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ABSTRACT

A case study was conducted on how principals are selected in American public school districts. Chapters 1-3 describe and evaluate conventional selection practices in 10 randomly sampled school districts; these include vacancy announcements, selection criteria, applicant pools, screening, and employment decisions. These procedures as currently practiced do not do justice to the importance of the principalship, nor do they manifest any consistent likelihood of attracting or selecting the best qualified candidates. Chapter 3, "Pathways to the Principalship," provides case histories of five principals of varying competence, in order to illustrate the vagaries of the selection process from the applicants' perspective. Chapters 4 and 5 describe three promising alternative procedures currently in use at five school districts: (1) assessment centers; (2) district operated internships; and (3) "exemplary" common practices. A comparative analysis follows, delineating the differences between the conventional practices and these alternatives. The essential advantages of the latter derive from sequential screening, which provides more objective, reliable, and comprehensive data for assessing applicants, so that appointments are based more on merit than on contingencies. Guidelines are therefore included for developing or revising a principal selection procedure. A bibliography and an appendix describing the study design and methodology are included. (TE)

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SELECTING AMERICAN  
SCHOOL PRINCIPALS:  
Research Report

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Project Director

Robert A. Dentler  
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**Prepared for:**

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CHAPTER 1  
THE PROBLEM OF PRINCIPAL SELECTION

Introduction

The quest for better methods of principal selection, like the parallel quest in business for middle managers, is predicated on two distinctively American beliefs: that leaders who have what it takes to face and resolve the issues of their times really do exist, and that procedures for finding and appointing them can be developed into a quasi-scientific technology that displays reliability and validity when properly used.

In response to increasing concerns about the selection of principals and in recognition of the great gaps in the knowledge base, the National Institute of Education (NIE) has underwritten this study as part of its larger research initiative on the principalship. This investigation of how school principals are selected is the first national effort to inquire into the means by which school districts actually choose school leaders. It partakes of the beliefs described above, in that school boards and superintendents welcomed our study because of the importance they give to those selection procedures.

The study has been designed and executed in two phases. Phase 1 focuses on describing and characterizing common practices in principal selection. Using a quasi-ethnographic method of inquiry, field research teams closely investigated selection practices in ten randomly sampled geographically diverse school districts with enrollments of 10,000 or more students. Following the field work, cross-case analyses of the ten districts were conducted to reveal both variations and commonalities in selection practice. (Methodological details are provided in the Appendix.)

Phase 2 led directly from the findings of Phase 1, and focused on describing and characterizing promising alternatives to common practices. Through a nomination process, five districts were selected to represent three



types of alternatives: (1) assessment centers; (2) district-operated internships; and (3) especially sound or "exemplary" common practices. Fieldwork and cross-case analyses for Phase 2 were roughly identical to the methods used in Phase 1.

The remainder of this report presents the results of our inquiry. Chapters 2 and 3 focus on findings from Phase 1; chapter 4, on those from Phase 2. Finally, chapter 5 offers conclusions and implications drawn from the total inquiry.

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This then is a report on how principals get selected for the position in two samples of American public school districts. At first glance, this subject appears to have high human interest value laced with low significance for learning about the conditions under which the quality of education may be improved for children and youth. Deeper reflection, which this chapter is intended to encourage, will disclose rather quickly, however, the ways in which principal selection procedures illuminate those very critical conditions.

As a matter of common sense, the more than three hundred school board members, school administrators, teachers, and parents we interviewed in the course of this study all shared the conviction that we may not always find what we are looking for when we begin to search out men and women to lead our schools, but if we know what we want and how to search for it, our chances of finding it are greatly improved. It is this sense that gives our subject its human interest value--this intuited connection between our hopes and the results that come from looking for leaders who will give them expression in daily practice. In this chapter, we shall explore this intuition by summarizing historical trends and by fitting selection into the context of knowledge about school improvement.

### Historical Trends

The principalship in American public education is an occupational position which has evolved gradually over the course of the last century

and a half as a concomitant of bureaucratization. Bureaucratic organizations are established when power holders in a society aspire to achieve goals in the most rational and efficient manner possible (Weber, 1946). All the tasks that the organization is expected to accomplish are broken down into small, manageable units and assigned to specialized personnel, allowing the resulting bureaucracy to cope with complex tasks and large numbers of people.

In pre-industrial America (1650-1812), only the largest academies and Latin Grammar schools employed more than one teacher. All other schools were taught by a single teacher who covered all the subject areas. Academies had headmasters, but principals did not materialize on the school scene until well into the nineteenth century, when industrialization stimulated the spread of schooling to the masses of children and youth and the introduction of bureaucratic organization. Katz (1971) has shown how both administrative and instructional specialists proliferated between 1850 and 1880. Dividing students by age and offering a planned variety of required subjects led during this era to the evolution of the differentiated, bureaucratized staff organized into a hierarchy of authority.

Expertise, specialization, managerial control, and industrial efficiency became the watchwords of public education in the years from 1880 to 1920. Franklin Bobbitt, a university instructor in educational administration, wrote in 1913 of the "supreme importance of supervisors" for the establishment of clear organizational goals and the coordination of efforts to attain those goals.

Definite qualitative and quantitative standards must be determined for the product...Where the material...passes through a number of progressive stages on its way...to the ultimate product, definite qualitative and quantitative standards must be determined for...each of these stages (p. 11).

The point of this trend was that administrators and teachers alike were to be evaluated "scientifically," said the exponents of scientific management who shaped the premises on which the newly emerging profession of

school administration was forming (Callahan, 1962). From 1920 to 1960, then, the modern principalship evolved into the school system equivalent of the corporate industrial middle manager. In the Great Cities from San Francisco, to Chicago, to New York, aspirants for the principalship took an ever-rising number of graduate courses of study, understudied with a mentor on the job, and crammed to pass the locally devised and controlled principal's examination.

For all of the contributions made by the bureaucratization of public education--the greatest being the expansion of opportunities for the vast majority of children and youth--Callahan, Katz, Rogers (1969) and other social scientists challenged its tendencies to deliver miseducation. As anthropologist Murray Wax (1972) summed up the critique,

Schools fail because they are designed as factories, and children organize themselves to resist the imposition of factory norms and factory attitudes. Schools can be operated successfully as if they were factories, but only if the goals are that the schools be custodial institutions whose educational orientation is to do a minimal amount of training. Schools cannot be operated successfully as factories if our goals are educational and developmental, because for education and development we require the active and enthusiastic participation, not merely of the individual pupil, but of the society of the pupils. (p. 66)

The analogies of bureaucracy and factory are obviously inadequate for characterizing a public school system or a school. Weber (1946, p. 246) remarked about bureaucracy and education, for example, "Democracy takes an ambivalent stand in the face of specialized examinations. . . democracy fears that a merit system. . . will result in a privileged 'caste.'" Rogers (1969) found the bureaucracy of the New York City Board of Education incapable of withstanding the challenges posed by the politics of desegregation on one side and of militant teacher unionism on the other side. Schools may be styled after factories, to be sure, but their students and staff engage in activities which break up the consistency of the model.

Thus, civil rightists and unionists alike began to ask in the 1960s whether test-based procedures for selecting administrators really worked;

whether merit was identified, and whether the procedures were free from the influences of patronage and cronyism.

Long after the advent in 1964 of the Civil Rights Act, whose titles expressly forbade sex and racial discrimination, these challenges persist. Women occupied more than half of the nation's elementary principalships in 1939, but by 1979 they accounted for 83 percent of all elementary teachers and only 18 percent of principalships. And, they held 47 percent of all secondary teaching jobs but only 4 percent of the principalships in high and junior high schools. Racial minorities comprised 15 percent of the teacher force but only 9 and 4 percent of the principals in public schools (Pharis and Zachariza, 1979; Byrne, 1978).

The surveys cited above also show that nearly half of the nation's currently employed school principals are men between the ages of 55 and 65 who entered the field of school administration in the decade directly after World War II. Few states had firm standards for certifying principals before 1955. Those that did simply required, with few exceptions, a teaching certificate, three years of classroom teaching experience, and from three to six courses in educational administration. As districts began to expand rapidly to keep pace with the post-war baby boom, moreover, thousands of principals were appointed first and certified years later.

Many of those who became principals did so because of the income advantage. As the women principals--most of them unmarried--retired from the elementary schools, World War II veterans with wives and children to raise took their places. Secondary school coaches had always been preferred candidates for principalships and for them, too, the money was better. In the very biggest city systems the applicants found that both written and oral examinations had to be taken to qualify, but cram books and tutors were available for favored proteges and veterans got extra points.

As school districts in 40 states have faced enrollment declines and strained budgets alike since 1975, these trends in the status of principals have taken an ironic series of turns. A new generation of better prepared,

state certified principal candidates was produced between 1965 and 1975. Until recent years, these men were waiting in line.

The New York Board of Regents estimated in 1975 that the state had a surplus of some 5,000 eligible principals waiting on an estimated 200 vacancies per year. At the same time, rates of withdrawal from the competition began to accelerate because the pay differential between the 15 year teacher and the principal had narrowed greatly under the impact of teacher union contracts. A differential of less than a \$1,000 began to seem unappealing, given the rising burdens of the principalship itself. In some districts coping with extreme cutbacks in staff, moreover, unions have secured agreements under which principals cannot fall back upon their seniority gained while teaching. In these, a new principal becomes a hostage to the fortunes of school closings.

White males still game to compete have also begun to feel the effects of sex and race equity policies in the many districts where court orders or state regulatory agencies and civic interest groups have forced the principle of affirmative action into reality. Even where the principle is honored only by symbolic gestures, the pathway to the principalship has become less obvious and more strenuous a route than it was only a decade ago.

#### Public Expectations

Before 1965, the school principal was regarded by school board members and parents as the implementor of policies and rules set by the board and superintendent. He maintained student discipline, listened for and conveyed the rules from "downtown," and presided over the faculty and the building.

Studies of the nature of principals' work reveal both the complexity of the modern principal's job and how the role has changed over time. The principal's role evolved gradually over a century from that of the teacher as soloist, to that of principal-teacher, to that of general-purpose building

administrator. However, in the period since 1965, the once evolutionary process of specialization has exploded under the impact of extremely rapid, contradictory, and uneven rates of change. The principal in 1913 served as a line supervisor and as a middle manager. Today, the principal is expected to juggle several roles, performing in large school districts as educational program leader, administrative manager, community liaison specialist, agent of the superintendent in implementing union contract clauses, and gatekeeper of program change. So much has changed so dramatically in the realm of expectations directed toward the principal, in other words, that their method of selection has come to be a sensitive factor in determining both public and professional definitions of school system success and failure.

In 1974, the Select Committee on Equal Educational Opportunity of the U.S. Senate issued this statement about the role of the school principal:

In many ways the school principal is the most important and influential individual in any school. He or she is the person responsible for all activities that occur in and around the school building. It is the principal's leadership that sets the tone of the school, the climate for learning, the level of professionalism and morale of teachers and the degree of concern for what students may or may not become. The principal is the main link between the community and the school, and the way he or she performs in the capacity largely determines the attitudes of parents and students about the school. If a school is a vibrant, innovative, child-centered place, if it has a reputation for excellence in teaching, if students are performing to the best of their ability, one can almost point to the principal's leadership as the key to success. (Emphasis added).

To further illustrate the complexity of the principal's contemporary role, Weldy (1978) has identified the following roles which principals are expected to play:

1. An Authority Figure - the principal as the one person who has the most direct influence on a student--he or she can set rules for them, can assign and schedule them, detain and suspend them, as well as the one person who can expel them.
2. An Advocate for Students - since schools exist for students, the principal must work vigorously in the

school and community for the best opportunity, programs and facilities for students.

3. An Educational Leader - in addition to their background in education, a principal is expected to demonstrate the leadership skills necessary to lead his/her faculty and students in pursuit of their school's objectives.
4. An Acknowledged Expert - good principals are expected to be experts in the field of education and more specifically in the field of administration. Although they cannot be expert in every subject area, they are expected to be experts in the teaching and learning process.
5. A Decision Maker - the decision-making process in the schools has evolved into one which is more participative than authoritarian--teachers, students, parents, and frequently members of the community have some input into almost all major decisions that principals make. This participative process is often confusing and frightening to many principals--a decision rarely seems "right" to all those concerned.
6. A Problem Solver - since conflict naturally arises in a school, the principal must call upon his skills as a mediator, compromiser and accomodator. Other problems may require extensive study and research, gathering of resources and calling consultants.
7. The Master Scheduler - the responsibility for developing the master schedule directly affects more people in the school than any other responsibility. The Master Schedule of classes is the school plan that brings students and teachers together in appropriate places for instruction and educational activity.
8. The Disciplinarian - even if principals may not be directly responsible for the administration of discipline within schools, they are directly involved in establishing the rules of behavior, the penalties to be applied, and the processes to be used.
9. The Goal Setter - a major responsibility of principals is keeping their schools goal-oriented and working towards accepted education goals. Other individuals--teachers, students, support staff--see only one aspect of the overall picture, and by focusing on those specific details, lose sight of the overall school goals. The principal is responsible for reminding employees in the schools of the purposes behind the school's existence.

Other researchers have broken open these role expectations by examining in some detail the actual tasks and activities principals perform in dealing with teachers, district administrators, and parents. These

authors both confirm and clarify the complexity of the principalship, and the role strains it entails.

For example, principals share many of the same values, perceptions and commitments as teachers (Rosenblum and Louis, 1981). Yet, they are primarily administrators, and an increasingly large amount of their time is devoted to administrative matters. A typical principal's day is long--generally lasting more than nine hours (Gorton and McIntyre, 1979), most of which is devoted to the administrative/managerial tasks. Further, the work of the principal is extraordinarily fragmented and varied; Morris and his associates (1981) discovered that a typical school day may involve the principal in anywhere from 50 to 100 identifiably discrete "pieces of business."

Morris and his associates (1981) also found that these "pieces of business" form a very complex whole, which requires principals to develop sophisticated strategies for dealing with faculty, parents, and "downtown."

One of the most important aspects of the principal's role as an educational leader is the communication and interpretation of school programs to the community. Jacobson, Logsdon, and Wiegman (1973) point out that, while previously left largely to the superintendent, this function has come to be performed by principals. As central offices become more complex, the principal is seen as the local interpreter of district policy. And, as Barth and Deal (1982) suggest, this function--as well as other critical aspects of educational leadership--may well be an expression of a more generalized leadership role demand: the need to manage symbols as well as realities.

#### Parallels With Middle Management

Many observers are beginning to suggest that the role of the principal is quite similar to that of the middle manager in business (and other complex organizations, such as the military and government agencies), for middle managers, like principals, serve a coordinative function. They are less involved in the direct supervision of technical work than in coordinating the work of a department or area to see that its work is related to



the immediate objectives and operations of the larger enterprise. Hennig and Jardim (1977) delineate several roles which middle managers are expected to play:

1. Technical expert - the middle manager must have a working knowledge of requirements of other functions/areas.
2. Goal setting - it is the middle manager's job to break down broader and longer term interdependent goals and set subgoals for subordinates.
3. Planning - it is also the middle manager's job to develop plans for the achievement of objectives.
4. Problem solving - anticipating problems and preparing alternative solutions in advance.
5. Interdepartment liaison: middle managers must build bridges and lines of communication and support with other departments whose operation is important to the successful functioning of their own unit.
6. Information carrier - the middle manager must constantly learn from others--peers, supervisors and subordinates--and disseminate what she learns to her own staff as it aids their job performance.
7. Gatekeeper for the informal system - the middle manager is responsible for maintaining access to the informal network of cooperation that "gets the job done" without recourse to (or in spite of) the formal hierarchy.
8. Delegator - middle managers are heavily dependent on others. They must learn to effectively delegate task performance, including assessment of others' performance.

The parallel between these roles and those identified by Weldy (1978) for principals is evident.

The parallels between principals and middle managers in industry and business have recently been drawn even more finely by Yukl (1982). In a major review aimed specifically at sifting the general managerial knowledge base for its application to educational settings, Yukl found much (but not total) similarity between principals and middle managers. He also suggests that effective principals might share some of the same skills, behaviors, traits,, and motivations as successful middle managers:

The hectic, fast pace of work for principals is similar to that of most managers, and requires similar high energy and stress tolerance. The high frequency of interaction with teachers, students, and parents enhances the relevance of oral, persuasive interests and interpersonal skills such as persuasiveness, tact, charm, empathy, and social sensitivity. Need for achievement enhances a principal's motivation to strive for academic distinction for his or her school. Self-confidence, together with a personal vision of what can be accomplished, induces a principal to initiate improvements rather than merely wondering whether the system will allow changes. A dominant, socialized need for power is likely to induce a principal to seek out the enthusiastic involvement and support of teachers in designing and implementing new programs, rather than trying to reshape curriculum and modify programs in a directive, autocratic manner. (pp. 44-45)

These parallels and similarities in role suggest that the general literature on managerial selection is useful for thinking about principal selection.

We cannot be sure that the parallel between school principals and business corporation middle managers comes to much more than a convergence of rhetoric about organizational leadership expectations, however, until real comparative research has been done. In the meanwhile, we can only infer that while schools are most certainly neither factories nor business firms, the duties being ascribed to both groups of administrators are replete with rising expectations.

### Effective Schools

The past five years have been ones in which these rising expectations have become particularized in education by a growing emphasis on the pivotal role of principals in maintaining and shaping all types of school-based improvements in teaching and learning. Hall (1979), Edmonds (1979), Brookover (1981), and Berman and McLaughlin (1978) have all contributed evidence showing rather precisely how the principal can exert leadership in ways that induce heightened effectiveness in a school's social climate, discipline, instructional impact on learners, and student growth.

In their synthesis of research on effective schools, Purkey and Smith (1982) explain that this research challenges previous research that found student academic achievement to be mainly a by-product of family background and other non-school influences. The more recent evidence suggests that academic achievement is enhanced by such school-level factors as well-defined school goals, staff training, a sense of order and good discipline, a system for monitoring student progress, and by administrative leadership that induces these factors by skillful facilitation rather than by fiat.

Gersten, Carmine, and Green (1982) have also reviewed this evidence and concluded that

The portraits of charismatic, exceptional principals...are likely to have a depressing effect... While one can marvel at the talent, energy, and vision of these few extraordinary individuals, it is clear that most principals simply do not--and in all likelihood cannot--perform at the same level. Nor do the majority of teachers and administrators expect them to do so...Schools cannot wait for these knights in shining armor to emerge. (p. 48)

These researchers cite studies by Mazzarella (1977), Morris and others (1981), and Wolcott (1973) which show that teachers do not perceive principals as instructional leaders of the sort cited by Edmonds, as well as evidence that principals actually seldom function as such (Howell, 1981; Lortie, 1975). They call for analysis of the tasks entailed in making a school instructionally effective and then urge the point that these tasks may be performed by a variety of participants: "Instructional support functions need not be carried out by the principal. Realistically, most schools will need more than one person to adequately carry out all of these activities anyway" (Gersten, et al, p. 49).

While the timeless debate over whether leadership is a set of traits and skills or is a set of functions that can as readily be distributed across a group will continue to resound, the sustained search for more effective schools has gathered considerable force. It has a strong parallel in organizational studies in business aimed at improving productivity. The

first brunt of that force is expressed in the call for more effective principals and middle managers.

### The Technology (and Dynamics) of Selection

Given that principals are increasingly defined as instructional leaders and that their roles and tasks are increasingly complex and demanding, how are they chosen? Who becomes a principal and how do districts go about the difficult task of filling the job? These questions take their new salience from this changing definition of effectiveness.

Since at least the era of the Great Depression, big city and big suburban public school principals have tended to be selected in a fashion that was a mixture of intramural patronage and grooming for the position through the early identification of classroom teachers and athletic coaches by school administrators, with some procedure for certifying, rating, and ranking candidates through a combination of state certification and local examination procedures. Large older cities such as New York and Buffalo, for example, conducted written and oral examinations, devised by their own boards of examiners, and maintained waiting lists of qualified candidates. In Boston, a similar procedure was often overridden by acts of patronage exercised by top administrators and by individual board members. Acting principalships became the normal means for providing on-the-job conditioning and for testing the loyalty of the principal to the campaign finances of politicians (Dentler and Scott, 1981).

Thus, the historical trends in big systems over a period of 80 years resulted in the selection of principals who reflected accurately the combined preferences of central office administrators and some school board members, and those preferences emphasized examinable merit in one system at one time and patronage criteria in another system at another time.

Between 1960 and 1975, as we noted earlier, these historical selection procedures began to break down under the impact of teacher unionism, school administrator unionism, civil rights legislation and activism,

and the rise of community and parent participation in shaping school policies and practices. What had evolved as a set of relatively closed, intramurally controlled and administered procedures could not be reconciled with changes in the politics and programs of public education.

During the same period, as we also noted, a series of contrasting and uneven rates of change transformed the prospects for attainment of principalships by ethnic minorities and women. Desegregation plans implemented throughout the Southern and border states displaced more than a thousand black principals whose separate and inferior facilities were closed or merged with previously white facilities, and administrator desegregation plans never kept pace with student desegregation policies (Haven, et.al., 1980). Women were displaced or not replaced by other women in the course of terminating girls' high schools and junior high schools, and very few high school principalships other than these had ever gone to women. Vice principalships aimed at counseling and disciplining girls were also eliminated in the course of sex desegregation. As salaries changed, men began to enter elementary teaching and to predominate over women as candidates for elementary principalships as early as 1955, further narrowing the range of available opportunities (Kavelage, 1978). At the same time, schools and colleges of education began to participate in preparing a mobile, journeyman's cadre of increasingly professionalized and highly competitive candidates for the position, constricting prospects for job-based, intramural promotion of teachers from within.

For these reasons, then, the process of selecting public school principals has taken on ever-greater salience professionally and politically over the past 15 years. As the content of the role itself changed, so concern about who aspired to and attained it intensified year by year among parents, teachers, administrators and boards, and faculties in preparing colleges and universities. The principal and his or her selection came to symbolize the spiralling controversies over public confidence in public education, accountability, community control, union regulations, legitimacy and equity in appointments to public office, and program innovation and the delivery of services. The resulting confusion was reinforced by a barrage of

studies and commentaries on the declining credibility of public schooling on the one hand and the rising importance of the role of the building principal on the other hand.

In spite of these rapidly growing concerns about selection, the knowledge base on the technology (and dynamics) of selection is thin at best. For the most part, the research literature is largely confined to local or state surveys of general district policies and procedures. For instance, DeFrahn (1973) surveyed New Jersey districts on recruitment and selection of high school principals and discovered that written policies and procedures were rare, superintendents were the key selectors, most principals were selected from within the district, the interview was the most widely used selection technique, and criteria for the job were more trait (e.g. judgment, personality, character, ability to communicate) than skill oriented. A similar survey was undertaken as part of report of the California State Legislature (1977) and reached similar conclusions: selection processes were generally ambiguous and imprecise. And, Poteet (1968) conducted a survey of Texas districts' approaches to selecting elementary school principals, which also documented loosely specified processes, superintendent control, and heavy reliance on traits (e.g., honesty, loyalty, cooperativeness) as criteria.

A few researchers have studied particular aspects of selection more closely. Caldwell and Curfman (1979) investigated the effect of collective bargaining environments on principal hiring and found positive relationships between the tendency to hire outsiders as principals and the tendency to engage in collective bargaining. Greenfield (1977) studied the experiences of several aspiring principal candidates at various stages of professional development and candidacy to ascertain the means by which aspiring administrators are socialized to the role. He found that school districts tend to view the candidacy period as a "live" test--or means of assessing aspirants' performances and suitability for the job of principal--and that candidacy does have an important socialization function.

The practitioner literature on selection technology and dynamics offers little more than the research literature. For the most part, the

general practitioner literature on selection is broadly descriptive, and tends toward speculation about problems or very general prescriptions for improvements. Lund (1977) for instance, and Yerkovich (1969), both offer very general prescriptions for steps in selecting a principal. Hawkins (1969) makes a well turned, albeit speculative, case for administrative restructuring at the building level to free the principal for instructional leadership, and then allowing teachers to choose the "principal-educator." Wagstaff and Spillman (1974) argue for considered and balanced application of traits or attributes as selection criteria. Similarly, McIntyre (1974) exhorts practitioners to improve and/or abandon bad selection practices (failure to appoint women, dependence on interviews and rating scales) of long and widespread use. And, in an interesting departure from the norm, Howes (1978) and Hertz (1975) offer some practical advice to candidates, which is revealing of the realities of the "hidden agendas" of the selection process.

The selection technology literature appears to be developing somewhat more strongly in regard to particular improvements or innovations in selection. For instance, there is a growing body of literature on assessment centers, as a psychometric technology for behavioral evaluation of candidates along specified skill dimensions. Finkle (1976) and Williamson and Schaalman (1981) have recently provided comprehensive reviews of assessment center research and implementation in business, as well as their growing application to educational settings. Schmitt and others (1981, 1982) have recently conducted an extensive validation study of the National Association of Secondary School Principals (NASSP) Assessment Center. From the practitioner side, basic descriptions of the NASSP center have been written by Hersey (1977, 1982), and practitioner reactions offered by several participants (Van Newkirk, et.al., 1980; Jones, et.al., 1980; Lepard, et.al., 1980; and Hipps, 1980).

Still others are developing a growing literature on district-run internship programs. While these are usually thought of primarily as administrator development and training efforts, they frequently are central to the principal selection process where they are in use. Some districts use

locally run internships as a sort of intensified and systematized grooming process for principal candidates, and may even require that all candidates successfully complete an internship program. And, as Bailey and Warren (1980) note, the general requirement of an internship for administrative certification is becoming increasingly common. Good reviews of internships in general are provided by Adkison and Warren (1980), as well as Pellicer and his co-authors (1981), whose treatment is somewhat more comprehensive. These authors also see increasing use of internships as central features of principal development (and, by implication, principal selection). From the practitioner side, much has been written about the NASSP Administrative Internship Project for example (Trump, 1970), which was the largest secondary internship program ever developed and which included several hundred interns in several hundred schools. Local districts have also begun to produce reports on their internship programs and the roles they play in principal selection (Buford, 1982; Arnold, 1982).

The literature on principal selection offers no hint of why some districts choose to adopt a selection process improvement such as an assessment center or an internship, or even make less costly and sweeping improvements of their principal selection processes. Nonetheless, this is a very important question, for it has implications for efforts to improve principal selection. The more general literature on district change efforts is somewhat helpful, although it is very limited in its application to principal selection because it focuses on change related to school-level educational programs of varying nature and scope, while principal selection is, of course, an administrative activity. Further, educational program implementation occurs at the bottom of the district hierarchy and is in the hands of teachers. In contrast, principal selection belongs to the top of the district hierarchy, and engages the most powerful actors in the system.

In sum, the literature on the technology and dynamics of principal selection per se typically offers only the broadest of speculations and descriptions. Insofar as we could discover, there are no studies or reports of actual instances of principal selection. There are surveys of district administrators on the general topic (e.g., DeFrahn, 1973); there are tightly



focused and small-scale investigations of restricted perspectives on one particular aspect of the process (e.g., Greenfield, 1977); and, very rarely, there are anecdotal descriptions of some of the "hidden agendas" and dynamics that lie beneath the surface (e.g., Howes, 1978). However, at best, this literature provides only tantalizing glimpses of small, isolated slices of the process, and serves as an incomplete stimulus to conjecture. It can be considerably enhanced, however, by the far more developed literature on general managerial selection.

### Parallels in Middle Manager Selection

The increasing importance being ascribed to principal selection is powerfully convergent with developments in American business. There, the M.B.A. degree has begun to serve as a screening requirement for identifying middle management candidates who can be trained to rise in corporate responsibility, and even hotel and restaurant management trainees are expected to have bachelor's degrees in business management.

The language of selection is also very similar. Whether insiders or outsiders are considered, the selection decision is widely perceived as a series of steps or hurdles through which applicants pass (Dillman, 1967). At each step, a few more applications are screened out and eliminated from further contention. The complexity of a selection process may range from a ten-minute interview and a superficial review of a brief application blank to a highly involved series of performance evaluations over several months. The procedures may also vary across and within organizations from job to job, depending on circumstances such as organization size and level, geographic location, statutory and labor contract provisions, affirmative action and equal opportunity requirements, and the hierarchical levels of the job to be filled (Yoder & Heneman, 1974). Regardless of the many variations, however, the general management selection process typically can be broken into several steps. (Few organizations use all the steps, since they consume significant amounts of time and money. Moreover, several steps can be performed simultaneously.)

The first step is the development of selection criteria or the formal or informal definition of characteristics desired in candidates for the position. When Steger (1972) reviewed studies of successful managers, he noted two ways of defining criteria: (1) to seek for a particular mixture of personality characteristics or motivation patterns in the candidate; or (2) to seek to measure aptitudes and skills known to be associated with general managerial success (such as intelligence and administrative skills) and the particular job in question. Campbell and associates (1970) reviewed the same literature and concluded that 30 to 50 percent of the variance in management effectiveness could be explained in terms of personal qualities like "high intelligence, good verbal skills, effective judgment in handling managerial situations... and organizing skills, dispositions toward interpersonal relationships, hard work, being active and taking risks, and temperamental qualities. . ."

Business organizations develop their own definitions and criteria of success that fit the task, the work situation, and the managers or potential managers available. The organization's adherence to a merit, as opposed to a patronage, system of filling vacancies will also have a substantial impact on the selection criteria. Use of the latter type of system emphasizes interpersonal and political connections, sometimes at the expense of professional background and expertise.

The second step involves some sort of preliminary review to eliminate those candidates that are obviously unfit for the position. Application blank checklists, preliminary interviews, sorting of resumes, and brief tests have been used in the preliminary screening process (Stone and Kendall, 1965).

Third, applicants who survive the preliminary screening are given a more thorough review of background and reference checks. Resumes and letters of recommendation are compared with previously established selection criteria. Background checks and biographical information methods are useful because they attempt to gather information on past job-related behavior, which is more likely to predict future behavior than tests and other paper-and-pencil evaluation mechanisms (Campbell et al., 1970). However, the rating of

previous education and experience may be more difficult than rating tests because of problems such as standardizing the evaluation process, securing equal performance by the examiners, and handling different combinations of education and expertise.

The fourth step subjects serious candidates to various forms of employment examinations, such as selection tests, interviews, and assessment centers. Selection tests have historically been used quite often in employee selection procedures, and considerable knowledge about their efficacy has accrued. General intelligence tests, personality inventories and temperament tests have all been appraised for their contributions to management selection decisions. Ghiselli (1966) and Korman (1968) focused on intelligence tests, while Guion and Gottier (1965) studied personality inventories. Typically, these researchers found that tests were inadequate predictors of effectiveness for higher level managers and should not be used as the only source of data for the selection decision. A joint survey by the U.S. Office of Economic Opportunity, Department of Labor, and the National Civil Service League in 1970 found that only 54 percent of state and local governments conducted any test validation, and most of these governments limited such validations efforts to only a few agencies (Berkley, 1975). One recent study found that the use of tests in personnel selection is declining, and that they are most frequently used for clerical jobs rather than management positions (American Society for Personnel Administrators, 1977).

The personal interview is the single most frequently used device in managerial selection. Almost invariably, it is used along with other selection methods, but if only one method is used by an organization, it is likely to be the personal interview. The interview has several purposes. Primarily, the interviewer seeks to determine the applicant's level of maturity, ability to persevere, and level of self-discipline. The interviewer also looks for the right attitude, knowledge, and skills needed for success on the job. While the interview is a highly subjective approach to selection, and vulnerable to the skills and biases of the interviewer, it is a relatively inexpensive method. Generally speaking, it has many shortcomings and inadequacies, but it can be helpful if it is focused on the interviewee's

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behavior and performance, rather than his personality (Webster, 1964; Carlson, 1973).

Assessment centers are also used in managerial selection. This method of examination was developed during World War II and was used by the Office of Strategic Services (OSS) to select intelligence officers. Individuals to be assessed or selected are brought to a facility and given tests and interviews as a means of evaluating developed abilities, potentials, strengths and weaknesses and motivation. The testing, which can be administered by trained laymen, lasts for periods ranging from one day to a week. The types of tests and simulations utilized can include management games, group discussions and activities, in-basket activities, pen and pencil tests, personality tests and other activities. Candidates are generally assessed in groups as a means of observing their ability to interact in group situations and to maximize the number of persons assessed. Some of the typical management dimensions evaluated in assessment centers are leadership, decision-making ability, oral and written skills, and scholastic aptitude. Although assessment centers are expensive, most studies support them as the most effective method of managerial selection (Huck, 1973; Bray and Moses, 1972; Carleton, 1970; Craig, 1976).

The final step is the employment decision. Following the rating of the examinations, a list or register of candidates who possess the requisite qualifications is usually compiled. From this list the final selection is made, though the nature of the final selection process is still problematic and rather mysterious. It is perhaps at this last step that the organizational dynamics that underlie the technology come most overtly into play. Both managers and researchers agree that no matter how it is structured, this final step is highly political and can become very emotional, depending on the zeal of any participating actor or group in the advocacy of a particular candidate.

Both the research and practitioner literature on principal selection exhibit intriguing parallels to the general literature on managerial selection. Like other organizations in their search for managers, school districts

struggle with questions of trait vs. skills criteria; appointment from within vs. recruitment from outside; candidate examination methods; and the nature and of the final employment decision. And, some of the educational literature tantalizingly hints at even deeper parallels among the forces and agenda beneath the surface of the managerial selection process. For instance, can the appointment of a principal be any less fraught with political considerations than that of a middle manager, given that school districts are public institutions? Certainly the conventional wisdom among practitioners--which as Barth and Deal (1982) point out, remains largely untapped by researchers--would have it that a principal appointment is if anything even more "political!"

In sum, the literature as a whole suggests several points to keep in mind as we look at principal selection:

- (1) The nature of the principal's work is complex, cross-pressured, and increasingly subject to role strain; hence the inherent difficulty of the selection task is intensified.
- (2) The state-of-the-art in principal selection appears to be rather primitive. The literature does not suggest that principal selection in general is characterized by modern personnel methods.
- (3) The state-of-the-art in managerial selection appears to be more advanced, and offers some helpful models for conceptualizing and studying principal selection.
- (4) There are attempts underway to improve in principal selection, many of which borrow directly from advances in middle managerial selection (e.g. assessment centers).
- (5) There is insufficient knowledge about the circumstances that underlie either principal selection or middle managerial selection. However, there is enough information to suggest that organizational factors are of central importance to the shape, nature, and ultimately the outcome of the process.

## CHAPTER 2

### THE SELECTION PROCESS

In Chapter 1 we outlined the purposes of this inquiry and traced the topic's connections to related issues and research literature. This chapter presents our findings from Phase 1 of our investigation, which examined in detail 30 principal selections in ten randomly selected, geographically diverse school districts of at least 10,000 students. Before presenting our findings, however, we offer a brief discussion of some of the larger issues that were central to our inquiry.

#### The Issues

Public school principals in the United States are drawn from the ranks of school teachers. If the duties of principals were at base identical to those of teachers except that principals were obligated to supervise their peers, and if all teachers were somehow rendered equally competent, then it would not matter much who was selected to be the "head teacher" or be first among peers. We begin with this hypothetical not only because it imitates the historical origins of the principalship but because it clarifies the issues treated in this study.

The first multi-classroom public school in the United States was the Quincy Grammar School, erected in Boston in 1847. Multi-grade, single classroom schools operated by a single teacher (sometimes with a helper) dotted the American landscape from 1650 to 1920. In these, the teacher was the principal. Even the terms principal and headmaster denote the long history of the model of principal as head or master teacher. As our review of the literature suggests, it is only when the duties of principals evolve--when they both expand and differentiate away from teaching--that we become concerned about selection. Teaching competency colors this picture, to be sure, for no one wants the head teacher to be less effective than her peers. Still, the issue that emerges as the role evolves is the issue of competency, not as a classroom teacher or as a teaching supervisor, but as a multi-purpose education leader.

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Key Issues

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if anything, about merit? How do they explain the way they go about seeking it, if they say they do? Do they believe that some candidates have the ability to increase the educational effectiveness of some schools?

