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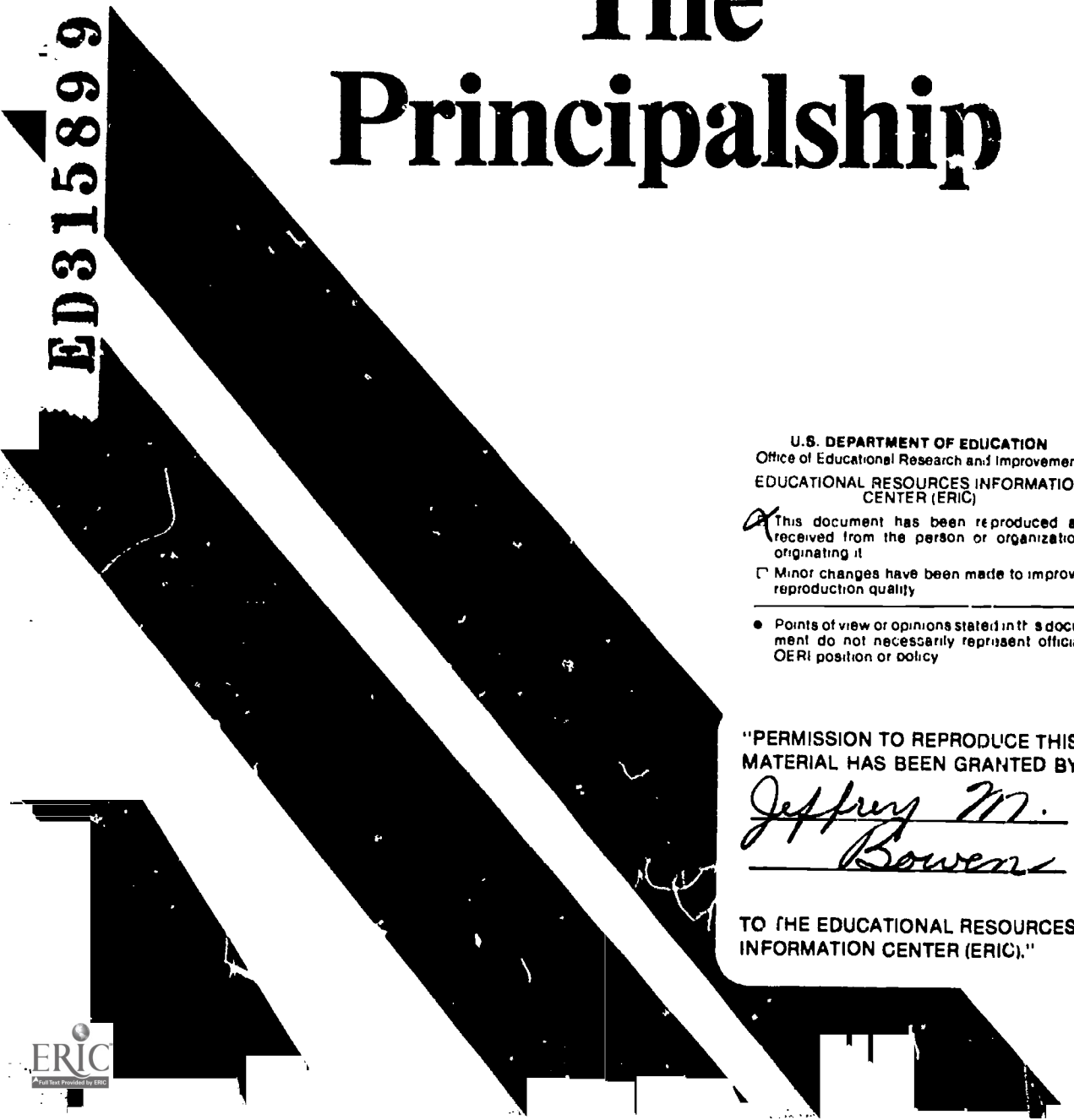
ABSTRACT

