

Principal Leadership

for Accountability: Optimizing the Use of Title II Resources



In the swirling wake of the No Child Left Behind (NCLB) Act, a vortex of educational changes now affects the way public educators at all levels conduct daily business. School principals, in particular, find themselves in a relentless public spotlight as they are held accountable for student achievement. This new accountability, of course, is measured by adequate yearly progress (AYP) requirements—coupled with increasingly stiff sanctions if all student subgroups do not meet established goals.

How can policymakers and institutions of higher education help principals cope with this stringent new climate? In what ways can they mesh preparation programs for the prospective principal with more demanding state licensure requirements? How can professional development for the practicing principal be strengthened so that school leaders can fall back upon a web of support?

This Topical Summary examines those questions in historical context, discusses policy considerations, and suggests targeted resources.

LEADERSHIP AND ACCOUNTABILITY

The idea that public educators now are held “accountable” for student achievement is a welcome concept to most members of the general public. And when schools do not meet AYP requirements in the march toward the goal of 100 percent student proficiency by the year 2014, it seems only justifiable that they face increasingly strict sanctions.

While many policymakers, faculty at institutions of higher education, and state department personnel may agree with these sentiments, they grapple with the predicament of the school principal as accountability demands are implemented. Principals live in challenging times and are faced with leadership preparation and professional development that may not be fine-tuned to NCLB requirements.

While there has been intellectual debate for years about instructional leadership—driven by scholars such as Kenneth Leithwood, Joseph Murphy, and Richard Elmore—educational administration programs, for the most part, have not weighed in on the side of emphasizing the importance of instructional leadership (Levine, 2005). And not everyone—including practicing

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principals facing other demands—has agreed that instructional leadership could be a primary lever to schoolwide reform.

But now, principals can no longer point to outside influences that may affect student achievement. While they must attend to what Larry Cuban calls the political, managerial, *and* instructional components of the job, instructional leadership has taken the lead.

INSTRUCTIONAL LEADERSHIP

Not only does NCLB demand accountability for student achievement: for the first time in nearly 40 years, the exhortation that principals become instructional leaders is not rhetoric, but the law (see Title II, Section 2113 (c), subparts 1–13). The law draws a clear and insistent link between instructional leadership and academic achievement—meeting AYP requirements.

Specifically, the law calls for principals to have “the instructional leadership skills to help teachers teach and students learn,” and “the instructional leadership skills necessary to help students meet challenging State student academic achievement standards” (Title II, Section 2113 (c)).

Principals now face a predicament. First, what exactly is instructional leadership? And second, if they can become instructional leaders, will that be sufficient for them to meet new accountability demands?

INSTRUCTIONAL LEADERSHIP: PAST AND FUTURE

Principals are not the only ones wondering about the meaning of instructional leadership. Critics of leadership preparation programs (Levine, 2005) point to the ways in which preservice programs have been uneven, weak, or substandard in quality—even focusing on how the definition of leadership has wavered through the past two or three decades. These critics contend

that if it is difficult for policymakers and leadership preparation programs to reach consensus about a definition of leadership, coherent coursework that leads to tighter standards for licensure could be precarious at best.

While NCLB has pushed the necessity of instructional leadership for principals to the fore, it is not a new concept.

When the 1983 publication of *A Nation at Risk* stirred a new education reform movement, principals were told by their preservice programs and professional development providers that they needed new skills. These included the ability to manage data, head the school improvement effort, be knowledgeable about curriculum and instruction, and have the expertise to shepherd teachers out of isolation into professional learning communities.

These skills sound identical with those demanded now. But while one might think this view of leadership had maintained currency through the present day, it only dominated the reform movement of the late 1980s and early 1990s. At that time, it was replaced by the restructuring movement—which placed its stock in changing the structure, organization, and culture of schools (Deal & Peterson, 1998).

Leaders of the restructuring movement argued that dramatic changes in school structures and school culture were needed in order to ratchet up student achievement (Newmann & Wehlage, 1995). The principal assumed a new role: facilitator and leader of structural change.

Simultaneously, principals were told they needed to be “collaborative

leaders,” “distributive leaders,” “visionary leaders,” and “site-based leaders.” Understandably, principals, preservice programs, state licensing agencies, and professional development providers gamely tried to accommodate these changing definitions of leadership, yet were frustrated by the constantly shifting definitions and demands placed upon them.

Now, Title II under NCLB has mandated instructional leadership. Licensure, mentoring, professional development, improved preservice programs, and leadership development academies are all recommendations under the law for principals. While principals are held accountable for student achievement, there is new emphasis on what is needed to make principals succeed under the demands of accountability. But Title II can also be a missed opportunity if principal development resources aren’t applied in new and creative ways.