We wanted to learn whether ideas about merit and merit-based principal selection varied greatly across the communities we sampled or whether variation was small because these are universal standards that pervade school systems. Above all, we avoided imposing on our respondents some set of external standards, since meanings attached to the ideas of merit vary in substance and in pertinence to the selection process.

Local school systems deal each year with a great variety of issues, which are defined as such by a fluctuating variety of constituencies and interest groups organized within and between those constituencies. We were therefore determined to study the issue of merit as it did or did not come up from within dynamic local contexts. We were aware before we visited any community, for instance, that leadership merit of one kind or another might be of local concern in some constant, backstage sense, but that this concern might be subordinated for practical purposes arising from those issues that occupied center stage in any one year. Or, if not subordinated, merit concerns might have to bend with the winds of budget, program, and facility issues.

The operative definition of merit, we expected, would be shaped in part by who participates in the selection process. Therefore, the issue of merit was examined in the light of the range of types of selectors. The actual range might be determined, however, not by a theory about how wisdom about finding merit is distributed but by very divergent considerations such as scope of authority of superintendents, board member changes and agendas for re-election, or teacher union-board relations, to name but a few possibilities. Administrative control, efficiency, or efforts to avoid intergroup conflicts might dictate one kind of selection participation and prevent another kind, quite apart from effect on merit concerns.



Still concerned with merit, we found some personnel administrators who believe that job holders are powerfully and enduringly affected by the terms and conditions under which they were selected and appointed. Our inquiry tested this in the course of interviews with principals. A principal who has good reason to believe she was selected for some purpose other than to enhance the effectiveness of her school may nevertheless work toward this goal, but often and sometimes only after she has invested in the primary purpose. Indeed, it is more likely that the candidate who is appointed will be the one who appears most disposed to fulfill the purposes of the selectors and to remain faithful to them for years, even after other conditions have changed. (We interviewed one urban high school principal, for example, who explained that he had been appointed three years earlier and had received only one directive from the superintendent in all that time. The school had suffered from a series of fights between white and black students. He was told "to cool it, put a lid on, and keep it on." He introduced severe discipline and met his assigned task within four weeks. When we asked him why the enrollment had declined by half and why classrooms and hallways had such an empty and dulled atmosphere, he agreed amiably and replied, "I'm waiting for more instructions.")

Therefore, we designed our study to investigate these and related issues that lead up to the point of principal performance. Some of the related issues include the following: Who participates in selection? What difference for merit does it seem to make whether participation extends to teachers, parents, civic leaders, and even students? Do selectors search for generic leadership abilities or do they try to achieve a fit between a particular school and the styles of candidates? If it is the latter, what happens when a policy of rotation of principals is introduced?

Our second major issue was the equity features of the principal selection process. By equity, we meant the extent to which school systems concern themselves with equalizing access and chances for selection to women and ethnic minorities. Are equity considerations built into the procedures? If so, do these have observable consequences for who gets appointed? Is the process equitable except when other goals have greater priority? What

trade-offs are made as selectors cope with balancing a series of contradictory goals? Does the relative presence or absence of equity concerns seem to respondents to have a real bearing on the legitimacy, authority, and performance of the principalship?

As with the issue of merit, we expected to find that equity would be defined in diverse ways, just as it would be acted upon under some conditions but not others. We did not take an evaluative approach based on some external standard but rather concentrated on learning the meaning and place afforded this concern across responding school systems. Similarly, we aimed at learning how system participants reconciled the two concerns, or if they tried to do so.

A third issue was one we came to call the issue of legitimacy, not because that word was ever used but because our very first site visit disclosed the importance which attaches to this concern. As we used legitimacy, it referred to the extent to which respondents believed their systems followed procedures that were openly described, fitted to local customs and norms, authentic rather than phony or indifferently implemented, and which result in credible selections. At first, we expected this issue would revolve around the representativeness of the selection participants in relation to constituencies of parents, teachers, board members, and the like. Later, we realized that deeper, less mechanical aspects of this issue determined its importance.

Finally, we have tried to obtain evidence on the question of the place of principal selection in a hierarchy of district concerns, particularly with regard to system efficiency. Is principal selection subordinated to efficiency? What happens where selectors give primacy to their activities? In other words, is the pathway to the principalship a matter to which great importance is attached as a result of presumed effects upon learners? Or, is there a rhetoric about importance but a body of evidence inside districts which enables selectors to embrace the rhetoric while coping with what are regarded as more urgent operating concerns? Our approach to this issue has been locality-based rather than national or evaluative. As in all parts of

our study, we have searched for the meanings that local selectors and others involved in the welfare of the system ascribe to their actions.

In developing a descriptive account of the principal selection process, we have tried to answer as an organizing hypothesis the question of how one "becomes a principal" in the districts under study. We think that a valid exposition will help to distinguish between reality and the ideal but abstract assumptions that are sometimes made about that process. The following sections of this chapter present our findings organized around a basic five point model of the steps in principal selection, which we used to guide our research. A schematic of this model is shown in Figure A-1 (page 205). Its five basic selection process steps are: (1) vacancy definition and announcement; (2) specification of selection criteria; (3) generation of the applicant pool; (4) screening of candidates; and (5) the employment decision.

### The Vacancy

Principal selection begins with the declaration of a vacancy. On one level of action, vacancy declaration is a simple point of departure. Vacancies are usually defined by the top administration as openings are created by resignations, retirements, deaths, dismissals, or reassignments. They are advertised fairly promptly in general terms in district newsletters and personnel circulars. The timing of announcements and advertisements usually coincides with the flow of the school year. In the event that a vacancy occurs in mid-year, the position is often filled by a vice principal or head teacher (who may or may not be designated as acting principal) to finish out the year. There is usually some advertising in public media, but the search is typically limited to the local area (the district and perhaps contiguous systems). Search boundaries may extend to include the state and perhaps even contiguous states on special occasions, but are virtually never seriously expanded beyond this.

Districts with labor agreements with associations of school administrators often carry a set of negotiated, written rules about vacancies and

their announcement. These are often very elaborated and specified in smallest detail, and, when compared with the lack of elaboration and specificity of subsequent steps in the process, seem oddly out of balance. In fact, these rules are a carry-over from a time when new schools were being built every two to three years and when the union tradition of emphasis on posting jobs for all to see was very strong. Now that few principalships fall open annually as a result of enrollment declines, the written rules about vacancies are not afforded much attention (although they are followed). Every district has become quite open about its dwindling list of all kinds of job vacancies, and the attention of aspirants has shifted away from the task of making certain that rapidly developing openings are fairly announced to the much more difficult and subtle tasks of obtaining an increasingly scarce position.

An estimated one in a thousand districts advertise nationally. Perhaps one in a hundred announce vacancies in some statewide publication, but these tend to be concentrated in the Southwest and West. No other descriptive finding of our study demonstrates as firmly as this that the principalship is not a "journeyman's position," as is the superintendency. Across our Phase 1 sites, 75 percent of all principalship vacancies are filled with educators residing in the district or in a district within 30 miles. And, among the remaining 25 percent, two districts are operating under court orders to recruit black candidates, and hence advertise more widely to fill this special recruitment need.

On another level of action, the vacancy announcement step is illustrative of the superintendent's need and desire for administrative control, which constitutes one of the two main controlling forces on principal selection (the power of the local culture being the second). For instance, one Phase 1 district had historically used acting appointments to avoid announcing a vacancy. This allowed those in control to dangle the acting principal on the tenterhooks of a possible permanent appointment and thereby secure an extraordinary measure of personal and political control over these individuals, some of whom served for 20 years as an acting principal.

Obviously, it also allowed the district to avoid the public accountability process of actually screening and making a permanent appointment.

Far more typical than this now abandoned extreme is the widespread practice of the non-specific vacancy announcement. In almost all of our Phase 1 districts, the vacancy announcements do not specify the particular schools where there are openings. Rather, the announcements call for applications for principalships in general. Hence, candidates apply "blindly" for an "elementary principalship" rather than applying for the principalship of Smith School. The grapevine is usually (but not always) good, however, and candidates often discover which schools are open either before or after they apply. On rare occasions, knowledge of which particular schools are open may condition a candidate's decision to apply. However, this does not happen often.

Interestingly, the top administration itself may not know until the last moment just which schools are in fact open. For instance, principals at elementary schools A and B retire and a general vacancy is announced. While the applications are coming in, the administration begins to think about the possibility of making some transfers to "solve some administrative problems," or "promote John to a larger school," or "protect Jim because we may have to close his school." (These are all examples of reasons given for transfers by Phase 1 district administrators.) The decision-makers may proceed immediately with these plans--unbeknownst to the applicants--or they may wait awhile to see how the applicant pool shapes up.

Depending on who applies, what the decision pressures are, and how strong the transfer needs become, the vacancies at schools A and B may topple a line of dominoes. Seven or eight principals may be moved through a series of administrative transfers undertaken for various reasons. (In one of our districts, 22 principals were rotated, given early retirement, or returned to a lower position in one move, which began with one vacancy.) In the end, the actual vacancies may be in schools Y and Z. The candidates' grapevines may or may not pick up this switching, depending partly upon how

sensitive the various negotiations become and in part on the timing of the various decisions.

In all of our Phase 1 districts, superintendents and other top administrators believed strongly that it is critical to retain this sort of flexibility and control over the vacancy declaration. In fact, the importance of control here seems almost as important as control at the final employment decision point. And, in some respects, the administrative control may actually be greater at the vacancy than at appointment. The next steps in the selection process--specification of criteria, generation of the applicant pool, screening, and the employment decision--are increasingly subject to public scrutiny, if not public participation. By the time the superintendent reaches the end point, many, many observers have witnessed and appraised the process, and the cultural pressures have come into full play. In contrast, at the beginning--the vacancy definition and declaration--virtually no one beyond the superintendent and his top administrators has the opportunity to witness or appraise the process.

In spite of these many extreme uncertainties, the vacancy stage of the procedure tells us a great deal about principalships and about our four general issues of merit, equity, legitimacy, and efficiency. For example, there are unresolved logical contradictions which surround the position. Every board member and parent we interviewed regarded the principalship as highly important in determining the quality of schools, and these same persons either followed the selection process with keen interest or took part in it directly. Superintendents and their top officers shared this attitude and explained that they spend many days year in and year out in the search and choice process. Yet, the announcements are, with few exceptions, very limited in outreach; the specific openings are seldom clearly identified; and, as we shall see, the volume of applicants is often rather small compared with the great numbers of educators who have state certificates.

Thus, actions at the vacancy stage do not correspond well with the weights placed on the importance of the principalship. Instead, this stage tends to send a message about a rather lower-level middle management or

supervisory post, more akin to the head teacher model of the 1920's. Where the announcements are kept local, the message implies that the search will not be extensive; where they are made statewide, it is usually to a newsletter for members of a state school administrators association.

If we had studied only this first stage, we would have concluded mistakenly that the approaches taken to merit and to equity are extremely localistic, that legitimacy is attained by keeping the search local, and that in terms of efficiency the positions are filled on a kind of "line of least effort" basis. How this inference becomes modified in later stages begins to become apparent in the next two stages.

### Selection Criteria

By the stage of setting selection criteria, we do not mean what is entailed later on in actually screening and appraising candidates. We mean instead the stage of setting forth the qualifications required for eligibility as a candidate. These are usually cited in announcements or are available on inquiry from the system's central office.

Without exception, all of our districts require at least a B.A. or B.S. degree, at least three years of classroom teaching experience, and a state certificate as principal. All states require from six to twenty hours of college credits in courses in educational administration and some require an M.Ed. or M.A. degree in that field along with a practicum or an internship. Both of us have studied or worked with school districts where principals appointed between 1940 and 1965 lacked any or all of these credentials, but that era has passed. As both states and districts have tightened criteria substantially since then, many board members and top administrators take understandable pride in their upgrading of basic eligibility requirements. There are still states whose bureaus will "stretch points" in order to certify a teacher for standing as a principal, but even these are much stricter today than they were twenty years ago.

Four of our ten districts limited their criteria to state certification. Others added master's degrees which were not required by their states for certification, or even specific course work in special or bilingual education and in curriculum. Very few made a concrete connection, however, between the vacancy and the criteria for eligibility, such as requiring teaching and administrative experience at the grade levels of the vacancy. Again, this does not mean that extra criteria were not brought in to use later in the selection process.

Stated criteria are necessarily limited in scope by the complexities inherent in the stage of defining a vacancy. If a superintendent is planning a series of rotative reassignments and closing a facility or two at the same time, for example, the criteria must be left general enough to accommodate many school settings. Uncertainties about the vacancy itself thus become sources of vagueness in the statement of eligibility requirements. This is particularly the case for schools in the grades below grade nine. High school principalships have much more prestige, pay more, tend to last longer, and are most often formulated to fit a specific school. (However, even here many ambiguities remain and extra criteria are brought to bear later.)

Even where the vacancy is clearly aligned with a specific school, none of the Phase 1 districts spells out criteria pertinent to educational leadership--such as experience with program planning, budgeting, plant management, community relations, or staff development and evaluations. These and other criterial concerns are quite uniformly deferred until a candidate pool has been formed and review begins. In fact, the announced criteria for eligibility are nearly always available in "the desk drawer" of the personnel director who posts the announcement and are most "obvious."

Leadership merit concerns therefore do not get activated at this early stage; equity is expressed, if at all, through a line asserting that the district is an equal opportunity employer or a line stating that applications from women and minority persons are encouraged. The criteria have no observable implications for legitimacy other than to demonstrate that a



search had been mounted and that some definite state and local standards will be used to form the candidate pool. The practice is efficient in a superficial sense: it takes almost no time and effort to formulate. In a deeper sense, the opportunity to channel applicants through a well defined and narrow gate of eligibility is sacrificed and the burdens of narrowing the flow are shouldered at great expense later on. In sum, the assumptions that specific criteria could be formulated at an early stage and that precision in doing so would improve the process may be true; however, our Phase 1 districts do not operate on this assumption.

For instance, in one district the top decision-makers all spoke with sincere intensity about the primacy of "finding the best educational leaders." Yet, when pressed, none could specify precisely what basic training or experience requirements this need generated for candidates. Rather, the respondents argued that candidate backgrounds had to be assessed on a "case-by-case" basis to determine exactly what educational leadership meant.

By way of illustrating this admittedly circular definitional cycle, they showed us resumes of applicants who had not been invited for a particular screening and those who had, and led us through a comparison. In several cases, the uninvited applicants had exceptionally strong and impressive training, certification, and experience in curriculum and instructional leadership. In comparison, the invited applicants appeared much weaker. The explanations given for not inviting the better qualified candidates to compete ranged from, "We think he may be too high-powered to fit in here" (for an outside candidate), to "We're afraid that she's too specialized in reading and compensatory education" (for an inside candidate). This suggested to us that these leaders were at once avoiding engagement with the knotty problems of operationalizing educational leadership and preserving their flexibility and observably heavy reliance on unstated notions of "fit" or "image" (discussed shortly).

In another district where political relations were undergoing rapid changes and fluctuations, the definition of and criteria for educational leadership varied from group to group. The traditional power center's

leaders defined it in terms similar to those just discussed. The emerging constituencies defined it in terms of equity. For instance, to the increasingly strong "women's group" (as the traditional power center's leaders labeled it), educational leadership meant sex equity. Similarly, to the rapidly emerging black and hispanic constituencies, educational leadership meant racial and ethnic equity. To none of the groups vying for power--whether old and entrenched or new and rapidly emerging--did educational leadership mean specific training and experience in curriculum and instructional leadership (or even administrative leadership).

In a few other Phase 1 districts, a few top decision-makers expressed much clearer definitions of what educational leadership meant. These respondents spoke of the need for candidates to have very specific skills and behaviors, such as "curriculum training in X on the resume," "ability and willingness to develop and/or use a systematic teacher evaluation/observation system;" or "specific plans for upgrading the curriculum and bringing achievement up." Such precision was rare, however. Less than twenty percent of the top 40 to 50 decision-makers we interviewed in the ten Phase 1 districts spoke in such concrete terms. And even in their districts, this precision was not specified in writing.

This lack of criterial specificity opens the way for widespread reliance on localistic notions of "fit" or "image," which emerged as centrally important in almost every Phase 1 district. Every district had a deeply held image of a "good" principal or a "top" candidate or "just what we're looking for." This image appeared to be widely shared by central administrators, parents and principals themselves. However, time and time again, this 'fit' seemed to rest on personal perceptions of a candidate's physical presence, projection of a certain self-confidence and assertiveness, and embodiment of community values and methods of operation.

The "fit" criterion works heavily against out-of-district candidates, minorities, and women. The outsider represents an unknown quantity. One does not know how he will "fit" or embody the local culture simply because

he has not been tested and observed in this milieu. Women and minorities are by definition "different." Further, women in particular do not embody deeply held images of how a principal, a leader, is supposed to look or act.

It is the compelling demands for "fit" and cultural embodiment that best explain the still widespread selection of former local athletic coaches as high school principals and assistant principals. The coach is usually of impressive physical size and commanding presence, and projects confidence and assertiveness. Even more important, he has been publicly tested as a carrier of local cultural values and ways of interacting. Everyone has fully observed his style of doing things, his values and ideas--his "fit."

The importance of at least approximating "fit" is further illustrated by the physical and self-projective characteristics of the women principals (overwhelmingly elementary and junior high) we met. Many of these women are exceptionally tall, 5'9" or more. Through grooming and self-presentation, they project strong images of assertiveness, confidence, and control. Their image of leadership strength is typically crisper and stronger from the outset than that of their male peers. This is often recognized by the selectors themselves. As one top administrator (male) commented, "These women are really something. They stand all over most of my male candidates."

Still another illustration of the importance of "fit" comes through the contextual events that sometimes surround the selection of men who do not fully conform to local notions of "fit" and proper "image." For example, in one district the top high school principalship was contested by two male candidates: one a coach in the best coaching tradition; one an openly non-athletic, avowed intellectual, portly and of medium stature, who far outstripped the coach in professional credentials and curriculum/leadership expertise. Much to everyone's open astonishment, the intellectual won the position. However, he achieved this victory only by bringing to bear extraordinarily powerful political connections in the context of an accelerating community conflict generated by serious scandals of district mismanagement.

In another district, a male candidate was initially discounted from any serious consideration because he had consistently projected a weak image to the administrator in charge through certain features of his physical self. However, the candidate eventually gained an interview with the screening committee. During this interview, he displayed expertise and knowledge of teaching and learning, distinguishing himself as a sensitive and talented educational leader, according to screening committee members (who put great weight on interviews) and to the previously opposed administrator (who attended the screening). Consequently, the administrator--who prides himself on a commitment to upgrading the educational leadership of the principals in his charge--became an enthusiastic supporter of the candidate. He rapidly secured his appointment as a principal and now considers him "one of the best I've got."

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Most principal selectors tend to fall back on vague notions of fit in part because they have no firmer criteria or test. However, even where there are much sharper and more specific notions of the definite skills and qualities principals should have, "fit" criteria still come significantly into play. Those administrators who articulated their criteria sharply (either in general or for a particular appointment) were still constrained by the local culture's "image"--or the community's notion--of what a principal should be. This was true even when they were in the process of appointing a principal who deviated significantly from "fit" with that image.

For instance, in one district with a long tradition of choosing only men as principals, particularly at the secondary level, the administration had been eager for some time to introduce women into the secondary school administrative ranks. However, the board and parent leaders are socially quite conservative, and openly resistant to the "idea of women as high school principals," as one top administrator said. (Board members and parents we interviewed confirmed this.) The administration therefore chose a gradual approach to the problem. After careful search, they found, in his words, "just the right candidate," a very capable woman educator with a

"low-key personality," who had been given special status through an administrative internship program. Then, the administration placed her as a high school assistant principal banking on the probability that, as he said, "over time the community will come to accept the idea that women can do well [as secondary school administrators]." The administration expects that by the time the next series of secondary principalships opens in several years, the community will be "willing to accept a woman as a high school principal."

In another district, which is undergoing substantial reform and renewal of its school administrator and instructional ranks, the superintendent is vigorously exercising a strong mandate to deviate from the traditional in appointments. Traditionally, "image" and "fit" have been critical in the principal appointment process in this district. In fact, several older appointees were explicitly characterized by one of our informants as "everybody's image of what a principal should be--tall, dignified, white-haired, father-figures." The new superintendent and his top administrative staff have without doubt discarded the notion of fit to this particular image in their "new day appointments" (as they are termed by several district staff). However, they cannot escape cultural fit issues entirely. Rather, they openly recognize and articulate that the new wave of school leaders must match fundamental, local cultural norms requiring good social skills and pleasant appearance at least well enough to be basically acceptable to parents and teachers. As the superintendent said, "There is a [definite norm] here for good manners and an attractive appearance. It's very important to people, and we have to take it into some account."

Just how this is taken into account became quickly apparent as our visit progressed. On the one hand, the "new day appointees" that we met were not only impressively qualified professionally, but were also a strikingly attractive and charming group. On the other hand, in the one or two cases where the administration had chosen to override these norms in making an appointment, the leadership was well aware that this might stimulate resistance, and had fully prepared to handle it.

In spite of the rhetoric to the contrary, then, educational leadership is generally not a well specified or widely applied criterion for selecting principals. On the one hand, specific educational leadership skills are seldom if ever articulated as part of criterial statements. On the other hand, when professionalism competes with "image" and "fit," the latter seem to be favored unless exceptional circumstances prevail.

Some of these examples move beyond the eligibility aspect of the selection criteria stage for a reason. They show how selectors know in advance what they are looking for--physical size, grooming, goodness of local fit--but they also know these are not legally acceptable as categories for eligibility. Four of our ten districts provide selectors with a checklist of things they cannot ask candidates about: age, family relations, criminal record, and so forth. Many vital criterial concerns fall into this same category.

#### Forming the Applicant Pool

These steps typically lead to an applicant pool that is made up of local candidates, most of whom have been aiming at the position for several years. The typical candidate began as a teacher or coach (especially at the high school level) and through willingness to stay after school, handle discipline and serve on committees, came to the attention of the supervising principal. This principal encouraged the candidate in the direction of the principalship by urging a return to college for administrative certification, providing opportunities for more visible committee work (for example, a district-wide curriculum or textbook committee), and "talking up" the candidate to other principals and administrators. The candidate assisted actively (but not too avidly) in this process of "becoming known" by taking care to present himself as a future candidate and seeking opportunities to learn and be visible in management roles.

After gaining a widespread reputation as a "comer" through this process, the candidate became an assistant principal or a vice principal, or perhaps a head teacher, department head, or status leader of the faculty, or

even a curriculum coordinator or reading/math consultant (within the district). After an appropriate tenure in this sort of position, which the candidate used to become more visible to the top decision-making group and cement his reputation, the candidate began to apply and screen for principalships.

Usually (but not always), the aspirant received some encouragement or signal from his mentors and supporters that it was time to begin applying. Depending on the types of openings available, the candidate may go through two or three screenings before receiving an appointment. For example, if there were several long-standing candidates in the queue the first time, the candidate may have been passed over (but not in a discouraging manner). Similarly, all the openings may have been for large or difficult schools, while first principalships are usually for smaller, easier schools.

However, if the candidate has successfully negotiated the earlier steps in his grooming process, and does not fail at this last hurdle of applying (and waiting) for a position, appointment is only a matter of waiting.

Women, blacks, and other minorities typically are selected into the applicant pool through these same steps. Affirmative action and federal projects such as Follow Through and Title I have enhanced awareness of district administrators and school boards in general, and provided more opportunities, but the process of becoming a female or minority candidate is much the same. Further, the identification and mentoring provided the candidate by the early supervising principal very often crosses sex and race lines. We heard many stories of black males mentoring white females, white males mentoring black females, and black males mentoring white males. It appears that the principal who wishes to come to the favorable attention of the central administration is on the lookout for likely future principals in general, and, when there is an affirmative action consciousness, for likely women and minority candidates in particular.

For instance, in one district a recently appointed, white male principal expressed deeply respectful gratitude to, in his words, "my first

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However, if the candidate has successfully completed the first steps in his grooming process, and does not fail at any step (and waiting) for a position, appointment is on the horizon.

Women, blacks, and other minorities typically do not move through the applicant pool through these same steps. Affirmative action projects such as Follow Through and Title I have enabled some district administrators and school boards in general to

the entire example was related to us by several informants as an illustration of the superintendent's instability and increasingly inappropriate behavior.

However, some of our Phase 1 districts claimed this method as a significant policy option in at least cases of special need. In another less typical district in this regard, the top administrators make it a routine practice to, in the words of one, "raid other districts." These leaders track promising candidates (principals or assistants) at professional meetings and through their networks. As one described the process, "I'll call people I know [in Jones School District] and ask them to give me the names of the five or six best assistant principals and principals they've got. Pretty soon, the same names begin to crop up. Then I'll go after them to see if I can get them to come here." This particular district actually used the process of outside recruitment to identify and hire one of the three principals studied. In this case, the school in question had particular and special leadership needs, and the administration determined that local candidates could not meet them.

Internships, which are more properly characterized as alternatives to common practices (and are treated in Chapter 4), seem to be of two basic types. One is the "ordinary" type, which is designed to sharpen, codify, and publish the grooming process. This type serves to make visible--and more accessible--the steps to the principalship. As a consequence, it seems to encourage a wider range of people to seek candidacy. A second type of internship is the "equity" internship, which is designed specifically to increase the number of women and minority candidates.

Regardless of whether an internship is of the "ordinary" type or the "equity" type, its impact on the principal selection process in general is quite variable. On the one hand, an internship program can serve to alter the selection criteria as well as change the composition of the applicant pool. In fact, if the district so desires, an internship program can be sequential for each step in the selection process. For instance, one of our Phase 1 districts was using an internship for precisely this purpose. The new administration, after review, had decided that the entrenched and

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However, some of our Phase 1 districts claim a significant policy option in at least cases of special typical district in this regard, the top administrator practice to, in the words of one, "raid other districts back promising candidates (principals or assistants) through their networks. As one described the process, "I go to people I know [in Jones School District] and ask them to recommend the five or six best assistant principals and principals. Then the same names begin to crop up. Then I'll go and get them to come here." This particular district process of outside recruitment to identify and hire one was studied. In this case, the school in question had leadership needs, and the administration determined they could not meet them.

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Leadership merit concerns get expressed most emphatically through the sponsorship-grooming process which culminates in membership as a serious prospect in the applicant pool (and which should not be confused with political patronage). Board members and other sponsoring network members define merit as they think they see it manifested in younger staff on the job and after hours in the community. (The operation of the sponsorship-grooming process is treated in more detail in Chapter 3.) Both merit and equity concerns get crystallized in the form of ongoing perceptions of performance and pragmatic tests by mentors of protegees. If there is a general awareness that black administrators are needed, for instance, the white mentors will look for, groom, and begin to advocate for those black aspirants who perform well as 'bridging personalities,' that is, who relate effectively to both whites and blacks. This approach is deemed legitimate, not because it truly compares applicants with other applicants but because it appears to be grounded solidly in the interactions of everyday life within the locality. It is efficient because it cuts through the red tape of credential sifting and moves swiftly toward selection.

### Screening

Screening typically involves two or three steps, which increase steadily in importance. First, there is a paper screening of resumes and applications, which is usually conducted by the personnel office and serves primarily to determine that minimal certification and experience standards have been met.

Next, there is usually a formalized screening interview of the eligible candidates, that is, those who passed the paper screening. This interview is important. A candidate who has come through the grooming as a borderline or weak applicant can become popular through a strong performance in the screening interview. Conversely, a strong candidate can hurt his chances by doing poorly in the interview.

The form of the screening interview is varied. It ranges from individual or team interviews by only the superintendent and his top staff;

to team interviews by a specially appointed committee of six or seven members, including parents, teachers, and lower level administrators; to very large, joint committees involving 15 to 20 parents, teachers, principals, vice-principals, and area superintendents representing several openings. Generally, however, committee control if not actual membership is concentrated in the hands of the top administrators appointed by the superintendent, who take care to guide the committee toward an advisory or feedback role and who sometimes (but not always) determine the choice of individuals who sit on the committee.

For instance, in one district, the committee is carefully instructed prior to the beginning of screening that they are there to provide "feedback" and "reaction," in the words of one top administrator. The committee is discouraged from engaging in any ranking or rating of candidates for fear that this might somehow come to carry special weight. In another district, where the committee does rate and rank candidates (as is more typical), the administrator in charge is very careful to instruct the group at several points--prior to beginning, prior to compiling the rankings, prior to voting the final recommendations--that they are there "to advise only." Here, committee members are sometimes resentful that, as one expressed it, "we don't get our first choice, or even our second;" however, in spite of the fact that the committee numerically rates and ranks candidates, "choice" is an inappropriate term for its role and activities. In still another district, the committee is broadly composed to represent several constituencies. However, the choice of individuals selected to represent these varied groups is heavily influenced by one top administrator, who tends to select individuals known to him or recommended to him by those he trusts, and the groups have little or no say in who represents them.

Just which groups have a part in the screening through representation on the committee depends on a number of local factors. For instance, one district emphatically excludes parents and teachers from the screening because these groups have been traditionally viewed as "potential trouble," according to one top leader. However, parents and teachers in this district manage to involve themselves in the selection process by petitioning and

phoning key administrators and board members. Interestingly, these mechanisms have enabled these groups to significantly influence more than one selection, possibly more so than if they had had membership on the screening committee. For instance, in one of the cases we studied, the very powerful parents at an affluent, high status high school in essence determined the appointment of the principal by phoning and individually pressuring board members and administrators. According to one top administrator, the principal would not have been appointed but for this, because, as our informant said, "He's a little too young and there are other good people who've been waiting for a school, but these are really powerful parents and we had to pay attention to them."

Informants in other districts which seek to include various constituencies often expressed both positive and negative feelings about the appropriateness and value of such inclusiveness. For instance, in one district which--by order of the court--includes teachers, parents, principals, assistant principals, and central administrators on its screening committees, each group had some criticism to make of the other. District staff accused parents of lack of expertise and deliberate manipulations of ratings to serve favored candidates, that is, those candidates who "would let the parents run the show." Parents accused school staff (teachers and administrators) of general bad faith. Teachers accused administrators of, in the words of one very typical teacher respondent, "ganging-up" to control the process because "there are always more of them on the committee and they all think alike anyway." And administrators accused teachers of being "hostile and disinterested." We could identify no major differences in credentials of the various candidates supported by these different groups. Rather, the main question for each constituency seemed to be: which candidate supports "our" viewpoint? In spite of this sometimes vituperative infighting, each group was emphatic in the wish not to revert to earlier days, when there were no screening committees and the entire selection process was the province of the superintendent and board, who appointed by political patronage.

In contrast, in other districts where participation was almost equally broad-based, the various groups worked together smoothly, and generally

expressed acceptance and appreciation of the opportunity to share perspectives. However, in districts where participation in screening was broad, top administrators often expressed some ambiguity about having extended membership in the selection process beyond their own inner circle. A number noted that extension is more time-consuming and logistically difficult. In addition, several pointed out that it can be dangerous to bring the various constituencies together, particularly if local politics are conflictual at the moment. Finally, several commented that broadening participation can be both constraining, for it increases visibility and public accountability, and frustrating, for broadly composed committees sometimes strongly resist the candidates initially preferred by the administration. On the whole, however, administrators in the more inclusive districts were generally positive, and viewed broader participation as offering two important advantages. First, it gives various constituencies an opportunity to test the candidate. However minimal this test may be, it can be revealing. Second, it is a method of conflict control and management. Better to deal with duly chosen representatives of constituencies than with a mass of constituents. Further, allowing various constituencies to participate in decision-making can be a good way to win their support. As one superintendent said, "It can be really frustrating sometimes when I'm sure about who I want. Then it's a farce that I don't see the point in going through it. But when I don't know, or when I'm not sure, it's really a help. I've changed my mind several times because of how someone performed in front of that committee."

Interview questions or topics for screening range from carefully constructed, standardized questions that are put to every interviewee by the same committee member each time, to free-wheeling, extemporaneous topics raised by any member of the committee who can get the floor. The substance of the questions is usually quite general, and tends to concentrate on the educational philosophy and attitudes of the candidates. There are often questions that seek to simulate situations, such as, "what would you do if ...." However, these seldom focus directly on the real situation of the school in question, but rather are generic. Typical questions we saw were: "What would you do if you had to improve school discipline?" "What would you



do with an angry parent?" Interviewers use questions not so much to get at the "right answers," as to test the interviewee's reflexes in the areas of poise, confidence, self-presentation, and "fit" with the local image of what a principal should be. 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.

Screeners we interviewed expressed great concern about the limitations of the screening interview in terms of its ability to predict success on the job. While the screening interview is universally regarded as an essential part of the process, both participants and decision-makers constantly fret over its fragilities and shortcomings. All of our districts had been disappointed at least once by candidates who interviewed superbly and later performed very poorly on the job. The need to apply some sort of performance test is deeply felt, and is the driving force behind the grooming process inherent in the candidate's rise through the ranks. Whatever the crudities and limitations of this grooming process, it at least seems to provide a district with some sense of actual performance in a variety of situations.

Finally, the screening committees summarize their responses to the candidates for the final decision-maker, the superintendent, by several means. These include individually applied numerical ratings or rankings; consensual agreements about candidates' strengths and weaknesses; and discussions of concerns and reactions. Our Phase 1 districts were about equally divided in their use of these options, with slightly more making use of numerical ratings and ranking than not. Like the scoring of questions, however, in no case had the numerical ranking and rating systems been psychometrically composed or evaluated. Once the summary is completed, the screening committees generally submit a formal (or sometimes informal) recommendation of three to five finalists. These are frequently but not always in rank order, and the specifics of the committee's deliberations are seldom conveyed.

The last interview belongs to the superintendent. If there are several finalists, he usually personally interviews each. Depending on

the situation, the superintendent may genuinely use this interview to help finalize his appointment decision. However, even then, the superintendent usually has some idea of which of the finalists he is most interested in at this last hurdle, and the interview is a means of confirming or disconfirming that impression. In other instances where the superintendent has essentially already made his decision, this last interview may serve as a "get acquainted" session with a promising candidate, who is being initiated into the selection process. In fact, on more than one occasion, top administrators spoke of, in the words of one, "presenting X to the superintendent this time around" as an important step in his or her grooming. In still other situations where the decision has already been made--perhaps based on larger administrative considerations having little to do with the particular opening in question--the superintendent's interviews with all the finalists may have primarily symbolic value. For instance, it can serve to signal to all that the superintendent at least observes the forms and rituals of the game. It can also serve to soothe and encourage good candidates who, for one reason or another, will not be appointed this time around. Virtually all of our Phase 1 superintendent interviewees spoke of having used final interviews for all of these purposes at one time or another.

While the variation in the composition and activity of the screening committees was great, the roles of these committees in relation to superintendents illuminated both the superintendent's power and his cultural boundaries. For example, in one district we observed a committee composed of three high ranking district administrators, two of whom sit on all screenings and one of whom rotates according to whether the opening is at the elementary or secondary level. The committee does team interviews of each candidate individually, and is careful to use standardized questions with a numerical scoring system. Much attention is given to continual refinement and improvement of the questions and scoring from year to year, and this effort is taken quite seriously. These administrators have worked closely with each other and with the superintendent for 20 years, as they all rose through the ranks together. The committee is powerful. It acts exclusively to develop selection criteria for each opening, compose the applicant pool by issuing

direct invitations to long-groomed candidates to screen, and virtually make the employment decision. However, exercising his intimate working relationship, the superintendent holds informal chats about candidates with the committee members during the screenings, so that he and the committee are usually in full accord by the time the finalists' names are presented to him. In this district, the screening step serves as the final certification of well known, groomed, and tested candidates from within the system whom as one of the screeners said, "everyone has had his eye on" for some time. The superintendent puts his strong stamp on the process through his close working relationship with the three key administrators who operate the procedures.