The position of principal is due for a fundamental reevaluation. Several aspects of the position are discussed: (1) history of the position; (2) impact and self-perceptions of the principal; (3) current challenges of the principal; and (4) role and style of the principal. Central to the utilization of the principal in the district is the choice of superintendent. As a result, board and staff roles need to be clarified. A major concern for school boards is the supply, training, and certification of applicants for administrative positions. The document offers steps to improve the supply, recruitment, development, and evaluation of principals. (41 references) (SI)

The Principalship



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The Principalship

A Position Paper of the
New York State
School Boards Association

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Summary of Recommendations

1. School boards can contribute to principal effectiveness by clarifying, in cooperation with the superintendent, the roles and style for the principal that are a good "match" for each of their schools. In line with this role clarification, boards should establish clear expectations, through policy and job descriptions, that allow principals to know when they have achieved success.
2. Through its selection and oversight of the superintendent, the board should encourage:

   - a team approach to the management of the district,
   - enlargement of principals' responsibilities and autonomy,
   - meaningful staff involvement in building-level decision making, and
   - board/administration communication about community needs.

3. Ensuring a supply of talented and qualified principals should be a major goal of state policy-makers.
4. The establishment of the proposed State Board of Educational Administration would contribute to the prestige and attraction of school administration by establishing educational administration as a licensed profession and improving standards for training, licensing and discipline.
5. The content and relevance of academic training for principals should be scrutinized. Advanced degree programs in educational administration should seek input from practicing administrators and board members and should provide practice in competencies crucial for building leaders.
6. The model for principal development must be redesigned to be more ongoing and continuous. The licensure system should encourage guided practice for the beginning principal and provide to the experienced principal the incentive to continue learning.
7. Licensure requirements for building administrators should ensure basic qualifications but be sufficiently flexible so as not to constitute a barrier to the hiring of talented individuals with unusual qualifications.
8. Private schools should be required by the state to hire principals who meet the same standard of qualifications as public school principals. This new requirement should be phased in, with assistance provided.
9. The State Legislature should assist with administrator recruitment by funding the State Education Department's Teacher Clearinghouse to maintain a statewide, computer accessible list of administrative openings and available candidates.

10. As the parties ultimately responsible for obtaining the best possible leaders for their schools, school boards should review plans for screening, interviewing and hiring principals.
11. Boards should encourage the identification and development of potential leaders, especially women and minorities, from within their own districts. Internships and assistant principalships should be meaningful growth experiences with expanding responsibilities and challenges.
12. Clear criteria for the specific principal position should be developed before the vacancy is announced or the candidates are screened or interviewed. School staff and members of the community should provide input in developing the criteria for hiring principals.
13. The induction process for new principals should not be left to chance but should be a carefully planned orientation in which the board and the superintendent cooperate to ensure the success of those they hire. The use of experienced mentors and/or a principals' center or academy is recommended as a support to new principals.
14. Boards should strongly encourage the continuing education of principals and call for state and federal support of administrator inservice training, through principals' centers or by other means, especially where principals are being expected to handle new challenges such as increased teacher involvement in decision making.
15. Clear expectations are a major aid to effective principal evaluation and development and should be established through policy and job descriptions.
16. To encourage increased accountability, administrator tenure should be replaced by a contract.
17. Boards should be vigilant in identifying problems with the performance of individual principals and should encourage them to seek professional or personal assistance in a timely fashion when needed. Boards should make sure also that the principal behavior they value is consistently recognized and rewarded, so that all principals are encouraged to provide more effective leadership.

"The principalship is like the eye of the storm in education reform—surrounded by competing pressures, relatively stable, but poised on the brink of inevitable change. Principals themselves feel this impending change. Many express a deep ambivalence about the job."

