying that educational quality began with a knowledgeable, alert, and dedicated human being in front of the classroom.

A hundred years later, the need for excellent teachers is as important as ever, but it is now accompanied by a search for educational leadership. For much of the past two decades, educators and policymakers seem to have been motivated by a new aphorism: “As is the principal, so is the school.”

This view of principals as the linchpins of school success began with the effective-schools research of the 1970s and 1980s, which indicated that the most successful schools had leaders who set clear expectations, monitored performance, and stayed tightly focused on instructional improvement. This image fit well with popular notions of heroic leadership, and the school reform movement that began in 1983 continued to view the principal’s role as pivotal.

Thus, when the first signs of a principal shortage emerged in the late 1990s, educators and policymakers reacted with alarm, producing a blizzard of articles and policy statements that affirmed the importance of principals and offered dozens of prescriptions for averting the looming crisis.

Although the most recent discussions have muted the predictions of crisis, the debate has made it clear that the health of the profession cannot be taken for granted. Rapidly diversifying student populations, diminishing resources, and heightened accountability for results have placed enormous stress on school leaders, and the passage of No Child Left

Behind has only intensified the pressures. Although most districts can still find qualified candidates for vacant principalships, the numbers appear to be declining. Many current principals are within striking distance of retirement, and the job seems to be less attractive than it once was.

Clearly, districts expecting to hire principals in the near future can no longer treat the training, recruitment, and selection of principals as routine tasks. Instead, keeping the leadership pipeline filled with qualified candidates requires proactive thinking, careful planning, and, above all, a clear vision of what school leadership *should* be.

This book presents a survey of current issues in preparing, recruiting, and selecting school leaders. As with all ERIC/CEM publications, it is designed to provide practitioners and policymakers with insights and ideas gleaned from expert research on educational leadership. In this regard, the federal government's recent push for "scientifically based research" has challenged longstanding assumptions about what constitutes a good research base. The "gold standard" of research, as defined by the U.S. Department of Education, requires experiments that randomly assign participants into treatment and control groups. Under those circumstances, differences in results can be more reliably attributed to the treatment being tested.

Unfortunately, such research is rare in education and almost nonexistent in the field of educational leadership. Apart from the considerable logistical difficulties that make it difficult to randomly assign participants to studies, researchers of the practice of leadership are faced with the problem of defining and measuring "success" clearly and credibly. Although almost everyone seems to agree that the most important measure of principal success is student success, establishing clear causal links between preparation programs and student achievement is exceedingly difficult because of all the intervening variables. The same is true of the relationship between hiring practices and student achievement.

Scholars may understandably wish to withhold judgment until better information is available, but school district executives and policymakers are in no position to withhold action:

Leaders have to be prepared and hired today. For that reason, this book uses the best of the literature that is available. What that body of knowledge provides us is not negligible:

- well-designed surveys that clarify the beliefs and practices of professors, practitioners, and policymakers
- thoughtful case studies that provide insight into the complexities of preparing and selecting qualified principals
- clear descriptions of representative or innovative programs
- best-practice recommendations that reflect the perspectives and accumulated wisdom of experienced practitioners
- theoretical speculations or thoughtful opinion that challenges engrained ways of thinking

Admittedly, none of this work authorizes us to elevate any particular strategy or practice as “scientifically proved.” So when this monograph ventures to make recommendations for practice, that advice should be treated as one analyst’s interpretation of a complex and incomplete knowledge base. Readers are encouraged to filter those recommendations through the lenses of their own experience, values, and institutional settings.

## Rethinking the Principalsip

**T**wenty years after *A Nation at Risk* ignited the educational reform movement, it's hard to find a discussion of school leadership that doesn't use the word "crisis." The Institute for Educational Leadership (2000) spoke for many observers when it said a lethal combination of escalating job demands and a shrinking pool of candidates meant that "the future of the principalsip is in question" and that failing to address the issue could result in "catastrophe."

Although the institute's strong language has been echoed in numerous journals, conferences, and district offices across the country, doomsday thinking may be a bit premature. The most recent discussions have displayed a more measured tone, suggesting that the candidate field is thinning, but not disappearing, and that shortages, while a problem in some districts, are not pervasive (Frank Papa and colleagues 2002; Marguerite Roza and colleagues 2003; Susan Gates and colleagues 2003).

Principals themselves seem upbeat about the state of the profession. Today's school leaders will admit to being frustrated by the system, pressured by demands for accountability, and very very busy, but they convey no hint that things are falling apart (James Doud and Edward Keller 1998; National Association of Secondary School Principals 2001; Steve Farkas and colleagues 2001). To the contrary, they leave the impression that most schools, most of the time, function well, offering safe environments for learning, employing well-qualified teach-

ers, and working hard to meet the needs of an increasingly diverse student population. Whatever their complaints—and they have many—principals take justifiable pride in what they have been able to accomplish under difficult conditions.

So why all the predictions of catastrophe? Were forecasters just overinterpreting a modest demographic trend? Not necessarily. The scholars, policymakers, and superintendents who raised the alarm have pointed out some troubling patterns in the world of school leadership:

- Most districts may still be able to find qualified principals, but those who do not are often in rural or urban areas serving some of the nation's neediest students.
- Although good candidates remain available in most districts, they seem to be fewer in number than previously.
- A surprising number of superintendents have expressed concerns about the quality of today's candidate pools.
- Principals' responsibilities have escalated dramatically in the past decade, leading to concerns that the job may be "undoable."
- There are continuing calls to "reinvent" the principalship by rewriting the job description, overhauling training, or opening the field to non-educators.

In short, the crisis may be embryonic—not currently disabling, but foolish to ignore.

Those responsible for hiring, inducting, and developing principals thus face a perplexing challenge. On the one hand, their most immediate concern is to get the best possible leadership for today's schools, something that by most accounts is becoming more difficult, if not yet impossible. At the same time, they must face the possibility that simply hiring the best of the available candidates may fail to provide the kind of leadership needed for successful twenty-first century schools. If the principalship is to be reinvented, it must be reinvented in schools, not in university preparation programs. Effective leadership is not just a personal quality of the principal, but also the result of how the system defines his or her role.

Thus, when districts enter the marketplace looking for principals, they need more than a job posting and a list of interview questions. They should also have a keen sense of the role they will ask candidates to fill, and what that role will require of both the principal and the district. A thoughtful, comprehensive approach to filling the principalship is a priority, not a luxury.

Most of this monograph deals with the practical realities and strategies for training, recruiting, and hiring principals. This chapter provides a context for those discussions. It begins with a brief portrait of today's principalship as reported by principals themselves and then describes not one but three possible crises looming on the horizon, if not already here. The implications of these crises will provide the framework and a continuing theme for the remainder of the monograph.

### The State of the Principalship

Before plunging into the debate on the state of the principalship, we can get a good reading of current conditions by listening to what principals themselves have to say about their jobs. Three studies by the National Association of Elementary School Principals, the National Association of Secondary School Principals, and Public Agenda have provided a rich body of information about today's principals (James Doud and Edward Keller; National Association of Secondary School Principals 2001; Steve Farkas and colleagues). These have recently been supplemented by a RAND analysis of data from the federal School and Staffing Survey (Susan Gates and colleagues 2003), as well as several other studies (Michael DiPaola and Megan Tschannen-Moran 2003; Rebecca Goodwin and colleagues 2003; Sue Poppink and Jianping Shen 2003). Some highlights:

**Demographics.** Principals generally appear to be more experienced than in previous surveys, a possible reflection of an aging work force. Among high school principals in the NASSP survey, 28 percent reported they had been principals for more than fifteen years, compared with 23 percent in 1988. Elementary respondents had a median age of fifty, three years higher than in 1988, and the highest ever reported in an NAESP

survey. School and Staffing Survey data reported an average age of 49.3 years for public school principals, with an average tenure of nine years. Both NAESP and NASSP reported increases in the number of women, with 42 percent among elementary principals and 20 percent among high school principals; the federal data indicated 43.7 percent of all public school principals were women, while 17.8 percent were racial minorities.

**Working conditions.** The NAESP survey supported the perception of increasing workloads. The typical elementary principal reported working fifty-four hours a week, up more than three hours from 1988 and nine hours from 1978. In return, the median salary for elementary principals in 1996-97 was \$60,285, a gain of almost \$20,000 over the previous decade (after adjusting for inflation, the gain was only \$854). Only 15 percent reported that their salary was based on any form of merit pay, and only a fifth of those said that student achievement was a factor. Almost 80 percent had a contract, and a similar percentage had a written job description.

Poppink and Shen cite federal data for 1999-2000 showing an average salary of \$68,025 for secondary principals, though the range was extensive (from \$42,000 in South Dakota to \$98,800 in New Jersey). As with elementary principals, there had been a modest increase in real wages over the past decade. Overall, principals' increases over a twelve-year period narrowly outpaced those of teachers, but slightly trailed those of other workers.

While salaries have thus kept pace with inflation, there are indications that principals may view themselves as losing ground in light of heavier workloads and increased expectations for results (DiPaola and Tschannen-Moran). This perception, hard to measure quantitatively, could be a potent factor in recruitment and retention of school leaders.

**Stresses.** Principals responding to surveys have not been shy about identifying their frustrations with the job. Almost universally, "time" topped the list. In the NAESP survey, 72 percent of the respondents said that "fragmentation of my time" was a major concern; in the NASSP study, almost 70 percent listed time as a major or somewhat major problem.



Principals in the Public Agenda survey (Farkas and colleagues 2001) identified “politics and bureaucracy” as a major concern; only 30 percent said the system helped them get things done (48 percent said they could get things done, but only by working around the system). They were particularly frustrated by their limited authority to deal with low-performing teachers. A survey of Virginia principals indicated that only 55 percent believed they had the authority necessary to meet expectations (DiPaola and Tschannen-Moran).

DiPaola and Tschannen-Moran found that Virginia principals cited instructional leadership as the major source of increased expectations. The secondary principals surveyed by Goodwin and colleagues reported that the need for instructional leadership sometimes clashed with the equally compelling need to keep the school running smoothly. The Public Agenda survey also revealed some ambivalence about testing and accountability. In the words of one principal, “Accountability is great, but schools should not be judged by what students do on one test on one day in March.” A plurality (48 percent) thought holding principals accountable for test results was a bad idea, whereas 34 percent said it was a good idea.

**Optimism.** For all their frustrations, principals seemed engaged with their jobs and confident of having an impact. In the Public Agenda survey, 97 percent of the principals agreed that “behind every great school is a great principal.” Fully 90 percent of respondents to the NASSP survey graded the quality of education in their school as an A or B. Fewer than 1 percent of elementary principals reported that their morale was low; over 90 percent described it as good or excellent. DiPaola and Tschannen-Moran found that 88 percent of their respondents would still become principals if they could do it over again.

These surveys show the daily world of the principal to be complex, fragmented, and stressful—but still manageable. School leaders face enormous challenges and at times feel overwhelmed, but so do professionals in many other fields. They still see themselves as leaders (in the sense of having followers) and believe they can have a positive impact on students.

So why have so many discussions of the principalship projected an aura of crisis? The answer is complex, resting not just in objective conditions, but in the continuing ferment of school reform that makes both educators and the public restless and dissatisfied with the status quo. In fact, a closer look at the debate reveals not one, but three potential crises: a crisis of human resources, a crisis of expectations, and a crisis of role definition.

### A Crisis of Human Resources

The initial concern over the future of the principalship originated in simple demographic projections: Many principals who had entered the profession in a time of expansion were rapidly approaching retirement. In addition, the NAESP and NASSP surveys cited above have supported the picture of an aging leadership cadre.

The evidence of an actual shortage has been more ambiguous, especially if shortage is defined as “absence of warm bodies.” Although a 1998 survey by Educational Research Service found half the districts reporting a shortage of qualified candidates, the 2001 Public Agenda study (Farkas and colleagues 2001) found only 3 percent of superintendents reporting a “severe” shortage of principals, and almost 60 percent reporting no shortage. The distribution of shortages was uneven, however, with large urban districts reporting greater problems.

The RAND analysis of School and Staffing Survey data (Gates and colleagues) concluded that the field was experiencing “neither tremendous growth nor tremendous decline.” Similarly, a survey of eighty-three districts by Marguerite Roza and colleagues found that the candidate pool had shrunk only slightly over a seven-year period, though there was considerable variation from district to district. The average district reported seventeen applicants for principal positions, but the range was from four to more than forty. Districts with small applicant pools were more likely to report a recent decline in applicants.

Roza and her associates concluded that there was no overall shortage, just uneven distribution across districts. Some of the variation was purely geographic, with high-

growth areas more likely to experience shortages. In addition, there were indications that districts with large numbers of low-income or minority students were especially likely to have lower candidate pools. Papa and colleagues noted the same pattern in a study of New York principals.

Such findings have raised fears that students with the greatest academic needs are in schools having less-qualified leaders, just as they frequently are taught by less-qualified teachers (Lynn Olson 2003). However, the evidence on principals remains somewhat ambiguous. It would hardly be surprising if candidates avoided troubled or especially challenging schools, but principal quality is hard to gauge from the limited evidence available.

After a close examination of federal statistics, Gates and colleagues found “no evidence that more-experienced principals were systematically choosing to work in suburban schools, schools with smaller enrollments, and schools with a smaller proportion of minority, low-income, or LEP students.” However, experience is not a perfect indicator of quality, and it remains possible that some schools consistently have less access to quality leadership.

There appears to be general agreement that the hiring problem was not caused by insufficient numbers of people with administrative credentials (Educational Research Service 2000). For example, a 1999 study (Timothy Sheldon and Lee Munnich) estimated that state schools employed only 1,800 of the 6,500 certificated administrators who lived in the state. The others fell into the “replacement” group (currently employed as educators but not administrators), the “new” group (recent graduates of preparation programs), and the “hidden” group (status unknown).

Superintendents actually appear to be less concerned about the raw numbers than the quality of the candidates. Most openings attract applicants, but the pool is small enough to raise fears that the right person for the job won't be there. One midwestern administrator put it this way: “Four or five years ago, there might be 50-200 applicants for a principalship, then there were 25 to 50—now it's only 15 to 20” (Educational Research Service 2000). For small districts, the margin can be razor-thin; commenting on a survey of Colorado schools,

Kathryn Whitaker (2001) noted that some rural districts were reporting one to three candidates for secondary principalships.

Aside from concern over finding the right match for a specific assignment, some superintendents have more general reservations about the qualifications or skills of the principals they hire. The Public Agenda survey found that only a third of district administrators said they were “happy” with the ability of their principals to hire talented teachers, make tough decisions, delegate responsibility, involve teachers, use money effectively, and communicate a vision. Most superintendents said those skills should be “a little better,” but 10 to 20 percent saw serious deficiencies. Only a third believed that the quality of applicants had improved in recent years; 36 percent said it had stayed the same; and 29 percent said it had gotten worse.

Another survey of superintendents reported that 52 percent judged high school principal candidates to be average or below average (Thomas Glass and Amy Bearman 2003).

Thus, it appears that in most districts the candidate pool has not dried up, but district officials have a growing sense of uneasiness over the future of school leadership. Most superintendents can still fill vacant positions but are not confident they will be able to do so indefinitely and are not fully pleased by the quality of candidates. What they seem to be saying is that current trends, if continued, could result in a genuine crisis. Given a leadership pipeline that is not as robust as it once was and a job that keeps becoming more stressful, it would not take much to tip the balance from surplus to shortage.

This analysis thus raises two critical questions. First, if the candidate pool is shrinking, what is keeping potential applicants away? Second, how can the pool be expanded?

### *Deterrents to Applying*

The first question asks whether something in the nature of the job is deterring would-be administrators. Given the large number of certificate holders, some must be consciously declining to throw their hats into the job ring. Why?

Some of the reluctance may have nothing to do with the job. Teachers who enter preparation programs for the position

of principal may have no intention of becoming administrators, but find the program a convenient way to earn a master's degree and move up the salary schedule (Gates and colleagues). Others enter a program undecided and gradually realize that the job simply isn't a good match for their temperament or skills; they may finish the program but never apply for a position.

Yet there are many reasons that could make thoughtful candidates hesitate. One obvious concern is salary. When Educational Research Service (1998) asked administrators what discourages principal candidates, 60 percent identified "salary/ compensation not sufficient as compared to responsibilities." The Public Agenda study likewise found 65 percent of principals believing that "improving the pay and prestige of administrators" would be a "very effective" way of upgrading the leadership cadre.

Using data from the Schools and Staffing Survey, Gates and colleagues found that principal salaries increased 9 percent (after adjustments for inflation) between 1988 and 2000. However, there was considerable variation across states. In some states, principals were better compensated than principals in other states and teachers in their own state; at the other end of the continuum, school leaders in some states were poorly compensated compared with principals elsewhere as well as with their own teachers.

The key issue may be *relative* compensation. In raw dollars, most principals earn more than most teachers, but when the principal's longer hours and greater responsibility are factored in, teaching may look like the better alternative. Some analysts have also speculated that efforts to enhance the leadership and prestige of classroom teachers may have lessened interest in administrative careers (National Policy Board for Educational Administration 2001).

But even apart from salary, the sheer burdens of the job may discourage applicants. Diana Pounder and Randall Merrill (2001) cited a promising young assistant principal who was willing to move up to the principalship—but only for three to five years. He said, "The demands of the job are just too great—the time commitment, the stress, and the difficulty in implementing change due to organizational, political and legal

constraints.” He liked the idea of making a difference in students’ lives, but was not willing to subject his family life to the kind of stress that would be involved.

Some 92 percent of the principals surveyed by Public Agenda believed that the time and responsibilities associated with the job discouraged candidates. When discussing the parts of the job that were most stressful or discouraging, they identified such things as dealing with politics and bureaucracy, handling public criticism, and trying to remove ineffective teachers.

Some researchers have gone directly to potential applicants to find out how they viewed the principalship. Pounder and Merrill interviewed high school assistant principals and middle school principals, and found that only 30 percent intended to apply for a high school principal position within the next three to five years. Members in this group, who are probably the most immediate source of principals, were ambivalent about the job. They were drawn by the chance to make a difference, help students, and reform schools, and also found the increased salary to be attractive. On the other hand, they hesitated because of the hours, job stress, political pressure, teacher grievances, and the difficulty of balancing job and family responsibilities.

Paul Winter and colleagues (2001) surveyed all the holders of principal certificates in a large midwestern city and found that only 10 percent were likely to apply for principalships in the near future. Many were approaching retirement or were simply satisfied with their current positions, but others identified specific disincentives such as long hours, less job security, and time away from family.

### *Attracting More Applicants*

The second question—how to increase the pool of candidates—has elicited a variety of strategies ranging from conventional to radical. The first response is frequently “more of the same.” That is, districts intensify their traditional recruitment practices, listing openings as widely as possible, sending recruiters farther afield, or even hiring headhunters. This approach can have impressive short-term results for some

districts, but does not expand the overall pool. Every principal snagged through aggressive recruiting is one less candidate available to other districts.

By contrast, many districts have sought to increase the talent pool through “grow your own” programs or other forms of outreach. In a profession that has been traditionally been filled through self-selection, districts can make significant gains by seeking out talented teachers with leadership potential and actively encouraging them to become administrators.

Recently, a number of researchers and analysts have proposed an even bolder expansion of the pool, urging schools to consider candidates from outside the field of education (Frederick Hess 2003, Roza and colleagues, Bradley Portin and colleagues 2003, Thomas Fordham Foundation 2003). Their argument is based on the premise that classroom teaching experience (an almost universal certification requirement for principals) is not an essential attribute for school leaders, and that generic leadership skills (motivating, communicating, managing) are far more important for school effectiveness. These skills can be found in every type of organization, and schools could dramatically widen the gateway to administration by abandoning irrelevant certification requirements. While this argument provides state policymakers with some interesting options, it does not offer immediate help to districts, since most states require some form of school experience as a certification requirement.

Finally, some analysts have suggested changing the balance of incentives and disincentives to entry. Raising salaries is a common suggestion, especially in districts with hard-to-staff schools (Cynthia Prince, June 2002). Conversely, districts could make the job less stressful by making sure principals had authority commensurate with the responsibility, or lessening the burden by some form of “distributed leadership” (Portin and colleagues).

Although all these strategies collectively offer hope that the candidate pool can be significantly expanded, there remains a troubling question raised by the surprising number of superintendents who have expressed concerns over the *quality* of candidates. At a time when principals have more education

and experience than ever, and preparation programs are making significant improvements, why would superintendents voice doubts about their performance?

A comment from one superintendent is revealing:

Schools are changing and the needs of children are changing. Principals need to be better prepared to understand the complexities of managing a school—especially schools with high poverty. (Farkas and colleagues 2001)

In other words, the quality of principals may not be declining in absolute terms but simply failing to keep pace with the escalating demands of the job. Perhaps the real crisis lies in the multitude of expectations that have been laid at the principal's door.

### A Crisis of Expectations

When Harry Wolcott published his classic 1973 ethnographic study *The Man in the Principal's Office*, it was widely regarded as a realistic and in-depth portrait of the principal's work life. For an entire year, Wolcott shadowed his subject, "Ed Bell," as he went about the daily business of running an elementary school.