Another district's screening committee is composed of three or four parents and teachers from every school with an opening being filled. The committee may reach 21 members, whom the candidate faces as a body for a lengthy unstructured interview. Following interviews with all candidates, this large group then splits into the individual school teams to meet with three top district administrators to discuss their reactions to the various candidates. This procedure is of long standing and has been inherited by the present superintendent, who had never used anything like this before coming into the district. Recognizing that the committee is too much a part of the district's 'way' of selecting principals to eliminate, yet wanting to establish control, the present superintendent has instituted pre-screening through individual interviews of all candidates prior to their presentation to the large committee. Hence, most candidates that go before the committee are desirable to the administration. The superintendent is candid about his intent to control the selection process through the pre-screening. In fact, he often largely decides at this point whom he would like to place in particular openings. However, the final employment decisions about which candidate goes to which school definitely factor in the reactions of the screening committee. On more than one occasion the superintendent and his staff have changed their impression of a candidate due to the reaction of the screening committee. On one or two other occasions, the superintendent has been persuaded to accept unshakeable committee resistance to a candidate he favored.

The importance ascribed to group interviews in all our Phase 1 districts cannot be overstated. This is the step in the procedures which is most universally regarded as the test of both merit and legitimacy. With respect to merit, the importance springs from the view of the interview as an examination. The candidate must display to others the ability to "think on his feet" (as one informant said) and to communicate well orally. These are widely believed to be relevant indicators of leadership ability (though many selectors regard them as insufficient) because leadership is directly associated with the criterion of social perceptions of the visual and oral presentation of self. Where subsequent events disclose the final choice for principal was poor, selectors assume that their perceptual discernment was faulty, as a result either of their own inabilities to "see" accurately or of the shortcomings of the interview per se. Virtually never do selectors question their reliance on the criterion of social perceptions of the visual and oral presentation of self.

We do not see how this belief differs in any way from its counterparts in the American traditions of job interviewing for hundreds of key occupations. Indeed, it is in this sense that the screening interview continues to have great symbolic importance for legitimizing appointments. Candidates who are not examined by a formally composed group of diverse but significant interviewers are regarded with suspicion. They did not compete 'in the open' with other candidates. They did not display their competencies.

When we note that in seven out of ten districts the screening takes an average of 30-40 minutes per encounter, that the questions are usually neither spontaneous nor answerable in terms of some independent standard of correctness, and that we could not identify differences in selection preferences as a function of who or how many screening participants there were, we are noting that the actual predictive significance of this step in the process is very slight. According to the many screeners we questioned across ten systems, the interviews in effect block or veto at most one in twenty otherwise expected selections! And, in half of these instances, the candidates get selected on a second or third attempt in a subsequent year.

A functional analysis therefore suggests that the screening process exists and has high visibility and importance, not because it upgrades merit selection, but because it mediates and affirms the appointive authority exercised by the superintendent. Close study of this stage discloses the ways in which superintendents delegate and extend their control over school systems by fielding screeners, by sharing with them through top associates, and by taking their advice--which confirms their preferences 80 percent of the time.

If this analysis is sound, revisions in screenings have a lot to do with adjusting the system to changes in superintendents, but very little to do with upgrading the validity of the selection decisions themselves. So, too, the screening procedures reflect the limits the community places on the exercise of appointive authority by any superintendent. In communities where patronage is widely practiced by some board members and some parent leaders, the superintendent "presides" over the consensus reached by patrons. The screeners are composed of those who serve these patrons or those who aspire to join the patronage network. In districts which rely heavily and trustingly on their superintendents, the screeners can be dominated politely yet conclusively by his staff aides.

For these reasons, very few school board members take a direct part in screening. They shape the candidate pool instead, or (as became especially clear in Phase 2) the larger policy concerns of the selection process.

#### The Employment Decision

The employment decision is generally made by the superintendent from among the finalists presented by the screening committee. He is seldom if ever bound by either legalities or policies to make the appointment only from the finalist list sent him by the screeners. In other words, he can, if he chooses, appoint a candidate who is not on the list. However, we found only a single instance where a superintendent had done this. The political, cultural, and symbolic pressures at this stage are much too strong; the costs

of ignoring committee recommendations are too high. Generally, superintendents work in various ways to insure that all of the finalists recommended are at least minimally acceptable. In the rare event that this does not happen, the superintendent will generally reject the entire list of finalists and instruct the screening committee to start over again.

In making his decision, the superintendent takes into account the reactions of the screening committee, solicits the opinions and recommendations of his top staff, and considers the reactions of the school board (which is the official employing body and must approve his choice). Nevertheless, the superintendent is the chief decision-maker. This is not to say that the superintendent can consistently make appointments in an arbitrary or authoritarian fashion, nor does it mean the board or the community are powerless. (For instance, sometimes a superintendent may informally "sound out" his board before bringing a particular appointment up for a public vote.) In fact, we saw several cases where the community and/or the board were powerful, direct actors in particular selections, but in a behind-the-scenes fashion.

For instance, in one district the board had been galvanized by the former superintendent's attempt to appoint as a principal an individual whose moral character and professional competence were alleged to be questionable. The board's rejection of this appointment was accomplished without its ever being brought to a vote, and marked the end of this superintendent's heretofore virtually unchallenged power, and the beginning of a bruising series of board confrontations that eventually forced his retirement. The board then sought out and hired the present superintendent, giving him a mandate for reform and renewal of the system.

In another case, the district administration sought to appoint an acting principal to fill a vacancy created in the late fall of the school year, and then fill the position permanently by transfer the next school year (most probably with a different administrator than the one filling the acting appointment). One board member with a particular interest in the school

became quite distressed at this plan. By his own account, he "felt the children deserved a full time, permanent principal now and not all this instability." Therefore, he blocked the acting appointment--again without its ever coming to a vote--and forced the administration to open the position for screening and make a permanent appointment immediately.

Board influence on the principal selection process often reflects a press for improvement in merit-based selection. However, we did encounter a few instances of board opposition to the appointment of women and minorities. For instance, in one district, community resistances to women as secondary principals are shared by several (but not all) board members. This has led to administrative hesitation in appointing women at this level. Similarly, in another case, several informants expressed an opinion that the administration's recent attempt to appoint a minority principal to a particular school was blocked by the board member whose district encompassed the school, specifically because the candidate happened to be black.

Superintendents, without exception, put their own reputations on the line when they recommend a candidate to a school board. If they have not investigated the serious candidates before screening, they often do it afterward, narrowing their queries to the top three persons. They may do extra telephoning to supervisors; they may send a trusted staff member out to 'shadow' the candidates on the job; and they may even have legal counsel arrange for checks of personal histories in order to scan for felonious, marital, or financial misconduct. Above all, if they have doubts, they defer decision and make transfers or acting appointments. Where a groomed candidate enjoys the sponsorship of a board member, the superintendent may have to devise ways to rationalize or even cover over gaps in the qualifications of the candidates. This is done as much to protect his own reputation as it is to fulfill the wishes of board members. In addition, the superintendent must condition his choice with considerations of how parents and teachers in the school might react, how board members will respond, court orders (or threats of suits) mandating equity, and other administrative and political concerns that face him at the moment. In sum, his reputation rides on all of

the factors and constituencies that come together at the moment of the appointment decision.

Thus, from the superintendent's perspective, each principal employment decision is a thread that he is weaving into the fabric of the entire district. To use another metaphor, each decision is a very important piece on his district gameboard. Hence with each decision, the superintendent is typically trading off among several educational, political, and administrative goals for both the individual school and the district as a whole. The pressures and cross-currents around the decision to employ are generally complex and can be quite intense. Superintendents in Phase 1 districts were usually quite candid and articulate about the different factors that typically have to be taken into account in any one selection instance. These included: seizing an opportunity to promote staff (assistant principal to principal, small school to larger school); solving administrative problems (giving a principal in trouble at one school a second chance at another); moving principals about for professional development purposes; protecting seniority in the event of future school closings; showing responsiveness to political pressures from boards and communities; and composing administrative teams (principals, assistants, deans) across several schools.

In other words, the decision to appoint a principal for Smith School is not independent of many other considerations. The importance of this reality cannot be overstated. The web of connectedness typically reaches to several other schools (and issues) at least, and in the larger sense, is spread across the entire district. Hence, the superintendent's reputation is on the line not just as far as Smith School is concerned, but also insofar as the appointment vibrates and shifts the larger web.

The final stage of selection contains many strains for superintendents but very few for any other parties, including the appointee. Because the terms are so well understood by candidates, there is little or nothing to be negotiated concerning salary or terms and conditions. Candidates who withdraw do so before or immediately after screening, not later. Board



approval is equally routine and predictable because it has been factored into the early stages of the entire selection process. Where there is a belated flare-up of board dissent or of parent or teacher protest, it is most often a sign of strains in the tenure of the superintendent and is thereby merely one among a series of problematic incidents. In about 28 of the 30 appointments we traced in detail, there was no discussion, reaction, or even delay associated with the decision to appoint once it was presented to the board.

### Roles of Superintendents and Boards

Who selects school principals? There are a few districts in which the answer would be the board, the senior administrators, teacher representatives and parent leaders. In one of our districts, for instance, a federal judge ordered biracial, multiethnic participation of these groups in screening and rating candidates. In another where court-ordered desegregation changed the racial mix of public involvement and leadership in profound ways, a committee of parents and board members played a major role in identifying and advocating local candidates.

In seven out of ten Phase 1 districts, however, the selection process is almost wholly determined, and candidate appointment is nearly always dictated by, three sets of players occupying three role positions in each system. If we assigned weights to sources of influence over choices of principals, we would probably assign 60 percent of the influence to superintendents, 20 percent to veteran senior administrators ranging from deputy superintendents to personnel directors to long-term principals, and the remaining 20 percent to some school board members. On a board of seven, for example, two members may attend closely to leadership selection, as tasks and political specialization emerge over time.

It is for this reason that we have provided so many examples of the superintendent's ways of controlling principal selection throughout this chapter. We also believe that many researchers and commentators on public education have not understood the full nature and implications of this high

level of control. In particular, the high visibility and symbolic value accorded the screening activities tend to mask the centrality of the superintendent's control. The essential nature of this control is that principals are beholden to superintendents and this service "at the pleasure of the chief" holds through the line of now rapid turnover among superintendents, for any new superintendent can transfer or remove his predecessor's appointees. Size and scale of districts have little effect on this generalization. Some superintendents delegate this authority to a deputy or even an assistant superintendent, but in most instances this is a retrievable authority. In one of our districts, for instance, where the system faced imminent bankruptcy and dissolution, the superintendent was so preoccupied with fiscal survival as to place the function almost completely in the hands of his deputy, but this is an extremely uncommon practice.

The superintendent controls principal selection from the formation of the applicant pool through the appointment. He does so because this is his primary means of system management. The principals are his program implementors. And, he does so because so many other decisions he faces each year--resource allocations, teacher union relations, operating and maintenance, facility planning, student discipline, and parent relations--impinge upon or are carried out through the principals. Finally, he does so, according to those we interviewed, because he was usually a principal for many years himself and he believes he knows how to judge educational leadership as well or better than others in his district. After making some choices over time, moreover, he has loyalties to reciprocate as he rotates some principals and retires others.

Superintendents in larger districts cannot perform this influential role adequately without mobilizing the help of others. Thus, in every district we studied, selection proceeds through the activities of from two to five senior associates. With the singular exception of personnel officers, this staff cadre is composed with little regard for the formal office held by its members. It is composed rather, of those who share the deepest personal confidence of the superintendent and whose judgment of people he regards as

keen in the way he thinks his own is keen. For instance, in one district the superintendent relied upon his administrative assistant, while bypassing the role positions of assistant superintendents for instruction and personnel (whose incumbents he intended to replace as soon as possible). In another, the superintendent relied heavily upon the assistant superintendents of elementary and secondary education, both his own appointees, and his special administrative assistant, also his hand-picked choice. And, in still another district, the superintendent relied upon his deeply trusted personnel director and deputy for instruction, both of whom had shared 25-year career paths with him, including serving under him as faculty during his own principalship.

The members of this cadre, whose second echelon always includes a few principals, can exert considerable independent influence as they identify, encourage, and "talk up" various candidates at various stages of the process. The personnel director, who sometimes is an associate or assistant superintendent, can be of particular importance because he is in full-time command of information about human resources. He can also introduce procedural innovations and rationalize them in terms of trends he hears about at association meetings and workshops. In one district, for example, the personnel director designed and administered to all principalship applicants an essay examination. He not only makes up the questions, he is always the only reader and appraiser of the written answers. He can use this to narrow the applicant pool. He and his peers elsewhere also, in their words, "keep tabs" on promising aspirants. They devise and maintain personnel records on all employees, and these include evaluations designed by themselves. In addition, these professionals fuse the ability to explain what constitutes modern personnel administration with the ability to facilitate patronage, mentorship, grooming, and 'little departures' from formal standards when the occasion demands. This position is so sensitive that it tends to be filled in one of two somewhat exaggerated ways: Personnel directors are appointed because they are ambitious, discerning, professional "brokers" (as one defined himself), or because they are earnest, well intentioned, but uninfluential "water boys" for other top administrators, particularly superintendents. It is the former group from which future superintendents and state agency directors are drawn.

Board members as a committee of the whole or as a majority bloc do not choose principals. The game is too intricate to be played by such a group and it takes too much time away from other pursuits. Boards therefore perform two critical functions. As a whole or as a policy-setting majority, they define the expectations of the community. Where these have been quite clearly built over the years and seem to a board majority to be what the community wants, or should have, this definitional function remains quiescent. At other junctures where deep change is desired, it leads to a change in superintendents, deputies, and procedures (as became especially apparent in the Phase 2 districts).

Secondly, some board members invest in the personnel selection network, as we have called it earlier. Their peers know them as such. Teachers and parent leaders and mayors know them as well. Where they specialize in this way in tandem with the superintendent and a proactive personnel director, these individuals build up a within-staff constituency. In this respect, they provide mutual aid and advocacy for some staff and thus sacrifice their own policy-making independence in return for increased influence over resource allocation and personnel, rewards and punishments. (In one Phase 1 district, for instance, our informants uniformly explained that minority principals were appointed through just such a network: the key minority board member, who had deep connections in city and state politics, in essence brokered the appointments of minority principals with the superintendent and personnel director.) As such, these board members are most often effective defenders of the system's status quo. They are neither reformers nor reactionaries. When the system undergoes deep or rapid impacts from others--when it gets caught up in economic or political changes of some magnitude--these board members do not get re-elected or reappointed. As they are replaced, the principal selection subsystems then begin to twist and heave with intense waves of uncertainty. The network decays or snaps under the cross-currents of change. This was well underway in one of our Phase 1 districts, and beginning to happen in two others. A fourth appeared to be on the verge. However, this was most clearly illuminated for us in our Phase 2 sites, and we shall show later how it can produce profound changes in who becomes principal.

A disadvantage for non-specialized board members when it comes to influencing leadership selection stems from the fact of lack of familiarity with the details of the principalship as an occupational domain. Board members from backgrounds as teachers and school administrators are exceptions, but others are seldom confident of their grasp of what may or may not be arcane about the position. As policy leaders themselves, board members have many ways of gauging general features of organizational leadership ability, but they remain a bit hesitant about the special, allegedly more unique features. In this way, they defer to their specialized peers or to the superintendent. This deference is so commonplace, in fact, that it is often stated as a witting division of responsibility. As one board member commented, "Oh, that sort of thing is in the good hands of Dr. X;" and another, "I could take part, but I concentrate on other issues."

#### Diverse Thoughtways

Our comparative case study approach afforded us an opportunity to think through a few of the diverse ways in which participants themselves conceptualize the principal selection process. While specific practices vary greatly across local districts, the ways participants think about the process display only a few such variations.

Perhaps the oldest and best understood conceptual model is that of social similarity. Selectors and their local constituents want principals who are most like the social characteristics they attribute to themselves. This can also be called the simple fit assumption. It entails credentials and qualifications to the extent that these have community salience. For example, a particular university was the dominant supplier for a century of nearly all of the professional and executive personnel in one of our Phase 1 districts. Being a graduate of that institution was correlated with race, social class, political party, lodge membership, spouse, church, and consumer preferences. Therefore, until very recently, principal selection consisted of following out the path of one's alma mater. Performance when a student was unimportant.

A second model might be called social similarity plus. Here, the sources of social fit remain important but the board and administration seek to add a second layer of considerations. These consist of extra credentials, tests of exceptional service, and other equally competitive refinements. The model allows occasional departures from social similarity so that some few women or ethnic minority candidates are chosen, always with the proviso that they can adapt cheerfully to the social similarity standard.

A third model might be termed pluralistic. Here, some aspirants are groomed because of their ideal fit, as in the social similarity models. Some others are chosen because new interest groups with new demands have organized; for example, the parents of children with special needs, or the hispanic bilingual advocates. In this model, a corps of leadership generalists is maintained while some vacancies are given over to emerging specialties.

Finally, a fourth conceptualization of principal selection is found in thoughtways of those identified with school improvement as a kind of applied science. We would call this the reform model. It assumes that the principalship can be analyzed, the analytic features converted into criteria, and the search for appointees put on a criterion-harnessed schedule of appraisal. None of our districts have fully adopted or use this model, yet some of them have some staff aware of it as part of the cloud (or is it a rainbow?) of sustained criticism and "professionalized reform" efforts common to professional education since Sputnik in 1958. To this extent, for those who want to find the edge of liberal educational progressivism, this model enters some people's thinking and action within local school systems when leadership selection is the topic.

#### Interpretation and Conclusions from Phase 1

Far from developing skepticism about the importance of the principalship for affecting the quality of teaching and learning outcomes and public confidence, our interviews and observations in Phase 1 confirmed our

sense of this importance at every turn and in every district from coast to coast. For instance, it appears that principals draw their sense of mission in significant degree from their selection experience. Without clearly articulated criteria and reasons for the final employment decision, principals can be left wondering exactly why they were appointed, and subsequently be undercut in their leadership roles, especially in the critical first year or two at the school. Several of our Phase 1 principals expressed frustration and anger at the lack of information they had received about their own appointment.

In addition, the selection process has powerful and widespread symbolic value. Our Phase 1 interviews and observations at every level of the district hierarchy revealed that a principal appointment is perhaps the most visible action a superintendent takes. Many, many individuals and groups observe it very closely, even when they are not directly involved. The way the process is structured and implemented widely communicates the values and operational style of the top leadership, as well as goals and aims for the district. If the process is perceived to be fair, accessible, open, and professional--or struggling in this direction--trust and confidence are enhanced. This seems to be the case even where there are disagreements about a particular choice. If, however, the process is perceived to be the opposite, the effect reverberates negatively throughout the system. For instance, several of the principals we interviewed spoke of feeling discouraged professionally by such selection systems, even after having successfully negotiated them to secure their appointments.

Hence, by concentrating on selection rather than upon performance, we became acutely informed about the ways in which the performance-impact relationship is culturally, politically, and economically constrained. The cultural variations from community to community are so great that it is not possible to construct an abstract or uniform model of the relationship. What board members, community leaders, parents and teachers want as schooling outcomes nowhere coincides with some national policy or logical theory. Locally diverse educational goals tend over time to become knitted into a

subculturally coherent set of themes and preferences, which makes sense to local actors and which may or may not place a high value on the principal as a leader of the instructional program, of teacher supervision and evaluation, and of student achievement. These local themes, however, inform and drive the selection process, unless subcultural changes or community conflicts have destroyed their coherence.

The polity of the district is no longer separated or buffered against the polity of the community as a whole, if it ever was. Therefore, except where court orders intervene, in an era of scarcity, appointments of principals are subject to the influence of the local political marketplace, and in some districts that marketplace extends to include much of the state. A superintendent has a great deal of calculating to do under these circumstances. Educational leadership merits become but one element in his calculations. The economic constraints have already been outlined. For the most part, they operate to distort key stages in an equity-oriented, merit-based principal selection procedure, even where the board and superintendent may be striving to create and preserve such a procedure.

The selection process thus attenuates the idealized relation between principals' competencies and enhanced school effectiveness.

However, there are ways of strengthening procedures in order to protect against attenuation. We saw several of these in the first phase of our research, and the second phase of research identified others. The selection process as it actually works in many school districts departs so profoundly from the idealized model, however, as to lead us to infer that much more must be learned about the cultural, political, and interpersonal functions of the principalship before development efforts can be devised that will in fact result in fitting leadership means to educational ends.



CHAPTER 3  
PATHWAYS TO THE PRINCIPALSHIP

Introduction

In Chapter 2, we described and characterized common practices in principal selection as revealed by cross-case analyses of our ten Phase 1 districts and 30 individual selections. This provides an elaborated picture of what the process is like from the overall perspective, but sacrifices portrayal of the more intimate and personal experiences of individual principals and candidates.

These individual views are important for a number of reasons. First, although candidates are often in the dark about certain features and meanings of the race they are running, their experiences and perceptions reflect the larger process. Second, the individual experiences illuminate and illustrate certain variations on the larger story. For instance, women and men appear often to have somewhat different patterns of personal decision-making in deciding to become a candidate. Third, those who have candidated for the principalship have reactions to and beliefs about the experience. These deserve to be reported, not only because they are interesting and worthy of respect in and of themselves, but also because they affect what a candidate thinks about being a principal. How one is chosen for a job, how one perceives and feels about that choice process, affects the way in which the job is carried out.

Therefore, in this chapter, we offer several illustrative stories from our sample of 30 tracked selections (three per district). We have chosen to offer these stories intact--with appropriate commentary about the larger district picture, which is sometimes different from what the candidate believes to be happening--in order to give the flavor of individual participants' experiences. We have selected these ten stories as representative of the larger themes and dynamics of selection, and as illuminative of some of the variations and finer points of the over-arching patterns.

In particular, these individual experiences illuminate a central finding about common practices in principal selection: the process itself cannot be characterized as merit-based or equity-centered. As some of our examples show, this is not to say that good candidates never enter the race or that good principals are never chosen. Rather, it is simply that when merit and equity win out, it is frequently due to chance or just the right combination of circumstances at a given moment; to exceptional personal ambition and political skill; or to leadership talent so outstanding that it is universally recognized, and would probably rise to the top in virtually any circumstance. (Pseudonyms have been used for all individuals and schools.)

#### Jessie Pratt: An 'Election' by Her Peers

Jessie Pratt is a tall black woman who, at the time of our visit, was completing her first year as principal of Lee Elementary, a small, beautifully maintained, older suburban school.

Pratt began her career in the district in the early 1960s as a classroom teacher at Jackson Elementary, and spent 14 years in this job. From the beginning, she had some aspirations towards administration, but these were not particularly strong or well-thought-out. As she said: "When I started in education, I always wanted to try all roles eventually." As a teacher, she became a unit leader at Jackson, which was essentially an elected leadership position. With the encouragement of her principal and her teaching colleagues, she next decided to apply for a position as a district-wide subject-area consultant. As she said: "I tried the consultant role as a first non-teaching experience, to see if I would like it. And, the teachers I worked with [as unit leader] kept encouraging me to apply for it."

Pratt applied for the consultancy by filling out a yearly checklist that is distributed to all staff to ascertain interest in administrative positions. There was no screening, but she did "talk with the curriculum director [of the subject area]." Pratt secured her appointment as consultant beginning the following Fall, and was very successful in the position: at

the end of her first year, she won a district-wide award as outstanding consultant. Interestingly, Pratt herself did not mention this during our interview; rather, a number of other informants mentioned it with no little pride, for Pratt is generally regarded as an outstanding and talented educator. Pratt is much more modest, however, and genuinely seems to regard her success as due in significant part to "all the support I've had--it makes it much easier [to do a good job] to have backing--it really encourages you."

After 18 months as a consultant, Pratt decided to apply for a new opening as assistant principal. This position was the first elementary assistant principalship in the district, and was split between two schools which had each grown large enough to require a half-time assistant principal under state law. As Pratt commented, she had anticipated the opening in part because "other people told me to keep an eye out for this and urged me to apply." When the vacancy was announced in the district newsletter, Pratt applied by calling personnel and expressing interest. Once again, teachers and principals she had worked with were very supportive. Many called to tell her they were very pleased that she had applied, and her original principal at Jackson continued with his encouragement.

Pratt interviewed for the assistant principalship in a group interview with the directors of personnel and elementary education and the two principals slated to share the assistant. As she said, "I had no idea who else was screening and I didn't have any sense one way or another when I came out of the interview." Pratt commented that she would have been quite content to stay in her role as consultant, which she evidently enjoyed, had she not been given the position. But, "A week later they called me to take the position."

Once again, by all accounts, Pratt was very successful in the role, winning accolades from her teachers and principals. In fact, one top administrator commented: "Jessie did such a good job that we're thinking of trying to have assistant principals at more of our elementary schools. It can be a really helpful role."

At the end of her first year as assistant, Pratt applied for and secured the position of Teacher in Charge of the Title I Summer School. This was in essence a mini-principalship, and, Pratt said, "I wanted to see what it was like to be completely in charge of a school." During this summer, Pratt received an announcement of the principalship opening at Lee. (Announcements were mailed to everyone who had indicated interest in the principalship on the annual checklist.)

After considerable thought and urging from colleagues, Pratt decided to apply for the Lee position. She said: "I got lots of encouragement to apply--namely from the teachers in both schools where I was serving [as an assistant] and from the Jackson principal. I probably wouldn't have applied if it hadn't been for this, because I was very happy as an assistant."

Pratt applied by letter, and she was pre-screened by the top elementary administrator in the district and the superintendent. Then she was interviewed by the Lee parent-teacher screening committee. Pratt characterized this interview as "tough, because there were so many people involved and I was concerned that I might not have brought out all the points I wanted to." However, according to reports of committee members, Pratt once again did well. As one said: "Originally we thought we wanted a man for the role modeling, but Jessie just did so well [in the interview]. We've been very lucky to have her."

The key to Pratt's career path has been her ability to create a "groundswell" of support and mentoring from her peers, colleagues and supervisors. She herself appears to be pleased and honored by this, yet somewhat bemused. She seems to see herself primarily as a committed elementary educator, engaged with curriculum and instructional issues (which pepper her conversation). She is always pleased to discover that she has "so much support," as she puts it, but does not appear to have consciously set about creating it.

Jim Brandon: Getting the Consolation Prize

Jim Brandon is a white man of medium stature, who was completing his second year as principal of Linden Middle School at the time of our visit. Linden is a large, brand new, high status, suburban middle school, serving the upper socio-economic strata of the district.

Brandon began his career as a high school teacher and remained in the classroom for 18 years, at which time he decided to apply for an assistant principalship. Brandon's motivation was simple: "I was getting a little bored with teaching and thought administration might be interesting. And, some people downtown [the superintendent and director of personnel, who closely control selection in this district] suggested I might like it too." Brandon received no other encouragement or mentoring than this, however, and complained of often being "left hanging" and "kept in the dark."

Brandon proceeded to apply for an assistant principalship at Whitney High School, and subsequently had a formal interview with the selection committee (the directors of personnel and secondary schools) and then the superintendent. He reported that he did not find the interviews particularly challenging, but, at the same time, did not feel any particular confidence that he had secured the position. As he said: "Central office people don't tell you until the last minute that you have a position. I didn't find out about Whitney until the board meeting when the board decided. Then my competition told me that he was there because they [the selection committee] wanted to give him exposure to the board, but that I had gotten the position. Then the board voted and I got it." And later, "It doesn't matter who the administration is here in this district, they like to hold their cards until the last minute in case they need to play them."

After serving as assistant at Whitney for two years, Brandon made a lateral transfer to an assistant principalship at Linden High School (companion to Linden Middle). He did not have to apply directly for this position. However, Brandon had "put my name on the list of people interested in some principalships that were open at the time." He had done this in

He said: "I don't know what the thinking was at different places in the selection, but it worked out really well for me here. Educationally I don't believe I would've been as happy at the high school. I wasn't aware of all this [high school/middle school differences] at the time, but before I came it looked better and better and since I got here I've been really happy." (Just how Brandon got Linden Middle's principalship is tied to the story of Linden High's principalship, which is the next case.)

When asked to describe the selection process, Brandon replied quite sincerely: "I would be hard pressed to say just what sort of selection process they really use." He did believe, however, that the final decision was a combination of board influence and the superintendent's desires. He also believes that the selection process has generally improved with the state's Sunshine Law. He noted: "Before, boards would meet behind closed doors and be more active in the process. For instance, a person would go to board members and kind of be sponsored by board members. People were not really discontent or critical of this, they just always took it for granted that this was the way it was done. But they can't meet behind closed doors now--this makes it much harder for them to make these sponsorships."

Since becoming principal of Linden Middle School, Brandon has been pleasantly surprised at how much he likes the position (as noted earlier). He reports that he has found it "a real relief" not to have so much time "taken up with police [discipline] kinds of things and all this night-time sports stuff." He has also discovered new interests in curriculum and instruction, and has embarked on a series of new educational programs and extensive inservice workshops in instructional methods for his faculty.

In sum, Brandon may indeed have found his place at Linden Middle, and his growing revitalization as an educator may indeed benefit the school. Nevertheless, this happy outcome was not conveyed to him as the central goal of the selection process that put him in the job. In fact, as will be seen shortly, it is questionable as to whether this outcome was at all important to that process.

Ralph Hooker: Winning the Support of Parents and Faculty

Ralph Hooker is a tall, white male, who was completing his first year as principal of Linden High School (companion to Linden Middle School) at the time of our visit. Linden is a large, high status, suburban high school serving the upper socio-economic strata of the district. It is sparkling new, and lodged in beautifully landscaped grounds.

Hooker began his career as a senior high teacher, spending eight years in the classroom. For the last two of these years, he transferred to Linden and then decided to move into administration. He is frank and open about his ambition to someday be a superintendent, and sees the principalship as a critical step on this career path. Having made this decision, Hooker went back to school at night to certify in administration, at the same time seeking all the extra duties and service opportunities at Linden High that he could manage. He said: "I let the principal know what I was doing, and then I started helping out in the office and after school as much as I could."

As soon as he was certified, Hooker applied for an open assistant principalship at Linden High. He interviewed with the screening committee and the superintendent, and was called back for a second interview. This is unusual for this district and was undertaken, according to one top administrator, "because we didn't really know Ralph that well--he was relatively new to us." In other words, Hooker was aggressively pursuing administrative positions rather than waiting to be "noticed," and this violated common practice. Hooker also commented: "My supervising principal [who was leaving after some conflict] also recommended me and mentioned my name in correct places."

Hooker's new principal was an anomaly in the district, for he had been brought in from the outside by the superintendent. In fact, it was his "wild card" (as one informant characterized it) entry that led to Jim Brandon's appointment as principal of Linden Middle School. Brandon was assistant principal at Linden High at the time, and in the words of one key decision-

parents and teachers, and Hooker was extremely popular with both groups. Both mounted petition and letter drives in support of Hooker, and two board members live in the neighborhood and have children at Linden. As one teacher leader said: "We felt so badly burned by [the outsider]--the school was seriously hurt by him. In this system, teachers usually play no part in principal selection. But it got so bad a large faculty committee went over his head to protest his principalship. When he left, the faculty went so far as to circulate a petition in favor of Hooker. It's not so much that we saw him as a saviour, but we felt he could do the job and we knew him." The very powerful parent community shared this perception, and let the administration know it through letters, phone calls, and en masse visits to the superintendent. In addition, the two board members were kept closely and frequently apprised of the situation and feelings in the community.

Hooker himself was rather surprised at his appointment, for he did not (and does not now) fully appreciate the weight carried by the parents in the situation. He did screen for the position, interviewing with the selection committee and the superintendent. However, he received no signal from the decision-makers until the day before the board met to vote, when the superintendent called and said he had the appointment. He said: "I didn't know what kind of a chance I had. I fully expected to see it given to someone else. I wasn't sure until the day the superintendent called. Then I assumed it would be an interim appointment because I figured if I had a chance, my best shot would be an interim." The appointment was not an interim, but rather was for a full, permanent principalship.

Once again, Hooker may well have been the best choice for Linden High. His youth, energy, and aggressiveness appear to be widely appreciated by the parents, many of whom are themselves youthful, energetic, and aggressive professionals. The teachers appear to appreciate his "hands-off" approach, which they had been accustomed to for all but six of the last thirty years. The school seems to have an atmosphere of busy discipline, and the students appear to the brief visitor to be at least as content as high school students anywhere. Regardless, however, the selection process that catapulted Hooker into the principalship did not seek out his merits and skills.



Rather, he owes his position in large part to serendipity: to the accident of choice that made him assistant at Linden High instead of Linden Middle; to very powerful parents and teachers who wanted stability and a known quantity after six years of unaccustomed turmoil and conflict. As one top administrator said: "They really wanted him and there just wasn't much we could do about it."

#### Thomas Walker: Prevailing Against the Odds

Thomas Walker is a diminutive, portly white man who was completing his third year as principal of City High School at the time of our visit. City is the high school in the district, and houses several thousand students and several hundred faculty in a new, modishly designed building.

Walker began his career as a humanities teacher at City in the mid-1950s. He is a native of the community, and in fact graduated from City. After obtaining his masters degree in administration in the early 1960s, Walker became vice principal at City in the early 1970s.

Walker obtained his vice principalship by submitting an application to the superintendent. He had sought to prepare for this position by volunteering to serve on various school and district committees, particularly textbook and curriculum committees, and becoming an active sponsor of various student clubs and extra-curricular organizations. Walker did not undergo any screening or formal interview process, and found out that he was to be appointed on the night of the school board meeting when he saw his name on the agenda. He said: "I had no hint. The superintendent did come to talk to me to see whether I wanted to be vice principal or department head, but that wasn't really an interview and he didn't say one way or the other what he'd do." Walker does not recall the vice principalship as a heated competition, for that was a time of growth and many openings in the district, and he did not mount a concerted campaign for the job.

Walker spent six years as one of several vice principals at City. He continued to position himself for a leap at the principalship by "working on a great many committees--substantive, departmental, school-wide,

alumni--and helping negotiate the first teacher contract the district ever had and serving as class advisor for every grade level." At the end of this period, he had earned the status position of "senior VEEP" (as he put it) by virtue of his longevity and activities. Walker then heard informally that the incumbent principal of City was leaving to take a less stressful position in a small school in another district. He decided to apply for the principalship, and submitted a letter of intent to the superintendent as soon as the position was officially advertised in May. He said: "Then there was utter silence."

After a few weeks of silence and, in Walker's words, "talk about whether a screening should even be held or not", the board decided to interview all applicants itself. This was an extraordinary move, and reflected a very serious and escalating conflict between the superintendent and the board. Usually, the superintendent decided whom he wanted to appoint as principal (typically with no screening and often not even a personal interview) and simply made the appointment. Walker and several other candidates were interviewed by the full board in closed sessions in August. The interview was very lengthy, and Walker characterized it as "revealing of some of the splits among board members as well as problems between the board and the superintendent." Following the interview, Walker again waited. As he put it: "One or two members expressed their support for me, but I had no feedback from the others. And I had no expressions or support from the superintendent." Walker told us that once again he discovered that he had secured the principalship by seeing his name on the board's agenda a few days before school opened.

This is not the entire story, however. Several other informants related other crucial details as an example of how "right can triumph," as one said. According to these other sources, Walker had long ago won a widespread reputation as an excellent educator, attuned to secondary curriculum issues and to the needs of adolescents. He had given many hours of extra service to students, and "done a lot to develop the school academically," as another said. However, he had absolutely no interest or background in athletics, frankly and frequently declaring that he felt academics came first.

This attitude (coupled with Walker's unmistakably non-athletic appearance) was considered very radical for the local community, a blue-collar town that places immense value on high-school sports competition. As one informant noted: "This is a sports town. It usually works for men, but even women have to be sports-minded if they're going to succeed at the high school level." Walker's main competition for the principalship of City (which had always had principals with coaching background) was another vice-principal who had moved up from the coaching ranks. Informants uniformly characterized this competitor as very sports-minded but not attentive to curriculum, and a very strict, harsh disciplinarian.

Another, more complex theme ran below the surface. The City High principalship contest had reputedly become deeply entangled with city (and state) politics, which were twisting and heaving under the strain of bitterly contested power shifts. Walker's competitor reportedly had the firm support of the old power center, which had deep roots into the school board. Walker, however, had equally strong ties to the new regime, which was reputed to have had not only strong roots into the board but also evidence of burgeoning mismanagement and fiscal scandals in the city government and the school department. At the time of Walker's appointment, we were told, these two opposing forces were in bitter conflict, with the outcome a daily see-saw. As one informant put it: "The politics for the City position were extreme. There were two groups backing two different people and it got hot and heavy. Walker was the right man for the job, but nobody thought he'd win."