Introduction

All the signs indicate that now is the time for a fundamental reevaluation of the principalship. There has been a blizzard of educational reform reports calling for "empowerment" of various groups and "restructuring" of education. State and local policy makers must try to balance these views in creating a vision for the future of education.

The principalship is like the eye of the storm in educational reform—surrounded by competing pressures, relatively stable, but poised on the brink of inevitable change. Principals themselves feel this impending change. Many express a deep ambivalence about the job: its great satisfactions, impossible demands; its rewards and frustration.

Is the principalship endangered? How dependent are schools on their principals, and how concerned should school boards be about the position and the people who occupy it? Do the pressures on the principalship demand action from policy-makers?

Above all, where does the principal fit in the vision of education for the future?

The Principalship: Past and Present

A glance back into history can give us clues as to how the principalship originated, how it evolved, and how those origins may be shaping the present and future of the job. Principals were a phenomenon resulting from two forces: the drive for universal public education and the evolution of specialization in teaching.

As proponents of universal education in the 1700s and early 1800s prodded the consciences of their fellow citizens, the problem became how to educate masses of children who had previously had no access to school. The cost of training an adequate supply of teachers was a barrier to universal education.

One solution was the monitorial system of Bell and Lancaster, which became popular in this country in the early 1800s. In this system, a teacher imparted knowledge to student "monitors," who then taught subgroups of younger students.[1] Another method was to place several young and inexperienced teachers under the supervision of a "principal teacher" having more education and experience. Several American cities were using principal teachers in their schools by 1850.[2]

As the common schools of the 1800s expanded upward into public high schools, the specialization of those schools into subject matter departments created a need for management and coordination. Here, too, the principal was usually a teacher, part or full time, with supervisory responsibility over the rest of the staff. In many cases the principal also became the school disciplinarian and authority figure.[3]

By the 1920s, with the passage of compulsory education laws, American education had become an enormous enterprise. Superintendents were adopting a big business philosophy of scientific management, with emphasis on efficiency and measurement. The need for budgeting and data management gave the principalship a more managerial dimension.

Before the principalship was a century old, then, it had already acquired the roles of instructional leader and building manager. These roles continue to coexist, sometimes in tension with each other, in the principal's job.

Starting around midcentury, the growth of teacher organizations and community involvement in the schools demanded that principals become diplomats, negotiators and experts in public relations. In the last decades of the 20th century, with the proliferation of regulations and programs, principals often find themselves to be information managers and facilitators in a complex and multifaceted system.

The principalship has expanded as it has evolved. It has not discarded one role to take on another, but rather has accumulated roles and responsibilities as education itself has expanded. Today, the job has taken on dimensions that defy the grasp of a single individual, and that the teacher in a one-room school two centuries ago could hardly have imagined.

"It is the principal who is pivotal in creating an orderly, fair and consistent educational climate, who sets high expectations, who establishes an atmosphere of mutual respect and who implements systems to support instruction and assess progress."

The Principalship Viewed from Inside and Outside

Today's principals are generalists: leaders, instructors, supervisors, managers, facilitators and communicators. Diversity defines the principal's job, both to principals themselves and to others.

As far as the individual school is concerned, the buck stops with the principal. Perhaps for that reason, most principals work 50+ hours a week. In New York State, the typical principal supervises a staff of about 50, serving a student population of about 650. When asked about their most important job functions, principals most commonly list supervision, discipline, management, curriculum, meetings, public relations, planning and budgeting.[4]

The Impact of the Principal

On the positive side, there is strong research evidence that an effective principal is an essential component of an effective school.[5] In a summary of 10 studies of effective schools, Shoemaker and Fraser show how principals who are assertive instructional leaders emerge time after time as necessary catalysts.[6] It is the principal who is pivotal in creating an orderly, fair and consistent educational climate, who sets high expectations, who establishes an atmosphere of mutual respect and who implements systems to support instruction and assess progress.[7] As Ronald Edmonds said, "There are some bad schools with good principals, but there are no good schools with bad principals."