Principals who read this account today will recognize much in Ed Bell's world, particularly the countless unplanned and unscripted encounters that filled each day and the constant demands for attention from teachers, students, and parents. Yet his world clearly belongs to another time, one that from today's perspective seems almost quaint. Bell's job strikes us as orderly and largely predictable, offering challenges, but rarely a major crisis. His concerns about discipline did not include gangs, guns, and lewd T-shirts; parent involvement was channeled into PTA discussions about menus at the school fair; and teacher-union militancy was just a distant cloud on the horizon. Although Bell often talked about change, no one was clamoring for him to reinvent education. In fact, Wolcott noted that Bell devoted most of his efforts to controlling change and maintaining stability. Having inherited a functioning school, he was clear about his mandate: Don't make mistakes.

Several decades later, a report on the principalship could have been talking about Ed Bell's world:



For the past century, principals mostly were expected to comply with district-level edicts, address personnel issues, order supplies, balance program budgets, keep hallways and playgrounds safe, put out fires that threatened tranquil public relations, and make sure that busing and meal services were operating smoothly. (Institute for Educational Leadership)

Those tasks were still necessary, the report went on to say, but far, far more was now required of principals.

Reasons for the heightened expectations are not hard to find. Since Ed Bell's day, massive social, demographic, and cultural changes have overtaken schools, upsetting comfortable old assumptions and behaviors. These outside forces have a major impact on the shape of education as well as the recommendations for school renewal (Pedro Reyes and colleagues 1999). For example:

- Population shifts have greatly increased student diversity, not just in the usual urban pockets but throughout the country. Schools everywhere are confronting unprecedented ethnic, cultural, and linguistic differences they are ill-prepared to deal with.
- A society that expects schools to be a positive moral influence has become much less confident in its definitions of right and wrong and much less capable of providing firm guidance to children. A rising divorce rate and the entry of women into the work force have left many children on their own much of the day, saturated with media images.
- School safety, which once meant not putting the swings on asphalt, now requires metal detectors and SWAT teams.
- Student achievement remains unacceptably low, at least for policymakers, and all fifty states, supported by the federal government, are engaged in a massive effort to overhaul both curricular goals and instructional methods.
- Schools that once were considered a safe haven from the bickering of politics have become heavily politicized, subject to relentless legislation and litigation. Some initiatives offer sweeping changes that would transform education from a public agency to a consumer commodity.

Despite all these difficulties, society's expectations for schools keep rising. Legislators continually turn to schools for a cheap fix to vexing social problems (if they can't actually solve problems like AIDS, violence, and drugs, they can at least feel a little better by helping the next generation gain the proper outlook). Policymakers have likewise set a high standard for achievement and have decreed that those high standards are for all students, but without providing any kind of roadmap for getting there.

Educators themselves have accepted a sweepingly ambitious role for schools. *Breaking Ranks*, NASSP's 1996 effort to envision a high school for the 21st century, argued that "the country is diminished to the extent that any high school fails to provide all that it might for every student." That idealistic sentiment has now become a mandate in *No Child Left Behind*.

Just as expectations for schools keep escalating, so do the expectations for school leaders. NASSP's and other organizations' descriptions of school leadership for the 21st century are both visionary and ambitious:

The principal—the instructional “artist in residence”—establishes a climate for excellence, puts forth a vision for continuous improvement in student performance, promotes excellence in teaching, and commits to sustained, comprehensive professional development for all staff members. (Gerald Tirozzi 2001)

Good principals lead change, inspire students and staff, leverage resources to make improvement happen, and bring community members into the process of change. (National Association of State Boards of Education 1999)

Principals today must also serve as leaders for student learning. They must know academic content and pedagogical techniques. They must work with teachers to strengthen skills. They must collect, analyze and use data in ways that fuel excellence. They must rally students, teachers, parents, local health and family service agencies, youth development groups, local businesses and other community residents and partners around the common goal of raising student performance. And they must have the leadership skills and knowledge to exercise the autonomy and authority to pursue these strategies. (Institute for Educational Leadership)

Since the mid-1980s, these ambitious aspirations have crystallized into explicit standards of performance, as various groups of practitioners, academics, and policymakers have attempted to articulate the specific skills needed by today's school leaders.

Unfortunately, each group has formulated its standards to serve different perceived needs at different points in time, so the profession has not yet been able to converge on a single unified statement of expectations (John Hoyle 2001). Originally, the National Commission on the Principalship (1990) formulated the "21 Domains of Educational Leadership" that led reform efforts for the better part of a decade. That document was superseded in 1996 by the work of the Interstate School Leaders Licensure Consortium (ISLLC), a collaborative effort among university professors, state policymakers, and professional associations to define a standard for beginning principals. The consortium's work has become the basis for the School Leaders Licensure Assessment, which is used in a number of states as a licensure requirement (Murphy, Winter 2001), and has strongly influenced the standards of the National Council for Accreditation of Teacher Education (NCATE), which are used to assess administrator preparation programs.

In addition, professional associations have developed standards to guide the professional development of experienced principals (John Hoyle and colleagues 1998, National Association of Elementary School Principals 2001). Currently, efforts are under way to develop national certification for school leaders that would be built on standards analogous to those of the National Board for Professional Teaching Standards (Jeff Archer, June 2002; National Policy Board for Educational Administration 2002).

Despite these differences, the standards, taken collectively, clearly show the trend toward a more expansive role for principals, one that goes far beyond functional tasks such as budgeting, scheduling, and facilities management. Several themes are particularly evident.

1. *The standards place a high priority on instructional leadership.* Indeed, if there is one commonality among all the new expectations, it is the nonnegotiable requirement that principals be capable of developing the learning capacity of

both students and teachers. Instructional leadership is not a new concept, but today's definitions are much more complex than those of the 1980s, which often seemed to view instruction as a straightforward management problem rather than an organizational learning problem.

Today's instructional leadership, driven by the demands of standards-based accountability, recognizes that significant, meaningful learning does not come from simplistic solutions and must be deeply embedded throughout the school. The Southern Regional Education Board (Gene Bottoms and Kathy O'Neill 2001), commenting on the "new breed" of principal, gave instructional leaders this agenda:

- create a focused mission centered on student achievement
- set high expectations for all students
- recognize and promote sound instructional practices
- create an environment in which every student counts and has the support of a caring adult
- use data to improve instruction
- keep everyone informed and focused on student achievement
- involve parents in the education of their children
- understand the change process
- understand how adults learn, and focus professional development on student achievement
- use time and other resources in the interests of learning goals
- gain support for school improvement from the central office and the community
- learn continuously and seek out like-minded colleagues

This unrelenting focus on instruction grew out of the SREB's conviction that "schools must change fundamentally" before they can be successful in today's world, and that redesigned schools require redesigned leadership. This assumption is embedded in virtually all the leadership standards.

2. *The standards emphasize the importance of engaging parents and community.* Living in simpler times, Ed Bell did not see a great need to cultivate community involvement, and sometimes resented it:

I get pretty annoyed by the idea expressed that because a person has a child in school he is an expert about education. The learning process is so complex that parents should leave it up to school people and have confidence in them. (Wolcott)

Bell knew that his public generally respected and trusted the schools. Living in a homogeneous community, he also assumed that he knew what citizens needed and wanted. Therefore, except when a school budget was up for approval, good community relations required nothing more than a monthly PTA meeting, periodic open houses, and an occasional speech at a Rotary luncheon.

Today's social landscape is dramatically different. Distrust of government is high, citizens are more inclined to assert their rights, and schools have become a battlefield in the culture wars. As icons of American democracy, schools are inevitably pulled into the debates over public policy and the state of American society, and school leaders must be prepared to engage the public proactively, not just defensively.

And while educators today would agree with Ed Bell that learning is complex, they now take that as a reason parents should be involved. With the benefit of three decades' more experience, they believe that learning is a reflection of the total context of children's lives, not just the formal instruction that takes place during school hours. More conscious of the many styles and pathways to learning, they distrust a one-size-fits-all philosophy that ignores the diversity of today's population.

For those reasons, all the standards regard collaboration with parents and community as a core leadership activity. As NAESP (2001) put it:

Schools and communities are inextricably intertwined, and the principal is the linchpin in creating a learning community that seamlessly integrates the work and expectations of students, teachers, parents, citizens, community and business leaders and policymakers.

3. *The standards show a renewed commitment to ethical behavior and social responsibility.* From the beginning of the profession, people have expected school leaders to behave ethically; early school boards often based hiring decisions more on moral character than technical skill. Nevertheless, ethical issues in leadership have often been treated as the straightforward application of ethical rules, dominated by discussions of administrators dipping into school funds or misrepresenting their credentials.

The new expectations put ethics into a much broader context of social justice; for example, the ISLLC standards ask leaders to be committed to “the ideal of the common good, the principles in the Bill of Rights, and the right of every student to a free, quality education.” School leaders are expected to recognize the transformative power of education in the lives of children and to act as advocates for all their students, not only protecting their rights, but seeking to extend and improve those rights. In short, the new standards hold that schooling is a moral enterprise, and school leaders must be “moral stewards” (Joseph Murphy, September 2001).

The standards reveal other persistent themes as well. Formulating a compelling vision is mentioned frequently, as is the systematic use of data to make decisions. But even without delving more deeply into these issues, we can clearly see how ambitious an agenda has been handed to principals. The role Ed Bell mapped out for himself—serving as a kind of genial shepherd—falls far short of the complexity and intensity of the new standards. Today’s principalship is a high-stakes, high-pressure job that requires a high degree of knowledge, skills, and commitment.

Perhaps too high? In the rush to create principals fully prepared for twenty-first century challenges, is the educational community asking for the impossible? J. Casey Hurley, discussing the trend toward ever-more-ambitious job descriptions for principals, asks, “Why are policymakers continuing to define the principal’s role in such a way that few people want the job and even fewer can be effective at it? Do they really think it is possible for principals to do more?”

Similarly, successful principals are forceful individuals who take risks, work around rules that interfere with their

schools' performance, and are so adept at maneuvering through the politics of the system that others are afraid to challenge them. As impressive as these leaders are, to depend on recruitment of extraordinary people is not a viable strategy.

It may be, then, that the real crisis of the principalship is one of role definition: What should we be asking of school leaders?

### A Crisis of Role Definition

By asking how the principal's role should be defined, we join a debate with a long history. The earliest principals were skilled teachers ("principal teachers") who were asked to do a few administrative tasks in exchange for reduced teaching responsibilities. As the size and complexity of schools grew, so did the principal's administrative role, until it became largely a full-time job by the 1920s (Larry Cuban 1986).

Since then, scholars and policymakers have engaged in a continuing cycle of debates over the nature of the job. Lynn Beck and Joseph Murphy (1993) studied conceptions of the principalship over eight decades and found the role to be "extremely malleable." At various times in the century, principals were likened to spiritual leaders, business managers, soldiers, social scientists, bureaucrats, public-relations experts, and instructional leaders. Beck and Murphy determined that these shifting conceptions came mostly from the outside, motivated by social, political, and economic concerns in American society. During economic depression, principals were expected to be thrifty stewards of limited resources; in time of war they were expected to mobilize the next generation to defend democracy; amid fears of declining achievement, they were expected to be instructional leaders.

Kenneth Leithwood and Daniel Duke (1999), after reviewing all the articles on educational leadership in four major journals from 1985-95, summarized recent thinking on the leader's role as encompassing six themes: instructional leadership, transformational leadership, moral leadership, participative leadership, managerial leadership, and contingent leadership. These categories were "eclectic and overlapping" rather than logically distinct. In addition, most had been borrowed from other fields without adequate analysis of how they might

differ in school settings. Nonetheless, the authors concluded that current leadership conceptions were “increasingly complex (a good thing), multi-dimensional, ecologically valid, defensible, and user-friendly.”

Contemplation of literature on educational leadership, no matter how engrossing to scholars, may offer limited help in the principal’s office, whose occupant wrestles with the daily reality that different members of the school community hold incompatible expectations for the job. Short of adding a couple extra days to the week, there appears to be no good way of satisfying all the demands.

### *Conflicting Expectations of School Leaders*

Two conflicts appear to be particular sources of tension.

1. ***Heroic leadership vs. collaborative leadership.*** Philip Hallinger has observed that the school-effectiveness literature of the 1980s pushed principals to be strong instructional leaders, encouraging them to adopt a take-charge approach that puts them in front of the educational parade (Quoted by Anne Lockwood, 1996). But the effective-schools movement was overtaken by the school-renewal movement of the 1990s, which placed much more emphasis on community and shared leadership. The result, according to Hallinger, has been “complete confusion” about the principal’s role:

Currently, there is a momentum toward teacher leadership, toward shared leadership from many people within the school and community. Yet, there is also a whole cadre of principals who have been educated in the belief that they should be instructional leaders.

The push for strong accountability has reinforced this conflict as many principals are under pressure to “get results” while still expected to operate collaboratively.

2. ***Leadership vs. management.*** In their study of changing metaphors, Beck and Murphy (1993) found that the job itself—the day-to-day duties—actually remained quite stable over time. Irrespective of scholarly debates, principals stayed focused on the immediate need to build schedules, order textbooks, and maintain discipline.

Larry Cuban sees this tension running like a fault line through the history of school leadership. Even when principals



are eager to transform, redesign, and create, they are unable to escape the “managerial imperative” that keeps them anchored to mundane tasks. Even the most visionary principals have to keep the buses running on time.

Thomas Sergiovanni (2000) has expressed this idea in a different way, contrasting the “systemsworld” of rules, schedules, and mandates with the “lifeworld” of culture, values, and relationships. Principals have obligations to both dimensions—and both are necessary—but he says the systemsworld keeps trying to assert its supremacy over the lifeworld (and is often successful).

The leader/manager dichotomy is not absolute. A principal’s walk around the school may serve both as an inspection tour to see that everything is functioning well and as a chance to demonstrate concern and support for teachers. Indeed, Terry Deal and Kent Peterson (1994) have suggested that effective principals have a kind of “bifocal vision” that allows them to invest routine tasks with deeper meaning.

Nonetheless, even with such virtuoso displays of leadership, just dealing with the dozens of administrative tasks that make up each day is often a full-time job. Advocates of a dynamic leadership role for principals have usually not explained where the additional hours will come from. For example, the ISLLC and NCATE standards list management as just one of six standards—yet management tasks easily take up more than a sixth of the principal’s time. Many principals try to fill both roles, and sometimes employers demand it, asking them to be Superman or Wonder Woman (Cuban). Much of the stress felt by principals may originate in this compulsion to “do it all.”

Aside from the time issue, the leadership/management split may create a kind of psychic tension for principals. Most are former teachers, and many still have strong emotional ties to the classroom and to instructional issues; they easily feel guilty over the amount of time they have to spend on managerial concerns (Cuban).

Given all the forces pushing and pulling on today’s principal, and considering the profession’s long history of changeable expectations, any kind of national consensus on the principal’s role is unlikely anytime soon. Nonetheless, school

district officials can promote local consensus by articulating their expectations for leadership and using them as they recruit, select, induct, and evaluate principals.

### *Issues To Be Resolved at the District Level*

As school boards, superintendents, and other central-office officials decide on the kind of leadership they want from their school-site leaders, they will have to confront three issues.

1. **Status vs. role.** Leadership is normally associated with a discrete position and status. Irrespective of their actual skills, principals become de facto leaders the day they are hired just by virtue of the label “principal,” and anything that seems to require leadership lands in their in-box. However, a growing body of work urges schools to develop more flexible forms of “distributed” leadership that take advantage of the leadership capacity of everyone in the organization (James Spillane and colleagues 2000, Richard Elmore 2000). These efforts raise the possibility that thoughtfully structuring the principalship to fit human capabilities may be more productive than trying to recruit candidates with superhuman attributes.

Clearly, leadership roles can be exercised by those who have no formal status as leaders. In many a school, teachers have stepped forward to kick-start a stalled committee or worked behind the scenes with parents to resolve a simmering controversy. In practice, no matter how heroic the principal, leadership is always distributed throughout the organization.

Rodney Ogawa and Steven Bossert (1995) have argued that leadership is as much an organizational trait as a personal one—a systemic quality that “flows through the network of roles that comprise organizations.” In this view, schools influence the kind of leadership they ultimately get by assigning roles and allocating resources to support those roles.

For example, Portin and colleagues, after analyzing interviews with a wide spectrum of principals, identified seven core leadership roles in schools (instructional, cultural, managerial, human resource, strategic, external development, and micropolitical). They also found that it was not necessarily the principal who exercised direct hands-on control in each area;

instead, leaders often let others with special skills step to the front. Portin and his associates concluded that the principal's job was to see that leadership happened in all seven areas, not to personally provide it.

Some observers have suggested that the principal's job requires such a broad span of skills that it really constitutes two jobs and should be filled by two people. For example, Frederick Hess (2001) has suggested that one leader focus on facilitation and encouragement, while the other serves as enforcer of district expectations (a pairing he calls "the priest and the pit bull"). Sheryl Boris-Schacter and Sondra Langer (2002) have suggested a rotating principalship in which a teacher steps into the role for a time while the principal returns to the classroom or conducts research.

Paul Hill and Sarah Brooks go even further, suggesting that schools should focus exclusively on roles rather than status. That is, the "principal" would be whoever took responsibility for a particular issue: "a teacher, an experienced school head, a business person, or anyone else who can do the job." One individual could be designated to handle a particular responsibility, or it could be rotated among team members.

Whether or not they experiment with new arrangements, districts must at a minimum provide clarity on the roles principals will be asked to play. Will new hires be presented with a white steed and sent on a hero's quest? Is the district looking for the kind of champion about whom books are written and movies made, or is it willing to spend time, money, and energy on making it easy for leaders to step forward at every level of the organization? Does the district want a highly skilled technical manager or a motivational leader? The answers will reflect local conditions, differing from district to district and from school to school.

2. *Role vs. task.* Settling on a role does not fully define the principal's duties. For example, even if the district agrees with recent recommendations that the principal be first and foremost an instructional leader, there are many forms of instructional leadership. The principal could operate as the expert-in-chief, developing a deep knowledge of curriculum, instruction, and assessment and marshalling the school's staff and resources to make desirable changes. Alternatively, he or she

could focus on developing the capacity of teachers to decide on the best strategies for change. Similarly, the principal's role as visionary leader could be fulfilled by developing and "selling" a compelling vision that would energize the staff, or it could involve working collaboratively with the faculty and community to formulate a collective vision.

Reviewing the job description can be an instructive exercise. How well does the district's vision of school leadership (which is often dynamic and uplifting) match the district's listing of duties (which is often mundane)? Does the description accurately represent the way the district wants principals to be spending their time? What should be added or deleted?

3. **Organizational support.** Principals' success in carrying out roles will depend on not only their own capabilities (which are what districts typically look at when hiring) but the organization's ability to support those roles (which districts seldom consider). To adopt an ambitious new set of expectations and then fail to create an infrastructure to sustain them is a recipe for futility and frustration.

In part, this means the district must be prepared to reallocate resources to new activities. Asking for instructional leadership incurs an obligation to provide adequate funds for staff training, or a willingness to consider early dismissal for faculty inservice (even if the central office or board has to spend some political capital to do so).

Even more, it means that principals must be provided the authority to execute the role laid out by the district. The survey by Public Agenda made it clear that systemic barriers were a major source of stress for school leaders. When districts give principals no authority to hire new teachers or routinely refuse to run the political risks of challenging tenured teachers who are performing poorly, then instructional leadership will be undermined. Similarly, districts that demand strong accountability from principals should also provide them with the authority to transfer teachers, adjust the school calendar, and allocate resources as needed to improve student achievement (Association of Washington School Principals, no date). In addition, districts that want their principals to be facilitative and collaborative leaders should be ready to work through the

ambiguities that come with shared decision-making (Lynn Lontos and Larry Lashway 1997).

On the whole, principals responding to the NAESP and Public Agenda surveys indicated that their authority was in line with their responsibilities. That may change, however, as districts expand their definitions of the principal's role; new responsibilities may require new forms of authority.

### Conclusion

It is too early to say whether any of the “crises” described above justify the apocalyptic language used by some policymakers, but they clearly represent challenges that districts must take seriously. Whatever role principals are asked to take, they will be key players in renewing schools and improving student achievement.

Clearly, the task of preparing, recruiting, and selecting highly qualified school leaders is more formidable than ever. Yet there are hopeful signs that the profession is finding ways of meeting the challenge. In particular, some of the old walls separating universities and K-12 schools are coming down. Preparation and selection of principals are increasingly viewed as two dimensions of a seamless continuum rather than separate functions that can be parceled out to separate entities.

The remainder of this book explores new approaches to training, recruitment, and selection. Chapter 2 examines the preparation of school leaders—a task that is no longer just a function of universities. Chapter 3 focuses on the challenge of recruiting leaders, and chapter 4 explores ways to make the best selection from the available candidates.

Throughout the discussion, we will be returning to the themes outlined above, which provide a crucial framework. Attracting and keeping good principals is not just a technical task; it is tied to the deepest values of an educational community.

## Training Principals

Are outstanding school principals born or made? Most modern authorities, stressing nurture over nature, believe that leadership can be learned. Most states, accordingly, require prospective principals to take a specialized sequence of courses, usually accompanied by a master's degree.