Several other informants confirmed this interpretation of events, including the expectation that Walker was going to lose. The general consensus was that it was not a matter of his being the less able candidate; in fact, quite the opposite. Rather, his opponent was seen as having the inside track because of his coaching background and his "heavy connections." In fact, several informants related that Walker's competitor had actually been notified that he had won the race and his name placed on the board agenda. (We did not see written evidence of this.)

At the last minute Walker secured a stunning reversal and won the principalship. Observers told us that he achieved this by bringing to bear some unexpectedly "heavy connections" of his own. He is related to an eminent state politician, who in turn is very close to another, especially powerful politician of national repute and influence. As one informant said: "I can't document this, but the accepted story is that some people on the state and federal level got involved." We cannot document it either, but our informants universally asserted that it happened.

It is important to note that, in the eyes of district staff, Walker took the proper step. As one key administrator commented: "Walker was the best qualified for the job. There was a political force that had another candidate. So, another political force was brought to bear to keep Walker from getting screwed."

Without evaluative evidence, we are unable to sort out the issue of qualifications in this case. However, it is worth noting that Walker has made several changes since taking over at City. These include forming a PTA and a National Honor Society chapter (both for the first time in City's history), increasing emphasis on vocational and career education to better serve the 50 percent of students who do not go on to post-secondary education, instituting school self-evaluation for accreditation, and continuing self-evaluation committees to undertake curriculum revision and upgrading.

In sum, while Walker's story illustrates the extent to which common selection practices can (and often do) become entwined with local politics, it also shows how this entanglement can cut both ways. Walker was able to use political power to secure a position that he probably merited. Nevertheless, the fact remains that merit alone was not sufficient to secure the position, and, in truth, did not matter. The contest was fought on entirely different grounds.

Bill Harold is a white male of average height completing his first year as principal of Bradley Elementary, a medium-sized rural school. Like a number of male principals (and candidates) we spoke with, Harold had very strong career goals for administration almost from the beginning of his career as an educator, and had been preparing himself for a number of years.

Harold's principalship at Bradley was secured as a result of a combination of personal ambition and aggressiveness and opportune circumstances. He expressed his ambition through the care he had taken to prepare and credential himself for the principalship, and through the care with which he selected a district to enter. Deciding that he wanted to be an educational leader before finishing undergraduate school, Harold completed three years of teaching (almost the universal minimum for administrators). He then returned to graduate school to secure credentials for administrative positions, for he ultimately aspires to the superintendency. While still in graduate school, he had the opportunity to participate in a management study of several school districts. This allowed him to "size up" both opportunities and openings. He noted he selected the district where he presently is as having: "real opportunities and potential to go somewhere. It's a growing community."

He entered the district as an assistant principal at a middle school, a position he obtained by answering an ad posted at the university he was attending. He simply called in response to the ad and was asked to come for an interview. Harold interviewed first with the directors of personnel, instruction, and middle schools, and then with the superintendent. A few days later, he received an offer for the position. He commented: "I accepted it with a little trepidation because I didn't talk with the principal."

Harold's supervising principal turned out to exert a profound influence on Harold's educational ideas and philosophy. Harold speaks of this mentor with the deepest respect and admiration: "I thought, 'Well, I'm a young hotshot and this is an old man. I'll show him what to do.' Well, he

really opened my eyes. If I'm a good principal today, it's because of him." During his two years as middle school assistant principal, Harold was encouraged and urged by his mentor to seek an elementary school leadership post. He followed this encouragement, applying for several elementary openings during this period.

At the beginning of his second year as assistant, a new superintendent took office and within a few months announced plans for a new training program to develop principalship candidates. When the program was announced, Harold immediately (and correctly) perceived it as drastically changing the rules of the game. He said: "The program had made it a whole new ball game--it seems to me that this program will affect who gets the job. These trainees are picked by a whole new committee of educators. Since these people are going to the screening committees, it doesn't matter who they pick. The basic pool is very good--the trainees have been hand-picked by the superintendent. The trainees will be able to leapfrog the traditional route [through the assistant principalship]."

Harold was sufficiently concerned about this possibility to confront the new superintendent on the issue. He sought and secured a meeting with the superintendent, whom he had not met before this, and: "I just laid it out. I had worked hard to become an assistant and I was working hard to become a principal and even beyond someday. I felt this hurt my chances, and I told him so." To Harold's knowledge, no other assistant principal took such action, although most shared his feelings. Harold reports that the superintendent assured him that this was not the case, that the competition would remain open, and that non-trainees would be considered for principalships. Nonetheless, the superintendent did not deny that the competition had suddenly become stiffer!

A few months after this conversation, several principalship vacancies were announced and Harold responded once again. Two weeks later, he was called for an interview with the director of elementary education

(also newly arrived in the district). As Harold said, "Not knowing him made it easier from my standpoint. I didn't know what his leanings were so I felt free to be open and frank. Also, since everybody at the top was new, there weren't any grapevines or connections for anybody."

Following this, Harold interviewed with a parent-teacher screening committee. He characterized this as "tough--I was totally unprepared for that many people [several schools were represented] giving me such deep attention. It was the toughest interview I've ever had." During the interview, however, Harold's confidence and expectations increased. He commented: "I thought I had it after the interview. I felt that the directors of personnel and elementary wanted me for the job. I felt they fed me supportive questions-- there were points I was trying to make and they would throw questions that drew them out." Shortly after this interview, Harold was notified by the superintendent of his appointment to Bradley.

In sorting out the reasons why he was placed at Bradley rather than one of the other open schools, Harold offered several, which were later confirmed by the administration. First, the school is predominantly white, with a very conservative community. Harold pointed out that he is white, and the two other open schools, which were predominantly black, received black principals. As he noted, the district has a good equity picture overall (confirmed by blacks and by the statistics), but it is still customary to match race of principal and school.

Second, Bradley's teachers and parents "have been a problem." The parents are very vocal, and split on desires for curriculum and discipline. The teachers were long accustomed to very weak leadership at best, and virtually no supervision. In fact, the vacancy at Bradley was created when the new superintendent asked for the resignation of the incumbent on the grounds of incompetence. As one top administrator said: "That guy didn't do anything. He looked like everybody's idea of a principal--nice, gray-haired, dignified--but he just wasn't there!" Reportedly, teachers were unsupervised

and unobserved, school records were not kept, and no leadership was exercised. Harold's aggressiveness in confronting the new superintendent about the training program showed him to be "capable of exercising a strong hand," as one top leader said. This, coupled with Harold's preparation and interest in leadership, was sufficient to win him a position under the new regime. But for this new regime, however, it is unlikely that Harold would be a principal today, for the old customs and traditions in this district required long tenure in the assistant principalship before appointment as a principal.

In sum, Bill Harold's experience illustrates one of the "merit-based" pathways to the principalship we observed in our Phase 1 districts. Under ordinary circumstances, merit may languish for years and be blunted and frustrated. Under conditions of change, and when the change is towards greater merit, capable candidates like Harold can succeed. However, even this often requires a combination of chance and personal aggressiveness that is beyond the norm.

Jeannie Clark: When the Superintendent Decides to Signal A Change

Jeannie Clark is a white female, who was completing her first year as principal of Gingerbread Elementary, a small, "antique," urban school of exceptional physical charm and interest. (It also hosts a large proportion of hispanic students.) Gingerbread is widely known in the community because of its physical grace and history, and is often the subject of media interest, playing host to visitors from all over the state. Hence, its principalship is highly visible.

Clark began her career as an elementary teacher, and spent 17 years in the classroom. (She is also fluent in Spanish, for she is related by marriage to the hispanic community.) She developed her aspiration for the principalship quite recently, and credits it to the support and encouragement she has received over the years from her husband and from a close woman friend who is a principal in the district. As Clark said: "I have grown



boundlessly in independence. If I had married someone else, I'm not sure I would've developed in this way." And: "I have a friend--from birth!-- who's a principal. She always encouraged, pushed me to think about becoming one. When I finally decided to apply, she was just overjoyed and helped me put together my resume and papers and everything." And finally: "I wouldn't have applied five years ago. I thought I wasn't ready. I have gained personally from the women's movement. Women are so alone here [the district has very few women administrators]--you are in front."

Clark was led to enter the ring partly by her increased self-confidence and partly by the changes that were beginning to sweep the district. Briefly, the retiring superintendent had attempted to fill several principalships by transfer. Clark, with the encouragement of her friend, had been preparing to apply for one of these at Arnold school (where she was teaching) when the transfers were suddenly announced. The school board refused to honor the transfers, demanding instead that the incoming superintendent have the privilege of making the appointments. Subsequently, the board decided to open school with a Teacher in Charge in each of these positions, and to give the new superintendent a chance to get his feet on the ground and then make the principal appointments.

Clark did not apply or screen for Teacher in Charge for any of these positions, but simply received a phone call from "downtown" one day, which requested that she serve as Teacher in Charge to open Arnold. Clark is not sure why she was called, but thought it might have been due in large part to the support of her close friend and that of another woman with whom she had taught at Arnold for years, who was candidating for the Arnold principalship. This candidate had left Arnold several years previously to become the principal of Gingerbread.

A few weeks after taking office, the new superintendent decided to screen for the vacancies. Clark applied for Arnold. She was subjected to a

"searching but very enjoyable interview" by the new superintendent and his key staff. This included written answers to questions on educational strategies, philosophies, and leadership. She did not get the appointment, and received notice of this from a friend. The Arnold winner was Clark's old teaching colleague, the incumbent Gingerbread principal.

Within two days, the Gingerbread vacancy was announced, and Clark applied by a letter of interest. After a wait of three or four weeks, the superintendent called and offered her Gingerbread. She had not had another interview or any screening beyond her previous interview.

The primary key to Clark's appointment at Gingerbread is the fact that she was in the right spot at the right moment. She appeared during our interview to be perfectly suited to Gingerbread Elementary by virtue of her deep elementary teaching background, her language fluency, and her personal style (very relaxed and warm, firmly but intimately in charge). But even more importantly, her appointment represented an opportunity for the new superintendent to signal a change of direction.

The new superintendent is the inheritor of a deeply entrenched patronage appointment system. The retiring superintendent had in effect been forced out for abuses that rocked the district beyond its ability to absorb the shocks, and the new leadership has a mandate to renew and revitalize the system. Principal appointments so early in his tenure offered the new leader an opportunity to send a signal about the "new day," and Clark's candidacy provided a special and unique opportunity in this regard.

The "old way" was characterized by tangled and interwoven networks of "who you knew," according to all our informants. Clark is notable chiefly for her lack of these sorts of connections. (By the standards of the local culture, Clark's friendships with the two women principals who helped her candidacy do not count as connections.) She herself is still somewhat bemused by her success: "My appointment wouldn't have been possible in the older days. My husband and I are just not political. We attend political

functions on a social basis, and then not much of that, and we don't contribute to or work for anybody's campaign." And later in our interview, "It was just incredible to get Gingerbread. I don't know anybody." Her report of other's reactions is also telling: "When I was up for Gingerbread, people called me and said 'if you don't call someone and talk to someone you're not going to get it! Mine and my husband's reaction was, 'But we don't know anyone!' Then after I got it, I met a lot of people who said, 'I didn't know you were thinking of applying for principal! I just had no idea that you were being considered.'"

The new superintendent and his key staff independently confirmed that surprise was exactly the impression that they were trying to produce with Clark's appointment. As one key aide said: "When we looked at Gingerbread, we said to ourselves, who can we appoint that nobody will expect, that will surprise everybody! It worked too! She was even surprised herself!"

Jeannie Clark's story can be summed up straightforwardly: merit and equity are served, but not entirely for merit and equity's sake, and if they are in the right place at the right time.

#### Julie Northington: An Independent Woman

Julie Northington is a moderately tall white woman, who was completing her first year as principal of the large, new, suburban Davis Middle School.

Northington began as a high school classroom teacher in the district in the late 1960s. In her fifth year of teaching, she was asked by her supervising principal to become department head, but at the time had no real aspirations towards administration. As she said, "I still didn't think of myself as an administrator--this is not unusual for women." Her supervising principal continued to encourage her in her role as department head, but did not push her to go any further.

But as the decade of the 1970s wore on, Northington began to take notice of women's changing role in society. She also noticed that in the

district:--"A number of women had begun to resent being overlooked. There was a tendency of capable female administrators to become embittered-- they had strength, ambition, but this was not acceptable. They were not liked by anyone." Northington then made two crucial career decisions: "I decided I could do this job [of principal] and I didn't want to become like that [frustrated and embittered]. So I decided to have a shot!"

Northington embarked on her now planful climb by seeking and securing a position as Administrative Assistant at another high school. This position was completely administrative, and focused on discipline and attendance matters. She secured the position by applying for it with the supervising principal first and then with "downtown" when it was announced. Northington commented: "This was beginning to be a breakthrough for a woman to have this kind of position at the high school level. I just went after it and got it!"

The following year, the assistant principal at her high school was moved into a principalship. Northington had by this time earned the full support of her supervising principal, who recommended her for the now open assistant slot. Northington was moved into this role without a screening, and continued to perform well. The following year, she secured a transfer to an assistant principalship at the larger high school where she had begun as a teacher, again without a screening and with the full support and recommendation of the principal for whom she had served as department head.

Northington was fully prepared to settle into this assistant principal slot for a number of years and distinguish herself in the competition for a secondary principalship, which she had now positioned herself to pursue. In her words, this competition would consist of "being very active on school and district committees and in the community, getting to know people and getting known, and just working hard to let people know you're interested and can do things."

At this point, however, an exceptional combination of circumstances arose. A new superintendent--with a special mandate to upgrade and improve

the system--had taken office the preceeding year. Having completed his "shake-up of the central office" (as several informants characterized it), he now turned his attention to the principals in the district. He found the long-time principal of Davis Middle School seriously wanting. Reportedly, this administrator had long failed to exercise appropriate controls over discipline, scheduling, teacher supervision, and more. In the words of one top administrator: "The school was a mess!" Shortly after the school year began, the Davis principal was demoted, leaving the principalship open.

To her considerable surprise, Northington was quickly placed at Davis as Acting Principal. As she said: "I knew nothing about it until I got a call from the superintendent on Friday afternoon to come down and talk with him, and I didn't know what it was about until I got to his office. There weren't even any rumors that the principal was going to be removed. On Monday I opened at Davis."

The new superintendent characterized Northington's appointment as "a long-shot," taken for several reasons. First, timing was an important factor. The administration did not wish to disrupt other schools at this point in the school year with a series of leadership transfers; yet, it was not a good time to hold a screening. Further, Davis was in turmoil and "needed tough, strong leadership fast," as the superintendent said. Second, the administration had already reviewed other candidates in the traditional pipelines and found them largely wanting. Third, other major reforms and shake-ups were in the planning stages for implementation in the spring, and the administration did not want to be distracted from these efforts by protracted conflicts and problems at a single school. Finally, Northington has impressed the key decision-makers in their earlier review of assistant principals as tough, intelligent, dynamic, energetic, and knowledgeable.

Northington was appointed by administrative action as Acting Principal at Davis for the duration of the school year. She was given a strong mandate and constant support from the top leadership to "clean it up," as she said. By her own account (and top administrators') she has succeeded in repairing the scheduling; reducing disciplinary incidents by

four-fifths, largely by bringing in consultants to work with teachers in classroom management; and instituting regular teacher observations and evaluations. Her plans for the future of the school include extensive curriculum revisions and instructional inservice in tandem with the administration's district-wide plans in this regard.

In undertaking these improvements, Northington did encounter strong resistance from teachers and staff, who had been content with her demoted predecessor. However, she was prepared for this resistance by the superintendent from the moment of her appointment, and, in her own words, "I always felt that I could rely on them to back me 100 percent." In addition, she made a point of privately interviewing every teacher and staff member in the school soon after her appointment to "get acquainted and find out how we could work together."

After serving as Acting Principal for several months, and going through the formality of a competitive screening in the spring, Northington was confirmed in her appointment as principal. While the screening and competition for principalships in this district are by no means always an empty formality, the superintendent freely acknowledges that in Northington's particular case they were. As far as he and other key staff were concerned, the "long-shot" had paid off, and Northington had done an outstanding job of bringing the school under control and "getting it moving." Hence, there was no doubt that Northington would be confirmed in her principalship. Nevertheless, the formality of the screening was observed for several reasons. First, it is simply so much a part of local custom that to fail to observe it is not practically feasible. Second, as the superintendent commented, "It gave them [competitors] a chance to present their case." Third, several principalships were vacant, and candidates competed for all openings. Hence, the screening was not a completely empty exercise for Northington's competitors, for they were also considered for other positions.

In sum, Julie Northington's is a story of a talented woman educator of independent ambition. Largely without benefit of the special

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In sum, Julie Northington's is a story of a talented woman with a strong sense of independent ambition. Largely without benefit of the special

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After serving as Acting Principal for several years, she was chosen through the formality of a competitive screening in the district to be confirmed in her appointment as principal. While the selection process for principalships in this district are by no means a simple formality, the superintendent freely acknowledges the particular challenges they were. As far as he and other key s



in general, led the district administrators and other principal candidates to regard Follow Through schools as outside the mainstream. Hence, the Follow Through principalships were of little interest. Casada expressed it neatly: "These programs have a very different philosophy. They are child centered, rather than teacher centered. They have parent involvement--teachers have to meet the parents. At the time, no one wanted Johnson. It has lots of special programs besides just Follow Through and there's a lot to do. And it's so different. When I first started as principal, the other principals rejected me because I'm Follow Through. They wanted Follow Through to go away. I had to prove myself to them."

For Casada, the Follow Through connection served two essential purposes. First, it kept her isolated from the larger district "game of the principalship" and provided her with opportunities for advancement that she otherwise simply would not have had. Perhaps even more importantly, however, it helped her see herself in a new way and, with the encouragement of her program director, led eventually to her embracing the role of principal. She summarized: "The Follow Through program has made me sharpen my vision of myself. When I graduated from college, I wasn't thinking of being a principal or anything else. This has been a real role switch for me--like a lot of women, I have a lot of family demands and I really wasn't a secure person. Follow Through has been a big growth process for me and my director has constantly pushed me to grow. Without that, without Follow Through, I wouldn't be where I am today. Now, I feel very secure--I'm learning to be a district leader and I'm even thinking about applying for elementary director!"

Ironically, the Follow Through process is now the model that the new superintendent intends to put in place for all principal selections. His is a mandate for reform of the abuses of the past, and both he and his newly appointed key administrators have deep ties to federal programs. Regardless of the future, however, the fact remains that while merit (and equity) were well served in the case of Casada's appointment, the selection is not due to the practices common in the district at the time. Rather, she was appointed because Johnson Elementary was simply not a piece on the larger gameboard.

Margaret Johnson: Another Special Projects Story

Margaret Johnson, a white woman, is one of the few female principals in her district, which has appointed only two women principals in the past 14 years. At the time of our visit, she was completing her first year as the Principal for Vocational Education, as she is titled. In fact, Johnson functions not as a principal but as a coordinator of a small set of vocational courses and an office lodged in a former car dealership on the edge of downtown. She sees herself as a coordinator obligated to process a great deal of state, county, and federal paperwork for funding adult and vocational education courses. The "main" vocational education programs are based at the district's high schools and are controlled by the principals there.

Johnson began her career in the district 20 years ago as a high school English and physical education teacher. She served in the classroom for two years, and then was tapped for Dean of Girls at a junior-senior high school. She stayed there happily for 15 years when, she said: "Against my resistance I was transferred to another high school as vice principal in charge of attendance, counseling, and employment." (Johnson did not offer details as to why she resisted the transfer.) Shortly after Johnson's transfer, a series of personnel changes at the high school exacerbated her discontent. To "extricate" herself (as she put it), she applied for a vice principalship of Vocational Education. She then went through a formal screening process for this position that involved interviews with two separate interview panels. (This district uses two interview panels, which are under the authority of a vacancy-specific screening committee, as part of its principal selection process.)

In the meantime, the director of vocational education was "counseled out" of this position, as one informant termed it. Several informants characterized him as an "operator" who did not "work out well" and who was "questioned for his integrity." But we could not substantiate this claim, and a significant factor seemed to us to be that he was from outside the district, and simply never fit into the local way of doing things.

For reasons which are vague, this incumbent remained on the district payroll for some time after leaving the principalship. Hence, the position could not be advertised. Johnson was asked to take the position as an interim appointment because "I had some administrative background." She commented: "I felt insecure, but I was willing to undertake the challenge."

When the position was finally advertised and the screening process put into operation, the two preferred candidates (Johnson was not one) turned down the position for personal reasons. Hence, it was decided to let Johnson stay on to "prove herself" in the position, and then to rescreen in the spring.

During the year, Johnson succeeded in cleaning up the paperwork and budgeting obligations of the position, which she characterized as "a shambles." She accomplished this even in the face of staffing difficulties, and earned the praise of her superiors. In spite of the fact that she had no depth in vocational education and had entered the administration track directly from the classroom with no other training, she was, in the words of one informant, "admired for not personalizing the administrivia or the politicking" surrounding her position.

In the spring, when the screening process was undertaken a second time, Johnson had decided not to apply, for she "had considered not applying for the opening because it was such a large responsibility." However, after some "counseling" from one of her superiors, she changed her mind and submitted her application. Johnson was the second choice of the two interview committees, according to one of its members. The first choice was an outside candidate, a black male, with reputedly strong credentials and a track record in vocational education. The reasons for the final choice of Johnson over this outside candidate are not clear. The superintendent noted that "he appeared promising on paper, but did not hold up after subsequent telephone checks." While this is perfectly plausible, once again we could not substantiate it. One black screening committee member commented, "I have never been given a satisfactory explanation." It is also worth noting that the

administrator who "counseled" Johnson to apply is the one who vetoed the application of the outside candidate.

Johnson's earlier unease about the large responsibilities of the position has been laid to rest, and she is now well satisfied with her position. While she has little program development responsibility (since the high school vocational education departments implement their own programs), she has all the paperwork. Johnson's forte is "paper management and administration," and she is comfortably proud of her skill in this regard. The educational program is very gratifying to her because, she says, "the young people are well qualified and are following through."

In sum, it appears that Margaret Johnson indeed fulfills the administration's informal criteria for the position, which is ranked as a principalship: she is a good "paper manager." Whether or not this can be considered a merit- or equity-based outcome is, however, open to question. This district offers other women little better than what it has offered Johnson, and, while "paper management" was no doubt needed by the administrators involved, it is difficult to see how the vocational education interests of the students are served. Ironically, this particular district had one of the more technically impressive selection processes that we encountered in Phase 1, complete with a "paper screening" committee to review credentials and two separate panels of screening interviewers. Johnson's story was not an aberrant failure of this technique, but rather was characteristic of the dynamics and operation of the selection process, as is shown by the companion case of T.R. Taylor, another recently selected principal in the district.

#### T.R. Taylor: Coached for Confidence

T.R. Taylor is a white male, completing his second year as principal of Mantle Elementary. Taylor began his career in the district as a secondary classroom teacher. After several years in this role, he was "tapped on the shoulder" to serve as vice principal in one of the district's middle schools. After attaining this position, he made two attempts at a principalship.

However, he was passed over both times. In explanation of this, several informants commented: "He lacked confidence."

Nevertheless, when the principal of Mantle Elementary died unexpectedly and early in the school year, Taylor was deemed adequately confident to assume the role of temporary vice principal in charge of the school. In other words, Taylor was placed as acting principal, but without that title.

The Mantle vacancy was not announced and screened until the end of the school year, during the summer. Screening interviews were held in June, and a week later Taylor's appointment was announced.

There were two keys to Taylor's success this third time around. First, the superintendent extensively coached Taylor, prepping him to give desired answers to the screening panels' questions. According to one informant: "The purpose of these coaching sessions was to instill confidence and enable T.R. to undergo a panel interview without faltering." In the eyes of the administration, this was necessary, because Taylor "was the most highly qualified candidate for the job" and the aim of the selection process was to find "a strong individual who could pull the school together."

Second, the chair of the Mantle selection committee (which oversees the interview panels and whose composition is established by the central office) was Taylor's original supervising principal during his first vice principalship. This chair, together with another elementary principal and the director of personnel (an intimate of the superintendent), determined the questions to be asked during the panel interviews and assigned questions to specific panel members.

Taylor was not without competition. Among the other candidates were an elementary school administrator seeking a transfer, and a former elementary school administrator who was attempting to re-enter administration after a one-year return to the classroom. Taylor's chief competitor, however, was a minority woman who had been in the district for 25 years and who had

extensive teaching and administrative experience. Among her achievements were several years' experience coordinating district-wide curriculum and special instructional programs, including the institution of libraries in all schools in the district. She had also been an elementary principal for one year.

Why Taylor rather than his chief competitor was selected as principal is not clear. The administration maintained during our interviews that Taylor was simply the "best candidate," yet could not substantiate this from the records. Some parents had pushed hard for a woman principal and one of their members said she found veteran senior administrators "were just not ready to appoint a woman principal at a regular school." More importantly, we think, Taylor had been a loyal member of the long-term administrative in-group who managed the district for thirty years and he was a protege of one of its leading members. He had not graduated from the preferred private university nearby, which slowed his progress up the career ladder, and he had no elementary experience. Still, he fulfilled the image of "manliness" which was described repeatedly as of highest importance in this community. He is acceptable to the Mantle faculty precisely because he does not "meddle with instruction."

### Conclusions

We have not chosen the case histories of those principals who were selected without any regard for merit. Our cases in this chapter are limited to those defined by their peers and faculties as excellent, good, or mildly mediocre performers. This is not accidental, for none of the 30 recent appointments we studied in depth led us to the doorstep of a manifest failure. In part, this is the result of the identification procedures. We had to rely on personnel directors or their staffs for our leads. In examining other files on location, however, we could see that while those selected were among the best qualified, they were not that different from other recent appointees. Common selection procedures in operation today, in other words, do succeed in fending off or weeding out grossly unqualified candidates.

Interviewing administrators in every district who had been principals between 1945 and 1970, or who were from that cohort and still on the job, we could sense that even in the most patronage-riddled of districts, not to mention those in the process of great positive change, the standard for appointment has been raised significantly.

Our cases further suggest that the range of appointees has begun to open up. Some candidates who are not white males, who are not part of a longstanding local network of patronage, and who do not conform to local stereotypes, are now getting appointed as principals. One of our districts was feeling intense pressures from what the personnel director called "the Gals in Company C," meaning the central curriculum unit where federal and state projects in compensatory, special and bilingual instruction were being developed. Their new expertise and self-confidence was threatening the balances adhered to by the "old-boy network" of administrators.

Our cases make the point, however, that selection pathways today are often chance-ridden, that even when merit and equity triumph they may do so for reasons that have to do with the maneuvers of transfer, the consolidation of a superintendent's authority, or the turning of the wheel of political fortune. An aspiring educator can learn from these case histories the best ways in which to plot her career moves, but she will also learn that even the best laid plots of would-be principals go awry.

We met many educators who express belief in the importance of the principalship but who are personally repelled by the aura of plots and maneuvers that continues to surround the selection process. Our first case, Jessie Pratt, suggests that in profoundly exceptional instances, merit simply gets demonstrated and rises. Even here, 14 years in teaching represents a very long period in waiting. There was a time when more teachers (nearly all of them men) competed for the principalship, just because the pay difference offset the displeasure of the maneuvering. That gap has been closed in many districts, and in an era of growing teacher discouragement about future public support for public education, the parity in pay combines

with a disenchantment toward administration--sometimes spurred into alienation by union-management conflicts. The results can be a thinning of the ranks of candidates.

Nevertheless, all 30 of our recent principal appointees were educators who wanted the position, who were glad to get it, and who showed no inclination to withdraw from the role. As our subsample of ten cases in this chapter suggests, some had aimed at principalships from the time when they were college students while others became motivated along the route. There is enough magnetism left in the position to attract an inexhaustible supply of aspirants, we suspect. Without changes of the kinds described in the next chapter in the integrity and vitality of the selection process, however, the ablest educational leaders may never turn toward that magnet.



CHAPTER 4  
SOME EXEMPLARY ALTERNATIVE PRACTICES

Introduction

In chapters 2 and 3 we described and interpreted the ways public school principals get chosen and appointed in ten geographically diverse districts each enrolling over 10,000 students. For several reasons, we think the practices we found constitute an indicative and adequate if not representative sample of conventional--that is, customary and widely shared--modes of selection. First, our findings are not inconsistent with the extant literature on principal selection, however thin it may be. Second, our findings are consistent with the more complete literature on general managerial selection in many respects (e.g., Kanter's (1977) descriptions of the importance and dynamics of mentoring and sponsorship in managerial selection). Finally, school administrators have strongly confirmed--from both their personal career histories and the conditions of their current employment--our description of "how it works."

Our Phase 1 study of common practices in principal selection suggested four major implications to guide our Phase 2 study of alternatives and improvements. First, there seemed to be a real need for knowledge about how to sharpen criterial statements, particularly in the area of educational leadership skills. Second, the need for behavioral or performance assessments of candidates seemed to be universally felt. Third, the influence of the local culture and context is so strong that adaptability and flexibility are necessarily key features of potentially transportable alternatives.

In addition, our Phase 1 work led us to profound skepticism about the possibility of locating truly viable alternatives to common practice. On the one hand, we felt quite certain that we could locate and study a variety of technical alternatives. In fact, our Phase 1 districts themselves had displayed considerable technical variety in their approaches to principal selection at virtually every step in our model. For instance, the ten

districts had devised 5 different membership compositions for screening committees, and each of the ten committees had individualistic approaches to interviewing and rating candidates.

On the other hand, we were even more convinced that the commonalities we found in our Phase 1 cross-case comparisons would also hold in Phase 2. While the Phase 1 districts varied greatly in technical elements of their procedures and while their goals varied even more widely, they were alike in several striking respects:

- Superintendents or a trusted deputy or veteran personnel director controlled nearly every facet of the process.
- This control aimed at reconciling each appointment with a concurrent bunch of other aims and decisions, from facilities to enrollments to the mediation of teacher disputes.
- Teacher and parent impacts were minimal everywhere.
- Women and minority candidates are increasing in volume and frequency of appointment, while the pool of white male applicants shows some signs of drying up.
- Candidates are usually appointed not because they fit the needs of a particular school, but for their generalized fit to the image of a rotatable, all-purpose sort of administrative implementor of a superintendent's aims.
- Although able principals were observed and interviewed everywhere, the processes that led to their selection could not be characterized as generally merit-based and equity-centered.

In Phase 1 our cases provided abundant explanations for these uniformities. Respondents in every district offered interpretations of the forces and exigencies which generated the practices. We interviewed board members, teachers, and parents who offered very incomplete accounts of how selection worked, while nearly all administrators described the workings in precise detail. Yet, neither set of respondents expressed surprise or dismay at how things work; and, within each district, each set of respondents provided a piece that clearly fit the local puzzle. Each believed that the selection process was historically conditioned and framed to adjust to challenges emerging annually on many fronts to attack the viability of their districts.

The weight of the local explanations became so heavy we concluded at the end of Phase 1 that selection procedures indeed might change technically, just as their results in human terms could adjust to the changing times. Nevertheless, the ideals of educational leadership merit and of sex and ethnic equity seemed to us to be phantoms shaped by the hortatory literature of national as contrasted with local reformers. In short, the general conventions shaping selection seemed to be overdetermined by management decision constraints of the local system and by local customs, and only minimally or exceptionally conditioned by national rhetoric about educational leadership and equity, particularly the former as a reform theme.

In the original design of the study, hewing to guidelines from NIE, we had planned to make Phase 2 the occasion for finding practices with promise for improving principal selection. The plan was that, having studied practices in general, we would then concentrate upon alternatives being developed in districts to strengthen the merit and equity features of selection. When Phase 1 was completed, however, we inferred from the evidence that technical changes in practices could not in themselves modify the overall pattern of commonalities weighing against the hypothetically desired improvements.

Given these implications, our main challenge in the second phase of the study was to select both the alternatives of interest and representative sites. (Our design required five sites.) Our goal was not to evaluate alternatives in a rigorous sense, but rather to explore promising variations in practice. Thus, we elected to maximize both diversity and soundness in our choice of alternatives to study. In this way, we hoped to provide a more useful and practical compendium of approaches of potential interest to practitioners and observers interested in the principal selection process.

With the help of our Study Advisory Panel, we distilled the range of potential alternatives for study to three: (1) assessment centers, which constitute a burgeoning movement in the field of educational administration; (2) internships, which have long been on the scene and are attractive to many districts as methods of sharpening, enriching, and stabilizing the grooming

process; and (3) "exemplary conventional" districts, or rather, those districts that depend upon neither an assessment center nor an internship, but nonetheless were nominated because they "do it well."

The first two types of innovations, assessment centers and internships, obviously fit well with the implications of our study of common practice. Assessment centers and internships both address the need for more information on behavioral or performance measures of candidates, and the need for knowledge about identifying and sharpening criteria. The appropriateness of the "exemplary conventional" alternative is equally fitted to the common practice implications, but is not as quickly obvious. Based on our early findings, we concluded that such districts could provide useful models for educators who do not wish to invest in assessment centers or internships, both of which consume considerable resources. Further, such models might serve to illustrate immediate changes that could be made, should a district desire to change. Finally, the very conventionality of these models might help districts in generally assessing discrete technical features of their own processes, unclouded by the effect of a large scale innovation such as an assessment center or internship program.

Identifying representative districts for the assessment center and internship alternatives was comparatively straightforward. For the former, we contacted the National Association of Secondary School Principals (NASSP), which has developed and is completing field testing of probably the most comprehensively designed educationally oriented assessment center available today. NASSP welcomed our inquiry, and opened the doors to our study of the NASSP Assessment Center in one of their 13 demonstration/pilot test sites, Howard County, Maryland.

For the internship option, we sought to identify two sites through a nomination and literature review process. We limited our focus to internships owned and operated by school districts themselves, with the aim of better training and grooming candidates for the principalships. (Preservice internships lodged in university degree programs were excluded since in our

observation they do not play a significant role in district selection processes.) Through a series of phone calls around the nation, we identified two internship programs that were repeatedly nominated as outstanding or excellent. (This is not to imply that no other internships were mentioned in this category, or that our query for nominations was exhaustive. In fact, other programs were nominated. Further, our inquiry did not systematically tap all fifty states.) These two were Hayward, California and Montgomery County, Maryland.

Finally, to select our "exemplary conventional" sites, we first tried the same sort of iterative calling and nomination process as for the internships. Based on what we had learned in our study of common practice, we speculated that sites of this type would have all or most of the following features: at least some degree of serious extra-local vacancy advertisement and search; well defined and school-specific criteria; applicant pools that include minorities, women and outsiders as serious candidates at all levels; some degree of broad-based involvement in the process; crisp screening; and clearly articulated employment decisions that communicate positive symbolic features of the process and provide principals with some sense of a mandate or job objective. However, when we sought to query nominators on these points or on the general cue, "doing it well," we drew a blank. While we received a few suggestions, most informants either were not sufficiently familiar with the details of districts' selection processes to make a judgment or, when willing to do so, could not provide concrete evidence to support their assessment.

Fortunately, however, we were able to draw upon data from the Florida Council on Educational Management for assistance. The Council is a newly formed, state-level organization engaged in research and demonstration projects to improve the performance of Florida's principals. Using their extensive data bases on principal performance (and district selection processes), the Council nominated two Florida districts known to have both a high concentration of "high performing principals" (as measured by various indicia, including student performance) and at least minimally sound selection procedures. Both of these districts--Broward County and Hillsborough County--welcomed our inquiry.

We have masked the identity of districts and persons in Phase 1 and identified those in Phase 2 because at the onset of the project we offered to preserve confidentiality. When we reached the Phase 2 districts, however, senior administrators expressed the desire to have their districts identified and we realized this would help readers find their way to places where promising alternatives to the status quo are being implemented. This change on our part is circumstantial and implies nothing invidious about Phase 1 districts, where many positive adaptations in technical procedures are being introduced. (Nor does it imply any lack of research rigor in our investigations of Phase 2 sites, for these districts were subjected to equally searching and intensive inquiries, which unearthed negative as well as positive features of their innovations.)