On the negative side, research also shows that many principals *know* what they should be doing to be effective but don't *do* those things.

While principals report that they consider instructional leadership and building relationships to be their two most important tasks, paradoxically they report spending most of their time not on those two tasks, but on a third category of managerial tasks.[8]

As with other managers, their tasks are often characterized by brevity, variety and fragmentation. They often find themselves reacting rather than initiating, with the emphasis on quick decisions and damage control. Further, a number of sociologists have asserted that because principals are "the man in the middle," subject to many conflicting pressures, they are typically conservative and conciliatory, putting most of their energy into mediating rather than leading.[9]

So while principals are centrally important to the success of schools, they also have difficulty fulfilling their potential.

Principals' Self-Perceptions

Principals' views of themselves also reveal tensions. Principals report they are losing authority, the job is becoming less desirable[10] and they often are left in doubt as to what is really expected of them.[11] On the other hand, 65 percent of principals surveyed in 1987 reported their jobs offered considerable opportunity for independent action and self-fulfillment.[12]

The key to the paradox may be revealed in a study by Daniel Duke. Four successful principals who were considering quitting revealed their greatest opportunities for job satisfaction—contacts with teachers, children and parents; constant new challenges; and the prestige and indispensability of the job—were also their greatest sources of frustration.[13] What this suggests is these dimensions of the job are uncontrollable, and that the principals' training did not prepare them for the amount of uncertainty they would have to handle in their pursuit of job satisfaction.

Current Challenges of the Principalship

To be more specific about why satisfaction can turn to frustration for today's principal, consider again some of the main opportunities for satisfaction for school leaders:

- **The chance to work with teachers to improve instruction.** The principal is hemmed in from two sides. On the one hand, contracts limit what can be asked of staff. On the other, the press for teacher empowerment challenges the principal's right to lead in the

instructional area. Teamwork may be difficult, and the principal's role is problematic.

- **The chance to better the lives of children.**
  Managerial responsibilities often cut the principal off from children, except when there is a problem or a complaint. Many of the principal's encounters with children and their parents are stressful. Societal problems and parental pressures are mounting, yet community support seems lacking.
- **The opportunity to attack new challenges frequently.**
  The challenges are there, but the major decisions on how they will be addressed are often out of the principal's hands. The repertory of solutions available to principals is curtailed by state mandates, contracts and court decisions. The principal learns to rely on standard operating procedure, not creativity.
- **The prestige and sense of being indispensable.**
  This is most distinctly a double-edged sword, since the job never ends and the principal is never out of the spotlight. While most principals would be loath to give up their place of distinction in the school, it exacts a high personal price in time and energy. Moreover, it is principals who make the numerous individual decisions that pose constant ethical problems—student suspension, teacher evaluations, allocation of limited resources. Within the limits placed on them, principals are expected to put themselves on the line and to produce many small miracles daily.

We can draw the following conclusions from the discussion to this point:

- The principalship has accumulated multiple roles and responsibilities in its development.
- Principals consider their instructional and human relations roles to be most important but are often unable to focus on them.
- The areas that principals look to for their greatest satisfaction turn out to be their greatest sources of frustration.
- Effective schools depend on effective principals.

Principals' problems mirror the problems of education as a whole. The same familiar roadblocks that the educational system experiences—the accumulation of multiple responsibilities, deflection of instructional priorities and impossibility of complete success in the central tasks—face the principal every day.

If a school's principal overcomes these roadblocks—integrates multiple roles, focuses on true educational priorities, comes to terms with partial success without giving way to frustration—then, perhaps, the school as a whole can do the same. If the principal can be effective in the face of challenge, then so can the school.

Principal Role and Style: A Matter of Emphasis

How are the tensions and ambiguities of the principal's job to be resolved? Is there a correct answer, a single solution? Some schools of thought have supported a particular style of leadership and said that a leader always should fill certain roles and not others. School boards are more likely to agree with a trend in thinking about leadership that says an effective leader must be a good "match" for a specific setting, and that organizations vary so greatly that no one style of leader is right for all.