Notwithstanding this commitment to learned leadership, policymakers, academicians, and principals themselves appear unconvinced of the value of what is taught, and even less certain about what should be taught. Numerous policymakers and blue-ribbon commissions have studied the question and laid out ambitious agendas for reform; foundations have provided millions in funding to develop new curricula and instructional strategies; and prestigious panels have formulated rigorous standards for the preparation of leaders.

Despite all this activity, there are few signs of dramatic change, and practitioners are left with the lingering suspicion that experience is still the best teacher.

But at a time when the principal's role is changing dramatically, relying on experience alone would be a recipe for mediocrity. What principals learn on the job is how to cope with the job as it exists, not how to transform it into something better. Formal training can provide a reflective environment that lets candidates develop an understanding of the principalship, create a personal leadership agenda, and hone critical skills before being thrown into the chaotic, high-pressure real world of leadership. Although policymakers and practitioners may have legitimate reservations about the current state of the art, most seem to accept the need for some kind of extended training.

This chapter describes problems in the preparation of principals, reviews alternative methods and strategies for reforming the field that have emerged in the last decade, and offers recommendations to groom effective leaders for America's schools.

### The Inadequacies of Principal Training

Critics have long complained about the training of school leaders. In 1987, the National Commission on Excellence in Educational Administration found much that was "troubling" about preparation programs. Problems included a lack of quality candidates, poorly designed curricula, and lack of relevance to job demands. The commission concluded that 300 of the 500 institutions offering programs should drop them.

Analysts have periodically compiled the rampant concerns: little targeted recruitment, lax admission standards, an ill-defined knowledge base, little academic rigor, fragmented curriculum, lack of connection to the world of practice, uninspired instructional methods, mediocre faculty, scheduling based on student convenience rather than program integrity, lack of diversity in students and faculty, use of an academic rather than professional model, and a part-time student body (Joseph Murphy 1992; Carolyn Kelley and Kent Peterson 2002).

Even after a decade of vigorous reform efforts, critics such as Michael Usdan (2002) of the Institute for Educational Leadership could say, "I wonder and worry whether the field as it is currently constituted will or indeed can survive in its present state."

Practitioners themselves have long lacked enthusiasm for their training. An NAESP survey found that 44 percent of elementary principals believed their graduate education was "of much value" in their development as principals, 48 percent found it to be "of some value," and the others thought it was "of little value" (James Doud and Edward Keller 1998). By contrast, 97 percent found on-the-job experiences as a principal to be highly beneficial.

Asking a slightly different question, a recent Public Agenda survey found that 69 percent of principals and 80 percent of superintendents believed that typical leadership programs “are out of touch with the realities of what it takes to run today’s school district” (Steve Farkas and colleagues 2001). Over 85 percent of both superintendents and principals believed that overhauling preparation programs would help improve leadership.

Unfortunately, we have little concrete evidence against which to test these perceptions. For all their focus on research, university faculty members apparently do not spend much time examining their own programs. Michelle Young, executive director of the University Council for Educational Administration, noted in 2001 that “there has been no systematic examination of how effective or ineffective university preparation programs really are in preparing future school leaders... we have only anecdotes and weak correlations.”

Despite the lack of tangible evidence, we can at least identify the major concerns that have led to the calls for reform. Three worries stand out: the quality of candidates selected for admission to training programs, the content of the curriculum, and the disconnection between theory and practice.

#### Less-Than-Rigorous Selection of Candidates

As in any enterprise, the quality of the final product is influenced by the quality of the raw materials. Unfortunately, university preparation programs get less-than-glowing reviews for selectivity, and the reputation may be well earned.

Scores on the Graduate Record Examination show that from 1999 to 2002, students intending to enter educational administration ranked fourth from the bottom compared with forty-three possible majors on verbal scores, and fifth from the bottom on quantitative scores. Moreover, the same group ranked seventh out of nine educational fields, just ahead of potential majors in early childhood education and counseling (Educational Testing Service 2003). Although these numbers are not direct measures of candidate ability (we have no way of knowing whether test takers actually go on to enter a



program), they do suggest that the potential administrative pool is not deep in academic talent.

Another common requirement is a minimum grade-point average. Theodore Creighton and Gary Jones (2001), upon examining the admission requirements for 450 university preparation programs (virtually every program in the country), found that 43 percent required a minimum GPA of 3.0, 28 percent set the minimum at 2.75, and 29 percent set it at 2.5. In addition, 80 percent of the schools allowed “conditional admission” when students did not meet the stated criteria.

Other common requirements were a bachelor’s degree from an accredited college or university, letters of recommendation, and a goals/purpose statement. Surprisingly, only 40 percent of the schools required teaching experience or a teaching certificate, even though licensure virtually always requires classroom experience. The other programs either have found the requirement superfluous (perhaps because few of their applicants lack such experience) or they serve students who do not intend to become school leaders.

Beyond the question of how prospective school leaders rank on quantitative measures, Creighton and Jones raised another issue. GPA and test scores tend (however imperfectly) to predict academic success. A candidate with a high GPA and a high GRE score can reasonably be expected to do well in course work, but that says little about the characteristics needed for success on the job. How much of the selection process is based on leadership potential?

Very little, apparently. Creighton and Jones found that fewer than 10 percent of university programs required any form of personal contact with candidates prior to admission. Only 6 percent required an interview for all applicants, and only one school required a demonstration of leadership skills in an assessment center.

While not dismissing the value of traditional requirements such as GPA and GRE scores, Creighton and Jones argue that selecting future principals requires attention to leadership capabilities. They advocate an “auditioning” process in which candidates would be required to demonstrate their potential by participating in simulations or responding to typical leader-

ship scenarios. These would be modeled after the assessment centers used by NASSP and NAESP. In addition, they argue that programs should require teaching experience. Without such experience, candidates would have an inadequate knowledge base for courses in school law, supervision of instruction, and working with students having special needs.

As Creighton and Jones put it,

Until all involved parties seriously address the selection of candidates with strong analytical ability, high administrative potential, and demonstrated success in teaching, the education profession will continue to be a refuge for mediocre candidates.

A final concern is the number of females and minorities who enter leadership programs. Although this is usually framed as an equity issue, it may also have implications for quality in that failure to attract candidates across the spectrum artificially limits the available pool of talent. In addition, at a time when the principalship is being redefined, recruiting candidates with different perspectives will add richness and depth to the dialogue.

Although there appears to be relatively little demographic information about students in leadership programs, anecdotal evidence suggests that the number of females has increased dramatically, and the number of minority candidates has increased somewhat (Martha McCarthy 1999). Most of the available data, however, come from a relatively small number of elite institutions and may not be typical for training programs as a whole.

#### Abstract, Incoherent, and Theoretical Curriculum

Principals, with few exceptions, qualify for the job by earning a certificate that requires about thirty credits of postbaccalaureate work, typically in areas such as curriculum, supervision, finance, research, school law, and organizational theory. This pattern has remained remarkably stable over the years, partly because professors are reluctant to initiate changes that would devalue their areas of specialization, and partly because licensure requirements have themselves remained fairly stable (McCarthy).

Efforts by the University Council for Educational Administration to clarify the knowledge base for school leadership have identified content drawn mostly from the social sciences, including issues such as societal and cultural influences on schooling, organizational theory, policy studies, and management processes (Robert Donmoyer 1999). The nature of such studies tends to treat human behavior in abstract, objective ways. The principal's world, by contrast, is awash in very practical issues that are laden with moral implications.

In the 1950s and 1960s, emphasis on theory was seen as a major reform in a field where many courses were taught by former administrators who dispensed anecdotal wisdom (McCarthy). Although good theory adds intellectual rigor to the curriculum, candidates often have difficulty translating it into workable solutions for the myriad practical problems that principals face. University faculty members are trained to develop deep knowledge in a narrow range, not to make connections across a broad range of ideas. By contrast, the world of school leadership lacks clear boundaries; everything seems connected to everything else. A principal who has mastered discrete courses in finance, curriculum, and leadership may suddenly be confronted with a budget issue that wraps up all those areas in one messy package.

### The Gap Between Theory and Practice

Whatever the potential value of curricular content, principals perceive a disconnection between their training and the realities of the job. Mark Anderson (1989) found that new principals criticized their preservice training for failing to prepare them for the highly interactive, rapid-fire pace of a principal's job, as well as for the emotional demands of working with angry parents, excited students, and willful staff members.

Yet this failure does not necessarily mean that program content itself is irrelevant; taken at face value, most courses seem to cover topics that should be of interest to future principals. Instead, it may be that the nature of academic work requires patterns of thought and behavior that ignore or even undermine the capacities required for school leadership.

For example, Edwin Bridges (1977) contrasts the turbulence of the principal's job with the tranquility of academic study, with its long hours of solitary reading, writing, and contemplation. "In comparison with the work pace of managers," Bridges states, "the student's tempo is snail-like. There are few surprises and much time alone." As a result, "the fledgling leader is ill-prepared to handle the accelerated tempo of the managerial role." Similarly, university programs often subordinate feelings to rationality, whereas school administrators deal with emotions constantly.

In addition, academic thinking is quite different from thinking on the job. Abstract textbook knowledge is the currency of higher education, and most programs place a high value on theory, research, and critical analysis. By contrast, the principalship, like most jobs, requires a high degree of "practical intelligence," which practitioners employ to solve problems that are highly contextualized. Robert Sternberg and Elena Grigorenko (2001) give an example:

IF you are in a public forum, AND IF the boss says something or does something that you perceive is wrong or inappropriate, AND IF the boss does not ask for questions or comments, THEN speak directly to the point of contention and do not make evaluative comments about your boss's, staff's or peer's character or motives, BECAUSE this saves the boss from embarrassment and preserves your relationship with him.

Although practitioners would quickly agree that this kind of reasoning is highly relevant to job success, teaching it in a college classroom is not easy. There are so many variables that trying to provide a comprehensive set of strategies is virtually impossible. At any given moment, the answer to the question "What's the best course of action?" is "It depends." Sternberg and Grigorenko argue that practical intelligence is based largely on "tacit knowledge" that is learned from experience and that is hard to articulate.

All these concerns, combined with complaints from practitioners and heightened awareness of the importance of principal leadership, have sparked a demand for changes in administrator training. The next section looks at how preparation programs have responded.

## Recent Reforms

During the 1990s, the pervasive criticism of preparation programs and the accelerating pace of school reform stimulated a decade of experimentation in leadership training. In 1989, the National Policy Board for Educational Administration (NPBEA) published its agenda for reforming the preparation of school administrators, which turned out to be just the first of a spate of similar reports from professional associations.

These reports included *Principals for 21st Century Schools* (National Association of Elementary School Principals 1990), *Principals for Our Changing Schools: Preparation and Certification* (National Commission for the Principalship 1990), *Skills for Successful 21st Century School Leaders* (John Hoyle and colleagues 1998), and most recently *What Principals Should Know and Be Able To Do* (National Association of Elementary School Principals 2001). Concurrently, a number of foundations, particularly the Danforth Foundation, provided significant financial support to a number of reform efforts (Mike Milstein 1993).

How successful has this activity been? There are signs of progress, to be sure, but it seems safe to say that most preparation programs have not been radically transformed. Recent policy documents continue to treat training programs as inadequate and anachronistic (Institute for Educational Leadership 2000; National Association of State Boards of Education 1999; Bottoms and O'Neill 2001).

Some of the reformers themselves are pessimistic. Carol Shakeshaft (1999), reflecting on her experiences in changing a leadership program, concluded that "in a decade packed with meetings, curriculum discussions, shared ideas, strategies, and program tinkering, there has been meager improvement, at best, and a change of labels at worst."

Others are more upbeat. Eddy Van Meter (1999) concedes that there is a long way to go, but says, "The good news is that we have a wealth of creative reform ideas and examples now available, a talented group of people involved, and a growing body of program improvement literature on which to base our continuing work."

The following sections highlight some of the recent changes and experiments in several major categories: the knowledge base and curriculum, connections with the world of practice, program delivery, assessment, and efforts to base preparation in schools.

### The Knowledge Base and Curriculum

**Knowledge base.** University faculty members build their careers around acquiring and producing knowledge, so it's hardly surprising that their first response to reform is to examine and debate the knowledge base for administration. Although much of this discussion is abstract and rather distant from the everyday concerns of practitioners, principal candidates are likely to notice some new emphases within their training programs.

1. *A shift away from the abstract, objective social-science paradigm to a model that makes room for more personal and humanistic perspectives.* Educational administration, like many other fields of study, has been affected by postmodern philosophies that question the traditional assumption that objective, value-free knowledge is even possible (Donmoyer). Theory and research today are more likely to involve personal perspectives and questions of meaning, using qualitative rather than quantitative methods.

2. *A new appreciation of ethics and values.* University faculty, whose commitment to objectivity once made them shy away from value-laden questions, are now more likely to believe that issues of morality and social justice are embedded in the leadership domain. Ethics is now treated not just as a set of rules that can be covered in one course, but as a foundational way of looking at leadership (Thomas Sergiovanni 1992; Lynn Beck and Joseph Murphy 1994; Robert Starratt 1995).

3. *A renewed emphasis on the principal's role as instructional leader.* Instructional leadership first gained attention in the 1980s, briefly seemed to recede from view in the early 1990s, and then re-emerged with a vengeance when standards-based accountability moved to the top of the national reform agenda. Today's conceptions of instructional leadership are

much richer than earlier versions that were based on the effective-schools literature. Virtually all recent policy statements have put instructional leadership at the heart of the principalship (National Association of State Boards of Education; Institute for Educational Leadership; Bottoms and O'Neill).

These trends have been reinforced by the rapid spread of standards from the Interstate School Leadership Licensure Consortium (ISLLC), which have been adopted by at least thirty states. The ISLLC standards distill school leadership into just six focus areas—vision, school culture, effective management, community collaboration, ethical action, and social engagement. All six are explicitly targeted at one goal: producing an “educational leader who promotes the success of all students.”

The standards are not universally admired. Critics have attacked them as lacking substance (C. M. Achilles and William Price 2001); as constituting a premature and ill-advised attempt to standardize the preparation curriculum (Fenwick English 2002); or as imposing politically correct beliefs on future school leaders (Hess 2003). In addition, the standards at this point reflect professional consensus rather than empirical research. Nonetheless, they are widely respected and have provided a driving force in many states' reform efforts.

**Curriculum.** The knowledge base reflects the general intellectual climate, but future school leaders will be more affected by a program's curriculum, which can select and present concepts in a variety of formats. Although the evidence suggests that most curricula have not been radically transformed, some institutions have made significant alterations.

The University of Southern Mississippi provides principal candidates with a curriculum divided into thematically integrated blocks of instruction (Jack Klotz 1999). The first semester focuses on “The Landscape of Leadership,” a block that emphasizes the nature of today's leadership and helps students understand their own leadership potential. The second block, “Principal as Instructional Leader,” highlights the principal's responsibility for student learning and incorporates concepts from curriculum, instruction, professional development, and assessment.

The final classroom block, “The Principal as Manager,” looks at management as a tool for achieving the goals inherent in the first two blocks; topics include school law, resource management, accountability, and educational equity. The three semesters of course work are followed by a year-long internship guided by a university advisor, a field-based supervisor, and a practitioner mentor (Klotz).

The University of Washington’s Danforth program also shows the influence of the changing knowledge base. During an intensive year-long program, students go through instructional modules organized around themes such as leadership, adult learners, multicultural education, the ethnography of school culture, and the moral dimensions of leadership, as well as more traditional topics such as supervision, curriculum, and school law. The program also conducts weekly reflective seminars to integrate the course work with the required half-time internship.

#### Connections with the World of Practice

When 69 percent of principals say that preparation programs are “out of touch with the realities,” university faculties need to take notice—and they have. Much of the recent reform effort has been dedicated to bridging the gap between the university classroom and the real world of school leadership. Strategies have ranged from focusing course content on practical problems to providing richer and more extensive experience in the field.

**Games.** Organizational, institutional, and business games provide one bridging strategy. Wilderness labs are an example of a training game that has achieved widespread recognition and use by corporations such as AT&T, Xerox, General Electric, and Marriott. Although wilderness labs have not been extensively used in education, Richard Schmuck (1992) has described how the University of Oregon incorporated them into a principal preparation program.

Based on a “ropes course” near Salem, the experience challenged future principals with a series of mental and physical tasks designed as metaphors for leadership challenges. Success depended not on physical strength or athletic skill, but



on a team's ability to solve problems creatively, allocate diverse resources effectively, maintain commitment of team members, and develop support networks. After each challenge, the participants as individuals and the teams reflected on the process: What contributed to team effectiveness? What fueled or took away energy and commitment of individuals? How might we apply what we're learning to the school? By the end of the weekend, insights from the woods were translated into action plans for the school.

**Case studies.** Another way to bridge the gap between classroom and field is the use of case studies rich in descriptions and contextual details of life-like situations. Cases are designed to help aspiring principals develop analytical, problem-solving, and decision-making skills, and to integrate abstract and practical knowledge. They provide a kind of "cognitive apprenticeship" that allows instructors to articulate the tacit knowledge relevant to real-world problems (Nona Prestine 1993).

Traditionally, the instructor constructs the case studies to model the kinds of reasoning needed to solve problems. Prestine also recommends the use of student-generated cases derived from personal experience. The use of such "critical incidents" directly links the classroom with the student's world, thereby ensuring that the content is relevant to students' future career needs and worthy of their engagement. By discussing their case studies with classmates, students become aware of issues and perspectives that may not otherwise occur to them.

Because case studies can be time-consuming to construct, UCEA has created an online collection (*Journal of Case Studies*) of well-designed examples that can be used by university faculty (<http://www.ucea.org>).

**Problem-based learning.** Closely related to the case method is problem-based learning (PBL). In both methods, students focus on concrete situations that require critical reasoning and practical problem-solving. But whereas case studies are usually confined to discussions of a well-defined problem, PBL works more as an interactive simulation of a real-world task.

For example, one PBL exercise asks students to serve on a teacher-selection committee with the goal of hiring a fourth-grade teacher. As background, students are given information about the school and its teacher-evaluation process, as well as readings on related topics such as recruitment, selection, and school law. Their task is to design and implement a selection process, during which they interview candidates and observe demonstration lessons. After deliberating, the committee must prepare a report to the personnel director making and justifying its recommendation. The students then receive feedback from a faculty member and the teachers they interviewed (Edwin Bridges and Philip Hallinger 1995).

PBL offers many benefits. Students are engaged in a life-like task that requires them to integrate abstract and practical knowledge; they develop problem-solving skills through experience, not just discussion; they gain skill in collaboration; and they become more self-directed in their learning. PBL also offers an opportunity for university faculty to collaborate with school practitioners; in the example cited, a school-district personnel manager could be the one who provides feedback to the students.

PBL seems especially well suited to deal with the “messiness” of real leadership problems, where multiple issues may be embedded in a single decision. Unlike textbooks or even case studies, the problems under study are not identified in advance, so students gain skill in recognizing that a problem exists.

The many benefits of PBL come with a price, however. The instructional method is not easy to design and implement, as it requires the instructor to produce background materials, identify appropriate readings, and recruit outside participants. In addition, as with many inquiry activities, PBL eats up a large amount of class time, forcing the instructor to make tradeoffs with other possible content.

To lessen the burden on instructors, Bridges and Hallinger have provided a useful handbook for faculty considering the use of PBL, and they and other experts have created ready-to-

use PBL projects, complete with background reading materials.\*

**Course-based field activities.** Another important source of practical experience for prospective leaders is course work that assigns students to activities in school settings. Examples of course-based assignments include:

- observing a school board meeting, a negotiations session, a student discipline hearing, or a faculty meeting
- interviewing administrators on a specific topic such as developing a building budget, bringing about a change in a program, or designing a staff inservice plan
- observing and then conducting a teacher observation and a postconference
- attending a regional or state principal conference
- interviewing a school board member or political leader on issues central to education

The best field activities are those that enable students to see how theoretical or technical aspects of school administration can be applied. In addition, trainers in effective programs teach students various observation and interview-recording techniques prior to their field-based assignments. Finally, they assist students in carefully analyzing information collected in

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\*Edwin M. Bridges and Philip Hallinger fully explain the PBL instructional strategy in two books available from the ERIC Clearinghouse on Educational Management (ERIC/CEM): *Problem-Based Learning for Administrators* (1992) and *Implementing Problem-Based Learning in Leadership Development* (1995). Also available from the Clearinghouse are the following PBL Projects (in both instructor and student editions): *Managing Technological Change*, *Charter Schools*, *Leadership & School Culture*, *Time Management*, and *Write Right!*

These books and resources can be ordered from the Clearinghouse's website <<http://eric.uoregon.edu>> or by calling 541-346-5044. Note: ERIC/CEM closed on December 31, 2003, but it has been replaced at the University of Oregon by the Clearinghouse on Educational Policy and Management, which continues to make available ERIC/CEM's resources. The new website address is <<http://cepm.uoregon.edu>>. The phone number remains the same.

the field. Without critical analysis and reflection, the activities are primarily passive in nature and may not help students develop useful insights.