The two samples differ dramatically in degrees of change being implemented, however, and contrary to our earlier research inference, the degree is great enough in the aggregate to force the conclusion that certain historical and organizational conditions can result in very profound changes in leadership selection practices. What those changes comprise and why they evolved is the subject of this chapter.

Readers interested in the fine detail of alternative practices should obtain the full report on the five districts. It is entitled School Principal Selection Practices: Five Case Studies, 1982, Abt Associates, 55 Wheeler Street, Cambridge, MA 02138. The following sections of this chapter provide thumbnail sketches of practices in each of the five districts, which differ among themselves in definitive technical details to a far greater extent than did the Phase 1 districts. While the Phase 2 districts share a few features with the Phase 1 districts, they represent five distinct alternatives to the general pattern of common practice that emerged in Phase 1. In addition, in spite of their differences among themselves, the Phase 2 districts share some striking commonalities, which, as will be discussed later, serve to distinguish them even more profoundly from the Phase 1 districts. Following the thumbnail sketches, we present an analysis of points of differences between the Phase 1 and Phase 2 districts, and their origins.

The NASSP Assessment Center in Howard County, Maryland

Long established in business and industry as a tool for identifying managerial talent, an assessment center

consists of a standardized evaluation of [assessee] behavior based on multiple judgments. Multiple trained observers and techniques are used. Judgments about behaviors are made, in part, from specially developed assessment simulations. These judgments are then pooled by the assessors at an evaluation meeting during which all relevant assessment data are reported and discussed, and the assessors agree on the evaluation of the dimensions [being assessed] and an overall evaluation that is made. The essence of the technology and its most distinguishing feature is the foundation of the assessment in the measurement of multiple characteristics of the individual using multiple measurement tools and involving at least some observation of an individual's behavior by multiple observers. (Williamson and Schaalman, 1981)

During the 1970s, the assessment center approach to personnel identification and selection began moving into education. Early in the decade, a number of school districts (and universities) attempted independent development of assessment centers for managerial selection.

However, probably the most comprehensive, systematic, and potentially important attempt to bring the assessment center technique to bear on the selection of educational managers is that of the National Association of Secondary School Principals of Reston, Virginia. Since 1975, NASSP has been engaged in developing and pilot testing an assessment center model for use by school districts in selecting principals (or assistant principals). The development of the NASSP Assessment Center has been orchestrated to meet both expressed school district needs and rigorous psychometric standards. By the time the pilot project is completed and NASSP is ready for widespread dissemination in 1983, the Center will have been subjected to a formal validation study and field tested in a variety of educational settings throughout the country. More than 300 assessors will have been trained, and more than 800 participants assessed.

Our goal in seeking the inclusion of the NASSP Assessment Center approach to principal selection in this study was not to evaluate either the NASSP model in particular or the concept of assessment centers in general. Rather, we sought to document this important innovation from the perspectives of both researchers and educators, particularly the latter. To accomplish this goal, we asked NASSP to nominate three pilot districts. Of these, we selected Howard County, Maryland, as being in several ways (albeit not all) typical of many school districts today, and hence broadly reflective of the implementation experiences that other districts might have.

One of the most notable characteristics of the NASSP Assessment Center model is that it is contractually standardized for all adopting districts in both its basic technical operation and its key implementation requirements, with much emphasis given to the latter. For instance, the NASSP General Design Model not only specifies various technical features, but also addresses the local role responsibilities of the assessors, the place of the Center in the adopting district's administrative hierarchy, and the maintenance and distribution of assessment reports. However, adopting districts are allowed some leeway, and are not constrained in policy decisions about the Center.

The basic technical features of the NASSP model are common to assessment centers in general. First, the Center is an event, not a place, and is conducted as frequently as the adopting district desires. For instance, Howard County presently conducts Centers three times a year. As increasing numbers of eligible staff are assessed, the district anticipates that it may cut back to biannual Centers.

Each Center is conducted by a group of six highly trained assessors, whose charge it is to observe, measure and evaluate 12 candidates as they complete various exercises and simulations. Assessor training is crucial to the validity and reliability of the Center, for the scoring of the various exercises is behaviorally grounded, and standardized to a high degree of precision. In the NASSP model, assessors participate in a three-day (and evening) training session at NASSP offices in Reston, and are then monitored



by a NASSP representative for at least the first two Centers they conduct.  
(Spot monitoring is done thereafter.)

Selection of the assessors is viewed as extremely important, both in terms of their local roles and their personal potential for becoming good assessors--they must be accurate, precise, and comfortable with an approach to observation and evaluation of staff that emphasizes behavior. In addition, it is critical that assessor teams be balanced for role, race, and sex. NASSP specifies that each team of six assessors must include both principals and district administrators, but does not specify which district administrators. Howard County has chosen to have 17 assessors trained, including principals at each level, top central administrative staff who are directly involved with principals and schools, and Personnel Office staff. For instance, all three Directors of School Administration (elementary, middle and high school) and the Director of Curriculum are trained assessors, as is the Director of Personnel.

At each Center, the six assessors evaluate each of the 12 participants on 12 skills dimensions: problem analysis, judgment, organizational ability, decisiveness, leadership, sensitivity, stress tolerance, oral communication, written communication, range of interests, personal motivation, and educational values. These dimensions have been empirically determined and validated as important to the principalship (Schmitt, 1981, 1982). While all NASSP Assessment Centers evaluate all 12 of these dimensions, adopting districts may choose to weight them differently depending on local needs and philosophies. For instance, Howard County has chosen to give preeminence to five: (1) problem analysis; (2) judgment; (3) organizational ability; (4) leadership; and (5) sensitivity. Not only are these five most directly related to Howard County's vision of the principal's role, but they are also the best measured dimensions in the district's estimation. Other adopting agencies may select other dimensions for emphasis, or choose to weight all 12 equally.

The exercises and simulations completed by the participants are designed to measure the 12 skills dimensions. Presently, there are six exercises, each of which measures at least six of the 12 skills dimensions.

Further, with two exceptions (Range of Interests and Personal Motivation), each skills dimension is measured by at least two (and usually three to five) of the exercises.

Each Assessment Center is a major event in the professional lives of both the assessors and the participants. For the latter, the Center is a two-day experience; for the former, a five-day affair. And, the assessors' days are long, often running well into the evening and spilling over into the weekend. In addition, the psychometric demands of each Center require close scheduling of individual assessors and candidates. Specifically, each assessor must observe each candidate at least once, and each candidate must be observed by multiple assessors on each exercise. Further, candidates must not be observed for most of the time by the same observers, and the observer sub-team for each exercise should be racially and sexually balanced insofar as possible. Finally, in addition to conducting the observations, the assessors must find the time to record their observations while they are still fresh, for the final evaluations of candidates are dependent on the assessors' evidentiary records of the participant's behavior during the various exercises. While the NASSP model provides standards and guidelines on the types of candidate behavior to look for and record on each exercise, it cannot compensate for assessors' memory decay. Hence, it becomes imperative that the assessors stretch to maintain comprehensive, on-the-spot recordings of candidate behavior.

The last three days are given over to group meetings of the assessors, during which each candidate's performance is discussed. Each candidate is given a summary score (according to behavioral standards and guidelines) based on the evidence provided by the assessors' reports prepared during the exercises. At the end of the discussion of each candidate, the group assigns a final rating to the candidate's performance. The group discussions are quite structured in the sense that there are standards and rules for discussing and rating candidates. Great stress is placed on the central rule that all discussion and rating must be grounded in evidence and linked to specific, recorded behaviors of the candidate.

When the assessors' discussions are complete and final ratings have been assigned, a detailed report is prepared on each candidate. Each assessor has the responsibility of preparing reports on two candidates. This responsibility includes serving as a "watchdog" for these two candidates while the group discusses each. The "watchdog" makes certain that the discussion remains focused on behavior and grounded in evidence. The reports cover areas of strength, needs for improvement, and training and development recommendations. The reports are precise and behaviorally cast, and each of the twelve skill areas is addressed in some detail. The assessment report is then given to the candidate and discussed in a confidential feedback interview. The interview is generally conducted by the local staff member who has been designated Assessment Center director. (The local role position of the director is left up to the adopting district.)

In sum then, the NASSP Assessment Center is a rigorous psychometric tool that involves a group of trained observers in the behavioral evaluation of aspiring educational administrators as they perform tasks designed to empirically measure their skills. The keys to its operation are: (1) its use of simulations that tap a wide variety of behaviors demanded of school administrators; and (2) rigorous training of the assessors in the requisite observational and scoring techniques. The NASSP model does allow for local adaptations of certain features, as well as full local control of critical policy aspects of use of the Center's results (e.g., for promotion, for staff development, or for both) and integration of its operations and results into ongoing personnel systems.

Howard County's NASSP Assessment Center is being implemented in the administrative context of an already highly professionalized approach to principal selection, which has in the words of one top administrator, "grown up with the district" over the past 14 years. The key to Howard County's development is the fact that it encompasses the planned city of Columbia, home to many affluent professionals who commute to Washington, D.C. and Baltimore, MD. Because this growth was planned, and because the school district was an integral part of that planning, an early decision was made by community leaders to develop the district accordingly. To this end, a new

superintendent was hired in 1968, and, by his own account, given a specific mandate to build a modern district.

One of the first acts that the superintendent took upon assuming office was, in his own words, "to open up the principal selection process rather than having one man making all the decisions." The selection process that he established is still operating in its basic form today, with the Assessment Center fitted in to provide more information on candidates.

This basic process is in essence an improved conventional practice. Technically, the main improvements consist primarily of the use of a broad-based screening committee, which relies on multiple pieces of information (transcripts, work histories, letters of recommendation, evaluations, structured interviews and an extemporaneous written essay) and secret balloting to arrive at finalist recommendations. All finalists are then subject to lengthy (one to two hours) and searching interviews by the superintendent.

However, it is the widespread normative dynamics that truly distinguish Howard County from our Phase 1 districts (in general) and that led the district to seek out and adopt the Assessment Center. The district appears to have made a deep commitment to merit and equity as the primary goals of its principal selection process, and has spent 14 years gradually implementing and extending these goals. While our informants expressed a few disagreements with some individual appointments, our informants were uniformly convinced that the selection process was fair, equitable, and merit-based. The level and extent of uniformity in this regard was remarkable, and it seemed to be supported by harder evidence (for instance, the proportion of black principals equals or exceeds the proportion of black children at all levels). Further, the disagreements that we heard were related in terms not of protests against patronage or favoritism, but rather in terms of substantive curriculum, leadership, or administrative issues. Finally, by their own accounts, candidates view each step as a stiff challenge, and perceive competition to be intense and service/substance oriented. As one said, "You've really got to put in the hours [of work] if you want to be a principal in this district."

In this context, the primary purpose of the Assessment Center for the present is to provide a method for more finely and rigorously discriminating among candidates. Data from the Center now constitutes a central, albeit not the only, piece of information for the screening committee and for the superintendent in making his final decision. District administrators estimate that the Center's ability to discriminate will reduce the candidate pool (probably by half or better) and provide much more information about each candidate that is recommended to the superintendent. In addition, the district expects that the Center will increase the certainty of due process by standardizing assessment of specific job-related skills. Finally, the Center will provide definitive feedback to the candidates themselves, and district leaders hope ultimately to use it for staff development purposes. (NASSP has devised training activities for each of the 12 skills.)

The Administrative Intern Program (AIP) in Hayward Unified School District (HUSD), California

The HUSD Internship program began operating in 1979. Its approach consists of locating and then training potential principals from within the district. Each April, all certificated non-management employees of HUSD are notified of the AIP by the posting of an announcement, which sets forth the eligibility requirements and application and selection procedures. To become eligible, applicants must be certificated educators with at least three years of experience, at least one of which must be in HUSD. In addition, a candidate must hold a California administrative credential or be willing to enroll in a credentialing program at a university. Similarly, only applicants holding an M.A. or M.Ed. degree or willing to earn one during the AIP are considered eligible. The M.A. need not be in educational administration, however.

In 1979, 70 interested teachers showed up for the first AIP orientation, and 54 filed applications which included letters of intent and problem exercises. The 13 members of the Superintendent's Cabinet screened these applications without name identification, and narrowed the set from 54 to about 31. The Personnel Office then prepared a file on each of the 31

selected candidates. These were interviewed one at a time for 30 minutes each by six-member groups from the Cabinet. Interviewers completed separate, undiscussed, numerical rating sheets on each candidate and candidates also did another written problem exercise. Some 22 were selected as interns based on these ratings. Personnel conducted private interviews later with those who were not finally selected.

The AIP includes a variety of opportunities for training, such as visits, observations, conferences and workshops, interviews, substituting, attendance at board and council meetings, and formal training sessions. Areas of training include personnel evaluation; curriculum development and instruction; contract, budget, and facilities management; conflict management; time management; state and federal programs; due process; and role of superintendent and board. The program seeks to develop both substantive skills in educational areas and more general skills such as listening, problem solving, leadership, communications, and human relations.

The AIP is intense. There are seven full-day didactic sessions from December through June of the interns' year, and constant workshops, conferences, observations, etcetera. HUSD senior officers are heavily involved in the training of interns, but outside experts participate as well.

Some interns withdraw voluntarily during each year as their experiences lead them to conclude that they do not want to become administrators or that their performance is probably not competitive. There is no position awaiting anyone upon completion. This is stated explicitly at the orientation session. There are also no posted grades or other forms of competition among interns built into AIP, but there are tacit social comparisons made among interns as peers and by supervisors qua trainers.

AIP ends in June, with the close of the school year. Vacancies for vice-principalships, principalships, and similar administrative positions are then announced and interns may choose to become candidates, as do others in the system who are already qualified. The selection procedure is closely

analogous to the procedure for selection into the AIP, with the same Cabinet members performing the same roles.

An intern who has completed her M.A. and who is appointed to an administrative vacancy serves, if she accepts, as an intern principal for a year. This probationary condition was not built into AIP but was added in 1980 by the superintendent because of his belief that the training period is not yet complete and because changes in administrative assignments are commonplace within HUSD anyway. The intern principals and vice principals we interviewed do not think of themselves in this way, however, and they expect to continue in their posts or very similar ones in the years ahead.

The HUSD superintendent said he installed the AIP because "I became appalled at the low quality of preparation characteristic of school administrators here and elsewhere. They seemed to me to learn how to repeat the mistakes made by others and they suffered from isolation on the job... I wanted to correct for these conditions and I wanted to combat the choice of principals through 'buddyism.'"

What is most striking about the working selves presented by the interns during our interviews was the way all of them seemed to exceed the aims of their superintendent. They are observably more than well prepared and capable of devising their own continuing, even lifelong, education as leaders. They are more than team players enjoying the benefits of membership in the circle of administrators, integrative as those benefits appear to be. They are also more than mere exceptions to the practices of cronyism and nepotism so deplored by their superintendent. Their most commonly shared and imposing characteristic appeared to be high ego strength.

Each has his or her own reasons for wanting to become a school administrator and the reasons have been thought out with care over a long period of time. Most came up out of classrooms within HUSD, but a few were drawn toward Hayward because they heard of AIP while working in other Bay Area school districts. The diversity of sources of experience, educational specialization, and life histories is great and there is an encouraging mix

effort to remedy this shortage.

The interns we interviewed regard the AIP as most w  
its orienting, role-building, and associative features. They  
the didactic sessions as formally preparatory, nor do any of  
that the homework task products are a sound basis for evaluat  
are simultaneously engaged in graduate studies appreciate the  
ings" as they call them, but they do not give much credence t  
exercises or examinations as methods for leadership preparati  
it is sustained interaction with supervising principals and s  
office administrators, combined with some chances to try out  
which are regarded as uniquely worthwhile.

Every intern believed that, in the words of one of  
Hayward, entering the AIP means a big change the minute you t  
the ring by applying for entry." The biggest change comes fr  
from one's teaching peers. "The teachers you know best remai  
encouraging," said one intern, "but a kind of wall goes up so  
rumors and problems is concerned." Some but not all interns  
be hard to regain one's former plac<sup>e</sup> among teachers in the ev  
placed into administration, and all interns made it clear the  
displacement and the risk of return to be unimportant when co  
opportunity to enter the AIP.

The AIP has opened the ranks of administration to w  
Before World War II, women used to become elementary school p  
rarely anything higher. Today in HUSD, as a result of the AI  
reductions in sexism in the Bay Area, "only jobs like dean of  
sex-bound," said a women intern, "and even the deans deal wit  
in some matters." One woman has become a junior high school p  
several are newly appointed as elementary principals and high  
principals. "When a woman becomes the principal of one of Ha



hensive high schools," said one intern, "this district will be fully open to both sexes." She thought this could happen very soon.

Selection as an intern does not rely upon "buddyism," and selection for a principalship is affected deeply by the merits of performance as an intern. All those interviewed subscribe to these propositions, although the newcomers to AIP are not sure about the latter. To this extent, then, AIP has accomplished the superintendent's main aim.

Several interns are conscious of the ways in which they are "pre-selected" into internships, however, and at least two are convinced that principal selection itself remains a political process. Being the only male on an elementary school faculty still affects the pre-selection, as do committee work or ancillary contact with administrators as in guidance counseling. And coming to the very favorable attention of an education professor can also help.

In other words, the scales that weigh the applicants for the internship are held by a few key senior administrators whose judgments are biased by prior acquaintance and by the recommendations of peers. Rating and paper grades are reviewed earnestly, but the procedure is confined to Cabinet members. There are no external appraisers and merit scores are not disclosed.

These conditions appear to exert even greater influence over the later appointment/selection process, moreover. When an intern completes her year of training, she does not learn of her relative standing, nor is feedback on homework and practicum tasks frequent or systematic. Above all else, the group of raters for a principalship has no new or independent raters in its midst. Thus, it could be the case that an intern pre-selected through favoritism could simply enjoy the benefits of a halo effect that accompanied him from before AIP entry until the final, later selection and appointment procedure.

Nearly all of those interviewed were somewhat aware of these conditions, yet their levels of trust in the processes were very high. Several were convinced that the political feature was primarily a matter of testing for some degree of social value convergence. According to these respondents, HUSD administrators are concerned with "firming up" the business-like qualities of staff and with "leaving far behind" the era of informality and ease that once characterized parts of the community. The virtues of efficiency, punctuality, fiscal prudence, and attention to procedural detail are visibly stressed.

The chief flaw in the Hayward principal selection procedure was identified by one principal, however, as a matter of a closed testing, rating, and choice procedure. No one of independent auspice and no one not already very familiar with the AIP graduates is involved. We have already pointed out the danger in the possible halo effect that may result, and according to successful appointees, those who are selected are not sure why they "won," and those who "lose" and return to teaching are perceived by others and reputedly by themselves as failures, when they may in fact have been rated nearly identically.

In spite of these flaws, however, the AIP works in Hayward to train, assess, and select educational leaders better than most procedures we have studied from coast to coast. It has met its founders' major objectives, and in their eyes the expense has been slight when contrasted with the yield in increased competency, organizational unity, and reported impacts on the instructional services of many Hayward public schools.

Its benefits spring from its auspice. It is the creature of an exceptionally autonomous and contractually empowered superintendent, conjoined with the excellence fostered by a contemporary, knowledgeable staff of personnel administrators. Its costs spring from the same sources: there is almost no involvement with outside groups because the ties to the central administration are so tight. This restricts expanding the legitimacy of the AIP over time and may shorten its life-span.

The Administrative Training Program (ATP) of the Montgomery County Public School System, Maryland

The Administrative Training Program (ATP) of the Montgomery County Public School System is actually a three-part program involving: (1) a career development phase; (2) an administrative internship phase to prepare candidates for the principalship; and (3) a district-run assessment center to assess interns as they complete the training program. After passing successfully through these gates, a candidate enters open competition for the job of principal.

For this study, we were primarily concerned with the internship, which is indeed the heart and soul of the ATP. However, the career development and assessment center phases in essence bracket the internship as entry and exit gates on the way to the principalship and hence deserve brief description. Further, the totality of the ATP conveys the rigor and intensity with which Montgomery County pursues its goals of merit, equity, and legitimacy--especially merit--in its principal selection efforts.

Briefly then, the career development phase is a two-stage course designed to help district personnel decide whether or not to pursue administrative careers. The first stage is a non-credit, ten-session weekly course conducted after work hours for potential aspirants (usually teachers, department heads, or specialists). Its primary objectives are to provide information on career opportunities, career planning, and participants' potential; self-assessment opportunities; and simulations. At the end of the ten weeks, participants are given feedback on their performance and aptitudes. (However, this first stage is intended as an awareness program rather than any sort of prerequisite or training for administrative appointment.) The second stage of the career development phase is a three-credit, 18-week inservice course conducted after work hours. The course is formalized and uses speakers, films, discussions and simulations to deepen participants' knowledge about administration.

The career development program is currently recommended but not required for entry into the intern program. However, our interviewees reported that most interns have taken the career development programs.

The administrative internship itself (which we shall henceforth refer to as the ATP for brevity) is an intensive, on-the-job training program for prospective principals. It is usually announced district-wide in the early fall. Applicants undergo a "book rating" whereby the deputy superintendent, the executive assistant to the superintendent, and the associate superintendents review and rank each candidate based on degrees, experiences, skills as noted in a mandated resume format, certification, references, and evaluations. Then, the top candidates are invited to the Administrative Competence Sessions, which are an intensive observation and assessment of the candidates' interpersonal skills, communication and conceptual skills, and group leadership skills. The assessors consist of administrative and supervisory personnel, such as associate superintendents, principals, directors and supervisors.

Although the specific activities of the Administrative Competence Session are currently under review for possible revision, the ones used in the past have been: (1) small group problem-solving task, (2) individual interview, and (3) written task. Candidates are given points for their performances on each of the activities and are then ranked. Names of the top persons are placed on "the administrative intern list" for two years after the system's Appointments Committee (composed of the superintendent, deputy superintendent, executive assistant to the superintendent, area associate superintendents, and director and assistant director of personnel (non-voting)), has determined the number based on future projected needs of the system. When an opening for an assistant principal occurs in a school, the decision is made by the superintendent concerning placement of a current assistant principal or an administrative intern in that position. If an intern opening is set, selected persons from the list are interviewed by a panel; then one person is selected to participate in the administrative internship program.

Each intern, serving as assistant principal for one year, experiences a wide range of activities which will prepare the intern for the role of principal. The scope of the intern's responsibilities includes the following areas: instructional program, staff, pupil personnel, management, community involvement and professional growth. The principal to whom the intern has been assigned is responsible for the allocation of duties similar to those performed by an assistant principal. The principal is also the primary trainer and supervisor of the intern. Since these tasks and activities in which the intern is engaged help to determine the skills which she develops, the principal is expected to share all aspects of the principalship with the intern so that the intern is exposed to the total operation of a school.

Monthly seminars are a major component of the internship program. The intern conducts these seminars with her supervisory team, which consists of a central office associate superintendent, area office associate superintendent, representative from the Department of Staff Development, and a university representative or outside consultant (depending upon whether the intern is receiving university credits toward a doctorate or inservice credits). At each meeting, the intern presents an analysis of a log of daily activities and discusses a selected activity analysis that deals with an issue such as supervision of instruction, pupil personnel, or community and parent involvement as it has contributed to growth and on which the intern seeks guidance. These seminars provide important feedback for the intern. The team's role is to provide support, guidance, and evaluation (interim and final) of the intern. The supervisory team has the opportunity to study the intern's on-the-job performance, thereby becoming acquainted with the strengths and weaknesses of the candidate. The team assists the intern and principal in assessing the intern's performance as well as helps design additional experiences and determines more effective ways of carrying out current responsibilities. As part of this team, the Department of Staff Development representative plays a special facilitative role during the monthly meetings by acting as an advocate for the intern and as a group process observer. Finally, the internship provides partici-

While the performance and analysis of local school duty assignments constitute the main thrust of the internship training activities, Department of Staff Development provides other experiences to give the intern a broader perspective regarding educational leadership. While the intern is paid on the teacher's salary scale for the year, the difference between this amount and the salary of an assistant principal is used for additional instructional programs and resources for the intern. After a needs assessment, training activities are planned that feature either the extension of knowledge about the school system or the development of skills and knowledge in educational management, leadership, and supervision. Opportunities may consist of specially designed training programs on school law, finances and budget, or teacher supervision; group field trips or retreats; individual visits to other schools or school systems; opportunities for individual assistance by consultants to assist with unique training needs; and participation in workshops offered by universities and consulting companies. Upon satisfactory completion of the program, the intern is interviewed for an assistant principal position as soon as one becomes available.

Candidates for school principal are also observed and reviewed through a locally developed assessment center. Candidates are invited to the center after a review of their credentials, recommendations and personnel folders by the system's Appointments Committee. The center is conducted over an intensive, two-day period, usually at a local site. Each candidate participates in five exercises designed to give him opportunities to demonstrate competence in five skills: group leadership and problem solving; analyzing classroom teacher behavior and conducting subsequent conferences with teachers; oral presentation; written communication; and organizational management.

The behavior of the candidate on the various exercises is observed and assessed by evaluators who include top executives and practicing principals.

pals of the school system. At the end of each exercise, these evaluators complete rating sheets on the candidate. Each evaluator is scheduled to observe each candidate in at least two exercises. After the activities have been completed, the individual rating forms are tabulated and summarized by each exercise. These ratings are used by the Appointments Committee to screen out some of the candidates. Each candidate is given the opportunity to discuss the results and recommended training programs for individual growth in an individual interview conducted by the director of personnel services.

Candidates who successfully complete the assessment center are then interviewed by the superintendent (and other relevant top administrators) for placement as principals.

Montgomery County is one of the nation's twenty largest public school districts: It takes more than an hour to drive from one boundary to the other; it enrolls over 92,100 students; it operates 160 school facilities; and it maintains a staff of about 11,500 personnel. As such, the district operates coherently and with exceptionally high quality because it is organized around the principles of modern personnel management. These include great investments in staff development.

From the points of view of every respondent, initial selectivity, career path guidance, training, and competitive assessment have been combined into an inclusive, challenging, and worthwhile upward mobility path for teachers who aspire toward leadership roles. The ATP, in other words, is neither special nor remarkable when viewed from within Montgomery County; rather, it is one among many comparable pathways to heightened proficiency and increased income. It has taken on greater importance in recent years, however, for reasons noted by the deputy superintendent. He believes the marketplace for locating educational talent has changed radically over two decades. "We once had five applicants for six jobs," he said, "and we had to make many compromises with quality. Now we are choosing one teacher or one administrator from among hundreds of applicants, and our selection and training procedures help us to hit well about 95 percent of the time."

point where a very large funnel narrows sharply into a small neck. Those chosen have already established a high performance record as teachers or lower level supervisory staff members. They all hold masters degrees and some have doctorates (from a variety of universities). They have usually done outstandingly in the courses, and they have demonstrated their skills in the assessment activities with distinction. Getting to the point of internship is regarded by most of those interviewed as an intensely competitive process. Further, the internship is very rigorous and evaluative. The internship year is dense with both didactic learning occasions and informally arranged self-study options. Learning progress and leadership potential are appraised after six months in an interim evaluation and then again at the end of the year. The final evaluation becomes a primary document for review by the Appointments Committee in deciding upon placement as acting assistant principal or assistant principal.

Everyone interviewed agreed that the strength of the internship experience is taken chiefly from the intern's repeated interaction with members of the supervisory teams, useful as the training and self-study opportunities are. It is through encounters with the supervisory team-- whose members include the supervising principals as well as some members of the Appointments Committee--that the intern becomes socialized to administration while the Committee has time to build a deep, extended familiarity with the judgment and character of the intern as a future leader.

The superintendent and his Appointments Committee also use the ATP as a means for affirmative action. They do not emphasize specific performance scores during the internship because they are determined to find and appoint women and ethnic minority candidates once assessment leads to a determination of adequate preparation and ability.<sup>1</sup> Thus, the ATP is more than an equal opportunity program. It results in equalization of principalship appointments from among those who rank high in the training sequences.

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<sup>1</sup>This is but one among several reasons why scores are dropped from the record when a candidate has been placed on the list. Another includes separating staff development from appointment.



The achievement is dramatic for women. Six women now serve as junior high and middle school principals. Many more are in charge of elementary schools, and two have become high school principals. A woman is associate superintendent in charge of curriculum, budget, and facility planning, and one serves as an area associate superintendent. The record for racial minorities also shows substantial equity gains. In the 1975-76 school year, 13 percent of the new administrative and supervisory appointees were from racial minorities, and during the 1981-82 school year, this proportion rose to 24 percent. The personnel director takes pride in noting that scrutiny of Montgomery County's equity practices has been intense for a decade, yet, "We have never lost a case or even come close."

Principal selection within Montgomery County is greatly enhanced by the ATP. The internship program is quite old, going back in fact to the late 1950s when some of its basic features were first introduced. The ATP will not fade away because it is viewed by the board as a means of conserving and upgrading leadership, although it may undergo many changes during the late 1980s as retrenchment pressures continue to build.

#### Exemplary Conventional' Practices in Broward County, Florida

Broward County's principal selection process has three main elements: 1) the Eligibility List, which essentially sets forth basic selection criteria and career ladders; (2) the Vacancy Screening, which rates eligible candidates against the specific requirements of each vacancy; and (3) the Vacancy Interview, which selects the finalists from among the most highly rated eligible candidates. The process is complex, for it is characterized by various checks and balances to help ensure the highest standards of fairness and professionalism as well as the confidence of various interest groups, and it is closely tied to the district's affirmative action plan.

The process begins with the compilation of the promotion lists or Eligibility Lists, which contain the names of all qualified candidates for each type of school administrative position (principal or assistant principal).

From the candidate's view, qualification for the list is a rigorous undertaking that involves meeting both state certification requirements and basic district standards of training and experience, which go beyond the state demands, and demonstrating extensive service, curriculum expertise, and administrative experience. While the latter are not stated as criteria, they are nonetheless central, and the level of competition among candidates has pushed them far.

In order to establish that the eligibility requirements have been met, the candidate prepares and files with Personnel a very lengthy and detailed application. The application requires specification of teaching and administrative experience and educational background; evidence of the professional, organizational and management, human relations, and communications skills the candidate wishes to present; specification of community participation; and description of any academic preparation beyond the terminal degree. In addition, the candidate must list the names of references, including all supervisors of one year's duration during the five years preceeding the application date. The application is extremely important, for it is the basis for the Vacancy Screening rating process to come. Completing it is a major undertaking, and candidates spend considerable time and effort on it. It is widely perceived to be critical, and only the naive candidate gives it less than full attention. Once the application is received by Personnel, it is reviewed to ascertain that the applicant indeed meets the basic state and district requirements and is thereby eligible.

At this point, Personnel also sends out standard recommendation forms to the references listed by the applicant. Although these are not needed for the eligibility review, they will be required later for the Vacancy Screening. The recommendation forms are empirically designed to help counter excessive subjectivity or halo effects from the recommending supervisor. The respondent is forced to choose only eight from a list of 20 qualities describing the applicant. On face value, all 20 qualities are highly desirable and credible characteristics. Hence the probability is high that the respondent will choose eight qualities that do indeed accurately reflect the applicant. However, the 20 items are empirically weighted on the

basis of a survey of school administrators conducted by the research department. The weights are a closely guarded secret. Thus, when a respondent selects an item as descriptive of a candidate, she does not know whether it has a high or a low weight, or rather, whether it is considered a highly desirable characteristic by Broward's school administrators.

Candidates can and do file applications for placement on the Eligibility List at any time, even at the same time an application is filed for a particular, announced vacancy. Personnel reviews an application immediately upon receiving it, and notifies the applicant of disposition. However, formal advertising in a variety of media (newspapers, professional journals, district newsletters and circulars) is done at least once a year for the Eligibility List in order to encourage qualified candidates to submit applications. In keeping with the affirmative action plan, special efforts are made to recruit minorities and women through various organizational and media contacts, as well as through internal recruitment and encouragement. The timing of the annual Eligibility List advertisement varies somewhat depending on fall hiring projections, but usually occurs sometime in the spring.

The Eligibility List advertising is critical, for the vacancies themselves are not heavily advertised. The net effect of this feature (and various other logistical aspects of the process) is to encourage almost exclusive promotion from within the district, although this is not written policy. Tendencies toward cronyism and in-breeding are countered by the fact that Broward is a large district that attracts instructional staff from all over the county.

When a specific principalship or assistant principalship vacancy occurs, special criteria in addition to the basic state and district criteria may be established to reflect particular school needs (for instance, a special need to upgrade curriculum). The special criteria are developed in writing by both the Associate Superintendent for Personnel, and the supervising Area (subdistrict) Superintendent (if the vacancy is a principalship)

or the supervising principal (if it is an assistant principalship). A copy is sent to the affirmative action unit, the Office of Comprehensive Planning for Equal Opportunities (OCPEO). Special criteria must be developed well in advance of any vacancy screening and included with the position advertisement. In addition, special criteria must be clearly and specifically job-related.

School-specific vacancy announcements are sent by mail to all on the Eligibility List (which usually consists of at least 200-250 aspirants) and are posted throughout the district. Little if any advertising is done beyond this. Those on the Eligibility List who wish to apply for the position (or positions) apply by letter of intent to Personnel. If a candidate does not apply, she is not carried into the next step of the process, the Vacancy Screening.

The Vacancy Screening is conducted by a Vacancy Screening Committee which is established to review the applications and rate each applicant for the specific vacancy at hand. The composition of the Committee is specified as a matter of policy and includes: the Associate Superintendent for Personnel or his representative; the Director of OCPEO or his representative; the appropriate curriculum director for the level being screened; and two principals from the level being screened. In addition, the district seeks to obtain minority and female representation on the Committee. This is not usually difficult, since both are now well represented among principals and central administrators in Broward County.

Using the rating forms the Committee conducts blind ratings of the applicants based on information contained in a coded examination folder prepared by Personnel. The folder contains the application submitted by the candidate at the entry point of the Eligibility List, with the first two pages removed. The folder also contains the applicant's references. Each Committee member independently examines the data and rates each candidate, assigning a numerical score on a four-point scale to each of 22 items. A number of our respondents who had served on Screening Committees commented that the rating is not always blind. As one noted, "If you knew anything about them [potential candidates], you knew who they were." This is no doubt

the case, for there are many opportunities for district leaders and aspiring leaders to meet, work together, and get to know each other. A number of our respondents also commented on the amount of time often required to rate all the applicants: as many as 30-40 may apply, and these may take three to four days to rate.

In order for a candidate to forge ahead at this point, there must be fairly strong consensus among the raters that the individual has done "more" in most of the 22 areas. Competition is keen, and a difference of a very few points is often all that lies between elimination and moving to the the next step in the process. The ability of the candidate to express himself through the application is a factor at this point. However, as one said, "the word is out" about this fact, and the candidates learn very quickly how best to fill out their application, often seeking help and advice from peers and successful candidates.

After all the applicants are rated--a procedure which may take quite some time depending on the number of candidates--the head of Personnel compiles and averages the ratings and the references to obtain a single "sum-of-the-ratings" score for each candidate. Excepting vacancies for which there are special criteria, a candidate's score remains in effect for one year, after which time he must reapply and be re-rated.

The candidates are then ranked in order of their scores (which are not made public), and the top four to six (or eight in the event of extremely close ratings for the sixth position) are selected to proceed to the next step in the process, the Vacancy Interview. The exact number selected for this Vacancy Interview List depends in part on the closeness of the scores and in part on equity considerations. For instance, if the top four candidates are all white females, the list will usually be extended to include some blacks and males. However, at this point in its equity history, Broward County does not have any significant problems with the race and sex composition of its various candidate pools. One respondent's comment on this issue was typical of remarks we heard from all constituencies: "We don't really pay much attention to that any longer--inservice, grooming, brings lots of people to the top and the pools at every stage are pretty well representative."