The economic and social profile of the school; the competence and maturity of the staff; the age, size, structure, and level of the school; the geographic location and degree of urbanization: all will shape the role the principal must take and the style of leadership that will be effective.[4] The nature of the school board, the superintendent's personality, the relative need for change in a given school and the principal's own personality also must have an effect. As Snyder and Drummond point out,

"Effective performance occurs when there is a match among the job's demands, the nature of the organizational environment, and the individual's competencies."[15]

A Good "Match": Three Examples

The importance of the "match" between the principal and the job can be illustrated by a few examples. Consider three hypothetical schools:

- School A has an experienced and highly qualified faculty and an involved community. The level of expectation and experimentation is high, and there is broad taxpayer support. The board has a strong sense of overall direction and likes to give its talented staff lots of leeway. The principal of School A is primarily an administrator, supporting good ideas, facilitating programs, marshalling resources and troubleshooting. The school has a strong norm of teamwork and achievement; the principal simply supports this ethos.

- School B is located in a demoralized social setting. There is high staff turnover, problems with students are frequent and serious, and the neighborhood has little support to offer and little voice in the local educational system. The board is rather remote and has many schools to attend to.

  The principal of School B sees the job as, above all, an effort to build a sense of community, security and pride among students and parents. The focus is on fostering basic educational success and positive self-image among all students, and the principal is an active leader and omnipresent force in the school, advising new teachers, counseling troubled students, holding frequent parent meetings, dealing with the police and demanding resources from the central administration.

- School C is in a small district of three schools with limited administrative staff. The principal of School C is expected to manage a wide range of responsibilities, from completing state paperwork to chaperoning basketball games. The staff is somewhat entrenched, and introducing change is difficult because there is little money available for experimentation or staff development.

  The principal wants to make incremental improvements in instruction without alarming a complacent and nonsupportive community. This means working closely with the board and the administrative team to build community support while handling many routine managerial chores.

In each of these settings, there are things that the principal can and cannot do—strategies that will work and others that will not.

Boards can contribute to principal effectiveness by clarifying, in cooperation with the superintendent, the roles and style that are a good "match" for each of their schools. They can help to create recognition that instructional leadership, human relations or management may each need to receive different emphasis in different buildings. They can insist on clear expectations that allow principals to know when they have achieved measurable success.

A written policy on the principalship, in combination with written job descriptions for each individual position, can contribute to good ongoing relations between the board and its principals. These tools also give the superintendent guidance in supervising and evaluating the principals.

"Just as boards must let superintendents do their job, superintendents must encourage principals to do theirs. Principals will be more enthusiastically committed to decisions when they have had a major voice in shaping them."

A Crucial Variable: The Superintendent

The choice of superintendent is central to how well principals will be utilized in a district. Boards need to be alert, in hiring and working with the superintendent, to the importance of appropriate delegation and a team approach to management in keeping good principals committed and involved. Just as boards must let superintendents do their job, superintendents must encourage principals to do theirs. Principals will be more enthusiastically committed to decisions when they have had a major voice in shaping them.

The superintendent is key in establishing structures and procedures for communication among school district and building leaders. A superintendent who uses a team approach with other administrators, and shares the spotlight before the board with other members of the team, is more likely to keep those team members committed and satisfied.

To whatever extent possible, boards should support enlarging the scope and significance of principals' responsibilities. Central office staff have

become increasingly important decision makers in some districts, but their role must not be allowed to abridge the principal's.

Principals who become mired in routine tasks, who are not permitted to make any decisions independently and who feel ignored in the making of policy are likely to feel frustrated and powerless, "locked in" to their jobs and not accountable for their actions.

By contrast, principals who are rewarded with increased autonomy as they win their boards' and superintendents' confidence will feel growing satisfaction and commitment.