**Practica.** Practica can also help aspiring administrators begin to translate theory into practice. A practicum is usually a significant project, at least one semester in duration, in which students demonstrate administrative skills. In exemplary training programs, the student is accountable for planning, implementing, and evaluating one or more projects.

Ideally, practica occur not only near the end of students' university training sequence, but throughout the training period. With this approach, universities and school districts can use the practicum as part of a career-guidance plan that allows those interested in administration to "test the waters" before deciding to pursue administration as a career. A brief encounter with reality toward the end of the program—no matter how bracing—comes too late for students who have already invested much time and money in their training.

A second criterion for a successful practicum experience is that university faculty members and school-district administrators work together to closely supervise and provide helpful feedback on students' projects. According to the National Association of Secondary School Principals (1985), university supervisors, school-district administrators, and peers need to carefully analyze and constructively critique students' practicum projects. One of the criteria in assessing practicum outcomes should be the ability to receive and act on criticism.

An exemplary practicum experience is the requirement that students bring about a change in some aspect of a school's structures, norms, or traditional procedures, as they work directly with people involved in the school. Thus, relevant practicum assignments will probably require some release time from an aspirant's regular duties. University faculty members and school administrators can also provide students with information and ideas on successful change strategies and carefully guide aspiring administrators through a change process. Examples of appropriate practicum projects include:

- initiating a new norm, structure, or procedure for inservice training in a school

- observing and improving a school's discipline or attendance procedure
- developing a student, teacher, or volunteer recognition program
- improving curriculum articulation within a school or initiating a new instructional strategy with staff in a curricular area

**Internships.** Practica, because they are typically limited in duration and scope, offer a taste of the real world but fail to replicate the intensity of being a principal. For that reason, the recent call to reform has almost invariably included proposals to require extended internships. The National Association of State Boards of Education spoke for many reformers when it said, "Carefully designed and closely supervised internships are a critically necessary component of any high-quality principal preparation program." NCATE standards for leadership preparation programs now require an internship.

Ideally, an internship is a full-time, semester-long (or even year-long) assignment that immerses principal candidates in the realities of school leadership. In practice, most internships fall short of this goal. Even among the reform-minded universities participating in the Danforth grant program, internships ranged from 120 hours to 1,703 hours, with the average around 632 hours. Even so, the duration of these more advanced programs was double the average for institutions in the UCEA (Milstein).

The major obstacle to long internships is financial; many candidates hold full-time jobs as teachers and cannot afford to trade their regular income for an unpaid internship. The alternative is for their districts to grant them paid release time, an expense most district budgets will not permit.

The quality of internships is just as important as the duration. Too often, they have been casual, poorly supervised, and uninspiring. A typical pattern is for a student to be assigned to work a designated number of hours each week helping out an administrator; frequently, the student is assigned a hodgepodge of low-level tasks and loose ends that the regular administrator hasn't gotten around to. As a result, people are being prepared to serve as instructional leaders by spending

five to ten hours per week supervising bus loadings, calling the homes of truant students, filling out forms for the central office or the state department of education, or devising new student handbooks. These are certainly tasks that go with the position, but they are far removed from the core leadership issues principals face.

Ronald Capasso and John Daresh (2001) say a good internship has three characteristics. First, it provides the candidate with significant leadership activities that require problem-solving and decision-making. Second, it helps candidates understand the scope of the principal's job. Finally, it provides the candidate with meaningful tasks that make a contribution to the cooperating district.

Milstein, summarizing the experiences of Danforth institutions, adds three other conditions. First, the internship should be spread over multiple settings so the candidate can experience a variety of settings and styles. Second, the internship should be closely supervised and evaluated, and the respective roles of mentor and supervisor should be made clear. Finally, opportunities for reflection should be provided on a weekly or biweekly basis.

The last point is easy to overlook, since many participants assume that one learns from experience simply by experiencing. But unreflective experience leads to little except imitation; genuine learning requires the student to connect events with some framework of knowledge. Anne Weaver Hart (1993) notes, "What has been tacit becomes increasingly explicit and, therefore, more deliberate and amenable to modification." Expertise comes when principals can move from theory to practice and back again. Ronald Williamson and Martha Hudson (2001) described the reaction of their students to a weekly reflective seminar:

Students report that it is the processing of internship experiences, not the actual experience, where meaning and understanding are developed. They suggest it is one thing to observe an event or a decision, yet another to understand the "behind the scenes" story and thinking.

Finally, internships require considerable collaborative work between university and school, something that can be draining for both partners. Universities have to provide clear expecta-

tions and adequate supervision; schools have to ensure that candidates receive a meaningful experience. At times, real-world demands can intervene. Williamson and Hudson describe numerous cases in which schools transferred a carefully selected mentor principal without warning or used interns to fill in for principals on leave, without considering the intern's needs.

Quality of mentors is another key to the success of internships. Williamson and Hudson observed that excellent principals do not always make excellent mentors. They summed up the desirable qualities this way:

The good mentor was willing to give the intern real and significant responsibilities. He/she gave the intern opportunity to try without risk of reproach. Time was provided for constructive feedback and processing of those experiences. The mentor was comfortable enough, both as principal and mentor, to reveal the inside stories and thinking that underlay administrative decisions and actions.

### Program Delivery

Preparation programs have traditionally delivered their courses cafeteria style. Each semester they offer a menu from which students can pick whatever selections suit them at that time. This pattern has been challenged by two developments in the past decade: the use of cohorts and the emergence of virtual learning.

**Cohorts.** When universities begin to reform their programs, one common step is to group students into cohorts that will progress as a group through the preparation sequence. Unlike the traditional cafeteria approach, students in a cohort follow an established course sequence with the same group of peers throughout the program.

Initially, cohorts were established merely to simplify program management, especially when a university wanted to run one experimental group without abandoning its traditional program. However, many university faculty members have found that a cohort structure has educational benefits as well.

The most widely reported advantage of cohorts is the development of a learning community (Cynthia Norris and

Bruce Barnett 1994). As members of the group pursue a common purpose under common conditions, they typically form strong bonds with their peers. Group members offer strong mutual support and build solidarity; many use the concept of “family” to describe the group. Within a climate of trust, students are more comfortable expressing their ideas. Students also become interdependent and develop collaborative skills, facilitating the formation of a learning community.

In general, faculty members and students are highly conscious of this social learning and speak highly of it (Bruce Barnett and colleagues 2000). The academic impact of cohorts is less clear, however.

Jay Scribner and Joe Donaldson (2001) found that the social dynamics of the cohort sometimes overpowered the actual learning opportunities. For example, the need to avoid conflict and reduce tension sometimes led students to back away from contentious issues that would have benefited from further debate. In addition, students were quick to capitalize on one another’s strengths. They saw that they could more efficiently accomplish tasks if they adopted or assigned roles tailored to each individual’s talents. Although their division of labor improved efficiency, it also allowed students to avoid working on skills that needed strengthening. Scribner and Donaldson concluded that instructors should teach students to recognize how group processes can restrict learning.

**Virtual learning.** On the whole, recent reform efforts have not been daring in their use of technology, and they have not made use of the emerging capacity to deliver courses online. The reasons for this are unclear, though some educators question the validity of electronic learning. Joe Schneider, then deputy executive director of the American Association of School Administrators, questioned whether graduates of online programs are even interested in becoming principals. He also said, “Superintendents are too smart to hire (as a principal) a teacher with an on-line master’s degree and no experience in administration” (Quoted in Joan Richardson 2001).

Although virtual learning is out of the mainstream for the moment, it does exist and is likely to grow. As of 2001, at least ten graduate-level programs were offering wholly online a master’s or doctoral degree in educational administration.



Arizona has become the first state to approve such a program for principal certification (Richardson).

Distance learning offers some obvious attractions to busy professionals, who would rather learn in the comfort of their homes than battle heavy traffic in questionable weather. Electronic programs are a special boon to learners in rural areas, who normally have to drive long distances to get to classes. Online courses are also “asynchronous,” allowing students to work at their own convenience rather than having to dedicate a specific block of time to the class. Students can even collaborate asynchronously, each posting comments and suggestions as the group builds a collective document.

Virtual learning also poses some formidable challenges for principal preparation. Whereas online work does promote the development of certain kinds of learning communities, it lacks the face-to-face interactivity that characterizes the principal’s work. Joellen Killion (2002) notes, “Effective leaders must listen fully to messages delivered not only in words, but also in voice tone and gestures. They use a full range of critical analysis skills, communication skills, and human interaction skills to respond and to participate in discussion, dialogue, or team meetings.” She adds that such skills are unlikely to be developed online.

Given the apparent skepticism of many university faculty members, mainstream programs will probably be slow to offer complete programs online. Some universities undoubtedly will begin to offer online courses as part of the total mix of experiences in the program.

### Assessment

If preparation programs succeed in developing more relevant and hands-on instructional strategies, they will need to develop new forms of assessment. A multiple-choice test would be an anemic way of measuring what happens during discussion of a complex case study.

One implication of grounding preparation in practice is that assessment should be based on skill in performing relevant tasks. The ISLLC standards have provided a loose framework for assessment by articulating the specific kinds of

knowledge, skills, and dispositions associated with each standard. The ISLLC licensure examination used in some states asks candidates to respond to case studies and simulated documents (Educational Testing Service).

For its part, the National Council of Accreditation for Teacher Education (National Policy Board for Educational Administration 2002) now requires programs to build in extensive performance-based assessment. Their suggested examples include:

- developing and presenting a plan recommending alignment of social-service agency programs with school-improvement needs
- conducting a cost-benefit analysis of a school-improvement plan
- presenting a multimedia report on technology to a community forum
- collecting, interpreting, and analyzing school data
- interviewing state legislators and/or lobbyists on strategies for influencing change

Other developments include the use of detailed rubrics to make performance expectations more explicit and the use of developmental portfolios that document progress toward the principalship. In addition, candidates in internships can be evaluated by the same processes and standards used for principals.

### School-Based Programs

Despite the calls for better connections with the field, most preparation programs remain within the university orbit, and few critics have advocated turning over the responsibility to other agencies. Aside from the difficulty of creating a whole new delivery framework, other institutions would have to seek suspension or modification of the normal licensure rules that require graduation from an approved and accredited program.

Nonetheless, some larger school districts are becoming more active players in the preparation process. One recent example is the Aspiring Principals Program in Providence,

Rhode Island. The city's school district launched the program in 2001 when it was confronting a large number of administrator retirements and a projected shortage of replacements.

Participants in the program, who must apply for the posted position of "Aspiring Principal," do eighteen months of courses, action research, and fieldwork, all of which take place in Providence schools. Participants retain their teaching positions, but are assigned to work with mentor principals on a wide range of leadership tasks. They are asked to maintain journals, develop portfolios, and put together final exhibitions of their work. Participants pay a third of the cost, with the remainder covered through an agreement between the district and participating universities.

This program, and similar ones in Ohio, New Mexico, Nebraska, and New York (Bess Keller 2000), do not challenge the existing licensure process, as all operate through arrangements with accredited universities. However, they demonstrate that school districts can take the initiative in creating programs tailored to their needs.

### Strategies for Change

As the preceding section makes clear, slow progress in leadership preparation cannot be blamed on any scarcity of ideas. More likely, the difficulty lies in a fragmented governance structure in which three distinct groups have a hand in principal training, but none has a free hand.

#### The Players in Principal Preparation

**University departments.** University faculty members are highly independent scholars who value their autonomy and guard their prerogatives. A department chair with a vision for change must work through patient persuasion, especially when the proposed changes would shake up teaching assignments or course content.

Charol Shakeshaft, describing the efforts of her department to revamp their program, notes that just maintaining coherence across the curriculum requires a major effort. "All of these contributions to student learning take time that we didn't have before we began our work together, and time that the univer-

sity neither requires us to spend nor rewards us for,” she laments. No matter how attractive the change, the added hours, the difficulty of changing personal practice, and the lack of clear results act as drags on change:

It takes time from my research, it requires an involvement with students that I don’t always want, it keeps me away from home for many hours more than I would like, and it involves me in long discussions with my colleagues as we wrestle with our ideas. I like closure, I hate meetings, I avoid intimate contact, and I like solitary work. The old program supported such behavior. The new program does not. (Shakeshaft)

Shakeshaft’s candid appraisal reminds us that significant change is at root a cultural change that encompasses the total institutional environment. Changes in the course syllabus will never amount to much unless accompanied by a support system that embraces the hearts and minds of university faculty members.

For a variety of reasons, education departments do not generally enjoy high status in the university pecking order and may be most appreciated as a reliable source of tuition income. Shakeshaft notes that when her department tried to improve quality by raising admission requirements, the result was fewer students. The university administration did not appreciate the reduced revenue stream, and the department ultimately lost a tenure-track position.

Similarly, the standard university reward system fails to recognize the time-consuming efforts of faculty to establish and nurture collaborative relationships with K-12 practitioners. Career advancement is governed by the trinity of “research, teaching, and service,” but at most universities research trumps the other two.

However, even if university faculty members manage to muster the commitment and resources for significant reform, their options are constrained by state certification requirements, which may specify admission requirements, learning goals, course requirements, length of the internship, and a variety of other components. No matter how inspired the program’s vision, it has to accommodate the reality of state mandates.

**States.** For their part, states have the legal authority to set requirements, but their influence is dampened by the volatile nature of public policymaking. Policies are the product of an unpredictable mix of players (governors, legislatures, interest groups, and the public at large), and what gets enacted is often an untidy collection of compromises rather than a coherent program. Additionally, in a system built around biennial elections, every policy initiative is subject to political mood swings.

In addition, most states have found that passing a policy is one thing, and implementing it is quite another. Whatever the state requirements, the actual preparation of leaders occurs in universities and K-12 schools, not in the state capital.

**Practitioners.** Finally, school and district leaders remain tenuously connected to preparation programs. While they are sometimes asked to be mentors or adjuncts or to serve on advisory boards, they have little formal authority in shaping programs. Even the informal contacts are limited; professors and K-12 administrators travel in different circles, attending different meetings, reading different journals, and focusing on different problems. Practitioners who wish to play a significant role in leadership preparation usually have to chart their own course.

### Reform Strategies

Given this interlocking system where no one entity has clear control, three broad reform strategies seem possible.

1. **Piecemeal reform.** This strategy continues longstanding patterns in which players use the tools at hand in their own spheres of influence. Thus, universities develop more cohesive curricula or better instructional methods; states legislate requirements for certification; and practitioners volunteer to serve as mentors for principal candidates. At times this approach can yield stellar results, but even the biggest successes usually stand as islands of excellence having minimum impact on the system at large. Often the reform is achieved and sustained by the energies of a few committed and talented people; when they leave, the reform gradually fades away.

2. **Reform by design.** The outlines of a more coordinated strategy have slowly emerged over the last decade under the

rubric of “coherent policy” (Susan Fuhrman 1993) or “reform by design” (Peter Hill 2002). This strategy identifies the key elements in the preparation process, determines how those elements could work together smoothly and effectively, and then redesigns the system accordingly.

When applied to leadership preparation, this strategy generally uses state certification rules as the lever for change. For example, Washington State worked with university programs and K-12 practitioners to develop a common set of indicators and benchmarks based on the ISLLC standards (OSPI). Preparation programs must be able to document (via portfolios or other performance measures) that their graduates meet the standards, but programs are not required to offer any particular set of courses.

Practitioners were not only involved in the formulation of Washington’s standards, they also have a permanent role as members of the Professional Educator Advisory Board (PEAB) that each program is required to have. Programs are expected to consult with the PEAB on a regular basis and show evidence that they have responded to practitioners’ input. In addition, PEAB members often work with the program to identify promising candidates, participate in admission interviews, and help assess student portfolios.

It is far too early to assess the effectiveness of this strategy nationwide, but surveys suggest that a growing number of states are moving in this direction (State Action for Education Leadership Project 2001).

3. *Reform outside the box.* Some critics, skeptical that bureaucratic systems can muster enough imagination to meet the challenges, look elsewhere for guidance. For instance, some policy analysts recommend borrowing ideas from other fields, such as business (Marie Eiter 2002), the military (Robert Hughes and Richard Haney 2002), and other professions (Gary Sykes and colleagues 2002).

In many cases, these analysts are simply urging that educational administration programs take the most relevant features from other fields and adapt them to the needs of future principals. Some go further by enunciating the belief that “leadership is leadership” and that certain generic leadership

qualities (such as ability to motivate others) are more important than training in specific tasks of administration.

Marguerite Roza and colleagues (2003) have urged schools to consider hiring people with leadership experience in other fields. Conceding that nontraditional candidates will usually run afoul of certification requirements, they suggest that certification itself may be obsolete:

The link between qualifications and performance in school leadership positions is unclear at best, and a mystery at worst. No one can say with certainty what qualifications or background will yield better school leaders. In reality, there is almost no empirical evidence to justify most of the certification requirements for today's administrators.

In a related argument, Hess (2003) has recommended that the university monopoly over certification should be broken up, allowing other public and private agencies to compete in preparing principals.

The scarcity of uncertified principals obviously makes it difficult to judge the effectiveness of such proposals. Roza and her colleagues cite a few anecdotal comments to support the idea that nontraditional candidates perform well, but research evidence is nonexistent.

For the moment, the argument seems to hinge on whether principals without a K-12 background could provide effective instructional leadership. Bradley Portin and colleagues (2003) believe that some form of distributed leadership would enable the principal to operate like a CEO, responsible for results but not exercising direct leadership over every facet of the organization. Others are skeptical that generic management skills are sufficient to master the organizational complexities of teaching and learning in K-12 schools (Fenwick English 2002).

### Lessons Learned

Over the next decade, the ferment in principal preparation programs may coalesce into reform models that are coherent and comprehensive. In the meantime, the work of the past decade yields at least a few guideposts.

*Lesson 1: Preparing school leaders is everyone's responsibility.* As noted above, no one agency can single handedly

reform principal preparation. University training provides a systemic perspective and a reflective orientation that helps principals recognize the forest even when the immediate landscape is dominated by trees. Meaningful work in schools lets future principals translate that broad understanding into realistic and effective strategies. And states have the leverage to bring universities and schools into productive partnerships. As Michelle Young and colleagues (2002) have observed:

We need to move beyond individual and group interests to consider issues in which we are mutually invested, and we must create and implement an organized and collective agenda for the improvement of educational leadership preparation.

*Lesson 2: All stakeholders should work to improve the selection and support of worthy principal candidates.* Participants in university programs are largely self-selected; the usual entrance requirements screen out only applicants with serious academic deficiencies and pay little attention to potential leadership qualities. Of course, grouching about low quality will do little to change the situation (at least it hasn't done so over the past several decades).

Universities should work with school districts not only to identify specific individuals with high potential but also collectively to develop admission standards that reflect strong leadership qualities. At the moment, even programs inclined to look for these qualities rely more on intuition than on any overt indicators. By simply articulating the standards in a collaborative way, universities and practitioners can do much to improve their ability to find the right people.

*Lesson 3: Districts concerned about the future of leadership in their schools must become active players, not passive bystanders.* This is a tall order for practitioners already overburdened with duties, but there is little real alternative if principal candidates are to be properly prepared for the rigors of the job. There is agreement across the spectrum that preparation has to be grounded in a deep, realistic understanding of the demands of leadership.

Districts can take a number of useful steps that don't require the effort of actually initiating their own programs. One simple action is to work with area universities to identify



promising candidates. Some programs require that a practicing principal or superintendent formally nominate applicants. Whether done formally or informally, the nomination process encourages universities to look at leadership qualities rather than purely academic capability.

School districts can also make a major contribution by working with universities to establish extensive and meaningful field experiences. In particular, districts can identify worthy mentors (not every real-world model is a positive one!), provide meaningful assignments, and offer realistic feedback to interns. School districts should also not hesitate to negotiate minimum standards of quality for internships. How much supervision will the university provide? What opportunities does the program provide for structured reflection on field experiences? What involvement and input will district personnel have?

For the internship to be a productive and relevant training experience, the parties should develop a well-designed working agreement that clarifies the expectations, rights, responsibilities, and functions of the intern, university supervisor, and field supervisor, including a list of required activities. Whereas universities control the content of preparation programs, they are fully dependent on K-12 schools to provide field experiences. A simple “no” will quickly get the attention of any university that appears not to have thought deeply about the purpose and conditions of the internship.

Finally, practitioners can directly participate in programs as adjunct instructors, presenters, and mentors, as well as by helping to interview program applicants and evaluate program outcomes.

Effective preparation programs are, of course, only the first step in developing capable principals. When well-trained principals are available, districts must devise strategies to identify, recruit, and select them. The next chapter explores the challenge of recruiting capable applicants when openings occur.

## Recruiting the Best

**F**acing a shortage of qualified candidates, schools in many regions of the country can no longer rely on the traditional “post it and they shall come” recruiting strategies. With fewer candidates applying, school boards and district officials must simultaneously contend with a tumultuous reform environment and new leadership paradigms that make careful selection imperative. That is, districts must devise hiring procedures that ensure the right candidate is picked for each school and its community—a leader who can elicit peak performance from staff and students.