NEW PROGRAMS, NEW OPTIONS

Tough as these demands are to realize, leadership is emerging as a reinvented and improved concept. Already there are beacons to which principals can look and from which they can work.

Across the nation, including the region served by the Northwest Regional Educational Laboratory, there is an array of promising programs that are intended to help principals meet

STATE PROGRAMS IN THE NWREL REGION

Partnerships and coalitions lead some of the most imaginative work. In Oregon and Montana, the Council of Chief State School Officers (CCSSO) has initiated the **State Action for Education Leadership Project (SAELP)**. SAELP is funded by the Wallace Foundation as part of a broader leadership initiative. Its

of State Legislatures, and the National Governors Association (www.ccsso.org/projects/State_Action_for_Education_Leadership/).

Also in Oregon, the **REAL** program (**Rural Education and Administrative Leadership**) works to decrease the effects of isolation for principals in rural schools. This program, which operates in Eastern Oregon, is a partnership of Umatilla-Morrow Education Service District, Lewis & Clark College, and Northwest Leadership Associates. Its overarching goal is to recruit a diverse group of principals for Lewis

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the accountability challenges of NCLB. Some initiatives are implemented at the state level and flow from national programs. Others are steered by professional associations. Still others stem from institutions of higher education. All focus on leadership development for principals and have coalesced under the umbrella of mutual need.

These initiatives clearly stem from the new policies and mandates of NCLB's accountability demands. They drive a new focus and cohesiveness for leadership development across states and districts. A fledgling, encouraging development is the infusion of funds from foundations that now are investing in leadership development in a variety of ways.

purpose, according to CCSSO, is to "prepare, support, and sustain a leadership cadre in each state that can transform schools and school systems to produce improved academic performance for low-income youth."

Generous funds support this goal. State government and education leaders compete for grants to support both research and the preparation/analysis of legislative and administrative actions that will meet SAELP's goals in each state.

In addition to support from the Wallace Foundation, SAELP states are part of a national network of technical assistance provided by CCSSO, the Education Commission of the States, the National Association of State Boards of Education, the National Conference

& Clark's preservice program. A twin goal is to mentor both prospective and practicing principals and provide professional development for principals and superintendent/principals.

The **Washington Principals Partnership for School Leadership** supports activities that train, recruit, mentor, and hire highly qualified candidates in that state. The partnership is sponsored by the Washington School Principals Education Foundation; 52 high-need school districts and their partners, including Washington State University, Central Washington University, Heritage College, and Educational Service Districts 101, 105, 123, and 171; the Office of the Superintendent of Public Instruction; the Washington Associa-

tion of School Administrators; and the Business Partnership for Learning. The organization, which is supported by a U.S. Department of Education grant, also provides participants with indepth, relevant professional development.

Alaska has a statewide leadership development program—**Leadership for Reinventing Alaska’s Schools**—which is financed by a challenge grant for leadership development from the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation. These grants—available to every superintendent and principal in public and private schools in all 50 states—focus on technology integration and whole systems change.

Leadership for Reinventing Alaska’s Schools is association-driven and represents the Alaska Association of Elementary School Principals, the Alaska Association of Secondary School Principals, the Alaska Association of School Administrators, and the Alaska Staff Development Network, a professional development organization that includes Alaska’s school districts, universities, and major professional associations.

According to the Leadership for Reinventing Alaska’s Schools, their research-based leadership curriculum is designed to support administrators in their efforts to respond to ongoing school reform that focuses on systemic change and technology integration (www.asdn.org/gates_leadership.html).

The Idaho Association of School Administrators (IASA), which represents both principals and superintendents, leads **Project Outreach**. The project is a large coalition of national professional

associations and Idaho organizations: associations, institutions of higher education, foundations, and state agencies. This coalition welds together the key levers that affect leadership development in the state.

The **Interstate Consortium on School Leadership (ICSL)** is another initiative of the Council of Chief State School Officers, made up of member states that pay a participation fee. The consortium allows states to share information and experiences and follows state-identified priorities such as recruitment of school leaders, professional development programs targeted to leadership, new technology standards, and the use of technology in professional development (www.ccsso.org/projects/Interstate_Consortium_on_School_Leadership/).

LITERATURE ON LEADERSHIP DEVELOPMENT

When the policymaker, researcher, or practitioner turns to the literature on leadership development, he or she witnesses something remarkable. Unlike other educational literature—such as the literature on accountability, which bristles with dissenting opinions—the majority of the leadership literature is unusually consonant.