Role Clarification

Communication, consultation, sharing and delegation can become the ethos of the school district if the board wants it to be so. Board attitudes and policies can shape the board's relations with staff, and staff's relations with each other.

Who Makes Decisions for Each Building?

Boards and superintendents want to see their policies and decisions carried out in every building. Furthermore, a degree of uniformity of practice in the district is desirable for educational, legal and public relations reasons. However, there are two good reasons to delegate as much decision making as possible to the building level.

First, decisions made close to the point of implementation are likely to be more appropriate, because they take into account factors that only the people on the spot can be aware of. Second, building-level decision making is more likely to encourage an atmosphere of accountability, since people feel more responsible for choices they have made themselves.

Who Makes Decisions in the Building?

By the same logic, building principals should be encouraged to take a team approach to decision making within their buildings. By increasing the meaningful involvement of staff in the decision-making process, principals can produce more appropriate and informed decisions and encourage staff to be more accountable for them. Involvement feeds commitment. There are many appropriate areas for consulting staff in decision making. Teacher improvement, program evaluation, parent involvement and student assignment are just a few important areas that benefit from staff input. Board policy can help to guide principals here.

Who Talks to the Community?

The board and the superintendent are the official district voices to the community. But as everyone knows, principals have high visibility because of the nature of their duties and their frequent contact with parents.

Thus, it is important for boards, superintendents and principals to have procedures for public relations situations as well as established patterns for communication and exchange of information about community needs and expectations, and about the messages that they wish to convey to the public. Frequent exchanges of this type, arranged by the superintendent, can ensure that school leaders in a district are adequately informed on public concerns and speak with one voice.

The Talent Pool: Principal Supply, Training and Certification

The supply of qualified and effective principals is something school boards are concerned about. The words "qualified" and "effective" are key. Of 38 superintendents responding to a survey by the Capital Area School Development Association, 35 report a reduction not only in the number but, more important, in the *quality* of applicants for administrative positions.[16]

There is also a concern that retirement may begin to take a toll on the principal force, with 47 the median age of New York principals and about 40 percent eligible for retirement in the next three years.[17] Furthermore, the number of new certificates for principals issued annually has dropped by a third since 1977.[18]

A number of factors may contribute to the problems of principal supply and principal quality. The size and quality of the supply may suffer due to:

- the long hours and high stress involved;
- the severity of student problems that principals must deal with;
- increased opportunities for growth and professional satisfaction in teaching;
- the perception that principals' salaries have lost their competitive advantage against teachers' salaries, and that principals have lost autonomy and control in their jobs;
- the inaccessibility and high cost of graduate training for many potential candidates;
- the failure of some graduate programs to adequately prepare potential principals for the realities of the job;

- the family and financial commitments that prevent potential candidates from pursuing and completing the requirements for certification as school administrators;
- the lack of mentoring and encouragement for potential candidates, especially women and members of minorities;
- the growing availability of opportunities outside of education for talented women and members of minorities;
- certification requirements (such as the three-year school experience minimum or the 18-credit minimum in educational administration) that may exclude some quality candidates; and
- stereotypes which may eliminate highly qualified candidates from consideration.

All these call for state as well as local attention to the problem of principal supply. Ensuring a supply of talented and qualified principals should be a major goal of state educational policy-makers.

Steps to Improve the Supply

The establishment of a State Board of Educational Administration would contribute to the prestige and attractiveness of school administration, and have a number of secondary benefits. It also would direct much needed attention to the graduate programs for training educational administrators, to the requirements for certification, and to procedures for discipline. The Association has recommended that such a board, consisting of a majority of licensed educational administrators, be established to serve in an advisory capacity to the New York State Board of Regents.