As soon as the Interview List is compiled, a Vacancy Interview Panel is convened. Once again, the composition of the Panel is specified by policy. Principal's panels include: the Associate Superintendent for Personnel; the OCPEO director; the Associate Superintendent for Curriculum; at least one "layperson" (or parent) from the school; at least one faculty representative of the school in question; and the supervising Area Superintendent. Parents are usually chosen from the leadership of the school's parent committees and teachers are chosen by the faculty. The composition of Interview Panels for assistant principals is essentially the same, except the Area Superintendent substitutes for the Associate Superintendent of Curriculum and the supervising principal sits in place of the Area Superintendent.

The task of the Vacancy Interview Panel is to select the top three finalists (unranked) from the Interview List of four to six candidates. Prior to beginning the interviews, the Panel is instructed about their purpose, proper procedures for security and general guidelines for sound interviewing. In addition, Panelists are provided the candidates' resumes. (The application form and the sum-of-the-ratings scores are not provided to the panel). Panelists are also provided with a checklist of interview questions and items (made up by Personnel), particularly "items which explore the special criteria for the job." The Panel may choose to add additional questions and items to explore; however, once the checklist is finalized, it is applied to all interviewees. In addition, the OCPEO office provides a statement of the current district-wide level of utilization and availability of minorities and women for the particular job category under consideration. Finally, the candidates may be required to write a short, extemporaneous essay on a job-related question just prior to the interview, and the Panel will have these responses.

After a 30-minute interview, the Panelists independently rate each candidate. Each Panelist signs the form for monitoring purposes. After all candidates have been interviewed and rated, the Panel discusses the interviews and the ratings. Taking these data and the data on utilization and availability of women and minorities into account, the Panel seeks to reach consensus on three candidates to recommend as finalists. These final three

candidates are not ranked. If the Panel cannot come to consensus, as many as six finalists can be submitted by majority vote on each of the six.

Once these data are in, the Associate Superintendent for Personnel asks the supervisor of the position to comment on the finalists (and the interview process if he wishes) and recommend his choice for the position. He then takes the list of finalists, the Panelists' signed evaluation sheets for each candidate, the comments and recommendations of the supervisor, and his own comments and recommendations to the superintendent.

This is the superintendent's first entry into the selection process, and his task is to review the credentials of the candidates, the comments and recommendations of the Interview Panel, and the recommendations of the supervisor and Personnel. By his own account, he views his oversight and monitoring role at this stage as crucial and consequential for the credibility of the entire selection process. As he said, "credibility [for the process] resides with the superintendent, not with the staff," and "credibility is the most important thing you have to maintain with regard to this [process]-- you might as well chuck the whole thing if you lose credibility. If the perception ever gets out that it's a Good Old Person process, it's all over--you may as well get another superintendent."

To ensure the integrity and credibility of the process, the superintendent has adopted several strategies. First, he never gets involved until the final moment, preferring, in his words, "to stay as far removed as I can in order to avoid any impression of entering into and manipulating the process." Nonetheless, he makes certain that his staff know that he will hold them accountable and that the consequences will be swift and severe if he ever finds deliberate manipulation or collusion. As he said, he considers this such behavior "would be the greatest imaginable violation of trust between a superintendent and his staff and violation of his office of superintendent." (Other respondents confirmed his behavior in this regard.)

Once the superintendent has completed his review and is satisfied that all is in order and the best employment choice has been made, he carries

the appointment recommendation to the board. He does have the authority to recommend an applicant not recommended as a finalist by the Interview Panel, if such a recommendation is accompanied by a written rationale. However, he has never done so. And, in the great majority of cases, the appointee is the person who was recommended by the immediate supervisor.

#### 'Exemplary Conventional' Practices in Hillsborough County, Florida

Hillsborough County's principal selection process is characterized by three main features: (1) well defined, well known career ladders to the principalship, each of which includes universally available development opportunities and careful scrutiny of candidates by top district administrators; (2) rigorous screening at entry-level positions, conducted by a diversified team composed mainly of school-level staff; and (3) team interviewing of screened and approved applicants for specific vacancies by the seven top administrative leaders in the district. The process rests upon both the broad-based participation of teachers, principals and assistant principals, who essentially control the entry gates, and the intimate and pervasive involvement of the top district leaders, who control the final appointment decisions. It is a process that is characterized by a great deal of stability and trust among its participants. These critical elements have been built up in part by the consistency and fairness with which it has operated for the past ten years, and in part by the high esteem and respect its top leaders (who are its originators) have earned for their integrity and professionalism.

At the secondary level, the principalship career ladder has three steps: (1) dean; (2) assistant principal; (3) principal. As a general rule, candidates must pass through both the dean and assistant principal steps to become a principal. While serving in the deanship, the aspirant is expected to learn "discipline and student relations," according to several of our informants. In the assistant principal role, the candidate also serves in a functionally specified role or roles. For instance, all Hillsborough high schools have an assistant principal for curriculum and an assistant principal for administration (as well as other assistant principalships,



depending on the size of the school). The supervising principals are encouraged to rotate their assistants so that each can gain experience with curriculum and administration as well as any other functions. If the supervising principal chooses not to rotate assistants (as some may), the assistants themselves generally seek to exchange information about their respective duties.

At the elementary level, the basic criteria are similar. However, there are no administrative steps in the career ladder to the elementary principalship. The principalship is itself the entry administrative position. However, in practice, the instructional position of curriculum specialist has become the prerequisite for the elementary principalship. Each elementary school in the district has a curriculum specialist whose role it is to provide curriculum leadership for the entire school. The curriculum specialist's duties cut across all grade levels and include: assisting teachers with student diagnostic testing and placement; working with teachers to evaluate students and prescribe instruction; conducting classroom demonstrations of teaching methods and materials; assisting teachers in grouping students and writing lesson plans; monitoring the entire curriculum for the school; securing materials; assisting with scheduling; coordinating special instructional programs; working with teachers and administrators to develop the school's inservice program; assisting staff in developing the school's annual goals and objectives; and serving as liaison between the school and various groups (such as parent volunteer workers, aides, and interns).

In terms of the district's philosophy, this is not a lack in the candidate's developmental experience. Hillsborough County places heavy emphasis on curriculum, particularly at the elementary level. The elementary principal is expected to be a curriculum leader, and, while she may rely on her curriculum specialist for day-to-day curriculum supervision, ideally she herself is deeply knowledgeable and up-to-date in elementary curriculum and instruction. As one top administrator said, "The concept of the principal [both elementary and secondary] has changed in this district so that they are now the leaders in curriculum. The principal is not appointed just because of his administrative and organizational leadership."

The entry positions of curriculum specialist, dean and assistant principal are all obtained through a two-stage process, by applying first to a screening committee and then directly to the supervising principal. As soon as an aspirant has completed the basic requirements, she files an application with Personnel to begin this process. The application is simple, requiring a listing of teaching and educational experience and three references. An open-ended opportunity is provided for the applicant to include other information, such as honors. The main purpose of the application is to register the candidate's interest and to declare that the basic certifications and training have been completed. Personnel reviews the application to verify that criteria are indeed met and compiles a list of eligible candidates for screening.

Applications may be filed at any time, and, as soon as a dozen or so eligible aspirants accumulate (or at least twice a year, in the spring and fall), the Assistant Superintendent for Administration and Operations convenes a Screening Committee. The Screening Committee is the gatekeeper for the principalship. It controls access to the early positions (and at the elementary level, to the principalship itself). It is regarded as a stiff hurdle for the candidates, who approach it with respect.

The make-up of the Committee is spelled out in district policy. Each Committee includes representatives of positions subordinate and superordinate to the slot being filled, as well as peer representatives. For instance, the dean's Screening Committee includes: two teachers; two members of the Dean's Council (representing both sexes); a representative from the Junior and Senior High Principals' Councils; and the Assistant Superintendent for Administration and Operations or his representative, who chairs the Committee. Instructions to the Committee seek to elicit the deepest role identification of each member, and this is one of the keys to its functioning. One administrator described instructions he had recently given at a screening for dean: "I told them, 'Teachers, you will be sending unruly students to this person; Deans, this person will be in the cohort working with you, down the hall and on the Deans' Council; Principals, consider this person as your dean at your school. Do you want him there?'"

Immediately following the interview, each candidate is asked to write a short essay in response to a standard question. The topic is usually, "Describe (anonymously) the best administrator you have ever known and the reasons you feel the person [was] outstanding" or "Why would you like to become [the position being filled]?" These essays do not affect the rating. However, they may be of importance later to the principalship interview team of top district administrators.

The ratings for each candidate are assigned according to a five-point scale in each of eight categories. The highest and lowest scores for each candidate are discarded, and the remaining scores are averaged. Thirty is the passing score, which means that the applicant must receive at least a four on most items to pass. As the previously mentioned administrator put it in his recent instruction to the deanship Committee: "Three is considered average. We don't want average administrators here." Approximately 35-40 percent of the candidates for the first-level positions (deans and curriculum specialists) fail the screening. Fewer fail second-level screenings (e.g., for elementary principals), but even here there are failures.

Following the screening, applicants can go to Personnel and review their rating sheets, which are anonymous. Candidates can also seek counseling from Personnel or from other top administrators. If a candidate fails, he may be rescreened after a one-year waiting period. If a successful candidate fails to secure an appointment within three years of screening, he must be rescreened in order to remain eligible for the position category. As several of our informants noted, the purpose of the rescreening requirement is to insure that aspiring administrators "stay current."

Once a candidate has passed the screening for curriculum specialist or dean, she must compete with other successful candidates for a position. (There are usually around 50-60 eligible candidates for these entry positions at any given time, although all of these may not apply for a particular position.) This competition is under the direct control of the supervising principal, who oversees and conducts the selection process for

these entry positions. The hiring principal typically advertises the position in the district newsletter, and then interviews applicants. It has become custom to appoint a candidate from outside the particular school in question, in order to "bring in fresh blood" as one informant put it. Many use a school committee of either administrators or administrators and faculty to interview candidates. Others choose to conduct personal interviews. The competition is stiff. As one ex-candidate, now a principal, put it: "Once you screen, you have to get out there and hustle if you want one of these jobs!"

Hillsborough's practice is to promote from within the district. Because of its size and the fact that it attracts a diverse population, the administration is comfortable with the practice of promoting from within. And, though Hillsborough is under court order for desegregation, equity in appointments has become a norm rather than an issue. Blacks, who make up about 20 percent of the student population, are well represented in the ranks of elementary and junior high school principals (and among curriculum specialists and deans). It is a matter of some concern to the administration that, due to a recent promotion to central administrative ranks, there is currently no black high school principal. However, according to black and white informants, at all levels, there are a number of black deans and assistants. Over half of Hillsborough County's elementary principals are women, a fact due no doubt to a principalship career ladder that places heavy emphasis on classroom and curriculum experience. The proportion of women declines substantially at secondary levels; about 10 percent of principals at junior and senior high levels are women. However, again according to male and female informants at all levels, women are well represented in the ranks of deans and assistant principals.

Once in an entry role, the aspirant undergoes a development and weeding process of several years' duration. Curriculum specialists usually spend five to six years in the role, and deans and assistant principals may spend even longer periods of time in these slots. In all of these roles, aspirants can avail themselves of numerous inservice experiences, including seminars, workshops, visits, and demonstrations. As one elementary principal

lightly said: "Once you get to be a curriculum specialist, they inservice you to death on everything!" And then, describing the career path in a more serious vein: "It's just so sequential. Everything is right there before you. The training is right there if you want it." The aspirants also have endless opportunities to serve on the committees, task forces, and councils that are central to the governance of the district. While Hillsborough is a centralized system, it is not autocratically so. The central leadership is constantly soliciting planning participation and feedback from school-level staff, both formally through the committee mechanisms and informally through the constant presence of the top leadership in the schools.

By the time the candidate comes up to the line to compete for a specific principalship vacancy, he has usually been observed performing as a curriculum specialist, dean, or assistant principal for a number of years. While there is no specific length-of-service requirement in these positions, it is the rare candidate who does not serve at least two or three years at one step before competing for the next.

Vacant principalships are advertised by school in the Administrative Bulletin. Present principals are given the right of transfer, and the vacancy listed is not necessarily the one that will be available for the competition. For instance, seven vacancies for the 1982-83 school year (an unusual number) resulted in a total of 25 moves when all the transfers and promotions were completed. Again, however, the transfer policy is well known and publicized, for it is a standard part of each announcement.

Candidates apply for vacant positions in two ways: (1) by responding to the Bulletin advertisement; and (2) by being a member of the screened and approved candidate pool (presently about 35 candidates at the elementary level, and about 60 at the secondary level). The latter automatically confers applicant status, regardless of whether the candidate notifies her General Area Director of interest in a specific position or not. In fact, it is common practice for candidates who have not actually applied for a specific vacancy to be invited from the pool to appear before the Interview Committee.

Such invitations may be issued from several sources. First, Personnel reviews the list of screened and approved candidates in order to (1) add enough candidates to those who directly applied to make up an interview group of "about two to three per vacancy," and (2) insure that those candidates who might be particularly suited to the position by virtue of special skills or geographic location, are called. New candidates also might be added by the assistant superintendent's office, after he and his staff have reviewed the pool list. Finally, the Interview Committee itself might decide consensually to expand the candidate group being interviewed. As one member of this Committee commented: "We might look at two or three per vacancy, then decide to go the list and pull two or three more."

The Interview Committee plays a crucial role in principal appointments in Hillsborough County. It consists of the district's top decision-making team, including the superintendent, and its fundamental role is to reach consensus about who should be principal at which school. Each candidate is called before the Interview Committee for an interview that generally lasts about 30 minutes, and is regarded as extremely important by both candidates and the Interview Committee. (In addition, candidates are usually well known to Committee members, almost all of whom visit schools frequently and work on the various substantive and governance committees and councils that are essential to the district's operations, and which include candidates. Hence, the Interview Committee's individual members have generally had ample opportunity to observe and assess candidates' job performance and leadership potential--as expressed by committee and service work--over a period of several years.) The structure is open-ended, and candidates who have been through the process characterize the questions as "What do you think about policy X or decision Y" questions, as compared to the "What would you do if" type of questions that characterize the screening. The Interview Committee waits until all candidates have been interviewed before discussing any. No rating forms are used, although individual Committee members may make notes as they desire. Questioning is free-flowing, and each Committee member queries the candidates at will.

The Committee often meets two or three times to discuss and review issues and candidates. According to several members, the discussions tend to focus on candidate-school matches, based on both student and community needs and the candidate's instructional/administrative skills and personality/public relations skills. And, as one Committee member put it, "Everyone tends to stress their own special interest--[one] emphasizes curriculum, [another] emphasizes community [that is, the type of community served by the school and the particular educational needs of the children], [the superintendent] emphasizes management, and so on." The Interview Committee strives for consensus in its final recommendations, and usually attains it. In fact, our informants noted that a failure of consensus had never happened. If this should occur, the superintendent would, in his own words, "step in and take one side or the other." In actuality, the authority for the decision always rests with the superintendent. However, the essential decision-making is done consensually by the top management team in Committee.

### Comparative Analysis

Phase 2 districts do share some features with Phase 1 districts. For instance, all five promote primarily or exclusively from within. And, in all five the superintendent retains central authority for appointments and for the selection process itself. In addition, all five make use of variously composed screening committees which in turn make use of various types of interviews and rating schema. Finally, in making appointment decisions, Phase 2 superintendents are confronted with the same cross-pressures: each appointment is a thread in the district tapestry; various considerations have to be taken into account.

However, even in these similarities, the Phase 2 districts are different from the Phase 1 sites. For instance, while the Phase 2 districts promote from within, they do so with a keen awareness of the danger of inbreeding and cronyism. Hence, they seek to counter these tendencies by encouraging and welcoming a diverse flow of outsiders to the entry instructional positions from which promotions are made. And, they take pride

in an an intensely competitive route to the principalships: the more strenuous the better.

Similarly, the superintendents in these five districts seem to share authority and control over the selection decision more widely than is the rule in the Phase 1 districts. For Hayward and Montgomery County, cabinet officers participate equally with the superintendent in selecting interns (and principals). Involvement is not confined to two or three especially trusted colleagues, as was the tendency in the Phase 1 sites. In Broward and Howard Counties, the superintendents are careful to stay well out of the process until the final stage, thereby giving the lower echelon, more broadly based gatekeepers a chance to work independently. And in Hillsborough County, the superintendent both allows his cabinet to participate equally in the final decision, and allows school-level staff to exercise a high degree of control over the entry gates.

In most other respects, the Phase 2 districts differ from the Phase 1 districts in so many ways that they cannot be catalogued meaningfully. Therefore, we shall concentrate on a few critically significant differences that struck us most forcefully in the course of our work--critically significant because they appear to produce divergent results in terms of leadership merit, equity, legitimacy, and efficiency.

First, all of the Phase 2 districts have substantially sharpened their selection criteria, linking them strongly to merit standards. This is expressed through statements of eligibility requirements, and through candidate grooming experiences. For instance, Broward County requires courses in school law, finance and budgeting, and curriculum or personnel management. This requirement is directly linked to the fact that the district is firmly committed to school-based management, and gives principals the authority and responsibility to plan and implement their school educational program. This includes budget authority. Similarly, Hillsborough County has established the curriculum coordinator position as a sine qua non grooming step for the elementary principalship. This reflects Hillsborough's strong commitment to curriculum, and its notion that principals should be curriculum leaders.



Hayward and Montgomery County both require that aspirants successfully complete intensive internships in order to candidate for a principalship. These internships in effect presuppose curriculum and instructional expertise, for applicants are taken from the instructional ranks after rigorous screening. The internships then concentrate on preparing participants as school administrators as the two districts define that role. Finally, Howard County now requires a successful performance in the NASSP assessment center as a condition of candidacy. Howard County also presupposes curriculum and instructional expertise, and uses the center to sharpen the definitions and assessment of general leadership skills, which are its central criteria for principals.

The net effects of these practices are to intensify the merit-orientation of both the unstated and stated criteria, and to minimize the influence of vague notions of "fit" and "image." The density, specificity, and public nature of the criteria and grooming needs make it difficult for "fit" to prevail over the merit the criteria and grooming demand. By the time a candidate has completed a rigorous internship or a lengthy apprenticeship just for the privilege of competing for a principalship, both he and the district have made a substantial and public investment in skills acquisition. It is not likely that this will be easily overthrown in favor of some ambiguous notion of "fit."

In addition, it might be argued that in these five districts, "fit" is largely composed of merit. Throughout our visits, we heard candidates, principals, and other staff expressing this in an indirect way through comments such as:

- "[Broward's process] heightens the awareness of administrators that there are folks who can meet the qualifications if you just make the commitment to find them. This system enhances objectivity."
- "I've heard a few people say it's who you know [in Hillsborough]. Well, in a sense it is, but it's who you know or get recognition from for what you do and for your merit. For instance, I got to know [the director of elementary education] by volunteering to

serve on the Summer School Committee. I didn't know him before that, and I worked hard and made sure I did a good job. Anybody could've done that."

- "In Hayward, entering the AIP means a big change the minute you throw your hat in the ring by applying for entry."
- "[Montgomery County] once had five applicants for six jobs, and we had to make many compromises with quality. Now we are choosing one teacher or one administrator from among hundreds of applicants and our selection and training procedures help us to hit well about 95 percent of the time."
- "You've really got to put in the hours if you want to be a principal [in Howard County]."

We do not mean to imply that we did not hear similar comments in Phase 1 districts, for we did. However, in the Phase 1 districts, such comments were expressed far less often and with far less intensity. The contrast was striking. In Phase 1 districts, our informants typically related steps in candidate grooming in very relaxed terms, using phrases like "serve on some committees," "come to the attention of the superintendent," "get noticed," "get a reputation." In Phase 2, respondents spoke of the process in much more intense, precise, and competitive terms, using phrases like "have to distinguish themselves on the curriculum committees," "work like hell," "do something innovative or special for your school," "do coursework beyond the masters," "really know what you're doing."

There were also profound differences between Phase 1 and Phase 2 districts in the way the applicant pool was formed. Chiefly, all of the Phase 2 districts devote considerable time and energy to developing and maintaining a ready pool of tested and assessed applicants. This is done apart from any specific vacancy (although vacancy estimates often determine the size of the pool). Then when vacancies do occur--either in the flow of the school year or in an emergency--the district invites those in the pool to compete. In other words, in Phase 2 districts, the search for candidates narrows with the vacancy announcement, while in Phase 1 districts, the search tends to begin and be widest at this point.

The Phase 2 districts use several different methods of constructing this large and constant pool of candidates. Broward County, for example rates applicants whenever there are enough to warrant bringing together a rating team, regardless of whether there are any openings or not. Further, the rating committee is entirely separate from the vacancy screening committee, and rating opportunities are advertised as such semi-annually. Hillsborough County has a similar, though much less complex approach. Here, to successfully pass the entry screening is to declare and attain candidacy. Only those who have passed (and apprenticed in the appropriate positions) are allowed to later screen for vacancies as they arise. Hayward and Montgomery County have made their internships a requirement for the principalship. This serves both to prepare and clearly define the pool. And, Howard County is using the Assessment Center for the express purpose of reconstructing its pool of candidates.

We saw roughly similar approaches to forming the applicant pool in only two Phase 1 districts. While these had internships, however, they were not yet requirements (although they might strengthen a candidate's chances). Further, while the key administrators in all the Phase 1 districts tended to "keep an eye out for comers" as one said, the investment in locating and developing a highly qualified group of candidates was nowhere present to the degree it was in Phase 2 sites. (A few Phase 1 districts were beginning to move in this direction.)

In sum, in the Phase 2 districts the steps leading to candidate status have been paved with challenge, preparation, and complex standards for establishing eligibility and candidacy. In all but Howard County, the Phase 2 districts concentrate their energies on explicating, formalizing, expanding, and evaluating the networking and grooming functions that are done informally and haphazardly in the Phase 1 sites.

The investment has several payoffs for the Phase 2 sites. First, the level of candidate quality tends to spiral ever higher as candidates compete more intensely to stay viable. As one Broward candidate told us: "It gets harder and harder all the time to be a principal here. You

really have to qualify yourself, and we have so many good, well qualified assistant principals and deans now." Second, the district gains especially high quality staff while the candidates wait for a chance at a principalship. The assistant principal or curriculum specialist who has prepared for a candidacy is generally regarded by these districts as bringing more to the assistant principalship than one who has not prepared for anything more. Hence, the Phase 2 districts feel that a large pool of prepared candidates enriches not only the principalship, but the lower levels of administration as well.

Third, there appears to be a tendency for a sort of ripple effect to occur and spread to other administrative positions. If the principalship is characterized by intense competition, rigorous selection, and extensive staff-development, why not all other administrative slots? Montgomery County is perhaps the most complete realization of this tendency. However, Broward is moving strongly in that direction: one of the improvements it has recently adopted for principal selection (discussed on p. 158) is also being used for other administrator positions. In addition, Howard County administrators who participate as assessors in its NASSP Assessment Center uniformly reported to us that they had come to use techniques and thoughtways from the Center in selecting and hiring new staff for their units.

Next, the Phase 1 and Phase 2 districts differed substantially in the way they treated the screening process. Once a pool of very well oriented, trained, credentialed, and seasoned candidates has been formed, all five Phase 2 districts expend great energy on the screening process. The two Maryland districts culminate with assessment center appraisals, but the other three expend similar effort on reviewing evidence of merit and on doing so in ways everyone can see are fair as well as rigorous.

Perhaps the feature that most distinguishes the sets of districts is the rigor and intensity of the screening in the Phase 2 sites. Like the Phase 1 sites, the Phase 2 sites use some form of committee screening. Committee membership is varied, and committees do group interviews of one sort or another. However, in Phase 2 sites, committee activities and other

evaluative aspects of the screening often consume several days of staff members' time and involve several iterative siftings of multiple sources of information. In addition, there is more than one committee (only two Phase 1 site had multiple screening committees). Further, the committees tend to have a real 'pass-fail' function, and they are not hesitant to use it. In fact, in the Phase 2 districts, there is widespread pride in the fact that not all applicants make it into candidacy. Finally, the flow of the screening is somewhat different in the two sets of districts. In the Phase 1 sites, screening tends to be confined to the task of sifting through applicants to make up a list of finalists for the superintendent. In other words, screening has no life or meaning until a vacancy is being filled. In the Phase 2 districts however, the most intensive screening efforts occur long before the vacancy point, and are in fact concentrated on composing the candidate pool.

For example, in Broward County, the screening for the eligibility list is central to the process, and it--like all of Broward's other screening steps--is very elaborate. Candidates are anonymously rated on the basis of an extremely complex and lengthy application form. References are controlled for bias. After passing this hurdle, the candidate can look forward to another entirely independent screening/interview committee. The system is heavily laden with checks and balances that extend to control of committees' membership and rating forms and procedures. Ultimately, each candidate is assessed using several data sources: application form, references, work history, and interview. (And, as discussed shortly, Broward is currently tinkering with the system to provide more information on candidates.)

Similarly, Hillsborough has two entirely independent committees, with the first determining whether or not the applicant can enter the pool. And, Hillsborough's second committee--which contributes heavily to the selection decision--often meets several times and may interview 20 or 25 candidates. This is a considerable investment of top leaders' time and energy. Howard County's Assessment Center certainly must be defined as a major investment in screening aspirants for the pool. Each Center requires at least a week of six assessors' (district administrators, principals) time,

plus two days each of 12 candidates (whose regular positions must be covered), plus investment in assessor training and Center administration (including extensive feedback sessions with candidates). And once again, the Assessment Center is a mechanism for providing better information to an entirely independent screening committee.

The two internship districts, Hayward and Montgomery County, also devote extraordinary amounts of time and energy to screening and selecting at the entry gates. Montgomery County first "book rates" or paper screens intern applicants, then subjects them to Administrative Competence Sessions, which are in effect mini-assessment centers. Once internship is successfully completed, candidates face still more screening for an assistant principal slot and then a principalship. Similarly Hayward intern applicants go through rigorous pre-screening, and, if they successfully complete the internship, face another competition for the principalship.

Nowhere in Phase 1 did we encounter such elaboration of the screening process. (This was the case even for those Phase 1 districts that had internships.) In fact, nothing we saw in the Phase 1 sites prepared us to even imagine that such intensely elaborated screenings could be invented. This is not to say that Phase 1 districts did not use complicated or varied approaches to screening, for they indeed did. And, the most elaborate of the Phase 1 districts used several of the features characteristic of the Phase 2 sites. For instance, two of the ten Phase 1 sites used more than one screening committee, and eight of the ten used more or less complex numerical rating forms for "scoring" the interview or rating candidates.

In essence, screening in the Phase 2 districts is highly distinguishable from screening in Phase 1 sites by what might be termed layering. In the Phase 2 districts, almost everything about screening comes in multiples or layers. Screening is at least a two-or-three tier process: applicants are screened at entry; as they pass through the career ladder, internship, or assessment center; and again as they compete for the principalship. Different and independently composed sets of screeners are involved at each step. Screening tends to be intensive at each step, and certainly across the steps,

involving more than just an interview. In fact, Hillsborough County's eligibility screening committee is the only one that relies solely on interview data for its ratings. Screeners in the other four Phase 2 districts rely upon a variety of information--work histories; extensive applications; simulations; observations; candidate essays; structured references; evaluation of candidate performance in lengthy apprenticeships, internships, and assessment centers; interviews of varying types--to weed out candidates at each gate.

In addition, the methods screeners use to score and rate candidates tend to be more elaborated than in Phase 1. In Hillsborough County, for instance, care is taken to elicit the strongest role identification of each of the eligibility screeners, and membership on the committee is considered an honor. Following the interview, each candidate is rated without discussion by committee members. (This was a frequent practice in Phase 1 also, but did not occur with the high frequency we saw in Phase 2.) Then, the highest and lowest scores are thrown out and the remainder averaged. In Broward County, the vacancy interview committee operates in much the same fashion, with one addition: committee members are required to sign their rating sheets, which are then monitored for halo effects or signs of bias. In Howard County's NASSP Assessment Center, the scoring of candidate responses can only be described as ornate: it is indeed a psychometric device, replete with checks and balances and complex scales for each of its 12 skill dimensions.

Finally, candidates in the Phase 2 districts have a much greater sense of passing through a sequence of ever narrowing gates as they move through the screening steps. Although hard data was not generally available, our Phase 2 informants universally spoke of screening as a "weeding out" process: some candidates were cut at each screening point. These perceptions were borne out by the hard data that was available: Howard County reports that 50 percent fail to achieve a satisfactory rating in the Assessment Center; Hillsborough reports that 35-40 percent fail to pass the entry-level screenings; Broward estimates that better than half of those are rated fail to attain a high enough score to get within range of being called for an interview when a vacancy opens up (the difference can be a matter of a

very few points). Further, both Broward and Hillsborough make candidates rescreen for eligibility after one and three years, respectively.

None of the Phase 1 systems approached this degree of investment in screening and preparing candidates. Even those which had internships used the program much differently, giving it less attention and treating it as a staff development program rather than a requirement for candidacy. Further, even in "conventional" Broward and Hillsborough Counties--which relied upon career ladders and grooming--the grooming process was much denser and far more specified than in the Phase 1 districts. For instance, Phase 1 informants spoke of candidates' being groomed through "being active" in the district and "serving on committees" to "get known." If pressed, they could give some examples of the kinds of service expected, which appeared to have only one common thread: it helped the candidate become visible and socialized into the leadership group. In even these two Phase 2 districts, however, informants universally knew which committees and planning teams candidates were expected to serve on, and what kind of substantive contributions they were expected to make.

At the final decision point, the Phase 1 and Phase 2 districts shared in common the fact that the superintendent retained authority and control. However, there were two striking differences. First, the Phase 2 superintendents appeared to rely heavily on the data provided by the process. In other words, while Phase 1 superintendents relied greatly on their personal judgments or those of trusted lieutenants, Phase 2 superintendents relied greatly on the evidence from their selection process, in which they had invested considerable energy. This is not to say that the Phase 2 superintendents abdicated personal judgment: they clearly did not. Rather, they reserved their judgment for picking one from a set of finalists, whose high quality was insured by the selection process and attested to by the evidence that the process produced. As Broward County's superintendent said: "I don't consider myself expert in selecting personnel. I leave that to the experts--my staff and this [selection] system."

Second, the Phase 2 superintendents seemed to share their authority more widely and easily than did most of the Phase 1 leaders. For instance, in the two Florida districts, the eligibility screening committees have



genuine control over the entry gates. Sponsorship and connections simply do not matter: if an applicant cannot get by these gates he cannot be a candidate. As the Hillsborough superintendent said, "Those Committees are very, very interested in what is happening in schools. For instance, this district used to appoint junior high football coaches to elementary principalships. Now those elementary committees will eat junior high coaches, even one who meets the [minimum stated] criteria. They can't pass here--an elementary principal has to know elementary programs [to get by the committee]." Even where the Phase 2 superintendents are sharing in a less broad-based fashion (as in the internship districts, where most of the screening and decision making is done in the superintendent's cabinet), there nonetheless appears to be genuine sharing of authority occurring within that more limited circle. (Interestingly, the superintendents of those Phase 1 districts that seemed to be reaching for or on the verge of reaching for major changes in their selection process appeared to share this characteristic.)

Finally, there are four additional important points of difference between the Phase 1 and Phase 2 districts. First, the Phase 2 districts factor sex and racial/ethnic equity goals into their selection processes at several diverse junctures, but all of them do this in ways that enable them to take affirmative action while preserving leadership merit objectives. They plan to appoint women and minorities and they do so in substantial numbers without departing from their other procedures.

One of the main strategies of accomplishing it is to make certain that applicant and candidate pools are fairly large and that they contain significant numbers of women and minority candidates. Most of the Phase 2 districts either now or in the recent past have expended special effort in recruiting women and minority applicants. This has taken the form of advertising in appropriate media, but has relied more centrally upon accessing networks of minority and women educators. Such efforts also occurred in Phase 1 districts, but appeared to be much less formalized and intensive. Another main strategy is close monitoring at various points in the process. Broward County, for instance, has voluntarily obtained the services of an external monitor to supplement the checking of its own equal opportunity office.

Hillsborough is monitored by the court, but maintains an even closer check internally. Howard County, which is not under any court order, keeps a close watch on itself by constantly monitoring selections for due process.

Again, these sorts of strategies were used in Phase 1 districts, but there appeared to be a significantly larger voluntary component in the Phase 2 sites. Phase 1 sites tended to comply with the letter of any court order or the minima of local social pressures. Phase 2 districts tended to go substantially beyond the letter of an order, regardless of how weak it was, fully extending the equity standards for minorities to women for example. In addition, the two Phase 2 districts without court orders, Hayward and Howard County, were vigorously carrying out affirmative action procedures as part of regular district business. In contrast, the Phase 1 sites showed more of a tendency to exhibit tokenism. One, for example, had recently implemented a special internship to prepare women for the principalships. While this is a significant step towards and represents a meaningful increase in both its real and symbolic commitment to sex equity, the internship is still very much outside the mainstream of the appointment process. And, both male interns had already been placed as principal and assistant principal, while most of the women were still interning.

Second, the legitimacy accorded to the selection process is much higher in the Phase 2 districts in two respects. Board members, administrators, and teachers take strong pride in the fairness, competitive vigor, and comprehensiveness of the processes. And, more crucially we believe, the processes used have the effect of heightening the prestige and esteem attributed by all parties to the principalship itself. The Phase 2 districts seem to operate on the notion: the harder the race, the bigger the prize. By making the race tough, the prize of the principalship increases in worth, status, and prestige. This works in many ways exactly like a sports competition: increase the purse and change the rules a bit to make the game both harder and clearly open to anyone who can muster the skills and strength to play; the better players are attracted by the challenge; the level of competition rises, which causes the game to get tougher and the value of the purse to rise; which attracts even better players, and so on.

...the Phase 2 superintendents reported more freedom to make merit-based appointment decisions. Many factors still conditioned a single appointment: transfers that needed to be made, planning for future school closings, the totality of the management team at the open school, etcetera. However, the Phase 2 superintendents were largely free of the political pressures that often colored the process in Phase 1. The "buddy systems" and patronage networks were neutralized by the process, which in four of the five Phase 2 districts, had been designed to accomplish precisely this end (as we shall discuss shortly).

Fourth, on one level, the Phase 2 selection processes are observably far less efficient than those in Phase 1 districts. Much more time and money is expended per appointment in Phase 2 sites. Training costs are higher, personnel paperwork is ten times greater perhaps, and staff coordination activities are very much more time-consuming. At another level, Phase 2 superintendents argue, with no reservations and as if in one voice, that their aim is to reach the targets of highest leadership merit and equity, and that efficiency standards have to be governed by whether the means achieve the ends. Stated differently, they convinced us that the benefits are so great as to justify high costs.

Only an evaluative study would enable researchers to test the real comparative outcomes. The performances of principals appointed in the ways described in Chapter 2 need to be compared empirically with those appointed in the ways encompassed in our Phase 2 sites. We lack evidence of outcome differences, but we did interview principals at length from both phases and our qualitative impressions--arrived at quite independently from one another as field workers visiting different places at different times--were that the outcome differences are extreme.

We estimate that the leaders appointed in all of the five Phase 2 sites are by gender, ethnicity, age, and educational as well social origins, much more diverse. Within any given district, they vary more widely in body types, appearances, and life styles. They are also more self-confident, more task-oriented, and above all, more explicitly equipped to lead a

school toward increased effectiveness. Finally, they are less ambivalent about being administrators and more directly identified with the subcommunity of peers in their districts.

### Accounting for the Differences

The 15 districts in the study, taken as two samples, did not differ radically in terms of organization, economic well-being, or stages of enrollment stability or decline. They ranged from very poor to wealthy in terms of revenues per pupil, large to moderate size, centralized to decentralized, and they were located in states with high degrees of policy initiative and states that are nearly quiescent.

Why then the difference? We think that there is one primary reason--as revealed by the histories of the five Phase 2 districts and some changes that were beginning to occur in a few of the Phase 1 districts at the times of our visits--that plays out in the life of the district in two or three critical ways.

Three of the five Phase 2 districts had undergone dramatic political changes within their school boards and administrations some time between 1970 and 1980. Only Montgomery County and Howard County differed on this, and each had made just such a change several years earlier. The three had reached a point where board members had decided to bury past practices and to reform their principal selections in a deep, long term way. At that point, they had searched for and found superintendents who were willing and able to accomplish the reforms. Some came from within their districts and others come from the outside, but all were sophisticated practitioners of modern personnel management principals. The "watershed" nature of this point of departure cannot be overstated.