Most recent policy documents agree that traditional recruitment patterns will not meet the challenge. The National Association of State Boards of Education (1999) has observed that the current system is based on self-selection, with teachers deciding for themselves to enter principal preparation programs and apply for jobs at the schools of their choice:

This laissez-faire system is not targeted and offers little ability to control candidates’ quality, dispositions, likelihood to ever practice, or potential to work in schools that need them most.

In the past, this system worked reasonably well because it produced enough candidates for districts to believe that with judicious choices they could find quality leadership. Today, that confidence is gone: Numbers are down and the difficulty of the job is up. Districts that fail to be proactive in the search for leadership will be left behind. More positively, the antici-

pated retirement of many principals offers districts a rare opportunity to reshape their future.

The challenge is twofold. Districts must both recruit a cadre of qualified applicants for each position that comes open, and then select the candidate who best matches the job requirements. This chapter assesses issues in the recruitment of principals and offers guidelines to assist school districts in attracting the most capable leaders. Chapter 4 will then examine the selection and hiring process.

### A Dwindling Talent Pool?

As noted in the first chapter, many superintendents report that the supply of quality candidates has been dwindling. Whereas a district might have previously been able to count on getting a couple dozen applications for a principalship, now it may receive just a handful. Districts in isolated rural areas or large cities may have even less choice.

Explanations vary, and in fact there may be a variety of reasons. But the principalship has always drawn its talent from the ranks of teachers, and some analysts have suggested that the relative satisfactions of teaching have begun to outweigh the satisfactions of administration. Philip Cusick (2002), in a series of interviews with Michigan principals and superintendents, identified some of the key issues:

- Although the principalship usually pays more than teaching, the job also involves longer hours; in some cases, experienced teachers earn more on a daily basis than principals.
- Teachers with a desire to exercise leadership can now do so without leaving the classroom. The recent emphasis on site-based management and teacher leadership has offered teachers an abundance of opportunities to influence school decisions, but without having sole responsibility for outcomes.
- Teachers, who are in a good position to see what principals go through, may simply be opting out of a career track that requires ever-increasing time and produces ever-increas-

ing stress. For example, Jeff Archer (April 2002) cited a Boston principal who succinctly summed up the situation: “By watching me move around that building and put in my 12- and 14-hour days, teachers say, ‘I wouldn’t do your job in a million years’.”

Thus, in a recruitment process based on self selection, fewer teachers are making the decision to become principals. Districts desiring high-quality leadership must be aggressive in identifying and attracting the best candidates.

### How Do Districts Recruit Principals?

Historically, school districts have recruited principals haphazardly, often overlooking the most capable candidates. Catherine Baltzell and Robert Dentler (1983) found that most of the districts they studied were unable to articulate the qualities they were seeking in principals. Although repeatedly stressing their commitment to finding the best leaders available, administrators could only explain their choices as having a “good fit” with the district.

“Time and time again,” Baltzell and Dentler noted, “this ‘fit’ seemed to rest on interpersonal perceptions of a candidate’s physical presence, projection of a certain self-confidence and assertiveness, and embodiment of community values and methods of operation.” This vague, informal process stacked the deck against out-of-district applicants, minorities, and women.

Moreover, little effort was made to recruit outside the district, and the process usually seemed to draw local candidates, some of whom district leaders had been carefully grooming for some time. The ultimate decision was sometimes affected by issues having nothing to do with merit, but rather political factors and the need to protect seniority. Baltzell and Dentler concluded that most districts ran “essentially closed” selection procedures.

The work of Baltzell and Dentler, now two decades old, reflected practices predating *A Nation at Risk* and the educational reform movement. Have the pressures of reform and accountability brought changes in the selection process? The answer is unclear. Considering the importance that most people

attach to the principalship, there has been surprisingly little research on recruitment and selection practices.

A recent study of teacher hiring showed that many principals were guided by notions of “good fit” and a reliance on “gut instinct,” with little clarity about the qualities being sought (Norma Mertz and Sonja McNeely 2001). While these findings cannot automatically be applied to the selection of principals, they do suggest that educators lack a well-developed tradition of systematic hiring.

On the other hand, a study of U.S. and Canadian practices (Stephen Lawton 2000) suggested that recruitment and selection have become somewhat more systematic and are more likely to be based on substantive qualifications and competence. Lawton speculated that the trend toward more systematic processes might result from the relative shortage of qualified candidates compared with the mid-1980s.

In addition, reports of “grow your own” programs for aspiring leaders provide anecdotal evidence that some schools are beginning to take a proactive approach to recruitment and selection (Bess Keller 2000; Educational Research Service 2000).

### A First Step: Building a Profile of the Ideal Candidate

The key to a thoughtful, systematic recruitment and selection process is a clear perception of the qualities desired. Districts that can articulate a clear image of what they are looking for are more likely to find it. Traditional job descriptions that list routine administrative functions fail to provide a meaningful basis for differentiating candidates. Descriptions such as “supervises certificated staff” and “implements policies and procedures necessary for efficient operation of the school” give little meaningful guidance.

Some districts have gone beyond the traditional descriptions to formulate “principal profiles” that capture their vision of the principalship. For example, the Greater Essex County District School Board in Windsor, Ontario, has identified eight elements of the job that guide its selection and hiring: admin-

istration, balance, communication, education, ethos, improvement, knowledge, and vision (see that district's profile of an ideal principal in table 3.1).

Such profiles provide district officials with a basic template to aid their search for candidates. They suggest the kinds of questions that can be asked at an interview and also serve to reinforce the district's value system (Paul Begley 1995).

Districts can develop principal profiles in a number of ways. One is job analysis, in which current practitioners identify the competencies critical for high performance (Diane Arthur 1998). The data can be gathered by questionnaire, interviews, activity logs, or direct observation. The key questions are what specific activities make up the job, and what knowledge, skills, and dispositions are required to perform those duties well. The job analysis can be supplemented by a survey of parents to gather their perceptions of the qualities desired in a principal. Although these data will naturally be less precise than a formal job analysis, the resulting profiles provide good insights into the climate and needs of particular sites.

This kind of analysis will yield good information on what principals currently do, but how they spend their time is not necessarily how they ought to spend their time. For that reason, job analysis can be supplemented by a review of leadership research and current thinking on best practices.

Research on leadership falls far short of offering definitive prescriptions for the ideal principal, but it has nonetheless identified some key behaviors associated with successful school leadership. A recent review of the literature by Kenneth Leithwood and Carolyn Riehl (2003) found a core of basic leadership practices that made a difference:

- Setting directions (articulating a vision, fostering the acceptance of group goals, and creating high performance expectations)
- Developing people (offering intellectual stimulation, providing individualized support, and providing an appropriate model)

Table 3.1

The Profile of a Principal  
Greater Essex County District School Board

(A summary of the skills, abilities, and personal characteristics required to provide high-quality educational leadership)

ADMINISTRATION

- applies superior organization skills and decision-making
- employs effective administrative practices and technology
- manages an effective support team in the school with minimum conflict

BALANCE

- demonstrates balance within career, and between career and personal life
- develops appropriate priorities for school community needs

COMMUNICATION

- speaks, writes, and listens effectively
- communicates concisely, persuasively, and at various levels of sophistication

EDUCATION

- demonstrates strong educational values and progressive philosophy of education
- commands respect as an educator and curriculum leader
- creates and sustains a safe and exciting learning environment

ETHOS

- engenders respect, confidence, trust, and loyalty
- works to foster positive relationships with parents and the school community
- appreciates and respects community diversity

IMPROVEMENT

- promotes measurable and sustainable improvement in all areas of responsibility
- motivates high achievement of self and others
- promotes involvement and commitment

KNOWLEDGE

- employs knowledge of all relevant legislation, policies, and procedures
- applies current knowledge of curriculum, pedagogy, and child development

VISION

- anticipates and prepares for change
- encourages professional goals for self and others

SOURCE: Greater Essex County District School Board. "The Profile of a Principal." 1999. Used with permission.

- Redesigning the organization (strengthening school cultures, modifying organizational structures, and building collaborative processes)

Beyond these practices, successful principals are responsive to the demands of accountability, and they focus on meeting the needs of all students, particularly those who have traditionally not experienced success in school.

Professional consensus on best practices, as represented in the Interstate School Leaders Licensure Consortium (ISLLC) standards, provide another fertile source for pinpointing desirable leadership qualities. The standards not only identify six broad areas of competence but also provide more specific indicators for each area.

For instance, standard V focuses on “collaborating with families and community members, responding to diverse community interests and needs, and mobilizing community resources.” The indicators include such things as knowing successful models of partnerships, commitment to an informed public, and the ability to collaborate with community agencies. The specificity of the indicators can help districts zero in on the most important qualifications as they recruit and hire.

Through careful reflection and much discussion, districts can formulate a fairly detailed portrait of the ideal candidate. Because the list of qualifications will often be long, the final step is to set priorities. Some qualifications will be desirable (nice to have, but not essential). Others will be required (you would not hire someone lacking them). Still others will be critical (so important they will be given extra weight). Armed with this kind of analysis, districts are prepared to get the most out of their recruitment and selection efforts.

## The Recruitment Process

Some districts see recruitment as the first step after posting the job, but that may be far too late to begin the process of creating a pool of applicants. Recruitment is a matter of filling the pipeline, and candidates enter the front of the pipe years before they are ready to accept a position. Districts wishing to



ensure an adequate supply of quality applicants should develop a long-term strategy as well as a short-term process.

### Filling the Pipeline

Consumers who set out to buy a car can be confident that whatever other frustrations may await them, they can count on finding a vehicle that satisfies their particular requirements of size, style, price, and capabilities. This is no accident. Manufacturers work ceaselessly to study the market, track demand, and gear factory output to customer demand.

Compare this with the recruitment of principals. Teachers decide for a variety of reasons that they might want to become principals. They enter programs where they are screened only by easy-to-satisfy grade-point requirements. Those with the interest and ability to complete nine to twelve graduate classes receive a certificate entitling them to become principals, whereupon they wait for a favorable opportunity to apply. Thus, the potential talent pool is one that has been largely self-selected and self-monitored, with no guarantee that candidates will match the needs of districts.

Increasingly, districts are taking a more proactive approach to finding and nurturing the kind of candidates who will meet their leadership needs. Many are now providing formal and informal ways of orienting, mentoring, and supporting worthy administrative aspirants.

Effective long-range recruitment strategies begin with a single question: Why do teachers choose to become principals? In most cases, it is not simply the realization of a longtime dream. As Catherine Marshall and Katherine Kasten (1994) note, "Few 6-year-olds say, 'when I grow up I want to be a principal'." Most principals start their careers in education as teachers; becoming a principal thus represents a shift in thinking that occurs while they are teaching.

What turns their attention to administration? The process has not been well studied, especially among teachers who have not yet entered principal preparation programs. We can infer that what happens is a form of "anticipatory socialization" (Dan Lortie 1975), in which potential candidates form impressions and create expectations about a job while they are

relative outsiders. That is, teachers are in a position to observe principals and make some judgments about effective leadership and their own ability to fill the role.

Closeted in their classrooms for most of the day, teachers necessarily get a limited picture of the principal's job, based on what they see and hear in faculty meetings, casual hallway encounters, and faculty lounge gossip. Moreover, these impressions are colored by their status as teachers; they tend to define "good leadership" by what principals do to support the work of teachers, rather than by the full sweep of the principal's duties.

While Lortie's work focused on teachers, his analysis applies equally well to recruitment into the principalship. That is, the "apprenticeship of observation" gives potential candidates a somewhat one-sided and simplistic view of role expectations but also considerable confidence that they know a lot about the job. Inevitably, there are surprises as they begin more formal training.

From a recruitment perspective, this process has several consequences. Teachers who like what they see of administration decide to enter preparation programs. As they develop a more realistic understanding of the job, many realize that it is not a good match for their interests and talents. Having invested in a training program, they may persist for purely pragmatic reasons, continuing down a pathway that neither excites them nor evokes their best talents. They may complete their program but decline to seek administrative positions—inconvenient for them and wasteful of public funds.

Even worse for a leadership-hungry school system, many teachers who have the capacity to become good principals opt out because they have an incomplete understanding of the possibilities. From a distance, they may see only the "three Ps"—pressure, paperwork, and politics—and conclude that their desire to help children is best fulfilled in the classroom.

Finally, Lortie observes that the apprenticeship of observation does not promote a shared culture; those who persist will enter their formal preparation with individualistic and idiosyncratic views of the field. Richard Elmore and Deanna Burney (2000) likewise point out that most teachers typically work in

isolation with little chance to observe leaders close up. Moreover, most of their formal training occurs in a university setting that typically is not tightly linked to the K-12 environment.

Thus, laissez-faire forms of recruitment do little to ensure that a cadre of knowledgeable and committed potential leaders will be awaiting the school district's notice of a vacancy. For that reason, many districts have adopted the "grow your own" philosophy that seeks to identify, encourage, and support future school leaders.

### Effective Long-Range Recruitment

A district's future principals are already in its classrooms—if they can be enticed into leadership roles. Successful districts do this in at least three ways: (1) singling out individuals who have the potential to do well in the field; (2) selling prospective candidates on the benefits of serving in the profession; and (3) providing a broad array of leadership experiences as part of a "career web."

#### *1. The Tap on the Shoulder*

People often view career development as a rational planning and decision-making process in which an individual consciously analyzes personal strengths, weaknesses, and interests; identifies an appropriate occupation; and maps out a plan to earn the necessary credentials. In reality, careers are often based on circumstances and happenstance: A layoff forces a worker to look in other directions; an adult-education class makes someone aware of a new interest; a too-lengthy commute forces a job change.

One strong influence is simply being told by a credible source that one has the potential to do well in a field. Such a "tap on the shoulder" not only flatters, it often sparks a self-examination that ultimately leads to a new career.

This has always been a part of the path to the principal's office, and many current administrators can recount the help and encouragement they received along the way. Too often, however, the process has had the flavor of a good old boys' network, in which the current leaders pick out potential candi-

dates in their own image and ease their way into power. As described by Baltzell and Dentler, the system operates through quiet winks and nods, more a case of anointing than developing.

Nevertheless, the tap on the shoulder plays an essential role in a comprehensive recruitment strategy. When administrators make a commitment to cast the net widely, this kind of outreach can bring in qualified candidates who otherwise would never have considered the field. This is especially true for women and minorities, who have not traditionally had an abundance of role models to point the way. Mary Gardiner and colleagues (2000) cite one female administrator who benefited from this kind of invitation:

I can remember my thinking, "Why would you want me to do that?" [Women] don't see themselves in that [leadership] role. So until you ask them to go there, they won't, because they won't seek it out themselves.

## *2. Selling the Profession*

As teachers look at administration, they undoubtedly see a patchwork of positive and negative features, depending on their own interests, styles, and perceived capabilities. What are the main incentives and disincentives?

Diana Pounder and Randall Merrill (2001) have framed this question in terms of job-choice theory, which recognizes three components in career choices. *Objective* factors focus on economic incentives such as salary, benefits, and opportunity for advancement. *Subjective* factors satisfy psychological needs such as self-esteem and personal satisfaction. *Critical-contact* factors enter when candidates have too little substantive information about a job and base their choice on relatively superficial criteria such as the warmth of the recruiters or the quality of the physical facility.

Pounder and Merrill found that when assistant principals were asked to consider the desirability of a high school principalship, they gave the most weight to psychological benefits, particularly the opportunity to influence education. The ability to earn a higher salary exerted a modest influence,

while negative factors included time demands and the complexity of the role. This finding is consistent with Lortie's observation that teachers are most motivated by psychic rewards.

Although superintendents and principals routinely pinpoint salary as a critical element in attracting quality candidates, it is usually not the first item mentioned by candidates. Salary clearly enters their calculations, however. Although principals generally make more money than teachers, the advantage is offset by longer working hours and more stressful working conditions. The key question appears to be whether the salary is attractive enough to compensate for the distasteful parts of the job. In this sense, salary is not just an economic benefit, but a gesture of respect that allows candidates to maintain dignity.

Another key factor in choosing administration is simply the belief that one can do the job (Pounder and Merrill; Paul Winter and colleagues 2001). This comes as little surprise, since few people deliberately embrace failure. Nonetheless, in an environment that hammers home the "impossibility" of the principal's job, the perceived gap between challenge and personal capability may deter teachers from taking even the initial steps toward the principalship.

The implication for districts is that teachers need to maintain a sense of optimism about the possibilities of leadership. Without sugarcoating the difficulties, current administrators can convey that the sometimes unpleasant and seemingly trivial tasks that go with the job can be the instrument of a vision focused on student learning.

Finally, all these influences are complicated by the persistent individuality of potential school leaders, who will respond "in varying degrees, in varying circumstances" (Pounder and Merrill). Prospective principals may value certain incentives differently according to which grade level they aspire to lead. For example, Paul Winter and David Dunaway (1996) found that elementary- and middle-school candidates were more likely to be attracted to jobs that emphasized instructional leadership, whereas high-school candidates gravitated toward positions that emphasized management. For any given candi-

date, the decision to enter administration will come down to a highly personal balancing of perceived incentives and disincentives.

Despite the complexity of these career choices, districts can take several steps that are likely to enhance recruitment into the profession:

1. *Emphasize the transformative potential of the job.* Most teachers are in the classroom because they have a strong commitment to the welfare of children. If all they see of the principalship is an unholy blend of paper-pushing and crisis management, they will have little incentive to take up the challenge.

2. *Keep a close eye on salary.* While money alone will not solve the recruitment problem, it can help overcome some of the other disincentives. Districts may especially want to consider substantially higher salaries for high-poverty, low-performing schools that typically have trouble attracting principal candidates (Cynthia Prince, June 2002).

3. *Redesign the principal's job to eliminate some of the more distasteful elements.* Pounder and Merrill suggest that some tasks could be redistributed to assistant principals, athletic directors, and lead teachers.

4. *Always be mindful of the importance of modeling.* When Jianping Shen and Van Cooley (1999) asked potential school leaders to rate the incentives and disincentives for taking a job, 84 percent identified the relationships among school-board members, administrators, and faculty members as a critical factor. When teachers look around them and see dissension and political warfare, they are likely to retreat to their classroom, close the door, and draw their satisfaction from working with students. But when the collective efforts of board, administration, and teachers are congruent, teachers are more likely to consider moving into a different role.

### 3. *The Career Web*

In many occupations, recruitment into leadership is supported by a "career ladder," a series of positions with gradually increasing responsibility that allow potential leaders to test the waters and move toward the top in a measured way. The path

to the principal's office, however, has often been straight and narrow. Teachers interested in school leadership complete a preparation program, apply for an assistant position, and then move into the principalship itself. There are few other opportunities to test the waters of leadership or to develop a repertoire of leadership skills. Even the assistantship often falls short of a meaningful apprenticeship, providing only narrow experiences as a "daily operations manager" or disciplinarian (Leslie Kaplan and William Owings 1999).

In actuality, a more productive metaphor may be that of a "career web," in which individuals may move vertically, horizontally, or cross-wise. Providing a broad array of leadership experience, particularly instructional leadership, can not only encourage potential principals to persist in an administrative career, but can build a broad base of skills. This is true not only of the assistantship, but of any leadership position—curriculum coordinators, reading specialists, librarians, program coordinators. Indeed, given the current emphasis on teacher leadership, districts can deliberately provide a "leadership curriculum" to those in the classroom.

Accordingly, many districts are experimenting with a wide range of career-development opportunities. Among the possibilities:

*"Grow-Your-Own" curricula.* The BELL program of the David Douglas School District (Portland, Oregon) provides a practical example of how school districts can improve the pool of principal candidates by identifying, recruiting, and training prospective principals from within the district's teacher corps (Oregon School Boards Association 2001).

The BELL project (Building Education Leaders Locally) began with a class examining the district's culture, operations, and priorities. The class, taught by district administrators and supervisors, was followed by action-research projects, group leadership projects (such as serving on district committees), administrator internships, and mentoring of new administrators. Three years later, five of the original forty-three participants occupied administrative positions (three in the district), eight had gained experience by serving as administrative interns or by overseeing summer programs, and sixteen were in the process of earning administrative certification.

The district's success may be due to more than the mechanics of the program. Superintendent Barbara Rommel, who was involved in an earlier version of the program in the 1980s, pointed to an underlying attitude when she noted, "The culture here has always looked first within, encouraging teachers to get their administrative certificate and to seek administrative positions in the district" (Oregon School Boards Association).

*Establish aspiring-leader academies.* In Hamilton County, Ohio, local districts collaborated with several universities, the county educational service agency, and the Ohio Principals' Center to build bridges from teaching to administration through an aspiring-leaders academy (Gregg Tracy and Carmon Weaver 2000). Conducted through a series of one- or two-day seminars (with graduate credit available), the academy generated discussion of leadership conditions and trends, established opportunities for mentoring and job shadowing, and asked participants to develop a leadership portfolio. After completion of the year-long academy, participants may enter a formal certification program or take on teacher-leadership roles.

Aspiring-leader academies offer a number of benefits. They provide teachers with a structured and balanced look at school leadership and encourage them to measure the job against their own capabilities and interests. They offer a collegial environment for teachers and current administrators and give teachers access to critical role models and mentors. And even when participants decide that the principalship is not a good match for them, they return to their classrooms with a broader perspective and improved leadership skills.