Training

The content and relevance of academic training for principals should be scrutinized. A program statement by the National Policy Board on Educational Administration articulates a number of concerns about some graduate training programs for school administrators. Among other points, the board noted that:

- Recruitment standards for graduate study in educational administration are too low in many cases, and recruitment is too casual and geographically limited.
- Programs are nonselective; for example, failure as a teacher does not exclude a candidate
- The residency requirement for a period of full-time, concentrated

study has been all but abandoned by some programs because of students' personal, professional and financial commitments.

- Performance standards are too low, bowing to the realities of students who are employed full time or who are not of high caliber.
- Program content is weak in some cases, and students may receive no exposure to organizational studies or to current educational research.
- Programs do not help students sufficiently in building professional relationships that will be useful later.
- Internships are determined by expedience and often fail to provide good clinical experience.
- Placement practices support the status quo; departments of educational administration do not help enough to increase the placement of women and minority members.[19]

While the National Policy Board statement was not directed at graduate programs in New York specifically, the concerns it raises should be explored. Practicing administrators and school board members should be consulted by graduate faculties about the demands of school administration and the leadership needs of school districts. Training programs should emphasize competencies and clinical practice, as well as research and theoretical understanding.

The model for principal development must be redesigned to be more ongoing and continuous. Currently, training of principals follows the lines established by state certification requirements. The nature of changes in those requirements will shape the principalship of the future.

Certification

An interesting distinction under discussion is that between "certification" and "licensure." Proponents of educational professionalism call for a shift from the former to the latter, arguing that certification is based on fulfilling a set of requirements, while licensure is based on demonstrating a set of competencies. Certification emphasizes content knowledge in an academic setting; licensure stresses clinical practice under expert supervision. The former is criticized as "paper credentials"; the latter is praised as a system for quality checking and accountability.

The distinction should be kept in mind in considering what kinds of credentials principals should have. The shift to licensure should be encouraged, since it offers more promise for a competency-based, accountable view of school administration.

Current certification regulations for a school administrator and supervisor (SAS) in New York call for the following:

For provisional certification (valid for five years),

- a bachelor's degree;
- 30 hours of graduate credit, 18 of which must be in educational administration;
- a supervised internship; and
- three years of teaching, administrative, supervisory and/or pupil personnel experience.

For permanent certification,

- all of the above, plus
- a completed master's degree in educational administration and
- two additional years of administrative or supervisory experience in the schools while provisionally certified.[20]

As these regulations stand, most of the requirements to be a principal are completed before the individual takes a principalship. The result is that principals in active service have little incentive to continue their education, little opportunity to do so and little structured guidance during their first years of practice. It, after a three-year probationary period, the board grants a principal tenure, there is even less incentive to pursue continuing growth.

By contrast, New Jersey has been considering a controversial plan for principal training and certification that proposes that the prospective principal will:

- earn a master's degree in a field with a strong emphasis on management (e.g., educational, business or public administration);
- pass a written examination on that field;
- undergo a simulation-style assessment to test the individual's ability to apply management theory to principals' tasks; and
- undergo an assessment of the individual's competency to teach.

After meeting these requirements, the candidate may seek a job. A key feature is that teaching experience is not required for principal certification. The rationale is that if a local school board wants a principal with prior teaching experience, it will make that a criterion of hiring and will screen candidates for the amount, type and quality of teaching experience that is appropriate for the position being filled.

Once hired, the candidate's training continues, including:

- a 30- to 60-day pre-residency before taking charge of a school;
- a one- to two-year residency as a provisionally licensed principal under

the supervision of the superintendent and a state-appointed, experienced mentor principal;
- 135 classroom hours of study on key education topics; and
- substantial practice in classroom teaching during pre-residency and residency for those without previous teaching experience.[21]

Although this plan poses many unaddressed problems, it provides some ideas for how principal training and certification might be redesigned to place more emphasis on continuing growth and practice in key competencies for new principals during their period of provisional certification. What would strengthen the plan would be 1) a more meaningful internship during the master's program, emphasizing the identification and practice of management competencies, and 2) a continuing education requirement to maintain certification.