In Hillsborough County, for example, the system had been characterized by cronyism and buddyism at best, and, more typically, by naked patronage in a political spoils system of both instructional and administrative appointments that reached into city government. As one informant

comments, "Even the good people back then were chosen for the wrong reason." Informants also universally reported that morale was low for both teachers and administrators, and that many well qualified professionals did not bother to apply for advancement. (In fact, the district was having trouble filling openings.) The situation came to a head in the late 1960s. Increasing discontent and burgeoning scandals of a very serious nature led the board to remove the last elected superintendent from office and switch to an appointed superintendency. Our informants without exception referred to this as "a time of great turmoil and chaos," characterized by much "confusion" and "loss of confidence in the schools." To almost all, it was still very unpleasant to recall.

The Hillsborough board decided to make a dramatic shift and correct the situation permanently. It appointed highly capable interim, internal leadership while a nation-wide search for a new superintendent was underway. The first priority of the new leadership was improving the principalship. As one participant rather delicately recalled: "During that first six-month period, we were getting rid of lots of poor principals. Then we started thinking about ways to get better principals." As another said, "It was a chaotic situation, and to try to pull things together we sought a new way of selecting principals."

This fundamental and critical mandate for a commitment to improving principal selection then proceeded to play out in the life of the district in two key ways over the next fourteen years. First, the board appointed a superintendent of high integrity who was deeply committed to reform, and gave ~~him~~ a special mandate. As he said, "[I took the position on one condition]: School Board members must stay out of personnel. I told them 'If you recommend someone to me for a position I guarantee you it will be the kiss of death.'" By all reports, this was quite acceptable to the Board, for their charge to the superintendent was, in the words of one top administrator: "Clean this up and develop a professionally operated system."

Over the next years, Hillsborough's leaders continually tinkered with the selection process. Once the basic system was in place (within a

year or two of the turnover), constant refinements and adjustments were made until the process was fine-tuned to the highly elaborated enterprise that it is today. This growth and development involved not just adjusting screening techniques, but, much more deeply, role changes for district leaders. For instance, intensive involvement of district staff is required for grooming, socializing, training, talent spotting, and on-the-job assessment of candidates in the pipeline. Hence, these leaders must make it a point to visit schools constantly, to work closely with the various councils and committees where candidates try their wings, and be generally and intimately involved with the daily life of the schools and school staff.

Hillsborough's story of watershed change is repeated in its essence for each of the five Phase 2 districts. The rhythms may vary, the circumstances and emphases differ in detail, but the fundamental message is the same.

In Broward County, for example, the turnover began in 1974 when the first of two "reform boards" (as informants termed them) led the way in changing what was universally described as a highly political, "good old boy" appointment system. As one informant characterized these earlier days: "It was who you went fishing with." These boards' pressures took three forms: (1) setting certain new policies (e.g., the establishment of a promotion list); (2) appointing new staff in key positions (e.g., personnel and equal opportunity office slots); and (3) asking embarrassing questions (e.g., "Where is the [promotion] list"). After three years of hard and persistent struggle and trial and error surrounding the appointment of school administrators, the board took another key step and appointed the current superintendent. At the time of his appointment, the principal selection process was in turmoil, for the needed reforms had been both incompletely and excessively realized.

A main point of contention was and always had been equity. The extraordinarily strong equity corrections that had been undertaken had alienated and demoralized while male candidates who, in the words of one

minority administrator, "felt they didn't have a chance," and line administrators, who felt that their legally constituted authority to hire had been subverted. In addition, appointments were continually being challenged from all sides, and turmoil and controversy were the order of the day. During his interview with the board before being hired, the present superintendent took a strong position that, as he said, "the personnel system needs to be fixed so that it's credible and fair to all groups." Given this mandate by the board, the superintendent has proceeded (since assuming office in 1979) to do exactly this, devising a process that is generally perceived by all groups to be fair, equitable, and merit-based. Once again, however, this effort required considerable expenditure of time and energy by district staff. In addition, outside expertise was called in to help with equity issues.

Interestingly, now that the basics of legitimacy and equity are solved, Broward is tinkering with means of improving merit still more. Not satisfied with the selection process's ability to sift for merit (which appears to be higher than that of the average process), the district has made several changes. First, it has instituted a required internship for elementary principal candidates. Second, it is testing a new method of interviewing, Targeted Selection, which is a behaviorally oriented, highly structured interviewing technique that is based on detailed and formal job analyses of the position in question.<sup>2</sup> Targeted Selection will supplement and possibly eventually replace (after comparative testing) the vacancy screening. And finally, Broward is considering adopting an assessment center.

Howard County's story is a more gentle version of this same change process. Since its growth was pre-planned as to both numbers and nature, the need to develop a professionalized personnel system could be anticipated. That is, the community could see clearly that a good school system was essential if they were to be successful in attracting affluent professionals as residents. The "watershed" came in 1968, when the district was half its present size. At that point, the present superintendent was brought in and

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<sup>2</sup> Targeted Selection has been originated by Development Dimensions Incorporated of Pittsburgh, PA.

given the specific mandate to build a modern selection system in step with the new vision of the district. As the superintendent said, "It has been a fine experience. I didn't have to tear down to initiate something new. I had an opportunity to plan and set in things from the beginning along with the growth of [the city of] Columbia. And, I had a community that wanted a top-level school system, that's articulate, intelligent and knew the value of education."

Again, one of the first acts the superintendent took upon assuming office was, in his own words, "to open up the principal selection process rather than having one man [the superintendent] making all the decisions." Prior to this point in time, the selection process was viewed as "political," and dependent upon one's connections with the few closely held power centers of the old community, according to our informants, many of whom were part of the system in the "old days." As one respondent said, "If you had a 'godfather' you were in." And also again, the process was constantly fine-tuned to its present form. In fact, in the eyes of the district, the Assessment Center is simply one more step in this tuning process.

In sum, then, we hypothesize that the striking differences between the Phase 1 and Phase 2 districts are accountable for by a change process that goes something as follows:

- 1) A "watershed" of crisis (Broward, Hillsborough, Hayward) or opportunity (Howard, Montgomery County) is reached. The "watershed" constitutes a real demarcation point: the situation is such that a decision must be taken, something must be done.
- 2) The school board takes the necessary decision. And, at this early point, it is the board's decision, for the school system itself is either in trouble, or there is no leader there capable of leading on the other side of the 'watershed.'
- 3) The school board changes the district's leadership and/or the mandates for the leaders. The board may reach outside for a new superintendent, or they may choose from the ranks of current administrators. Regardless, the new superintendent will be a "new man" for the "new day."



- 4) The board will give the new leader a special mandate (and exceptional authority, which he will likely insist upon) to overhaul the system.
- 5) The new superintendent will view reform and revitalization of the principalship as a critical task and will begin to tackle this immediately.
- 6) Great effort and energy will be expended in devising and testing out a new system. This effort will not stop at technical features of the selection process (e.g., how screening interviews are conducted), but will involve significant role changes for district leaders, and may even involve hiring special staff or reallocating district personnel to conduct training programs or assessment centers.
- 7) Evaluation of the results of these changes will be ongoing, and will result in endless tinkering and fine-tuning of the selection process. The leadership and other district staff will be continually on the alert for methods and strategies of making even more improvements.
- 8) A considerable degree of pride will build up around the fairness and the difficulty of the selection process. The principalship itself will be enhanced as a result.

Once we began to understand this evolutionary process in our Phase 2 sites, we could look back over our Phase 1 sites and see what appeared to be the beginnings of the process in some of these districts. Two, for instance had just had "watershed" periods that led to the appointments of new superintendents with reform mandates from their boards. Their stories were very much like those of Broward and Hillsborough, although they were in different parts of the country and were considerably smaller. These new superintendents were beginning to tackle and change the principal selection processes they had inherited. Another Phase 1 district struck us retrospectively as being very similar to Broward in that it had had its "watershed" moment (also centered around equity), but was still fighting out the implications: its selection process was in tremendous flux as various "equity groups" fought for control of it, and there was much turmoil, with appointments coming under constant challenge. We could not help but wonder if Broward

or if our Phase 1 district would look more like Broward a few

We also visited one or two Phase 1 districts that seem to be on the verge of evolving into their own "watershed" moments. In these districts, many informants at all levels painted a picture of discontent with what they perceived to be a "good old boy," or "buddy-oriented" principal selection system. Comments even from those who had negotiated the system to secure their appointments were bitter, as they complained that their own professionalism was being eroded by the process. In short, the natives were getting very restless with an excessively outmoded approach, no longer suited to choose principals able to deal with the difficult tasks of the modern educator. At these districts at least, it appeared to us that the opening shots had been fired by the board, which had recently caused the superintendent to back down on a principal appointment on what the board considered to be merit grounds that had not happened before.

Much remains to be learned about the reasons why some school systems chose to adopt sweeping reforms of their principal selection systems. Clearly, the "watershed" moments appear to be critical. Beyond these, however, is the deeper question of what leads a board--or community--to a watershed. In other words, given that school systems reflect the desires of the local community, what causes local communities to adopt the pattern we saw in most Phase 1 districts, in ways that are not best for its educational system? We cannot answer this question, at least beyond the scope of our inquiry. We can speculate, however, that we caught in Phase 2. Specifically, Legislative and State initiatives in Florida--undertaken in the early 1970s for the purpose of upgrading education and improving public confidence--growing state--have been of great importance for stimulating, and guiding local changes throughout the state. We did not find these influences anywhere else in either Phase. Similarly, both the Broward County training program and Howard County's NASSP Assessment of the effects of federal public management advances in nearby Washington

since 1960 and of proximity to nationally oriented professional association leadership. Hence, we speculate that when opportunities or needs for general reform arise in the larger community (local or state)--whether from a crisis of confidence or from an opportunity to reach for and attain "something better"--the public polity can be mobilized for change.

Much remains to be learned about the process, however. And, as we have noted earlier, much remains to be learned about whether these reforms or alternative practices actually produce genuinely better comparative outcomes.

Neither these caveats nor the details we have presented about procedures and events should obscure the magnitude of our surprise as researchers in finding that positively exemplary practices do exist, can emerge in a variety of local settings, and do appear to produce deep changes in who becomes a principal. Furthermore, those changes appear to ramify widely across other features of local school systems, raising levels of staff morale, improving the quality and efficiency of service, and upgrading the learning opportunities for students. The more detailed evidence also helped us to locate certain limits on the transferability of alternative practices: we have found that once the commitment is there, local board members and administrators have the ability to search out and develop those particular procedures which might work best in their settings. It is this local process of self-design which gives the alternatives their efficacy.

Thus, the Phase 2 cases became important not as examples of technical modifications, although they provide those in abundance, but as proof of the original project notion that the role of the principal could be pivotal for the future quality of education and that sound selection was therefore strategic to role expectations and performances. We do not mean proof in the mathematical sense; rather, the cases disclose the fact that the leadership of a public school district can, under some conditions, make the hypothetical role importance of the principal come true in practice. And, while there are many cross-pressures at work to depress the chances of this outcome some of the pressures are surmountable. Only localities can decide whether the change is desired enough to be worth the opportunity costs, a matter

discussed in Chapter 5, because the balance between goals and available means is peculiar to each community.

### Conclusion

Our findings suggest that principal selection is a variation on the generic theme of leadership selection in all kinds of human organizations. The variation is informed by studies of middle managers in all kinds of firms, agencies, and other formal organizations, private as well as public, and by the subcultural features peculiar to the principalship, which are its visibility and symbolic representation of what schooling stands for in the community. The literature on the principalship also shows how it has changed since World War II from a supervisory to a general executive role. In the course of this continuing change, ideas about what educational leadership comprises when it comes to affecting instruction have become confused. The same literature suggests that, through this confusion, expectations may fragment and multiply to a point where no coherence remains.

Our field studies in both Phase 1 and Phase 2 made it obvious that this point has not been reached. The 15 districts we sampled had maintained their coherence of expectations about principals and their ways of searching for candidates. While the participants varied widely across the 15 sites, each district exhibited a high degree of internal coherence about its own particular expectations and ways of selecting principals. They also give high importance to the position and the search process, and every district in both phases was engaged in some periodic technical revision of its search and selection procedures. What was changing rapidly consisted of rates of turnover and rotation, and tension stemming from the discrepancy between expectations and the abilities of new appointees to fulfill them all.

Viewed from a projected future, the Phase 1 selection processes we observed are probably not, in general, merit-based enough to result in leaders who can meet the many emerging needs of the times. Some of the Phase 1 districts are racing the clock, trying to make changes that will improve the yield. In Phase 2, we discovered that the technical means for

running that clock and beating it are available, but that the changes entailed involve a deeper dynamic and have more general effects. Superintendents and board members do not refer to the changes in this way. They prefer to downplay their changes and leave them couched within locally perceived routines. But the outside visitor armed with a comparative perspective can witness a substantial difference in the resulting leadership abilities and in a wide range of positive side effects.

CHAPTER 5  
IDEAS ON DEVELOPING A PRINCIPAL  
SELECTION PROCEDURE

Introduction

The aim of this final chapter is to help school board members, superintendents, personnel officers, and teachers and parents reflect realistically on whether and how to develop better principal selection procedures (PSP) in their local public school systems. We do not presume to argue that PSPs ought to be improved--only that this possibility presents itself frequently in many communities as one means of increasing the effectiveness of schools. We have already made the point in Chapter 3 that there are many ways to go about setting up the technical features of a PSP and that the variations are connected to variations in district aims and traditions.

Here, then, we shall explore the gains that can be achieved by changing not only the techniques but some of those aims and traditions, if a school board chooses to do so as a matter of policy. In addition, we shall make some recommendations about design of PSPs which seem to us from the record of our evidence from 15 districts (all of them enrolling well over 10,000 students) to offer no "one best approach" but an array of possibilities.

Selecting Principals for What?

While we were doing this study, Van Cleve Morris and his associates published the results of their study of the day-to-day behavior of The Urban Principal (1981). They concluded that the duties and responsibilities of the position in the district they studied (Chicago) are usually "loosely worded and open-ended" (p. 128), but they did make a list of duties most often attached to the position. To this we have added others that came up in our study to yield the following combined list:

1. Organization of school setting;
2. Resource and logistical management;
3. Staff supervision;
4. Staff evaluation;
5. Staff development;
6. Student discipline and safety;
7. Instructional improvement;
8. Curriculum innovation;
9. Speaking on or taking other symbolic actions on behalf of both school and district.

Our study results concur with those of Morris and associates: principals fulfill these duties in individually varied ways. Each puts a somewhat different emphasis on the performance of each day's set of tasks. Styles and time given to tasks vary substantially, just as there are multiple ways of going about each duty. Yet, the list of duties--in no predictable order that we could find--is fairly universal across as well as within districts.

How the list of expectations will be ordered, how varied the performance style will be, and what will result from the leadership effort, depend on local system conditions and on conditions set by the grade level of the school and its internal details. Our study places the role of the principal in the context of terms and conditions of selection for the role, just as the Morris study places it in the context of daily activities within schools. Valuable as the latter is in providing an accurate picture of what principals in one system do hour by hour, we think this picture depends for its meaning on who was chosen for the job, what the principals think they were selected to do more or less intensively, and what significant others--teachers, parents, other administrators--make of the integrity of the selection process.

In order to show how the context of selection becomes critical, consider one of our Phase 1 case histories: John Watkins was appointed as principal of the Monroe Elementary School for three main reasons. As a

teacher there, he had been a strong disciplinarian. He "carried a big stick," in his own words, and this quality was sought after by parent leaders and board members alike. He is black, and Monroe was being desegregated from mainly white to a half-black, half-white facility. And, Watkins had ten years of assembly line experience in the nearby factory to his credit. He knew firsthand the life situations of the families whose children attended Monroe.

Watkins was a certified, experienced elementary teacher before becoming a principal. In addition, he was assigned for two years to the biggest, most innovative magnet elementary school in the city in order to become more knowledgeable about instructional leadership. During that assignment and since his appointment to Monroe, however, Watkins has been criticized by the assistant and deputy superintendents for several shortcomings. He has few skills pertinent to staff evaluation and instructional improvement and he does not write "good" English in reports and newsletters. He is disappointed by these criticisms but he believes they are immaterial in the long run because he was appointed for other reasons. The chance that he will enlarge his range of skills is low. He knows, and his staff and the parent leaders know, that he was appointed for more pressing short-term reasons.

Watkins is correct in his strongly held impression that he can and does do well what he was selected to do. He maintains very firm social control over a potentially restive student body. He maintains knowledgeable outreach to parents and others in the community. He is well known to the faculty and he enjoys their trust. What he does not do well is also not done very well by many other, more veteran principals in the district.

The case illuminates the issue faced by superintendents and boards. Are they going to search for principals who can do all things well, or will they compromise and emphasize some skills at one time or place, general merit at another, and racial or sex equity at still another? Are the number of considerations entailed in a complete commitment to a merit-based, equity-centered, full-spectrum-of-ability search so costly as to over-tax the



resources of a district? How much does the complex web of leadership considerations matter relative to other challenges?

Two events have begun to change the way in which these questions are answered. First, as the Deputy Superintendent of Montgomery County, Maryland, noted, public school personnel changes have meant that in 1960 an expanding district would have six principalships to fill and five semi-qualified candidates, while in 1982 it may have one opening and a number of administrators with seniority who are potentially surplus, together with a large pool of applicants. Second, as ancillary administrative staff are reduced--and the pace of this trend has quickened since 1980--the role of the school principal intensifies in its essentiality. A side effect of this second event may also be that longstanding networks of acquaintance are breaking up through transfers, early retirement, and layoffs. As a result, old ways of choosing one's proteges are being rendered useless.

There are many ways in which boards and superintendents choose to deal with the resulting challenge. The most common choice in the 1980s is often called the rotation policy, which we found comes down to transferring principals from school to school and, in the process, counselling out the least competent by retiring them early or returning them to non-principal positions. Another choice is to beef up inservice training, helping principals in place to do a better job. A third choice--and all of these may be used in combination, of course--is to restructure the chain of command so that principals may intensify their efforts on some duties and transfer others to other staff.

Whatever path is chosen, our findings on selection speak directly to variable conceptions of the job of principal that people at the local district level hold in common. For example, a strong emphasis on fitting veteran teachers into the job through informal grooming usually signifies that principals are part of a process designed to conserve district traditions. The principal appointed in the common fashion described in Chapter 2 performs all of the duties listed above, but performs them according to longstanding customs and local norms. If those are changed, they are changed by other persons or groups in the system.

In contrast, a principal appointed through an internship program such as the one in Hayward, California, described in Chapter 3, is expected to initiate changes, to trouble-shoot, and to carry both problems and possible solutions forward to the central administration. A principal appointed in Montgomery County, Maryland, is expected not only to initiate in these ways but to move along a continuously evaluated career path where success and failure are assessed quite intensively.

Thus, the method of selection affects the concept of degree of initiative. It expresses the level of confidence placed on the position as well as on persons who occupy it. In the two Florida cases, the principalship has come to be loaded with extra duties, including budgeting and financial management. Thus, selection procedures there have become very demanding.

Our study and this final chapter are addressed to local leaders who want to consider a different approach; that is, changing their selection procedures in order to appoint principals capable of giving high performances on all of the duties listed above, and in order to establish the district's reputation for making appointments in a merit-based, equity-centered way.

#### Principal Selection and School Effectiveness

New knowledge about improving the effectiveness of schools is currently being disseminated very widely (as we have noted in Chapter 1). The series of research and development projects on which this knowledge rests all emphasize the pivotal role of the principal in leading a school toward the conditions described in the research. Many of the ideas for improvement can be exchanged, adopted, and put to work by principals already on the job, of course. Still, many of these men and women were not selected because of their ability to accomplish this or similar aims, and it is difficult to change the basic expectations which originally defined a particular principalship.

The obvious connection between PSP and school effectiveness is that candidates relatively best equipped to exert instructional and supervisory

leadership and best able to shape the informal climate of expectations toward serious matching of teaching resources to learning needs, would be those most likely to apply and to get appointed as principals. Even if this connection were perfect, a particular school might fail to become a place where student achievement increased. No one change has the strength to reorganize conditions in all necessary respects. Still, the odds would improve substantially and this is the leveraging advantage so many districts yearn for today.

The dream beneath the formalism is quite ancient. It is the dream of finding persons who identify issues accurately; who not only understand students and teachers but who know how to act on their understanding; who take the initiative that turns a building into a learning environment; who communicate clearly and well; who know how to guide teachers without suffocating their own creative autonomy; who know how to keep the setting safe and humane; and who can advocate for its well-being in a fruitful way. What is so novel about the dream at present is that its realization has become so freighted with difficulties that exceptionally able leadership is needed in order to offset the negative force of many complexities surrounding each school.

Everyone we interviewed registered a positive belief in the instrumental importance of the school principals. Some teachers expressed the qualification that this importance arises from the support given principals by teachers, and some teachers seemed so discouraged about the prospects for public education in their communities and states as to lead them to doubt whether principals could offset downward trends. And, many of these discouraged, professionally glum teachers were alienated from or explicitly antagonistic toward their school boards and superintendents. The Phase 2 districts disclosed no such faculty despair, however.

In any event, where fiscal conditions and management-labor relations have not become too difficult, people involved in public education have no difficulty in seeing or in spelling out the hoped-for relation between school leadership and school effectiveness. It is this hope which drives efforts to revise leadership selection procedures.

Improved leadership gets tempered by diverse competing concerns and the result is a unique local meld.

In Montgomery County, personnel management practices have come to be central to the mission of the system across a period of two decades. The quest for advanced, efficient, and results-centered subsystems of personnel management has become the main method for differentiating the county's rural pastoral past from its urban, dynamic present. Personnel testing, highly selective recruitment, continuously provided staff development, and career ladder extensions for every type of occupational subgroup have become the hallmarks of the Montgomery strategy. This strategy is comparatively expensive (which is not to say it is cost-ineffective), and therefore depends upon above-average revenues for its realization.

Hillsborough County, in contrast, is a fiscally strained district undergoing great regional change. It has adopted comprehensive reforms in its principal selection procedures in the course of adapting to this wave of change and of living down a past era of corrupt patronage, but it has neither the aim nor the means for adopting a complete range of management practices. Levels of parent involvement and of school board investment in administrative decisions also differ in the county districts.

In Phase 1, we visited districts where principal selection procedures were being improved technically in one way or another but where the main energies of decision makers were given over to other challenges where improved selection was not regarded generally as strategic for maintaining services. In one city, bankruptcy loomed before the board and all but five administrators out of 97 were carrying termination notices. There, the preoccupying aim was to strengthen a coalition between parents and the board as part of an effort to pass a school tax increase. In another district, enrollments were increasing while federal and local revenues declined;

there, the board was preoccupied with budget trimming while the superintendent searched for principals who would give strong loyalty during hard times.

These illustrate our conclusion that boards and superintendents should assign weights to what is most and least important to the larger aims of their districts. One may need politically to be working on every issue that comes up, as well as to be striving to improve school operations, but only a few issues can be given high priority across any two to three year period.

We recommend that boards try to break through the superficial crust of importance ascribed verbally to the role of the principal on the one side and the ideology of quality selection of educators on the other. Beneath this crust are the varied actual concerns of each district. Many of these can be so compelling as to change the ingredients of action quite radically, leaving only the appearance of a quest for educational leadership.

Our findings not only address the question of what principals are expected to do; they also speak to the changing roles of school superintendent. The superintendent of Montgomery County explained to us, for example, that his board had held one hundred meetings in the 1981-1982 school year and that he was not at all sure he wanted "to keep up this pace." He announced his plans to resign a few months later. One year after the advent of Proposition 2 1/2, a state and local revenue limitation law similar to Proposition 13 in California, more than 60 superintendents in Massachusetts retired, took early retirement, or resigned. The confluence of changes in funding, enrollment, federal and state policies, and personnel relations was too extreme to be tolerated by many of these administrators.

Our findings show that superintendents are very heavily committed in principal selection activities in every district we studied. In only one was the bulk of the authority delegated to a deputy. Our Phase 2 districts imply that there is no alternative to this practice, and we not find that the

heavy burden of this search and review activity are at all adequately represented in studies of the superintendency. We believe that this is due to the possibility that the sensitivity and urgency of the leadership selection work, as contrasted with the work of mediating and legitimizing it by ensuring that a good local cultural fit was achieved, has intensified very rapidly over the years since 1975. In the course of this intensification, moreover, the burden has seemed especially heavy to those superintendents who did not know very much about leadership selection.

We do not suggest that most aims are mutually exclusive--only that PSP and its context of personnel management appear to be so complicated and taxing as to be aims that do not subordinate readily or even fuse smoothly into other aims such as millage votes, retrenchment, curriculum revision, varsity sports competition, union contract relations, and many other vital activities.

We are confident of the conclusion that a school district whose board members and administration decide to embark on PSP changes will need to place great importance on this effort, including provision of money as well as authority, if the changes are expected to be real in their consequences. The magnitude of commitment will depend upon how deep the changes are expected to be. But without a new emphasis on leadership selection and preservation, the chances are great that the changes that take place will be slight and will gradually erode.

The first "universal" feature of a PSP change, therefore, is a board policy appraisal of the status quo. Unless there is a majority consensus that current practice must change in substantial ways, PSP change is not worth the fuss it entails. Small technical revisions or partial improvements will tend to be swamped by the weight given to tradition and by the force of other competing concerns.

A second universal feature, we think, is that the superintendent and a majority of the board have to aim together toward an outcome that they desire very strongly so that PSP changes can be harnessed tangibly to that

outcome. In other words, a change in personnel management practice may have intrinsic merit, but it is not apt to be accomplished, given the depth of the imbedding of past practices in the lives of hundreds or even thousands of staff members, unless its objectives are explicated in full and agreed to at the highest levels.

For example, if a federal court intervenes forcefully to modify a local PSP for the purpose of desegregation, the new procedures will indeed generate minority principals, but only a board and its superintendent can commit to implementing those procedures in ways that will modify staff relations and student outcomes. Where this commitment is missing, the court-ordered PSP will come over time to change the ethnic mix but little else, and even this change will then erode in many ways. So too, a district board that "goes along" with PSP changes proposed by a superintendent, but neglects to make policy on a new basis, will find itself cross-pressured and conflicted when that superintendent resigns or retires.

A third universal feature links the aim to the design elements. A district that wants to select candidates mainly from within its boundaries will advertise vacancies very differently from one seeking to recruit from without, even where both sources remain as permissible. A district that wants to strengthen school-community relations in substantial ways that go beyond increased public satisfaction will build community representation into screening procedures in a deep manner, and so forth. Elaborate forms of administrative team building for the purpose of intensifying the chain of command or increasing accountability will generate procedures that are strong on central office controls over nearly all elements of the process, to the relative neglect of community participation. An eclectically balanced PSP can be designed, to be sure, but when implemented, it will skew toward the enduring aims of the board by the weight of subsequent events.

For these reasons, the new PSP should be designed to fit the locale and its policy priorities from the outset. A district in which principals will be rotated for whatever reason needs to design procedures that clearly

de-emphasize school site uniqueness and inputs; otherwise those who are selected will be mismatched with the schools they are later asked to run.

This matter of fitting procedures to aims and local conditions cannot extend to the question of fairness, however, for we saw no district in which the actors at all levels neglected this characteristic, no matter how incompletely it may have been realized in practice. A PSP that is perceived to lack fairness in the provision of opportunity and in due process aspects is a serious waste of resources and should be replaced. The attributes of fairness themselves tend to vary from place to place, however, so that one cannot formulate a general set of rules for attaining it.

An improved PSP must be taken seriously by the board and superintendent, and it must be implemented in a fair manner to be consequential, but most interestingly, perhaps, it need not be comprehensive or elaborate in the range of its operating features in order to be highly consequential. If administrators, teachers, and parents conclude from its introduction and from the appointment of the first few new principals that a serious and positive change from past procedures is evident, many related changes begin to occur. Talents latent in the regular school staff begin to surface and to be contributed in new ways. The sequence of snowballing effects depends not on the details of the procedural changes but on the definitions of a changing situation which are shared by all affected parties.

In his study of Cairo, Illinois, sociologist Herman R. Lantz (1972) concluded about the repeated failure of that community to secure a means of self-development:

Calls for effort and cooperation, while necessary, are hardly sufficient. Basically, the problem is one of reversing a way of life which has grown up around community failure, in which people have little hope and faith in themselves, and little faith that those on the outside will do much for them. Reversing such patterns is exceedingly complex. . . (p. 172)



Taking this perspective back across our two samples, we were struck by the extent to which successful developments in revising PSPs were part of efforts to rebuild or redevelop the communities. Wherever those we interviewed thought they were helping to change community directions, or improve schooling, or build a clear alternative to a pattern of historic failure, PSP changes were taking hold as one facet of the redefined situation. Where this redefinition was not taking place, the relevance or quality attributed to the PSP itself was always diminished.

This is not to imply that all systems using Phase 1-type practices are studies in failure. Rather, conventional practices tend to become permanent where community expectations are low and where poor performance of public services in general has become a way of life. Conventional practice also persists wherever performance is deemed acceptable regardless of quality and where patronage through grooming and informal advocacy is endemically a part of local government. Change appears to take place most often where local decision-makers commit to a concerted effort at reconstruction, or where, as in Montgomery and Howard Counties, profound changes in the region, demographic and economic, overtake the locality.

PSP innovation locally should thus be conceived of as part of community or school system renewal and adaptation. Those larger ends may be pursued over a generation as in Montgomery County, or over a decade as in Hayward and Howard County. It is not the speed of the change but the quality of confidence about the effort that is significant. Substantial improvements in PSP tend to become self-reinforcing, and the pace of change quickens.

As corollary to this, districts disclose to themselves and to visitors the importance they attribute to their own changes, including PSP reforms. Where actors believe they have accomplished much for further improvement, this belief is communicated in ways that amount to far more than local "boosterism." Board meetings, committee sessions, civic gatherings, and interviews are charged with the sense of possibilities for improvement and people are kindled by it. It is this symbolic effect which gives portent to principal selection and calls forth competencies and levels of effort that were latently available but not recognized prior to the change.

## Criteria for PSP Change

Among the procedural elements themselves, several stand out as somewhat regularly central to a new efficacy. One of these is the openness of the intake process. Where people believe that anyone who meets the widely announced eligibility criteria is really welcome to apply, a first condition of efficacy has been met. Another is that of preparation. If eligibility itself or competitive standing as an applicant requires a number of experiences and competencies, the PSP becomes respected to the extent that it provides wide access to explicit means for voluntary preparation through counseling, training or advanced graduate study, service work, or informal apprenticeships. Potentially valuable educational leaders look for districts where the starting point is open and the means for becoming a serious contender are available and well charted.

So, too, most of the districts we studied are succeeding with improvements to the extent that their procedures are perceived to be rigorous. Hard preparation during training, stiff standards during interviewing, challenging written work, and demanding, even stressful evaluation and feedback, are quite generally regarded as evidence that something of enduring value is taking place. Rigor becomes a public measure of how much seriousness will be accorded the role of the principal; and where the inference is made that the competitive process is stiff, other administrative staff and teachers often rise to the idea that their work will also require more and better productivity.

Another common feature is the importance ascribed to appointment outcomes. Do people who are eligible and who compete effectively actually get principalships? Are some of them perceptibly different from those who used to get appointed? The new emergence of minorities and women can convey this when the procedure appears to be fair, open, developmental or preparatory, and rigorous, but there are other sources of surprise as well. If nearly all past principals were tall, for example, the advent of short candidates will be deemed to be indicative of efficacy. If all past high school appointments were from the coaching ranks, the appointment of a chemistry teacher will send a strong message.

Our exemplary cases offer another clue to efficacy. A PSP that comes to be highly valued is one that builds a strong network of interdependence among central office and building administrators. This network characteristic can be induced in a variety of ways, but its positive significance for the district comes from the changes in expressiveness, trust, candor, and pace of interlevel communication that result. And, as new appointees come to feel fully included in the network, their readiness to do their best work as leaders clearly intensifies. The previous PSP may have built a network, of course, but it will usually be viewed as rewarding cronyism rather than leadership performance.

### Clues to Essential PSP Elements

We have covered the topics of purposes, policy aims, and some criteria of PSPs, and we have stressed the great natural variability of local models. There remains the question of whether there are some technical elements which are essential to effective implementation even if their forms vary. We cannot answer this with solid confidence because our project lacked a national probability sample. In addition, our data are confined to districts with more than 10,000 students, and it may be that what is essential in large settings is not essential elsewhere. We do have some clues to what appears to be essential, however, and our clues are firmer than those based on fewer cases or studies done in less depth.

The order below follows our original model of the principal selection process. Features summarized by Table 5-1 are discussed as aggregated around the concerns of merit, equity, and legitimacy. Efficiency is discussed later.

#### A. Merit

1. Vacancy. Contrary to the proposition imbedded in many administrative association contracts, defining and posting announcement of a vacant principalship is no longer a feasible practice. Every district we studied in Phases 1 and 2 subverts the practice or gets around it one way or another

Table 5-1

ESSENTIAL PRINCIPAL SELECTION ELEMENTS

	VACANCY	SELECTION CRITERIA	APPLICANT POOL	SCREENING	APPOINTMENT
hip	If no one knows you are searching, no test of merit is possible	Develop a complete set Connect each criterion with a type of evidence Decide whether general or unique to a school	Generate and prepare continuously Define access clearly Keep size large State real incentives	Include diverse and divergent screeners Avoid reliance on interviews Evaluate	Avoid excuses to defer  Notification Protocol for winners and losers
Race	Women and racial/ethnic minorities depend for their applications upon a vacancy announcement  Fair or unfair?	Review of criteria by women and racial/ethnic minorities	Generate women and racial/ethnic pool continuously  Prove list is used Recruit outside district, if necessary Use informal networks	Eliminate sources of bias  Fair or unfair?	Equalize real appointment outcomes  Fair?
acy	All affected groups are informed	Criteria are made public Criteria are Board-approved	Leaders of affected groups informed of pool members  Nominations taken	Broad representation Divergence explained Evaluation results disseminated	Full announcement Full account of process

for reasons presented in Chapter 2. Even so, one aspect remains essential: Unless you know you are looking and unless others have a way of learning about your search, you do not have a selection procedure.

It is important to acknowledge that school closings, early retirements, the exercise of transfer rights, and budget uncertainties impinge too heavily on systems nowadays to make specific vacancy definitions stable or amenable to planning. Internship programs enable a district to transform instability into a treatable challenge. Systems such as Hayward and Montgomery County have a backlog of previously trained and assessed candidates from which to draw at any time in a school year. An independent assessment center such as Howard County's provides a similar resource. Large systems need a backlog of ready candidates.

Every one of the Phase 2 districts is filling vacancies from within the ranks of interns or assistant or vice principals whose eligibility and leadership potential have been thoroughly assessed. In essence, they have added new, pre-vacancy stages to their PSPs so that when a vacancy is announced, the qualified candidates are already at the gate. The process of searching is not publicized by the posting of vacancy announcements. It is built into more general and continuous personnel practices which are themselves widely described and accessible.

2. Selection Criteria. It is not only essential to develop and disseminate criterial standards which encompass all of the duties and skills required; it is even more essential to decide in advance what kinds of evidence will be gathered to use in appraising candidates on the basis of the stated criteria. Our study suggests that the higher the priority given to a leadership performance criterion, the more difficult it will be to conceive of and collect evidence that bears upon it. If a district emphasizes the ability to lead teachers toward improvements in instruction, for example, paper credentials and group interview responses will tell selectors very little they need to know.

When the criteria are fitted to a particular vacancy, they achieve their highest level of intrinsic validity. If a particular school hosts a large program in Cambodian bilingual education, the criteria might ideally reflect this fact. Unfortunately, too many changes in assignments lie ahead to make this feasible, and more comprehensively general standards must be developed. A large system will need to examine its complete array of schools at any one grade level and build their special requirements into the general set of standards. Where the resulting set becomes too vague, however, the vagueness is bound to detract from the vacancy pool and from screening efforts.