*Collaborate with university preparation programs.* Working with university certification programs allows districts to take advantage of established academic structures while ensuring that candidates receive a heavy dose of practical experience to go with their course work. For example, the IDEAS program of the Jefferson County (Kentucky) School District and the University of Louisville integrates mentoring, case studies, and collaborative projects into a university certificate program (Educational Research Service 2000). The program is open to district personnel who do not currently hold administrative credentials and who can secure a formal nomination



from an already-certified principal who agrees to serve as a sponsor-mentor.

In addition, the district extends this preparation with a curriculum for candidates who hold certification but are not currently employed as principals. This “Principals for Tomorrow” program hones candidates’ skills with mentored training in key areas, thus bridging the gap between certification and administrative employment. Candidates can also earn nine hours of graduate credit or seventy-two hours of professional development credit.

*Seek state or national partners.* Local efforts can be supplemented by support from state agencies as well as state and national professional associations. A number of states have established leadership academies that bring together leadership teams of not just principals but teachers who may be potential principals (John Norton 2003). The academies often focus on the needs of low-performing schools, offering future leaders a collegial environment in which to sharpen their leadership skills on practical problems.

In addition, NAESP has an Aspiring Principals program (<http://www.naesp.org>) that for a nominal fee gives potential leaders many of the benefits of association membership, providing networking, development opportunities, and a general orientation to the culture of school leadership. NASSP (<http://www.nassp.org>) also offers a variety of development and assessment opportunities for future principals.

*Cultivate assistant principals.* Although assistant principals are a logical place to look for principals, districts have often neglected this part of the pipeline. The assistantship often ends up as a catch-basin for routine managerial tasks that the principal either does not have time for or does not relish, such as discipline, parking, and cafeteria supervision. Thus, candidates who spend several years in an assistant position may develop a rather unbalanced set of skills, as well as an inclination to view administration in terms of coordination and control (Norma Mertz 2000).

Even when assistants perceive the need to be instructional leaders, they often report having to spend most of their time on more mundane chores (T.C. Chan and colleagues 2003). Thus,

when a principalship opens, assistants may be underqualified because they have not had the opportunity to develop a full range of skills. Accordingly, districts should invest in developing assistants by creating collaborative leadership teams or at least making sure that APs have ample on-the-job opportunity to grapple with the challenges of instructional leadership (Kaplan and Owings 1999).

### *Creating Nontraditional Routes*

Increasingly, analysts are suggesting that the real principal shortage is a matter of quality rather than quantity. Although there are no objective or reliable data on candidate quality, some recent surveys suggest that superintendents are dissatisfied with the ability of candidates to live up to the growing demands of the job (Marguerite Roza 2003; Steve Farkas and colleagues 2001, 2003; Cusick). In addition, the traditional reliance on self-selection fuels the suspicion that the people who end up in the principal's chair are not necessarily the ones who should be there (Kathy O'Neill and colleagues 2003).

As noted in the previous chapter, some policy analysts have been floating proposals to offer alternative pathways that would attract highly qualified candidates. One idea is to streamline certification requirements to make it easier for accomplished teachers to enter the field. O'Neill and colleagues have suggested that teachers with master's degrees, good teaching records, and demonstrated leadership skills should be allowed to earn credentials while working as principals. Use of performance-based criteria could allow talented candidates to bypass some of the usual course requirements that discourage some potential leaders from moving into administration.

More far-reaching recommendations would open the field to non-educators (Roza and colleagues; Hess 2003; Thomas B. Fordham Foundation 2003). These proposals argue that many capable "outsiders"—lawyers, accountants, business professionals, and retired military—have the interest and leadership ability to serve as principals, but are blocked by certification rules or traditional expectations.

Hess has suggested that minimum qualifications should be a bachelor's degree, demonstrated leadership skills, and any technical knowledge that policymakers identify as essential. The Fordham Foundation would set the bar at a bachelor's degree, a background check, and passing a test on school laws and regulations. Schools should be free to hire anyone with those qualifications, with or without prior school experience.

These arguments are relatively recent, and there is very little evidence on which to make judgments, if only because the vast majority of principals have previous teaching experience. Recent data show that few states offer any kind of alternative route to the principalship and that few candidates take advantage of the alternatives that exist (Thomas B. Fordham Foundation; see also <http://www.ncei.com>).

Moreover, administrators in Michigan, which eliminated principal certification in 1996, report little change in hiring practices, with almost all principals continuing to hold traditional credentials (Jeff Archer, April 2002). Despite a perceived shortage of qualified candidates in the state (Cusick), districts there either still regard traditional preparation as an essential qualification or potential outside candidates are unaware of the opportunities or simply uninterested.

### Short-Term Recruitment

Efforts to fill the pipeline may take at least a few years to pay off. A vacancy today has to be filled from whatever candidates are available. For this reason, districts seeking to fill a position will want to recruit aggressively using all available means, as Diane Arthur explains:

Proactive recruiters start recruitment efforts as soon as they learn that there will be an opening. They expand their recruitment pool to encompass other than traditional recruiting sources and aggressively go after candidates, luring them with attractive employment packages.

Effective recruiting for an immediate opening includes at least seven major elements:

1. *A brief but well-crafted job posting that identifies the position and the desired qualifications.* A few short phrases such as “community-oriented leader” or “demonstrated suc-

cess with standards-based instruction” will help target the posting to the most likely candidates. (Districts should avoid the temptation to saturate the posting with desirable qualities. Everyone would like to hire Superman or Wonder Woman, but they seldom show up for interviews, and each listed qualification will lead some potential candidates to screen themselves out.) Districts that have developed principal profiles will find the task much easier.

Although most districts hire principals to serve in various schools during their tenure, they are more likely to attract good candidates when they include in the vacancy announcements information about the special needs and characteristics of a school. Baltzell and Dentler warn, “When the resulting set of standards becomes too general, the generalities detract from the vacancy pool and from screening efforts.”

2. *Vigorous dissemination of the posting.* Many agencies and organizations operate job-listing services that are often the first place job-seekers look. Announcements should also be placed in large-circulation newspapers in cities within a 500-mile radius of the vacancy. If the district is itself in a large city, the search committee might advertise the opening in similar cities. Other outlets include principal and superintendent newsletters, education journals, conferences of professional associations, and university campuses. There are many options, but the most important thing is to avoid a narrow search that ends too soon.

3. *An informative and attractive application packet.* Districts often take a minimalist approach to this step, sending out a bare-bones envelope with the necessary forms and perhaps a couple pieces of information about the school. This step should be viewed as an opportunity to do some self-promotion. The packet can highlight the desirable qualities and major achievements of the district, the quality of life in the community, and even information on employment opportunities for spouses (Ward Sybouts and Frederick Wendel 1994).

4. *Continuous networking and prospect management.* Personal contact and word of mouth remain highly effective recruiting tools. A casual lunch conversation at an educational conference may uncover an assistant principal who shows

considerable curiosity about the district, or an unsolicited résumé may appear in the daily mail. Even if there is no immediate vacancy, each such contact represents a potential applicant.

At a minimum, the district should keep a list of names that can be pulled out when an opening does occur. When individuals appear to be exceptionally promising, it pays to send a friendly letter thanking them for their interest in the district and assuring them their name will remain in the active file. In the meantime, they can be placed on mailing lists and receive periodic information about the district.

5. *Working with university programs.* Potential candidates can be found among those who are about to graduate or have recently graduated from an administrator-preparation program. Districts should not only send job postings to campuses, they should cultivate contacts with university professors. In addition, agreeing to host internships or mentoring experiences for students will often give districts an edge in identifying and courting promising candidates.

6. *Reaching out to underrepresented populations.* School districts can work closely with other districts, state administrator associations, women's educational administration associations, and groups of minority educators to encourage and recruit applicants from all segments of the population. In the words of one superintendent who has successfully recruited capable female administrators: "We are attempting to recruit our leadership from the whole population, not just half of it."

7. *Readiness to offer an attractive employment package.* Arthur notes that such packages are not restricted to large corporations: "Any organization can put together a tempting offer reflecting such items as shared decision making, child and elder care referrals, suggestion and award programs, health club memberships, and company-sponsored social affairs."

State law and internal politics may limit the kinds of perks that can be offered, but thinking beyond the traditional salary and benefits may yield some helpful incentives. For example, many principals value the opportunity to attend educational conferences; providing an annual allowance for that purpose

can have a significant psychological impact on a candidate from a district in which professional development is always the first budget line to be cut.

### The Problem of Hard-to-Staff Schools

The actions described above will improve recruitment prospects for many districts, but they may not be sufficient for hard-to-staff schools. As noted in chapter 1, the apparent principal “shortage” may actually be a problem of distribution. There may be sufficient candidates overall, but a persistent scarcity for certain schools. That is, even within the same district, a given posting may attract abundant candidates for School A, but a paltry number for School B (Cynthia Prince, January 2002).

The reason comes as no surprise: Schools that struggle to find good leaders are struggling in other ways as well. They are typically urban, with large numbers of low-income and minority children, test scores that lag far behind, and inadequate facilities in a distressed neighborhood. Or, they may be rural and remote, lacking infrastructure and resources while serving sizable numbers of low-income students. Candidates guided by traditional incentives find little to attract them: The workload is horrific, the stress unrelenting, the political environment often highly charged. Despite these liabilities, the salary is the same as in the high-income, high-achieving school across town.

No surprise then that attracting and holding good teachers and principals at these schools is an overwhelming task. Inevitably, the most distressed schools end up with the least qualified staff. The pattern is particularly clear for teachers. Teachers in low-performing schools tend to have less experience, less preparation in their content area, lower scores on teacher tests, and less likelihood of holding full certification. In addition, they are more like to transfer out as soon as an opportunity presents itself (Craig Jerald 2002; Prince, January 2002).

The evidence on principal qualifications is more elusive, but anecdotal accounts and some surveys seem to confirm the same pattern as exists for teachers. For example, a 1999 New

York City survey found that applicants for principalships varied between 116 at a flagship school and just 21 at a high-poverty school (New Visions for Public Schools 1999). There seems little reason to doubt that principals would follow the same path as teachers, with the more qualified seeking to move on as soon as possible.

### What Incentives Will Attract Qualified Candidates?

Can districts turn this situation around? The most obvious response would be a district policy that allocated principals by school need, with the best principals going to the neediest schools. However, as Prince (January 2002) has pointed out, even such a simple proposal immediately confronts a thicket of political, managerial, and instructional concerns:

- In some districts, master contracts severely limit the district's ability to transfer principals.
- Transferring a successful, highly qualified principal may alienate parents at the former school.
- Principals' morale may suffer as they realize the reward for success is a less desirable assignment.

Thus, assignment policies, no matter how well intended, seem to be a limited tool for getting the most highly qualified principals into the schools that need them most. For that reason, most of the recent discussion has centered on the idea of providing incentives for voluntary transfer. The incentives fall into three broad categories:

- increased salaries
- enhanced benefits
- district support for instructional leadership

1. *Salary incentives.* The simplest approach is widely used throughout the private sector when candidates are scarce: Offer a higher salary. Whereas union contracts present some hurdles for doing this with teachers, principal contracts generally have greater flexibility.

How much of an increase would be necessary? At this point, schools have too little experience with this option to be

confident of the answer. However, Erik Hanushek and colleagues (2001) have estimated that it may take anywhere from a 20 to 50 percent increase.

2. *Enhanced benefits.* Districts have also experimented with nontraditional forms of benefits, such as housing allowances (including relocation assistance, reduced-price homes, and low-interest mortgages), educational benefits (such as loan forgiveness), and tax credits. Options of this kind are attractive because they often involve less direct cost to the district and because they give districts an appealing “extra” that may hold a psychological as well as financial appeal.

3. *District support for instructional leadership.* Although not as frequently discussed as an incentive, districts may gain interest by appealing to principals’ often-stated desire to “make a difference.” On the surface, low-performing schools would seem to offer this kind of opportunity in abundance, but experienced principals may doubt their ability to have an appreciable impact on an institution that may be suffering from multiple problems. In short, they want to make a difference but don’t think this is a place where they can. Districts can overcome some of these doubts by offering tangible support:

- Distributing leadership (through teams or coprincipalships) so the burden of leadership is more widely shared (Fenwick and Pierce 2001; Sheryl Boris-Schacter and Sondra Langer 2002). Where this kind of restructuring is not possible, districts or states can provide temporary relief by teaming the principal with an experienced mentor. For example, a number of states have leadership academies aimed at providing assistance and training for principals in low-performing schools (Norton).
- Offering opportunities for the principal’s own professional development. Even the best-qualified leader is unlikely to have ready-made prescriptions for low-performing schools and will usually be in a learning mode. The intensive induction and training provided for principals in New York City’s District #2 provides one model (Elmore and Burney). Principals in this district are provided a menu of structured principal conferences, study groups, support groups, mentors, and a variety of central-office assistance. Candidates



considering a low-performing school would find this kind of support network to be reassuring.

- Ensuring that low-performing schools have adequate budgets to meet their needs. Although economic realities typically make this strategy difficult to implement, the important factor may not be the absolute amount but the existence of sufficient discretionary funds to let the principal undertake some initiatives and make his or her mark on the school.

### Recruiting Through Community Action

The Public Education Network (2003) has developed a comprehensive process for mobilizing the community to address the issue of educator quality. (While their primary focus is on teachers, many of the recommendations are easily adaptable to principals.)

As described by PEN, a “teacher quality initiative” involves articulation of goals (What do we want in the principalship?), data collection (What makes it difficult to keep and hold good principals?), engaging the public (What resources are available in the community and how can they make the principal’s job easier?), and development of an action plan (What steps do we need to take to get the leader we want?).

The PEN approach is supported by a detailed guide and a variety of practical tools. Although time-consuming, it has a potentially large payoff. Many candidates would regard this kind of initiative as a sign that the community was committed to turning the school around. In addition, community involvement is more likely to identify a leader in tune with the unique characteristics of a particular school and to produce an initial climate of positive support.

### Conclusion

In discussions of principal supply and demand, the dominant metaphor is “the pipeline,” giving rise to images of principals being funneled into the pipe at one end and emerging at the other, certificate in hand and eager to lead. Viewed

that way, the principal pipeline has never been empty nor is it likely to be in the foreseeable future. The real problem is ensuring that the pipeline attracts the right kind of candidates and then reliably delivers them to the schools most in need of high-quality leadership.

Faced with that challenge, districts can no longer depend on the vagaries of candidate self-selection. Instead, they are learning to treat recruitment as a continual process rather than an occasional event, constantly working to identify and nurture leaders who can create schools that are focused on student achievement. Increasingly, one of the most important responsibilities of current leadership is to develop future leadership.

Even at its best, however, the pipeline will produce leaders of varying skills and styles. Presented with an ample supply of candidates who are well qualified, districts still face the task of selecting the one who is best matched to the needs of a particular school. The next chapter describes best practices in the selection of school leaders.

## The Selection Process

With applicants in hand, a district faces the critical step of selecting the one who is best suited to fill the position. Unlike training and recruitment, which are relatively easy phases to observe and describe, selection generally occurs behind closed doors and remains something of a black box.

Two decades after Baltzell and Dentler (1983) noted the typical informality and subjectivity of the hiring process, districts seem to be taking a somewhat more systematic approach, with written policies prescribing minimum qualifications, advertising of vacancies, letters of reference, and interviews (Stephen Lawton 2000). There still appears to be considerable variation in practices, however. For example, a dissertation by Linda Baker (2001) found that virtually all districts used interviews, but they ranged from highly planned (with carefully chosen questions and orientations for interviewers) to highly casual (with interviewers simply asked to show up with three to five questions of their choosing).

Overall, we still have little indepth research on principal-selection practices, much less empirical evidence demonstrating the superiority of any particular approach. Instead, this chapter relies on current thinking about best practices, supplemented by research from other fields, to suggest ways of strengthening screening, interviewing, and other components of selection.

### Basing the Decision on Evidence

For those who have to make the decision to hire, the selection process can be quite daunting. They are essentially

being asked to make a bet on rather flimsy evidence that the person in front of them will succeed in this particular position. Even previous successful leadership experience does not guarantee success in a new district or new school. It is easy to screen out the obviously unqualified, but much more difficult to avoid choosing someone whose career will be aborted a few years later with the rueful phrase, "It just didn't work out."

Human judgment in such situations is not a sharply defined process. Employers often concede that their hiring decisions involve "gut feelings," but seem to be largely comfortable with the results, or at least resigned to the lack of a better approach. And, in fact, there is reason to respect the intuition of a perceptive, experienced administrator. Many cognitive psychologists believe that the human mind can recognize patterns and relationships without being able to articulate the basis for those judgments (Guy Claxton 1997).

Nonetheless, even the best-honed intuition is subject to error, especially when a decision has to be made quickly. (For example, a candidate may create a vague feeling of discomfort because he physically resembles an ineffective principal the interviewer once knew; in this case the "gut feeling" would be irrelevant and unreliable.) For that reason, employers should view the selection process as a means of gathering tangible *evidence* that bears on the candidate's chance of succeeding on the job. While the decision to hire will always have subjective elements, anchoring the process with verifiable information will greatly improve the prospect of achieving a good fit.

In meeting this challenge, districts have a number of resources at their disposal, including a well-crafted job description, careful screening procedures, materials submitted by candidates, trained selectors, and a thoughtful interview process. Because the interview is widely regarded as the most important step in the selection process—and entails the most difficulties—it receives special attention following briefer discussions of the other selection tools.

### Preliminary Steps

Effective selection processes may culminate in an interview and a handshake, but they begin with careful prepara-

tion. Several kinds of advance preparation increase the odds of a successful hire.

As noted earlier, districts fare better when they begin with a clear vision of their preferred candidate, ideally a vision that is tailored to the specific school. A well-focused list of specifications will serve as a visible reminder of what the district wants, making it less likely that selectors will be led astray by a slick résumé, engaging personality, or their own hidden biases.

### Principal Profile

If the district formulated a “principal profile” (see previous chapter) that describes its vision of the principalship, this profile comes into play at two points in the selection process. First, it offers criteria for the screening of résumés and other application materials. If “demonstrated success working with school councils” is one of the critical competencies, then a résumé that fails to list such experience will not make the cut.

Second, it provides scaffolding for creation of useful interview questions. Each critical competency can generate a number of questions that will yield important information about the candidate’s qualifications. For example, the school-council concern could lead to questions such as “How have you provided instructional leadership for your council?” or “Describe a conflict that came up in your council and how you resolved it.”

### Application Packet

Another key step is designing an application packet that provides enough raw material for the initial screening. The most common elements are the cover letter, the résumé, letters of recommendation, and district application form.

1. The cover letter requires candidates to briefly introduce themselves and match their qualifications to the job. In addition, it provides evidence of their communication skills and ability to market themselves.

2. The résumé undoubtedly gets the most attention because it provides a comprehensive snapshot of the candidate. However, the information it contains can be highly variable, de-

pending on candidates' résumé-writing skills and their insights into impression management.

3. Letters of recommendation are highly regarded by selectors, ranking just after the résumé and cover letter in importance (Educational Placement Consortium 2000). They are usually viewed as testimonials to the quality of candidates, but can also provide evidence of specific accomplishments; letter writers may mention specific examples that the candidate did not list. Recent letters that address the desired qualifications are especially valuable. For that reason, it may be desirable to provide a structured recommendation form that covers the key areas as well as leaving space for open-ended comments. (See the example of such a form in table 4.1.)

4. A district application form ensures that candidates provide all desired information, such as a complete job history, current certification status, technology skills, recent course work, and similar information. Because candidates control the content of the résumé and cover letter, a standardized form provides a core of comparable information for all candidates.

#### Who Will Do the Screening and Hiring?

A crucial preliminary decision is determining who should be involved in screening, interviewing, and hiring. A diverse selection team brings fresh perspectives that counteract the “groupthink” often found when a small, close-knit group of senior administrators do all the screening. Over time, they lose their ability to recognize faulty thinking and challenge each other's judgment.

Baltzell and Dentler say that without some other participation by parents, teachers, principals, or students, the process loses its external credibility and appears to take place in a way no one can attest to as trustworthy or well executed. Baltzell and Dentler noted that some superintendents chose to delay their direct involvement until the final stage in order to avoid any appearance of undue top-level influence.

Involvement in screening and hiring varies widely, depending on the district's philosophy, size, political climate, and legal requirements. Potential participants include central-office administrators, principals, board members, teachers, parents, community members, and sometimes students. While

broad participation can invigorate the selection process, it can also backfire if participants do not have a clear understanding of the decision-making rules. Will their input be advisory or do they have an actual vote? Will the decision be made by an up-or-down majority vote or based on tabulated points from a scoring rubric? Will the selection committee make the final choice, or will it be forwarding a recommendation to the superintendent and/or board? Failure to communicate the boundaries can result in political turmoil and public embarrassment for both the district and the candidates.

Because selection is a professional process, participants should have appropriate training to carry out the process effectively. Kentucky, which gives school councils a major role in principal selection, also requires formal training for everyone involved. The training includes explanation of procedures and timelines, desirable qualities of principals, interviewing techniques, and legal considerations, such as questions to avoid asking (Kentucky Department of Education 2001).