National associations, researchers, and policymakers agree on almost everything related to leadership. A chorus of voices concurs that institutions of higher education need to increase the amount of coursework geared to instructional leadership. Many authors and organizations have issued lists of six or seven key skills or traits the effective school leader should possess. Still others have worked to revamp standards for licensure, such as the development of the Interstate Leaders Licensure Consortium Standards (ISLLC), now operable in 35 states. While the ISLLC Standards have sustained mild critiques, they still represent the only successful effort to date that has increased the quality of state licensure requirements and eased state-to-state portability. Finally, on a very encouraging note, foundations are recognizing the value of leadership development and providing funds for leadership development programs, targeted technical assistance, and the use of technology in school leadership.

POLICY CONSIDERATIONS

The following are steps that could help improve utilization of Title II resources for principal development:

- **Align licensure with challenging course content** in educational administration programs that prepares principals for accountability demands of NCLB
- **Develop multitiered licensure systems** to encourage the continuing development of principals throughout their careers
- **Develop alternative routes to licensure** aside from traditional preservice programs
- **Create supportive programs for new principals**, such as the provision of on-the-job mentors, to help them develop their skills, particularly in low-performing schools
- **Involve state policymakers and higher education faculty** in a concerted effort to tighten state licensure requirements in tandem with honing educational administration programs to prepare principals to meet accountability requirements
- **Encourage partnerships among states, local educational agencies, foundations, and other entities** to create and sustain leadership academies for new and practicing principals that will develop and extend their knowledge and skills in leading reform

RESOURCES

FOUNDATIONS

The Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation

www.gatesfoundation.org

The Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation awards grants earmarked for leadership development for educators; grant guidelines are published on the foundation's Web site.

The Broad Foundation

www.broadfoundation.org

The Broad Foundation's education arm sponsors a management academy geared to urban leadership; information is provided on its Web site.

The Wallace Foundation

www.wallacefoundation.org

The Wallace Foundation Web site has a host of resources on leadership, including research reports on principal internships, managing school data, the effect of leadership on student learning, and much more.

NATIONAL ORGANIZATIONS AND ASSOCIATIONS

American Association of School Administrators

www.aasa.org

The American Association of School Administrators (AASA) lists its state affiliates on its Web page, as well as in its monthly magazine (*The School Administrator*). The publication is available online and addresses a variety of topics related to educational leadership.

Council of Chief State School Officers

www.ccsso.org

The Council of Chief State School Officers (CCSSO) maintains an educational leadership section on its Web site that lists and describes its leadership projects, including membership information.

Education Alliance at Brown University

www.alliance.brown.edu

The Education Alliance at Brown University sustains several leadership projects, described on its Web site, as well as publications on the topic, events, and grants.

Education Commission of the States

www.ecs.org

The Education Commission of the States devotes one of its issues pages to leadership, including information on what states are doing, a selected bibliography, programs and practices, policy questions, and a list of other Web sites.

Institute for Educational Leadership

www.iel.org

The Institute for Educational Leadership (IEL) places a premium on the preparation of school principals and has developed the e-Lead (Leadership for Student Learning) program, a partnership of the Laboratory for Student Success and the Institute for Educational Leadership. Information about both can be found in detail on the IEL Web site.

Mid-continent Research for Education and Learning

www.mcrel.org

Mid-continent Research for Education and Learning (McREL) maintains a Leadership and Organization Development section of its Web site that includes publications on leadership, a list of resources, policy information, and tools/guides for the school leader.

National Association of Elementary School Principals

www.naesp.org

The Web site of the National Association of Elementary School Principals (NAESP) allows the public, policy-makers, and its members to search for information on principal and leadership development. Links to its state sites can also be found here.

National Association of Secondary School Principals

www.nassp.org

The Web site of the National Association of Secondary School Principals (NASSP) is devoted to its membership. It maintains publications, “hot topics,” information on principal development and instructional leadership, research on the principalship, and state-site links.

National Center on Education and the Economy

www.ncee.org

The National Center on Education and the Economy operates a National Institute on School Leadership, targeted to the school principal. It is specifically geared to the demands of school leadership and accountability. The Institute is funded by the Carnegie Corporation of New York, the Broad Foundation, the New Schools Venture Fund, and the Stupski Family Foundation.

National Middle Schools Association

www.nmsa.org

The National Middle Schools Association (NMSA) Web site has information on its Leadership Institute as well as its Principals Online program.

Southern Regional Education Board

www.sreb.org

The Southern Regional Education Board (SREB) has been a pioneer in leadership development, and was the first interstate compact in the nation. Its Web site features a variety of publications on the topic as well as SREB-sponsored state and university leadership academies.

WestEd

www.wested.org

WestEd conducts a wide array of work on leadership and professional development that is featured on its Web site. In particular, WestEd focuses on leadership training, workshops, technical assistance, and evaluation strategies.

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