As with vacancy announcements, each of the five Phase 2 districts copes with the challenges of selection criteria by recruiting, training and assessing aspirants to the principalship in explicitly formal ways for from one to four years prior to selection itself. This is the dramatic difference between the two phases of our study. If selection criteria are prepared each time a vacancy occurs, and if applications are taken each time, the validation of qualification and eligibility narrow down to a precious few hours of scanning resumes and making telephone queries. If, on the other hand, aspirants are being trained and appraised continuously, there are abundant data at hand and criteria can be fashioned to pertain to a particular school or for generic openings.

3. Applicant Pool. A good PSP is one where generating an adequate pool of candidates is part of the regular business of administering the system locally. It matters little whether the pool is created from inside the district or in other ways. Some districts host highly diversified, large teaching staffs, while others are relatively homogeneous and in-bred. In one Phase 1 district, for example, before court-ordered desegregation 95 percent of the city's 5,000 teachers were whites born and raised in the community, and 80 percent of them were graduates of the same local teachers college. In that instance, an applicant pool had to be developed by recourse to a nationwide recruitment drive. In Hayward, teachers aiming at eventual principalships are attracted into the district from other localities in the San Francisco Bay Area because of news about the internship program.

In an effective PSP, there is heavy and constant pressure on the application gate as large numbers of staff seek to enter the competition. That pressure builds up because a system builds a magnetic reputation for good management; because the route to candidacy is well laid out; because the competition for opportunity is both rigorous and observably efficacious (e.g., those who meet the criteria get appointed); and because there are describable rewards associated with becoming a principal. In some of our Phase 1 districts, the pool of men is dwindling because the pay differences are negligible, while women want to be candidates simply because sex equity conditions have improved. They do not want leadership by default, however.

Our Phase 2 districts have in common a strong preoccupation with generating, training, sifting, and conserving a large pool of applicants and future candidates. They leave no aspect of this effort to chance.

4. Screening. It is essential to think through, long in advance of any one search for a principal, the answers to this question: Who will collect and appraise what evidence about candidates? The answers are irrelevant unless prior decisions have been made about criterial standards and types of evidence.

The energies of screeners are wasted if they are expended on issues of eligibility. A competent and trustworthy personnel director and staff can do much to set the stage for effective screening by sifting out the ineligibles on the basis of objective standards of certification, length of types of service, and the like. Broward County's resume form offers an example of how much can be accomplished in advance of group screening. Thus, personnel not only narrows the list but contributes a uniform format to the usable evidence.

Assuming these preliminaries have been handled effectively, we can deal with the issue of who screens. Social psychologist Irving Janis (1972) uses the term "groupthink":

. . . as a quick and easy way to refer to a mode of thinking that people engage in when they are deeply involved in a cohesive in-group, when the members' strivings for unanimity

○

override their motivations to realistically appraise alternative courses of action... Groupthink refers to a deterioration of mental efficiency, reality testing, and moral judgment that results from in-group pressures. (p. 9)

Every PSP we studied in both phases gave signs of the effects of groupthink. Only the assessment center operations within Howard County show serious, concerted efforts to mitigate those effects through painstaking checks and balances, and even there the assessors trained to screen were limited to a small group of district and school administrators. Some Phase 1 and several Phase 2 districts combat groupthink by including parents and teachers on their screening committees. This does help to break up the strain toward unanimity common to close-knit groups of senior administrators; however, even where these techniques were used in Phase 1 districts, the evidence on candidates available was often weak or the selection criteria underdeveloped.

It is essential for a good PSP to balance multiple sources of evidence with multiple sources of assessment. By and large, those interviewed in our Phase 2 sites did not accept the proposition that screeners should come from diverse backgrounds or from multiple interest groups. For several, the idea of including board members, parents, or teachers smacked of a return to a past era of politically motivated patronage appointments. For others, the assessment activities seemed to have become too technical to permit diversity in those doing the screening.

We are concerned with two essentials of the screening process, however, on behalf of both merit and legitimacy, which we believe transcend these points of view. One is that those who do the screening comprise more than a cohesive team of senior administrators who lose the ability, over time, to correct one another's errors of judgment and who tend to strain toward uniformity. A second is that without some other participation, screening loses its external legitimacy. It appears to take place in a way no one can attest to as trustworthy or well executed, except the same team members.



When we began this study, we hypothesized that a measure of quality of screening would be the breadth of membership in screening groups. We had in mind not only the dangers of groupthink but the virtues of local democracy. Early in Phase 1, we even watched for high school student members on committees. Our sites led us to revise this hypothesis because we saw very diverse, broadly representative groups serve as rubber stamps for superintendents or personnel directors and we also saw them add little of value to the decision process.

Hence, we revised our hypothesis as follows: given well formulated criteria and evidence sufficient to test for their relative fulfillment, a measure of quality of screening will be the presence of some members different enough to countervail the negative effects of groupthink. For instance, several Phase 2 districts placed heavy reliance on the participation of school-based as well as district-level administrators and staff on screening and/or interview committees. The integrity of the process will tend to be appraised by other means, for example, whether all the steps are scrupulously followed or whether exceptions are made for certain candidates.

Finally, where districts do not use assessment center simulation exercises, a great deal of ritualistic activity seems to build up around screening group interviews. Screeners seem in these cases to come to believe there is much to be learned from how a candidate responds to questions put by members during a 30- to 45-minute encounter. We call this ritualistic because screeners (often working with incomplete evidence of other kinds), in their keen diligence, come to believe that they can differentiate accurately between interviewees and that their combined ratings really do signify something pertinent to future job performance. Most of us have taken part in such a process and we can recollect the emergence of a halo effect from using our judgment and fusing it with others. Candidates who interview well and are later appointed sometimes carry the halo with them. Skeptics, however, wonder whether the encounter was really indicative of much of anything and they said so in our interviews.

Paper examinations of the kind once used in very big cities turned out upon evaluation to fail to discriminate between better and poorer candidates. The personnel director in one Phase 1 district uses an essay test of his own devising as a pre-selection measure, but he scores it and he has not had it evaluated. So, too, we found no district where the selective validity of screening interviews had been evaluated. We believe it is essential to conclude that the results of screening ideally should never rest entirely upon the ratings members make based on brief interviews. Rather, additional data should be taken into account, for example, as in Broward County, Florida or Howard County, Maryland.

5. Appointment Decisions. We have reported that superintendents tend to participate heavily in the PSP, and they nearly always abide by the nominations produced by the screening committee. We therefore take these to be "given" properties essential to the imputed consistency, importance, and integrity of the local process. The internship methods in Hayward and Montgomery County enable superintendents there to test their choices over time and to revise them as evidence of performance accumulates.

What is as common as full and responsive participation, however, is the practice of letting other considerations divert the appointment itself. The decision to appoint the top ranked candidate is sometimes deferred in order to accommodate a rash of transfers. Someone who has given long and loyal service suffers burnout and is brought into headquarters in July, displacing the director of secondary education, who is then sent into the principalship. The top ranked candidate from the June screening then becomes an assistant principal awaiting an opportunity. Last minute changes are particularly likely, we found, to reflect some strong bond of sentiment or long association which gets factored in by the superintendent or his key deputies. What gets lost, at least for a year or two, is the culminating placement of the ablest leader in the most suitable position. This tendency brings a PSP full circle, back to the hedging tendencies in defining a vacancy. In part, this is a byproduct of unstable conditions in public education, as these overcomplicate the superintendent's efforts to plan well. In part, those conditions offer a rationalization for "settling out" and ending up with less than highest quality leadership.

Conservation of merit depends, too, on the observance of a protocol of communication with the winners and losers. Appointees need to hear privately from the superintendent and to have a chance to bring up concerns or to define their expectations before anything becomes public. Losers need similar exchanges and expressions of appreciation or guidance on future prospects.

#### B. Sex and Racial Equity

Except for the omnipresent issue of fairness which we presented earlier in this chapter, there seem to us to be eight other essential elements of a good PSP if a system's aim is to do more than pursue merit and is to include sex and racial/ethnic equity as well. The concept of equity includes fairness; today, it goes beyond this standard and beyond even provision of opportunity to include the standard of representativeness. We do not mean this in terms of statistical balance but in terms of demonstrating that educational leadership of highest merit comes from all segments of the population. Representativeness today presupposes the presence and the successful implementation of affirmative action goals by local officials.

1. Women and minorities lack the informal channels of access to information shared by most white men. Therefore, the wide distribution of vacancy announcements helps to offset a built-in disadvantage. Better yet, a training and internship process which welcomes women and minority candidates offsets this lack of access.

2. Selection criteria should be reviewed periodically by women and minority educators as a means of eliminating barriers and disadvantaging formulations which may be developed in good faith by white male administrators who lack adequate awareness of the latent or tacit features. So, too, there may be some criteria that should be included because they pertain to a leadership position even if their inclusion gives some small advantage to otherwise disadvantaged applicants from the ranks of women or minorities. Sexual and racial neutrality are not essential in all critical features. It is in this sector that the interplay between merit and equity deserves the most thoughtful review.

3. In order to appoint women and minority leaders of merit, an especially substantial pool of applicants must be generated and maintained. Many Phase 1 districts used the practice of having token candidates who were women or black, and all affected parties knew this was taking place.

4. There must be evidence that the pool is used--that being a candidate has positive consequences.

5. A district which has neglected women and minority educators over many decades cannot expect to recruit solely from within. It will have to reach outside aggressively and build up its teacher force composition as well as its pool of principals-to-be.

6. If a district embarks on generating a substantial pool, it will need to rely on networks of information and access other than those it used in the past. Women, black, and other minority candidates will communicate through networks of their own devising if there is news of a district which has actually determined to act affirmatively within a framework of merit selections.

7. Screening groups devoid of women and minority members will make realization of equity much more difficult. Similarly, the types of evidence gathered to test for fitness to the criteria should be reviewed for bias and for deliberate inclusion of some points for special status. These should be performance-based, not attributes of sex or race, of course.

8. Above all, the appointment of women and minority candidates of observably high merit is the touchstone of equity success. As the pace of good appointments picks up and comes to include high school principalships, the pool of applicants will expand.

### C. Legitimacy

Underlying all facets of public leadership selection is the importance of legitimacy. Teachers and parents will increase their confidence in

the system and will follow the lead of principals to the extent that they interpret the PSP as operating with integrity and on the basis of merit. The legitimacy accorded to newly appointed principals calls not only for the other essential elements discussed above, but for its own ten ingredients, as follows:

1. All affected parties--staff and board and parents--must be fully informed about vacancies and procedures.

2. Selection criteria should be made public and explained each time they are going to be used. Particular care should be taken to ensure that candidates understand exactly what is expected in terms of preparation.

3. Those criteria should be examined, revised or approved by the board in public session.

4. Teachers and other staff representatives and parent leaders should be informed periodically about the nature and membership (not necessarily by name) of the candidate pool.

5. There should be a means through which staff and taxpayers may nominate candidates after eligibility standards are announced. This element contains a serious paradox which limits its universality, however. If nominations have been a source of special interest influence in the past, or if a district has developed careful and rigorous processes through which aspirants become candidates by virtue of inservice training and internship-type preparation, then an open nomination element may reduce confidence in the legitimacy of the PSP. Use of nomination also must be done in a way that safeguards against the fiction that a nominee is in some way preferable to an applicant because influential persons have done the nominating. We can rephrase the element, then, to say that the legitimacy of a PSP depends on reasonably widespread public understanding of the ways in which aspirants can become candidates. If those ways are open and observably fair, a nominating element is itself not essential and may even contain perverse effects.

6. Broad representation on screening groups of teachers and parents as well as administrators and supervisors enables greater legitimization of the selection process, as the reasonableness, fairness, and integrity of the process can be witnessed by relevant affected parties. This is especially the case where long periods of training and internship are absent and screening must proceed from comparatively limited information. If membership becomes a matter of interest group politics--a risk entailed as representation broadens--then merit and equity aims may suffer. Therefore, even with regard to the quest for legitimacy, local conditions should guide the composing of screening and rating groups. If the composition is uniformly and invariably limited to the same few senior administrators, we think a loss in legitimacy will occur over time.

7. Administrators should make a public disclosure on the subject of how divergent judgments will be factored into the screening and rating process. Stated more bluntly, who will take part who is not a regular member of the superintendent's cabinet or inner circle? Do those persons have expertise and standing sufficient to offset their non-membership? If sex and racial equity issues are present, legitimacy will increase as women and minority participation is increased.

8. The legitimacy of claims about the ability of screeners and raters to make meritorious judgments requires independent evaluation. How will the public learn whether an improved PSP has been consequential? In other words, when the appointment decisions are assessed in terms of outcome effects on school achievement, service delivery, and community relations, the assessment should extend back to include screening decisions.

9. The superintendent's office should publicize the action of appointing principals, stressing the qualifications of the appointee and indicating fit to assignment. Legitimacy increases as staff and parents see that the appointment has importance and was approached with special care.

10. Similarly, the system should make an annual public report on how the PSP has operated, who has taken part, and what its relation to merit

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## Operating Difficulties

Just as there are some rather universal conditions surrounding and threading through good PSP development, so too all of the procedures we studied share a number of severe difficulties which never get fully resolved. Most of these stem from the limitations in available knowledge from which to make better procedural designs.

For example, all of our districts shared the problem of basing selective judgment on pertinent evidence. What can be learned from written essays? What weight should be given to records from a personnel file? From a university transcript? From interviews by screening committee members? This is the nexus of the problem being addressed by assessment centers, of course, where serious efforts are being made to replace credentials and testimonial data with exercises which simulate leadership in action and which are amenable to observation and rating. It will take some years before the real relation between ratings of performance under simulation and performance on the job can be established. Even then, as Robert Menges (1975) has warned, we will not have the level of certainty to which most selectors aspire.

We may be fairly confident that, the intelligence and objectivity of the judges being equal, the quality of evidence about educational leadership goes up as the evidence approximates most closely the actual performance conditions and functions of the principal. If this is true, then we may infer that our Phase 2 districts differed most tellingly from Phase 1 districts on this dimension. The Phase 2 districts were more exemplary because their PSPs made much fuller use of performance-linked evidence, gathered over a longer period of time.

Districts that emphasize internships, for instance, do so in large part in order to obtain performance-based evidence. This is not the same as evidence gained informally and in retrospect on teachers who have been "in the pipeline" for years as potential leaders, nor is it the same as reports on the performance of candidates already in lesser positions or in principal-



ships in other districts. Even the Phase 2 districts, however, seem to give more weight to screening committee interviews (even where these last only 30 to 40 minutes) than the logic of evidence would suggest as offering predictive validity. We did not reach this conclusion on our own; many respondents brought this to our attention as a source of mild disbelief. We think the interviewing has an importance for screeners, not because it holds much validity, but simply because it gives them a shared, firsthand sample of some kind of behavior from which to make a group judgment. Even so, the weight screeners tend to ascribe to their interviews probably exceeds the power of prediction that can be gained under the best of circumstances.

A second source of technical difficulty that comes up from a weak knowledge base is the problem of educational as contrasted with administrative ability assessment. All of the Phase 2 districts exhibited the ability to seek out, trace, and make judgments about the latter. The strongest features of all the PSPs we studied, moreover, were those derived from the profession of personnel management. Those features do not in themselves illuminate the mysteries of curriculum and instructional supervision. That Phase 2 districts place genuine and widespread emphasis on instruction was evident from verbal assertions and from examination of the credentials of new appointees. Nevertheless, all district PSPs seem to us to display some uncertainty about how to appraise knowledge and performance skills in curriculum and instructional leadership.

A third source of strain comes from an uncertainty over counseling those who remain in the district but lose in the competitive selection process. This came up in every instance from all candidates, successful and failed. There appears to be some lack of general readiness to follow through completely in a way that will help people reconcile their experience and regroup either to move away from leadership aspirations or to try again. The effect can be the unwanted if unintended generation of alienation from management. The more competitive the candidating process, by the way, the more necessary a program of counseling becomes.

### Some Benefits and Costs

Improving PSPs seems to us to be a truly beneficial strategy for improving educational practices. We were not convinced of this during Phase 1, although it was then that we learned how deep and extensive were the interaction effects between PSP and all other aspects of the local service delivery system. Several Phase 1 districts, moreover, gave evidence of earnest efforts to make improvements in one or two aspects of their selection procedures, so that while they had not yet gone far enough to fully counter-vail local customs of cronyism and reliance on vague notions of fit, they did express a new importance being attached to PSP. In Phase 2, we could see the same deep effects. More importantly we learned that under some political and cultural conditions, school boards and superintendents could actually choose to make PSP improvements which then helped to improve their other operations.

We also realized that district leaders are capable of reaching out for new knowledge and for technical assistance. When a change is firmly mandated--when the policy aim is clear and the superintendent wants to reform the procedure badly enough--the techniques are within reach. The greatest initial benefit comes to the line administrators at headquarters and in the school sites. They are alerted, revived, and remoralized, although some who lack competence are made very anxious by the change.

Benefits also accrue to parent leaders and to board members whose constituents are clamoring for school improvements. Where these two groups have built a coalition, it can be strengthened by evidence of a better focused, fairer, and more earnestly competitive process. Teachers are least directly affected, we believe, because of severe difficulties facing them today in the form of reduced mobility, reductions in force, and a diffuse sense of professional malaise. Many districts, including the most exemplary, do not seem to us to go very far toward building teachers deeply into the reformative process, however, and those who do so may find this helps to reduce alienation.

Our study did not focus on outcomes for students. We shall have to await evaluation research being conducted by the Florida Council on Educational Management and by NASSP on its assessment center before concluding authoritatively that deep changes in a district's PSP produce deep gains in achievement, student satisfaction, curricular scope, and school-community relations. Everything we were able to learn verged on support for this hypothesis, however.

The costs associated with these benefits seem to us to break into two parts. One is that leadership expectations are unmistakably raised during a period when they may then go unmet or, worse yet, be met and then broken. Those being chosen with the greatest care are best suited to do well as leaders. They are not maintainers of the status quo. They may not, in the long term, even do as well as others at the task of reducing instructional programs, cutting back other services, and "making do" with declining resources. A new PSP can achieve some economies by reducing deadwood and heightening efficiency, but it raises the distinct possibility of building a very strong cadre of leaders who share high standards that are a liability in an era of decline.

Similarly, new PSPs can change the very foundations of school districts. There are vital historical continuities which are usually preserved, to be sure, but the pace of change toward an increasingly different future is intensified. Student achievement may rise while varsity championships may grow scarce. A once-rural community in process of suburbanizing will find that process speeded up. The change in leadership cannot truly outpace all other rates of change or constancy that work on a district, yet the leadership effect is profound enough to leverage many events. Therefore, a district embarking on the design of a new PSP ought to consider in advance just how much positive change and challenge it really wants. The adoption of deep changes in PSPs is not one of those fads which will wash through a community and leave no change.

Further, our study was not cost analytic. We did not attempt to estimate the cost of various types of PSPs. We are confident in asserting,

however, that Phase 2 PSPs are, as types, significantly more expensive than those studied in Phase 1. Some of the extra costs are obvious to the reader of the reports on Montgomery and Howard Counties, for they are attached to the special training, retreats, simulation exercises, testing, and record-building inherent in these PSPs. Other extra costs are less tangible and derive from the time and effort, both paid and voluntary, expended in participation. Taking all of our districts together, we saw wealthy districts that spend little and poor districts that spend a lot. We are also confident that a poorly designed PSP can also take a lot of costly time to operate, with unjustifiable yields.

Finally, we do not have an answer to the question of whether small, partial, and incremental changes in a district's PSP will result in observable benefits. Our Phase 2 districts have embraced PSP changes in a very comprehensive sense. Our Phase 1 districts include some where small changes have been introduced in recent years without modifying overall results very substantially. Still, we close by hypothesizing that a continuum of changes probably exists, ranging from a zero to the sum of all parts. As corollary, we expect that moderate, partial changes which center on instructional leadership and increased equity will, over time, tend to induce more comprehensive changes. Our Phase 2 experience is counter-intuitive, however. It shows how adoption of very comprehensive changes in PSP has been the preferred approach of some districts. This could stem from our sampling method, however, and should not be taken to mean that small, partial changes are unworthy of adoption.

#### Concluding Comment

Our study was by contractual prescription neither basic nor evaluative research. Therefore, some of our ideas about developing principal selection procedures are incomplete; they depend for their refinement upon future research. For example, we did not presume to answer the question of what someone should look for in a school principal, even though this question is central to our subject. Our research design was quasi-ethnographic; it allows us to describe and contrast local practices, but it does not enable

causal modelling or performance outcome assessments. Similarly, our aim and our design together do not let us conclude much about the economics or the efficiencies of contrasting procedures.

We have built some subjective confidence in the idea that there are probably leadership abilities pertinent to the principalship which have relatively universal features. We believe the Phase 2 districts are in earnest search for those features. We also believe that the searches will converge gradually with evidence accumulating from current research into effective schools. The local variations we witnessed were too great to permit any generalizations, however, and we concur with Gersten, Carmine, and Green (1982) who report in connection with effective schools research:

. . .None of the models of leadership explains much of the variability in observed performance. . .It makes more sense to measure attributes such as competence, knowledge, and observable performance. . .leadership is not innate but. . .the nature of school and situational variables can bring forth leadership qualities in an individual who did not previously exhibit them. Further, Kerr and Jermier (1978) recommend an examination of the whole leadership structure (that is, the principal, vice principal, supervisor, and others) rather than of the site administrator alone. (p. 48)

There is much that our study did not address, then, let alone answer, including the mystery of the substance of leadership qualities. It did, however, ask about and answer two questions of strong practical relevance to education: how are principals selected, and how are some districts striving to improve their selection procedures? The answers offer many valuable hypotheses for future basic educational research.

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APPENDIX  
Study Design and Method

This study has been designed and executed in two phases. Phase 1 focused on describing and characterizing common practices in principal selection. Phase 2 focused on describing and characterizing alternatives to common practices. The following sections of this appendix describe our approaches to sampling, data collection, and analysis for both Phases of the study.

Sampling

For Phase 1, ten districts were chosen to participate through a random sampling procedure, which took place in several stages. First, one state was randomly selected from a list of states in each of the main five geographic regions: Northeast, Southeast, Midwest, Southwest, and West.

Second, the sampling frame was defined by ethnic composition, dichotomized according to whether the percentage of minority pupils in the district was less than 30 percent or equal to or greater than 30 percent. For each sampled state, the Office for Civil Rights Directory of Elementary and Secondary School Districts (1976-77), was used to identify those districts in each ethnic category. (This was the most recent data available.)

Third, school districts of 10,000 or more enrollment in each cell of the sampling frame were numbered consecutively, and candidates for inclusion in the study were selected using a table of random numbers. One primary candidate and six alternatives (wherever possible) were selected per cell.

Fourth, the candidate districts were contacted, beginning with the primary, to ascertain their willingness to participate in the study and to verify their eligibility in terms of amount of principal turnover. Only those districts that had selected at least two principals but not more than

20 percent of their total principal corps during the last two years were defined as eligible. Selection itself was defined as a new appointment: transfers or rotations of current principals were not included as selections for sampling purposes.

Few districts refused, and those that did usually gave as a reason extraordinary internal turmoil due either to severe and sudden fiscal reversal or sudden and intense flare-ups of desegregation litigation. These were presented to us as placing too much of a burden on top administrators (and the district in general) to enable participation. At the time we received such refusals, we did not fully appreciate their significance. Later, when we came to understand the central role top administrators play and the general sensitivity and symbolic significance of the selection process, we could look back and see that even the districts that declined to participate were revealing of the process.

The districts that accepted our Phase 1 invitation ranged in enrollment size from about 12,000 to about 85,000 students, with most falling in the mid-range. Each of the ten cells in the region-by-degree-of-minority-enrollment sampling frame was filled, and each district had replaced at least two (but not more than 20 percent) of its principals between 1978-1980. In addition, by serendipity, the districts represented a full range of economic conditions, from one Midwest system facing bankruptcy to highly prosperous Sunbelt districts. And finally, a range of urbanization was represented, from suburb to small city to large inner city. In sum, our random sample of ten districts captured diversity in region, ethnicity, enrollment declines and growth, desegregation conditions, and size.

Within each district, we traced in detail three cases of principal selection. These were chosen by the district itself on the basis of grade level (with all three represented) and recency of appointment, with priority given to the most recent selections. Given a tie between these two criteria, we asked the district to select the case most characteristic of its selection procedures.

Sampling for Phase 2 (which called for five districts) was a two-stage problem. First, we had to 'sample' or identify the kinds of alternatives to investigate. Second, we had to identify districts that illustrated these alternatives.

The solution to the sampling problem of which alternatives came from Phase 1, which suggested four major implications to guide our Phase 2 study of alternatives and improvements. First, there seemed to be a real need for knowledge about ways of bringing to consciousness and sharpening criterial statements, particularly in the area of educational leadership skills. Second, the need for behavioral or performance assessments of candidates seemed to be universally felt. These findings suggested that alternatives or improvements that advanced solutions to these problems would be of use to educators as well as of interest to researchers.

Third, given the characteristic flow of power to the top of the district administrative hierarchy, it appeared that any attempt at improvement that involved extremes of decentralization would likely be ignored by districts in general (even if it could be located for study'. Fourth, the influence of the local culture and context is so strong that adaptability and flexibility are necessarily key features of potentially transportable alternatives. These findings suggested that widely deviant or 'rigid form' alternatives would be of little interest, and hence, a waste of resources to investigate (even if they could be located).

With the help of our Study Advisory Panel--which included representatives of the National Association of Elementary School Principals, the National Association of Secondary School Principals, the American Association of School Administrators, a principal, a superintendent, and a parent leader--we distilled the range of potential alternatives for study to three: (1) assessment centers, which constitute a burgeoning movement in educational administrator selection; (2) district-run internships, which have long been on the scene and are attractive to many systems as methods of sharpening, enriching, and stabilizing the grooming process; and (3) "exemplary conven-

tional" districts, or rather, those districts that depend upon neither an assessment center nor an internship, but nonetheless "do it well."

Identifying representative districts for the assessment center and internship alternatives was comparatively straightforward. For the former, we contacted the National Association of Secondary School Principals (NASSP), which has developed and is completing field testing of probably the most comprehensively designed educationally oriented assessment center available today. With NASSP's help, we selected one of their 13 pilot sites to study: Howard County, Maryland.

For the latter, we sought to identify two sites through a nomination and literature review process. Through a series of more than 75 iterative phone calls around the nation, we identified two district-run internship programs that were repeatedly nominated as "outstanding" or "excellent:" Hayward, California and Montgomery County, Maryland. (This is not to imply that no other internships were mentioned in this category, or that our query for nomination was exhaustive. In fact, other programs were nominated. Further, our inquiry did not systematically include all fifty states.)

To select our two remaining "exemplary conventional" sites, we first tried the same sort of iterative calling and nomination process as for the internships. However, we drew a blank: most informants either were not sufficiently familiar with the details of a district's selection process to make a judgment or, when willing to do so, could not provide concrete evidence to support their assessment.

Fortunately, however, we were able to draw upon the Florida Council on Educational Management for assistance. The Council is a newly formed, state-level organization engaged in conducting research and demonstration projects aimed at improving the performance of Florida's principals. Using their extensive data bases on principal performance (and district selection processes), the Council nominated two Florida districts known to have both a high concentration of "high performing principals" (defined by several

indicia, including pupil achievement) and at least minimally sound selection procedures: Broward County and Hillsborough County.

### Data Collection

Our method of inquiry for both Phase 1 and Phase 2 was quasi-ethnographic, and involved sending a two-person research team to each district for a week. Using a detailed topical outline, the team conducted intensive, open-ended, site-specific interviews with 30-35 informants per district (on the average). The topical outline was based on our eight-point model of the selection process, which includes: vacancy definition and announcement; development of selection criteria; generation of an applicant pool; screening of candidates; employment decision; consequences; the site context; and critical events (see Figure A-1). The interviewees were chosen for the part they played in each of the three focal selections that we were tracking, and included superintendents, personnel directors, other central administrators, principals, teachers, parents, and school board members. The team also reviewed available documents such as court orders, memoranda and policy statements describing selection procedures (in the rare cases where these existed), vacancy announcements, and files on selection instances.

Each research team visited at least three districts to ensure a cross-site learning effect and facilitate later cross-site analysis. Each team was composed of one senior researcher and one experienced junior researcher, with the former serving as leader for the site-specific inquiry. Insofar as possible, we also sought to compose each team cross-sex and cross-ethnically, and to assign them to culturally appropriate sites. (For instance, sites with significant hispanic populations were assigned to a team that included a bilingual senior researcher of hispanic background.)

Our method of inquiry in Phase 2 differed from these procedures in three important respects. First, we did not approach the Phase 2 inquiry from the perspective of tracking specific instances of selection, but rather from the perspective of understanding the alternative selection process which



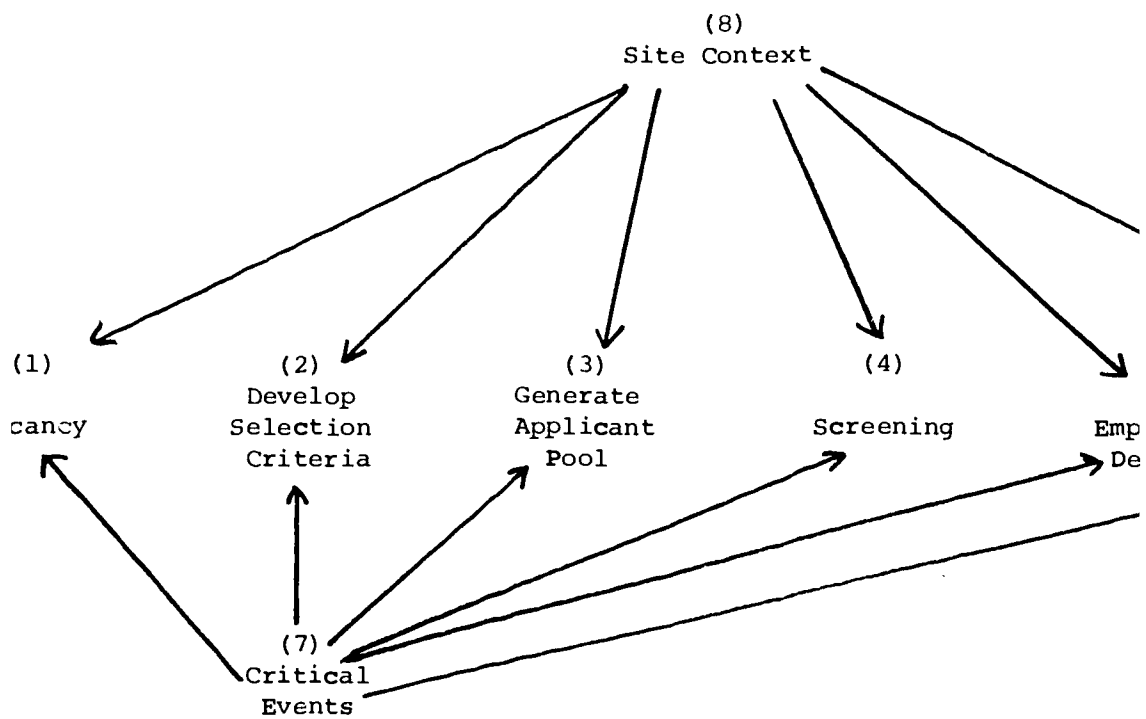


Figure A-1: MODEL OF PRINCIPAL SELECTION PR

the district had been chosen to represent. For instance, in the assessment center district, we focused on understanding the assessment center rather than on tracing in detail three instances of principal selection. During the course of studying the alternative procedures, we indeed traced numerous cases of selection. Nonetheless, the shift in emphasis from tracing selection cases to investigating systemic procedural alternatives remains consequential from a methodological perspective.

Second, we did not interview parents and teachers in Phase 2. Rather, we increased the number of principals, assistant principals (and other candidates), and central administrators that we spoke with in order to gain a deeper understanding of the historical antecedents of the alternative practices and the local implementation experience.

Third, from the outset we offered our Phase 2 districts the option of being identified, whereas all Phase 1 districts were to remain anonymous. Our entering agreement with the Phase 2 districts allowed them to choose--after reviewing and commenting upon our report of their experience--whether they wished to be identified or not. It is worth noting that all five chose to be identified, and all were very candid and open about the negative aspects of their selection systems and experiences. Further, while in the field, we were not constrained in any way from speaking with critics of the system. In fact, the Phase 2 districts were as candid and open as the Phase 1 districts, and both took pains to make certain that we understood the problems as well as the successes of their local selection systems.

Throughout our fieldwork in both phases of the study, we were repeatedly struck by the willingness, even eagerness, of both the districts and the individual informants to disclose the intimate details of highly sensitive processes and decisions. Both of us (as well as the other field staff) have done many studies of this sort (including such sensitive issues as desegregation and fiscal issues), and have always found educators to be forthcoming and candid once they are assured of the interviewer's respectful

interest and integrity. However, on this particular study, the response was extraordinary, especially given the extreme sensitivity of the subject. We discovered that our inquiry was providing most school personnel with an opportunity to think sharply about and discuss with safety their experiences and observations about an issue of considerable importance to them. This was not confined to the more peripherally involved informants, but extended to the superintendents and administrators who actually conduct and control principal selection. These experiences contributed substantially to our understanding of the high visibility and intense attention accorded principal selection at all levels of the educational hierarchy.

While in the field, extensive notes of each interview were taken by interviewers. (In the first visits, we attempted to tape record interviews, but the topic proved too sensitive to permit this. In fact, on many occasions we were asked to "put down your pencil" during certain points in the interview. Each evening, team members shared their notes, experiences, and conclusions/speculations. Each day of interviewing built on the evidence (or gaps) from the preceding day. In addition, as teams "learned" a district, they typically doubled-back to respondents interviewed earlier in the visit in order to cross-check findings, confirm interpretations, and probe more deeply into earlier statements in the light of later facts.

Once back from the field, teams prepared a structured case study for internal use only. This report followed the topical outline and was laced with evidence trails. In other words, if a team wished to draw a particular conclusion or interpretation, supporting quotes, events, chronologies, statistics--a strong fact pattern--was included to support the finding. In addition, teams prepared summaries of each of the three selection cases they had tracked.

### Analysis

Our analyses were cross-site and actually began while the Phase 1 fieldwork was in progress. After each set of three visits, field staff met

for lengthy debriefings and discussions of what they had seen and learned. Tentative perceptions, emergent cross-site themes and hypotheses could then be tested to see if they held across the next two or three sites. In other words, the fit of the new data to the emergent cross-site themes could be checked and probed while the team was still on site. If the data did not fit, counter-hypotheses and thematic adjustments could be developed and tested while the team still had access to informants and on-the-spot observations and data. In sum, the first stage of analysis consisted of continuously developing and testing models of the selection process against the data while in the field.

The main analysis was conducted using the case reports on the districts (and tracked selections). These were not treated quantitatively, for reductionism of this sort would have meant too much loss of information. Rather, our analysis was a search for cross-cutting patterns and themes, much akin to investigative reporting or anthropological inquiry. Throughout, we were seeking to provide causal explanations of the whys and hows of principal selection.

Specifically, the case reports tried to explain the dynamics (as well as the technologies) of selection in each site. Stated somewhat simplistically, the aggregated or cross-site analysis then consisted of comparing these explanations to yield a more general explanation. (A number of authors have argued for this as an effective approach to the difficult problem of aggregating case studies. See, for example, Yin and Heald, 1975, and Campbell, 1975, who has coined the term "pattern-matching" to refer to the same sort of aggregation as it occurs within a single case study.)

Operationally, this meant two things in terms of how we organized our analysis. First, the case reports were filed on three levels: (1) district or case; (2) individual selection summaries; and (3) cross-case by topical outline headings. The latter enabled us to quickly access all sites on any given topic (e.g., vacancy advertisement). The first two preserved the individual selection and site level explanation. Analysis consisted

(again stated somewhat simplistically) of working back and forth through files to search for fact patterns and explanation patterns that held up across different levels of files and different sites. Analysts conducted independent searches, hypothesized patterns, debated and discussed these went back to the files, and so on until the patterns fell into place and solidified.