Training is especially important for interviewing, which is an acquired skill. Mary Jensen (1986) lists five qualifications for teacher interviewers that are applicable to principal selectors as well. Districts should select interviewers possessing these qualifications:

- alertness to cues
- ability to make fine distinctions, perceive accurately
- ability to make immediate and accurate records
- willingness to use criteria established by the organization
- ability to suppress biases

### Screening Procedures

Screening typically involves two phases. First, the personnel office reviews application packets to screen out any applicants who fail to meet minimum qualifications such as appropriate certification. Second, the surviving candidates are further winnowed to select a small group (typically three to five) that will be invited to interviews.

Table 4.1

## Example of a Recommendation Form

Lake Marion School District  
Application for Principal

Name of candidate \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_ The information on this form will be provided to Lake Marion School District in support of my candidacy for a position as principal. I agree that the information provided to the district will remain confidential and I waive my right to review it.

\_\_\_\_ The information on this form will be provided to Lake Marion School District in support of my candidacy for a position as principal. I retain the right to review the information provided to the district at any time.

\_\_\_\_\_ Signature of candidate

\_\_\_\_\_ Date

Name \_\_\_\_\_

Position \_\_\_\_\_

Address \_\_\_\_\_

Phone \_\_\_\_\_

E-mail \_\_\_\_\_

I. In what capacity have you known the candidate and for how long?

II. Please indicate the degree to which the candidate exhibits the following behaviors, using the following scale:

5—Demonstrates the behavior to an exceptional degree

4—Demonstrates the behavior on a regular basis

3—Demonstrates the behavior sometimes

2—Demonstrates the behavior rarely

1—Never demonstrates the behavior

DK—Have not been in a position to observe the behavior

Please provide concrete examples where possible, especially for any items rated as "5."



1. Effectively communicates a positive educational vision to staff, parents, students, and community.  
1-----2-----3-----4-----5-----DK
2. Keeps the school community focused on student learning and development as the highest priorities  
1-----2-----3-----4-----5-----DK
3. Effectively manages facilities, resources, and policies to support student learning  
1-----2-----3-----4-----5-----DK
4. Establishes collaborative relationships with parents and community members  
1-----2-----3-----4-----5-----DK
5. Consistently models the school's highest values  
1-----2-----3-----4-----5-----DK
6. Maintains an open door and listens carefully to members of diverse community groups  
1-----2-----3-----4-----5-----DK
7. Effectively uses data to monitor progress and adjust goals as appropriate  
1-----2-----3-----4-----5-----DK
8. Creates a culture of accountability and high expectations  
1-----2-----3-----4-----5-----DK
9. Confronts and solves problems in an open, objective, and timely way  
1-----2-----3-----4-----5-----DK
10. Works with community members to marshal resources and support for school goals  
1-----2-----3-----4-----5-----DK
11. Treats all members of the school community with respect  
1-----2-----3-----4-----5-----DK
12. Effectively upholds the school's goals while meeting local, state, and federal expectations  
1-----2-----3-----4-----5-----DK

III. Please provide any other information that you believe would be helpful to us in making a decision.

The second phase is clearly the most challenging. Trying to project a paper portrait of the candidate into real-world performance is far more art than science and is subject to a variety of biasing influences. Those biases are magnified when screeners use only a superficial “eyeballing” of the résumés. A more systematic process that uses specific criteria and a ranking system can overcome some of those deficiencies.

For example, raters could work from a principal profile that highlights the essential qualifications and assigns point values to each. A particular district might give a point for “experience working with school councils,” but two points for “demonstrated success with standards-based accountability.” Using multiple raters can further increase the reliability of the process.

Even when the criteria are clearly spelled out and prioritized, résumé analysis is inevitably subjective. For this reason, the initial paper rating should be followed by a conference with all the raters that can serve as a cross-check on perceptions. For example, “demonstrated success” can be defined in many ways; is “three years of rising test scores” as great a success as “instituted widely accepted standards-based math program”? There is no unambiguous answer, but group discussion can at least challenge assumptions and promote deeper thinking.

Moreover, some excellent candidates may sell themselves short because of poor résumé-writing skills; someone on the team may be able to point out a strength that other raters missed. Although there will never be a guarantee that the best candidates make it to the interviews, making the process somewhat more systematic will at least increase the odds.

## The Interview

By all accounts, the interview is the most widely used—and abused—selection tool. Districts consistently identify it as the most important step in the hiring process (Educational Placement Consortium). Yet researchers have often pointed out that traditional interviewing is subjective and superficial, with a poor record in predicting on-the-job success (Robert Eder and Michael Harris 1999).

Baltzell and Dentler observed these same flaws in their study of hiring practices. They found that most interviews were casually constructed, and “even where the questions themselves are developed with care, there are few criteria for scoring the answers, and in no cases have these been psychometrically composed or evaluated.” Yet their research convinced them that, of all the selection procedures, the interview is the step “most universally regarded as the test of both merit and legitimacy.”

Interviewers asked many questions about philosophy and attitudes, and seemed to be interested less in the content of the answers than in gauging candidates’ poise, confidence, and general “fit” with the district. Baltzell and Dentler doubted that the process had much predictive validity, but noted it was considered an important test that conferred legitimacy on the successful candidates.

Whatever the limitations of the interview, it clearly satisfies a deep need for face-to-face appraisal of a candidate, and districts will continue to use it with or without hard evidence of validity. The following sections discuss the pitfalls of interviewing and provide guidelines for effective use.

### Bias in Interviews

The main criticism of the interview is its susceptibility to bias, especially when it is unstructured. Rather than using it to gain information about the candidate’s qualifications, interviewers may use it simply to confirm initial impressions. See table 4.2 for a description of common errors that lead to bias in hiring, provided by the Kentucky Department of Education.

What happens is a form of self-fulfilling prophecy (Thomas Dougherty and Daniel Turban 1999). The interviewer forms a positive or negative impression based on reading of the application materials and enters the interview looking to confirm that perception. When the initial impression is negative, interviewers may be more assertive in asking questions that confirm the perceived area of weakness; when the initial impression is positive, interviewers are more likely to ask questions that highlight the perceived strengths.

Similarly, candidate responses are also more likely to be judged according to the initial impression. Finally, actual

Table 4.2

### Common Errors and Bias in Hiring Kentucky Department of Education

Rating other people is an inherently subjective process that is susceptible to biases that can lead to overestimating or underestimating the capabilities of a candidate. The bias is usually not conscious; in the great majority of cases, raters believe they are being fair and open-minded even as they misjudge the candidate.

The Kentucky Department of Education has identified several types of bias that may lead to poor or unfair hiring decisions. It suggests that anyone involved in rating candidates should receive training to help recognize and eliminate such biases.

The list includes the following:

Halo effects occur when one trait of the candidate creates a holistic impression that influences all the qualities being rated. For example, the “similar-to-me error” occurs because people tend to compare others to themselves. The subconscious assumption is that anyone like me has all my good qualities and must be an all-round good person. Conversely, those who differ from me may be regarded more skeptically. Another halo effect arises from first impressions. Humans are apparently wired to make quick qualitative assessments of others based mainly on appearance, nonverbal behavior, language use, and actions. Once formed, such general impressions are difficult to overcome and may influence more specific judgments either positively or negatively. A third kind of halo effect is use of a stereotype. When people have preconceived ideas

about the characteristics of a certain group, all members of the group are assumed to have those traits,

Rating scale errors occur when raters do not use the full range of the scale. That is, they tend to be unusually severe or lenient across the board (giving mostly 1's or 5's); conversely, they may cluster their ratings in the middle of the range. The problem is that failure to use the full range of scores makes it less likely that raters will be able to differentiate candidates.

Contrast errors occur when candidates are compared to each other rather than to a common standard of performance. For example, if the first candidate gives a poor interview, the second one will tend to be rated high just by comparison. However, if the remaining candidates all do well, the last ones may seem more "average," even if they do as well as candidate number two. Similarly, interviewers may begin with high expectations and downgrade the first candidates for failing to live up to those standards. However, when it becomes apparent that none of the candidates will reach that level, interviewers may adjust their expectations downward and begin rating more leniently. Contrast errors are best controlled by using a predetermined rubric that spells out the criteria for desirable responses.

Primacy/recency errors are based on order of appearance. The candidates who interview first or last seem to stand out more clearly (especially if the selection committee has spent the entire day in interviews).

*Source:* Kentucky Department of Education. *Guidelines for Principal Selection*. April 2001. Used with permission.

candidate performance may be strengthened or undermined by interviewer feedback; a candidate who senses the interviewer's skepticism is more likely to become nervous and distracted, thus further reinforcing the interviewer's bias.

Dougherty and Turban note that a certain amount of preselection bias may be healthy. To the degree that the initial impression is accurate, confirmatory behavior may yield better information during the interview. For example, a negative initial impression may lead to more probing questions that uncover valid information. They also note that a completely open-minded interviewer—one with no preformed expectations—might be more susceptible to the candidate's marketing skill.

Nonetheless, most research tends to show that structured interviews have more validity than unstructured interviews (Eder and Harris 1999). Most likely this is because the predetermined structure yields more objective information that challenges initial impressions. No matter how valuable the role of intuition, better information improves the chances of an accurate judgment, and may also leave a district less open to charges of discrimination. The next few sections outline a well-structured interviewing process.

### Before the Interview

Some of the most critical interview decisions are made weeks before the candidate walks into the room. In particular, district leaders must develop the questions and devise a scoring rubric.

The reliability of the interview process is strengthened when the interview is structured—that is, when candidates are asked identical, predetermined, well-formulated questions. What makes a question well-formulated is not just the wording, but the information it will yield. Good questions are those that produce evidence about the candidates' qualifications that are most important to the district. The principal profile (or similar document) will be a crucial guide. For every desired qualification there should be one or more questions designed to generate useful information about the candidate's knowledge, skills, or beliefs in that area.

Within this framework, several types of questions can be asked: situational, behavioral, philosophical, personal trait, and personal.

**Situational questions** pose a hypothetical but realistic scenario and ask the candidate how he or she would respond. For example:

- Your district has a zero-tolerance policy on possession of weapons (defined very broadly as any objects that could be used to physically threaten or inflict serious injury on another person). A three-day suspension from school is the minimum penalty for violating the rule. Two eighth-grade boys and a female classmate have been sent to the office from the cafeteria, where a teacher saw the boys playfully “fencing” with a pair of knitting needles they had grabbed from the girl’s backpack. The girl says the needles were in her pack because she was going to an aunt’s house right after school for a knitting lesson. All three students have good academic records and no disciplinary history. What are the issues and what will you do?
- As a high school principal, you’ve been approached by several teachers with a proposal to move back the start of the school day by an hour. They express concern about the high absenteeism and poor student performance in early-morning classes, citing research on the harmful effects of sleep deprivation in adolescents. In formulating a response to this request, what are the key issues and perspectives that you must consider? How would you proceed?
- You’re principal in a school in which a sizable number of parents have voiced concerns over the curricular impact of state-mandated testing. Many of these parents have high-ability children, and they fear a test-oriented curriculum will limit the opportunities for enrichment. One of these parents, acting as spokesperson for the group, has asked for a meeting with you, and has indicated that if their concerns are not adequately addressed, they will have their children boycott this year’s test. What would you do to prepare for that meeting?

Well-crafted questions of this type can provide insight into candidates' ability to "read" a situation. That is, do they react only to immediate surface problems or do they recognize the more significant contextual implications? Is student misbehavior seen only within a crime-and-punishment framework, or is there also sensitivity to the related instructional and motivational issues? Are parents seen as potential allies and collaborators, or just as distractions requiring smooth PR skills?

The disadvantage of situational questions is that since they are hypothetical, the candidate has a certain amount of freedom to answer idealistically rather than confronting messy realities. Situational questions tend to favor candidates with high verbal IQ, who can provide a fluent and persuasive "textbook" response while utterly lacking the ability to actually implement a solution in real-world settings.

**Behavioral-data questions** ask candidates to describe how they have handled certain types of questions in the past, such as:

- Tell us about a difficult discipline question you resolved successfully.
- What was the most difficult conflict you've faced on your current job? How did you resolve it?
- Give an example of a teacher performance problem you have had to deal with.

Unlike situational questions, behavioral-data questions require applicants to demonstrate actual achievements; they cannot simply outline an "ideal" solution to a hypothetical scenario. One disadvantage is that such questions are much less helpful when the candidate does not have actual experience in administration. In those cases, interviewers may either adapt the questions (for example, the discipline question could be rephrased from a classroom perspective) or could just use situational questions.

**Philosophical questions** ask applicants to state their position or general disposition on an issue:

- What are your views on inclusion of special-education students in the regular classroom?



- Do you believe it is wise for a district to adopt a zero-tolerance policy on drugs?
- What qualities would you look for when hiring teachers?

By their nature, philosophical questions do not have objectively “correct” answers, though they can give some sense of compatibility with district beliefs. They may be even more useful in assessing the candidate’s analytical skills and understanding of educational issues.

**Personal-trait questions** ask applicants to describe their work characteristics and leadership style.

- What is your leadership style?
- What is your greatest strength as a leader? Your greatest weakness?
- How do you handle stress? Give an example.

Personal-trait questions appear to be fairly common, perhaps because they seem to get at the notion of “good fit” that interviewers are so often interested in. However, candidates frequently anticipate this kind of question and can put together brief “sound bites” that sound impressive but yield little useful information. (For example, a popular strategy is to coyly describe a “weakness” that actually puts the candidate in a good light: “I’m a workaholic; I know I should allow more time for myself, but I’ve always found that hard to do.”)

Trait questions do provide some information on how candidates perceive themselves, but responses should not be taken at face value. These questions become more useful if they can be cross-checked against the perceptions of the candidate’s colleagues. At the very least, applicants should be asked to provide concrete examples of how the trait affects their work.

**Personal-information questions** seek personal information about a candidate:

- How long have you been in this area?
- How many years have you been in your current position?
- Why did you decide to become a principal?

While occasionally useful as ice-breakers, personal questions play relatively little role in a structured interview. First, they provide little basis for evaluating or comparing responses. Second, there is little reason to expect a close connection between personal information and competence. Third, they can easily stray onto dangerous ground by revealing possibly discriminatory information such as marital status, age, and religion. Finally, most personal facts can be gleaned from a résumé or credential file.

As a rule, behavioral and situational questions are most frequently used in structured interviews because they provide evidence about the candidate's thinking processes and typical response patterns, which in turn are likely to predict future behaviors.

No matter how objective and well-structured the questions, interviewers remain perfectly capable of responding to candidates' answers in highly subjective ways. For this reason, a carefully developed scoring sheet is recommended.

When interviewers have to rate each answer, they are likely to listen more analytically. Nevertheless, merely assigning numbers (4=superior, 3=good, and so forth) will gain little objectivity. People may have very different views on what separates a superior answer from one that is merely good, and the rating process itself is subject to several kinds of bias, as discussed earlier.

Ideally, the rating scales should be attached to rubrics that identify specific characteristics of a four-point answer, three-point answer, and so forth. For example, with a situational question that focuses on the discipline of a special-education student, an answer would get four points only if it mentioned at least three factors to consider, one of which must be the relevant special-education regulations. A three-point answer would be one that mentioned at least two factors, including the regulations, and so forth.

Although such rubrics take some time to develop, and may initially seem complicated to administer, they anchor the ratings in specific statements rather than holistic impressions.

In addition to developing the questions, the selection team should give attention to orienting the candidates. John White

and Caroline White (1998) recommend that applicants be sent a packet that includes maps and directions to the interview site, school profiles, and a summary of interview procedures. In general, extending courtesy and respect to candidates serves the district well. A welcoming atmosphere not only helps them be at their best, it creates a favorable impression of the district.

### During the Interview

Interviews usually last no longer than an hour, which is not a lot of time for getting to know someone you may never have met before. The following steps can make the most of that time.

1. *Establish rapport.* Interviews are stressful experiences for candidates, who are usually aware that an incorrect answer or even a slip of the tongue can undermine their chances. For that reason, it is usually best to greet the candidate warmly, introduce the interviewers, and begin with a few minutes of small talk. The purpose of the interview should be explained, as well as the procedures. Beginning with a “softball” question that lets the candidate get warmed up also helps. Throughout the interview, maintain eye contact and an expression of interest.

2. *Take notes.* Although there is limited research on the usefulness of taking notes, the practice is usually recommended as a way of documenting the rater’s response to the candidate’s answers (Diane Arthur 1998). Most interviews cover a lot of ground, and written comments can jog the memory when the time comes to assess the interview. Interviewers should be careful not to become so absorbed in the notes, however, that they lose eye contact with the candidate. One possible alternative—tape recording the interview—is usually regarded as counterproductive because it may make candidates nervous and defensive (Arthur).

3. *Ask followup questions.* Some candidates have a gift for discerning the intent of a question and delivering a crisp, well-focused answer. Others may misread the question or respond in a way that leaves the interviewers wanting to know more. For example, a candidate may describe an unorthodox action she took to solve a certain situation but not explain why. At that point, the selectors could simply chalk it off to poor interviewing skills, rate the answer as “fair” or “poor,” and

move on to the next question. But if they follow up by asking why the candidate took the action, she may reveal a thoughtful rationale and deep understanding of the situation.

Similarly, when the candidate makes an unsupported “I” statement (such as “I have excellent organizational skills”), interviewers should ask, “Can you give an example of how you’ve used those skills in your current job?”

Asking clarifying questions will help differentiate candidates who truly lack the qualifications from those who merely have limited interviewing skills. Of course, care must be taken to extend the same opportunity to all candidates. The ultimate goal is to find the right person for the job, not just the one who gives the best interview.

4. *Give the candidate a chance to ask questions.* In part, this is because what the candidate chooses to ask becomes a piece of data that shows something of his or her interests, discernment, and knowledge. In addition, it recognizes that an interview is a two-way process, especially in a time of shortages. The best candidates usually have more than one job opportunity, and it is important to recognize that they are interviewing you as much as you are interviewing them.

5. *Close the interview.* Thank the candidate for participating and explain the remaining steps in the selection process, including the anticipated timeline for notification.

### After the Interview

Immediately after the interview, team members should review their notes and complete their ratings. Although it is important that their ratings initially be done individually, it can be equally valuable to have team members share their perceptions and raise any issues that seem important. This kind of group discussion can challenge participants’ assumptions and lead them to think more deeply about their judgments. The discussion should be based on examining the evidence, not on forcing people into agreement.

When all interviews have been completed, the team should determine the ranking. Numerical ratings will provide the basis for initial discussion, and will often confirm the more intuitive judgments that interviewers make. It is worth remem-

bering, however, that even the most careful rating system is never completely objective. When two candidates are close, the team is not obligated to accept a small numerical difference as the final word. In some cases, very close results may merit another round of interviews with the top candidates.

In making their decision, interviewers always walk a fine line between intuition and evidence. People with sufficient experience and expertise in a field can often make valid judgments without being able to articulate the reasons for those judgments. If the candidate with the top score nonetheless sets off warning bells deep within the mind, that intuition should be respected at least to the point of saying, "Let's take another look at the evidence." Nevertheless, intuition alone does not justify ignoring the evidence at hand. "Gut feelings" are sometimes just thinly disguised preconceptions or prejudices, and should be carefully scrutinized. Good decision-making will respect both the inner feelings and the outer evidence.

### Beyond the Interview

For most districts, interviews are likely to remain the primary selection tool. Properly done, they offer valuable insights about candidates without requiring excessive time or money. For districts that want to go beyond the interview, added depth is possible through use of tools such as assessment centers, formal tests, performance simulations, portfolios, and writing samples.

#### Assessment Centers and Tests

An assessment center typically uses day-long activities that simulate school-based leadership tasks. The results are evaluated by trained assessors and can pinpoint specific strengths and weaknesses in a variety of areas, such as setting instructional direction, teamwork, sensitivity, judgment, results orientation, communication, development of others, and understanding of personal strengths and weaknesses.

Assessment centers have not been widely used for selection, mostly because of the expense. But they can provide

valuable information about candidates that is not available through the typical selection process. Centers such as those affiliated with NASSP offer a chance to observe candidates in action, rather than relying on candidates' accounts of how they work. More information can be found on the NASSP website (<http://www.principals.org>).

An alternative to the assessment center is the School Leadership Licensure Assessment (SLLA) provided by the Educational Testing Service (2003). This assessment is aligned with the ISLLC standards and is already required for certification by ten states. The six-hour assessment consists of constructed-response items such as vignettes of typical situations that require candidates to identify the key issues, prioritize action steps, or predict possible consequences.

Anna Hicks McFadden (2001), a university professor and former principal who took the test, was impressed by its realism:

This was like a demanding day in the principal's office—not a terrible day—just a non-stop day of one problem after another—some that could be resolved rather quickly and others that would take time and lots of heads to resolve.

She concluded she could feel confident that a candidate who passed the test “could think on her feet, make good decisions, solve problems, and synthesize information.”

A few critics have claimed that the SLLA and the ISLLC standards themselves are driven more by ideology than evidence and that they are laced with “bias and a disdain for substantive knowledge” (Hess 2003).

A recent survey by Thomas Glass and Amy Bearman (2003) identified a possible “disconnect” between the ISLLC standards and superintendents' priorities in hiring. They found that “effective communication skills” were valued by significantly more superintendents than the kind of instructional leadership qualities embodied in the standards, while “managing student discipline” was on a par with instructional leadership. (They also noted, however, that their sample included superintendents from states that had not adopted the ISLLC standards, which might account for some of the difference.)

Despite these concerns, attention to the ISLLC standards and the SLLA seem to be growing, and districts may find them to be a convenient framework for structuring selection criteria, especially when the standards are consistent with district values. Districts should be aware, however, that as yet there is little direct empirical evidence of the correlation between proficiency on the standards and effectiveness in a job setting.

### Customized Performance Simulations

Somewhat less formally, districts can design their own performance simulations similar to those used in assessment centers or the SLLA. For example, some districts have candidates view a classroom lesson designed specifically for the simulation by a staff-development teacher. The candidate then prepares an observation report and holds a conference with the staff-development teacher who taught the lesson. A committee member observes this conference. Finally, the staff-development teacher rates each candidate's conferencing and observation skills.

Written simulations on situational or inbasket problems are other exercises districts can use.

### Portfolios

Professional portfolios are growing in popularity; one survey indicated that 41 percent of the responding superintendents used them in the selection process (Educational Placement Consortium). The portfolio is a collection of artifacts and reflections that describes and documents a leader's experience, skills, and values. It may include a wide variety of entries, including a statement of philosophy, letters of recommendation, student-achievement data, performance evaluations, curriculum proposals, meeting agendas, case studies, and testimonials from students, parents, or colleagues. In short, any evidence of accomplishment is fair game for the portfolio (Genevieve Brown and Beverly Irby 2001).

Portfolios can be used in several ways during the selection process. Candidates can be asked to submit the portfolio as part of the application packet, where it will be reviewed along

with the résumé and cover letter. They can also be asked to briefly present the portfolio during the interview, or they can be encouraged to draw on the portfolio to illustrate their responses to interview questions. Finally, the portfolio can be left for review after the interview.

Administrators who favor using the portfolio believe it is helpful in providing objective evidence that might not emerge elsewhere in the process; for example, faculty-meeting agendas can provide insight into leadership style and priorities. In addition, the portfolio offers clues about the candidate's ability to articulate a self-portrait grounded on behavioral realities.

Administrators who decline to use portfolios cite the added time and the lack of objective rubrics. Portfolios are highly individual, and it's unlikely that any two will be directly comparable. Without a rubric, selectors may be more easily seduced by extraneous factors such as well-done graphics. Finally, poorly done or ill-focused portfolio presentations can be excruciating to sit through; a few administrators have observed sourly that there is a fine line, often crossed, between a portfolio and a scrapbook.

One alternative that addresses some of these concerns is to ask candidates to bring in a selection from their portfolios related to specific critical competencies. For example, they could be asked to provide artifacts that illustrate their approach to faculty collaboration. This provides some objective evidence for the interview and also allows comparability across candidates.

### Writing Samples

Some districts require a writing sample that not only assesses written communication skills but provides insights into a candidate's philosophical views. For example, candidates could be asked to respond in essay form to a series of pertinent questions. Examples of these questions are as follows:

- What are the essential qualities of effective leaders? Describe how you have demonstrated at least three of those qualities in your previous experience.



- Describe your philosophy of education and how you would get others to share it.
- What are the requirements for successful collaboration between schools and families? Provide examples of steps you've taken as a teacher or administrator to establish collaborative relationships with parents?

Administrators in districts that ask for written essays say the exercise gives good insights into how candidates express themselves in writing and how they think, forcing them to focus their philosophy into a succinct statement and quickly get to the crux of key issues.

### Reference Checking

The selection process is not complete until the district has verified information provided by the candidate. Although the extensive educational and licensing requirements for school administrators discourage outright fraud, it happens. Principal candidates have been known to invent substantial portions of their backgrounds or obtain advanced degrees from diploma mills. More commonly, candidates may be tempted to omit key information or inflate their accomplishments.

Careful reference checking can at least reduce the chance of a candidate slipping under the radar. A systematic process will include the following steps:

1. The district should request original university transcripts (either mailed directly from the institution or submitted by the applicant in an unopened envelope). If a college or university is unfamiliar, selectors should verify that it is a regionally accredited institution.

2. Application forms should include a statement indicating that false statements may lead to loss of position. Applicants should also be asked for permission to contact names listed as references.

3. Reference checking should be consistent with a written policy that is applied uniformly to all selected candidates. This will reduce the chance of discrimination claims.

4. The district should be especially careful that all state and district regulations on background checks and fingerprinting have been followed to the letter.

5. Requested information must be as objective as possible. Fear of lawsuits makes many employers reluctant to provide broad evaluative comments about their former employees, but employers may be more willing to supply objective information. Moreover, employers themselves may not be completely unbiased, so sticking to objective information is fairer to the candidate. The best results may come from questions such as “Could you give an example of how the candidate resolved a conflict?” or “What role did he play in your district’s response to state standards?”

6. Letters of reference provided with the application materials may be of limited value, especially if they are part of a standard placement file. First, the letters are chosen by the candidate, who has every incentive to ask people who will say good things. Second, they may be dated or simply too generic. If the district decides to request letters of recommendation, it should ask for at least one or two from individuals familiar with the candidate’s recent performance. An alternative is a rating form, which in addition to soliciting open-ended statements, asks references to rate the candidates on selected characteristics.

7. Finally, if the finalists are not from within the district, hiring officials should also consider site visits in finalists’ schools and communities to learn more about the candidates’ qualifications.

### Making the Selection

Ideally, the final choice will reflect a broad consensus that this is the right person for the job. Expecting complete unanimity is probably unrealistic, but strongly divergent opinions are a warning sign. Deep divisions generally occur when participants have different expectations about the principalship or when the decision has become entwined with internal politics. In either case, the disagreement should lead to further discussion. Consensus may be beyond reach, but participants should at least have a clear sense of the reason for the disagreement.

Because of this possibility, participants should understand from the beginning how the decision will be made and who will make it. District practices vary widely. In some cases, states

have given school councils the power to hire principals. In some districts, the decision will be made by a team of central-office administrators. In other districts, the superintendent will have the final say. In smaller districts, the school board may be involved.

Any of these arrangements can work as long as the stated process is followed. Superintendents will do considerable damage to their credibility if they create an illusion of bottom-up decision-making and then impose their own decision at the end.

The choice should be made as soon as possible following the interview. Top candidates may have more than one offer pending and may commit elsewhere if the district waits too long. Until the job offer has been accepted, officials should refrain from notifying the other candidates. It is always a bit awkward to make an offer to a candidate who was officially rejected only a few days earlier.

Once the top candidate has accepted the job, other candidates should be notified as soon as possible, preferably by phone. Rejected candidates should be treated with courtesy and respect. The district may need them to fill a future position, and word will get around if they are treated in a cavalier manner (White and White).

### Conclusion

In summary, exemplary districts use a comprehensive system to screen and select capable principals. They adopt written selection policies, develop specific selection criteria, identify the specific opening in vacancy announcements, involve and train a broad base of people in screening and selection, use multiple means of assessment including structured interviews, and consider varied sources of information about candidates.

## Afterword: Developing the Best

Next year thousands of individuals will walk through the doors of a school as the new principal. Those individuals may be male or female, white or black, tall or short. They may have been trained at a major research university or a small private college. Their school may be a tiny rural outpost, a well-worn urban bastion, or a sprawling suburban campus. Yet for all their differences, these principals will share one common mission: to steer a highly complex organization through politically volatile waters to levels of student learning beyond anything previously envisioned.

How they fare matters not only to them but to the schools and students they serve. The principalship is such a pivotal position that failure can demoralize the faculty, polarize the community, and cause long, painful legal action. Even worse is “failure to thrive,” with the principal not really succeeding but not failing so badly that anyone is willing to endure the pain of correcting the mistake. A school can spend years mired in mediocrity when that happens.

Three decades ago, a district that used a thoughtful, systematic process for finding and selecting principals could imagine that signing the contract was the final piece in the personnel puzzle. Thereafter, principals were considered to be on automatic pilot, capable of finding their own way

through the inevitable challenges. While sometimes hard on new principals, this belief seemed supportable. Schools offered well-known organizational landscapes with plenty of leadership role models; change, if constant, was incremental and manageable; and most schools, most of the time, seemed to function reasonably well.

Today?

- Federal and state policies have imposed unprecedented performance demands on schools.
- Demographic shifts have increased the numbers of students—minority, low-income, and limited English proficiency—who have historically been least well served by the school system.
- Schools are reexamining long-established practices and reinventing the way they do business.

Thoughtful preparation, recruitment, and selection will produce leaders with the potential to master these challenges, but their ultimate success depends on continued learning and development. Increasingly, districts are recognizing that their efforts to find capable leaders must be complemented by an investment in their professional development. Principals are simply too valuable a resource to hire and forget.

### A Career-Development Perspective

Careers are often visualized in terms of “ladders,” suggesting a climb from one elevation to another. People accept a position, work diligently, and gain a promotion to the next plateau. Not surprisingly, attention often focuses on the rise from one level to the next. Thus, policymakers concerned with the state of the principalship have usually concentrated on providing more incentives for teachers to move to the principalship or on preparing them to serve effectively at that level.

At that point, however, the ladder narrows. A minority of principals will continue to move up to the superintendency or other district leadership positions; some may switch to staff roles such as reading or curriculum specialist; and still others

may return to teaching or leave education altogether. But most will remain as principals. How do we describe their careers? Do they progress through distinct stages? Do principals with fifteen years of experience see the job differently than principals with five years of experience? Is leadership style a stable trait or does it evolve over time? Unfortunately, such questions have been little studied, so answers are elusive.

We can assume that a dynamic work environment will challenge and reshape principals' goals and beliefs, especially in today's volatile environment. Ed Bell, Harry Wolcott's representative "man in the principal's office" four decades ago, could expect that once he completed his initial induction he would have a skill set that would adequately serve him through the remainder of his career. There were always new things to be learned, and skills that could be strengthened, but no expectation that he might have to master a whole new paradigm. Not so today. For that reason, it makes sense to view principal development less as a series of scrambles up a ladder than as a steady trek up a continuous slope.

Traditionally, principals have charted their own growth and development, but a growing number of districts are taking the position that the process is too important to occur haphazardly and that supporting principal development is as important as hiring promising candidates. This support is provided in three areas: induction, professional development, and evaluation.

### Induction

The induction period, usually defined as a principal's first couple years on the job, is viewed today as a critical period of socialization that has an impact not just on immediate success but on long-term beliefs and behaviors. Beginning principals must learn not only what it means to be a principal, but what it means to be a principal in this particular school (Forrest Parkay and colleagues 1992). Newcomers typically start with some degree of mismatch between their preconceptions and the realities; the greater the discrepancy, the more severe the shock. Districts have ample reasons for paying close attention to this process:

- Research on new principals (John Daresh 1987; Mark Anderson 1989; Parkay and colleagues) has shown that they face a wide range of surprises, frustrations, and problems, including a sense of isolation; struggles with time management; lack of feedback; and the need to hone technical skills, learn the unwritten rules, and develop a sense of efficacy.
- As noted in chapter 2, initial preparation programs have been less than exemplary; surveys of principals and superintendents continue to show widespread skepticism about their value (Farkas and colleagues 2003). The principalship has many of the characteristics of a craft (Arthur Blumberg 1989), requiring practical wisdom or “street smarts” that can be learned only on the job. Like teachers, many principals swear that their most valuable learning has come through hard experience and that they were often left to their own devices to figure things out. Thus, principals may be abandoned during the period of their most significant learning.
- New principals walk into a school that is unsettled because the leadership is changing. Teachers know that comfortable routines may change, new priorities may push aside the established agenda, and alliances may shift, rearranging the lines of power and influence. The new leader will be intensely scrutinized, and even minor missteps may have disproportionate impact.
- Newcomers are under considerable personal as well as professional stress. The new job with its new schedules and responsibilities may affect family life, particularly for women. If the job requires moving to a new community, there will be the stress of moving as well as acclimation to a new living environment.

For all these reasons, leaving principals to sink or swim may negate all the time and attention that districts have put into recruitment and selection. Fortunately, in the last decade both policymakers and practitioners have begun to put significant resources into the induction period.

1. Mentoring is far more common than it was a decade ago, and has grown beyond the informal “call-a-buddy” relationship that once predominated. The best programs include careful matching of mentors and protégés, clear expectations and guidelines for participants, adequate time for the mentor, and selection of mentors who have a record of success and who are “reflective, compassionate, good listeners, good communicators, and able to speak the hard truth” (Laura Dukess 2001).

2. Districts can use a wide array of other strategies, including portfolios, professional development plans, study groups, leadership academies, focus groups, peer coaching, workshops, and retreats (Kent Peterson 2001).

3. State-sponsored school leadership academies provide workshops, mentoring, and other forms of guidance for new (and continuing) principals (John Norton 2003).

4. A number of states have realigned their certification requirements to better support the developmental needs of leaders (Southern Regional Education Board 2002). Some have developed two-tiered licensure systems in which full certification comes only after successful experience as an administrator, aided by structured mentoring, focused course work, and other forms of assistance, leading to full-fledged certification after a successful first year. These programs provide a useful framework into which districts can integrate their local priorities.

5. Professional associations offer a variety of professional development resources. The National Association of Elementary School Principals conducts numerous workshops, assessments, and training opportunities. NAESP also partners with Nova Southeastern University to offer intensive mentor training and certification. The National Association of Secondary School Principals has long been a leader in using assessment-center methods to promote principal development.

6. Universities offer still another source of support. For example, the New Teacher Center at the University of California, Santa Cruz, provides trained coaches to give individualized guidance to new administrators. Participants meet every two weeks and also maintain contact by email and phone.



Services include observation and coaching in authentic work dilemmas (Gary Bloom 1999).

Although direct empirical evidence is scarce, some researchers have suggested that formal induction programs improve retention. Linda Morford (2002), after interviewing ten new rural principals who had no access to any kind of induction program, found two years later that nine of them had either moved on to other positions or returned to teaching. If nothing else, reports from new administrators (Anderson; Gary Hartzell and colleagues 1995) make it abundantly clear that any help extended during the first few years will be regarded as a cherished lifeline.

### Professional Development

While the need to provide support for new principals is now widely accepted, veteran principals are still frequently treated like gifted children: left to their own devices because everyone assumes they can get by without much help. The accelerating pace of change means, however, that even the most experienced leader faces a steep learning curve that can benefit from structured opportunities for professional development.

Accordingly, the induction activities described in the preceding section are equally appropriate for principals at all levels of experience. Even mentoring, which is often viewed as a service for newcomers, can be beneficial for principals throughout their careers (Gary Crow and L. Joseph Mathews 1998).

Unlike traditional professional development, which has often been driven by a scattershot combination of convenience, cost, and curiosity, today's efforts are increasingly focused by the need to align principal learning with the demands of school improvement. In many cases, the necessary structure is provided by some body of standards representing the collective wisdom of the profession and/or the findings of research. For example, the National Association of Elementary School Principals has outlined a curriculum for instructional leadership with its 2001 publication, *Leading Learning Communities: Standards for What Principals Should Know and Be Able to Do*. Districts could use the standards as a reference in setting up professional development experiences.

The ISSLC standards, which are already used to guide principal preparation programs in many states, can easily be extended to induction and professional development efforts. The six standards are both broad enough and deep enough to present a challenge to veterans and newcomers alike. A recent publication from WestEd (2003) has shown how the standards can be benchmarked at different levels of expertise, allowing principals to progressively move closer to exemplary practice.

Another way of structuring professional development is linking it to the school's improvement efforts. Analysis of student test scores and other school performance data will invariably reveal areas needing attention. District leaders can work with the principal to address deficiencies in the school's performance by designing appropriate professional development activities. For example, persistently low math scores might trigger attendance at a math workshop, visits to schools with successful math programs, or participation on study groups aimed at raising math achievement.

Perhaps the most important guidepost for professional development is to embed it in the culture of the district, clearly conveying the expectation that that learning and leadership are virtually synonymous (Richard Elmore and Deanna Burney 2000).

## Evaluation

Performance evaluation can be a powerful tool for stimulating principal growth, though it does not have a strong reputation for doing so. Discussions of typical principal evaluation practices have often been highly critical. After analyzing a recent survey of administrators, Douglas Reeves (in press) characterized most leadership assessments as "infrequent, late, unhelpful, and largely a source of administrative bother." Over half of the principals surveyed said that their evaluations were not specific enough to know what behaviors should be changed.

Reeves recommended that productive evaluation processes be anchored in explicit standards that make the expectations clear to the district as well as the principal. Such expectations could be based on ISLLC, on NAESP's recommendations, or

on the district's own standards (for example, the "principal profile" discussed earlier in this monograph).

While districts are often concerned with finding the right instrument for evaluation, using the results productively may be a more important issue. The principals surveyed by Reeves seemed to suggest that evaluation is often treated as a perfunctory bureaucratic chore dominated by a file-and-forget mentality. While evaluations must sometimes satisfy district or state rules, their far greater value is to generate professional growth.

To make this connection, two strategies seem especially helpful. First, the evaluation should be evidence-based, requiring the principal and the evaluator to focus on tangible indicators of success rather than vague generalizations. While valid indicators are not always easy to determine, focusing on evidence tends to keep the process more objective and less subject to impressionistic judgments. Second, the evaluation should yield a plan for action that targets professional development activities to address areas that need strengthening.

An evaluation process incorporating these elements has been developed by the Center for School Leadership Development at the University of North Carolina. The process begins with a self-assessment aligned with state and national standards for school leaders. Unlike traditional checklists, this assessment requires principals not just to rate themselves but to provide evidence to support their rating. A rubric provides concrete descriptions of performance at three different levels: "exemplary performance," "adequate performance," and "performance needs improvement."

The principal then discusses the self-assessment with his or her supervisor, identifying areas for improvement. The supervisor's role is to provide candid feedback on the principal's self-assessment and also suggest goals for the professional growth plan (which typically includes two to four goals). For each goal, the plan establishes strategies that will be pursued, evidence that will document achievement of the goal, and a timeline. The principal and supervisor have periodic conferences to monitor and discuss progress, followed by a summative conference.

This discussion of the principalship from a career-development perspective is only a skeletal overview, but it hints at the richness of possibilities, especially if induction, professional development, and evaluation are viewed as a mutually supporting system designed to stimulate continual learning. At the very least, such learning will improve the prospects for retention, reducing the possibility that a painstaking, time-consuming recruitment process will have to be repeated a couple years later.

More important, this perspective recognizes the inescapable reality that *no* candidate will match every point on the district's leadership profile, and that there is always room for growth. In short, comprehensive professional development is what allows the fruits of preparation, recruitment, and retention to fully blossom.

## Conclusions

While the state of our knowledge of principals' careers leaves us far short of being able to offer simple recipes, the following three points offer a useful foundation in beginning the search for high-quality leadership.

1. *Have a clear vision of leadership qualities that would meet the district's needs.* When the expectations are explicit, they can play a decisive role in recruiting, selecting, and developing top-flight leadership.

2. *Be proactive.* Although the leadership pipeline is still supplying sufficient *numbers* of candidates to most districts, many analysts are skeptical that it will deliver the quality required for today's leaders. Districts that wait for the right candidate to show up on their doorstep are likely to be disappointed. Districts should aggressively establish links with university preparation programs, offer aspiring principal programs, recruit widely, encourage potential leaders to consider administration, and take the extra time to align selection processes with the district's needs. Not all districts have the resources to develop elaborate programs, but any district can provide the "tap on the shoulder" to those who have the potential for leadership.

3. *Think systemically.* Preparation, recruitment, selection, induction, professional development, and evaluation should work cohesively in pursuit of the same goal: getting expert leadership into the schools that need it. Every principal is a whole person, not just a random collection of functions, and the ways districts nurture leadership should reflect the same kind of integration.

As this conclusion is being written, some of the earlier alarm over an approaching crisis in leadership has diminished, at least for the time being; the candidates are still coming. But the passage of No Child Left Behind has raised anxiety that the real crisis may be finding candidates with the knowledge, skills, and dispositions needed to lead schools toward fulfillment of the law's unprecedented performance demands. Leaders of that quality do not roll out of universities on an assembly line, and they cannot be found simply by posting a job notice. They must be *developed*, from the first glimmer of interest in administration to the culmination of their careers.

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Many items in this bibliography are indexed in ERIC. Each document in the ERIC database has an “ED” (ERIC Document) designation and a unique six-digit document-specific number. Each journal article in the database has an “EJ” (ERIC Journal) designation and a six-digit number that identifies that specific article.

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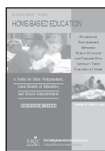


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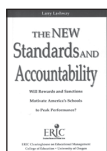
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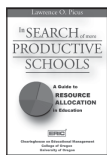
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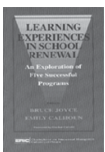
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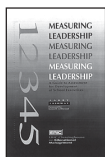
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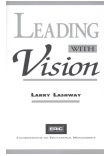


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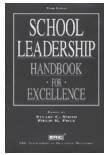
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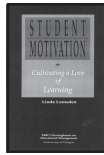
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