Such a plan would have both burdens and benefits for school boards. The burden would be the demand to support the principal's need for continuing growth (through mentoring, the residency, coursework, teaching practice, etc.) The benefits would be greater flexibility to choose from among an increased pool of candidates, and the promise of a better qualified principal.

Under an administrative licensure system, the requirements for building administrators should ensure basic competencies and be sufficiently flexible so as not to make paper credentials a barrier to the hiring of talented individuals. They also should be designed to provide guided practice for the beginning principal and incentive to the experienced principal to continue learning. Currently certified and experienced administrators should be "grandfathered" into any new system to minimize disruption and costs.

Other Needed State-Level Actions

The reform of principal training and certification requires state-level action. A Commissioner's Task Force to Study the Preparation and Licensure of School Administrators and Supervisors has developed recommendations to address not only needed reforms, but also the realistic demands of the state's school districts. Those recommendations deserve careful consideration.

New York has reciprocal agreements on administrator certification with 14 states and jurisdictions, but only six are in the northeastern United States. Portability of certification should be studied to see whether an expansion of reciprocity would contribute to or drain New York's principal supply.

Private schools are not required to hire state-certified principals. Such a policy limits the mobility of those uncertified professionals. A require-

ment that all schools be administered by fully certified principals should be phased in, and uncertified administrators should be assisted to fulfill uncompleted requirements. A "grandfather clause" should cover those with extensive qualifications and long-term experience.

Finally, state-level initiative is needed in principal recruitment. An exhaustive principal search is often beyond the capacity of a school district. The existing Job Network provided by the State Education Department is useful, but it lists openings only and is not comprehensive. The Teacher Clearinghouse, approved by the State Legislature for the last two years—but not funded, is designed to make listings of both openings and candidates available for computer access, including administrator openings and candidates statewide. The Legislature should fund the clearinghouse for these purposes.

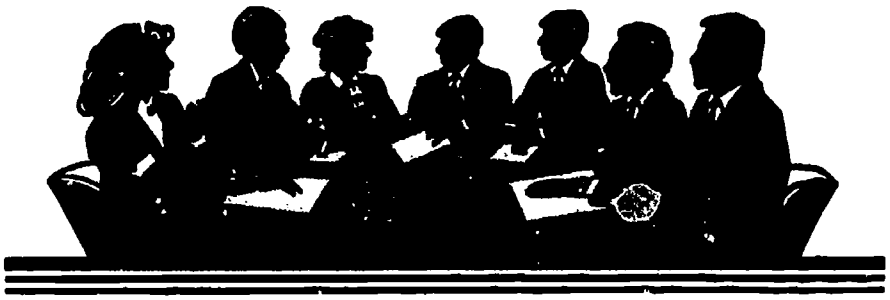
In the District: Recruitment, Development and Evaluation

Providing good principals is a vital task, and not one that can be carried out casually or on a "one-shot" basis. Good school leaders must be sought out, encouraged and guided. It would be fair to say they are made, not born. And the school board has a key role to play in that shaping process by overseeing the policies and procedures used to recruit, develop, and evaluate principals.

Boards should ask themselves, for example:

- Are we getting the best principal candidates available?
- Are we fostering potential leaders from within the district; if not, how could we begin to do so?
- Are we reaching outside of the district for candidates in the most effective way?
- Are the incentives we offer principals appropriate for their role and responsibilities, and reasonably relative to those of other staff?
- Are we clear on the criteria and standards we want principals to meet?
- Is our selection procedure fair, open, and effective; is it getting us the results we want?
- Are we giving beginning principals a reasonable opportunity to learn the job?
- Are we making sure that incumbent principals continue to learn and develop?
- Is the evaluation procedure for our principals useful and effective?

If principals are to be the kinds of leaders that today's educational challenges demand, boards should examine their policies and procedures



regarding principals and make a commitment to using board leadership to get the best.

Recruitment

Mark Anderson, in *Hiring Capable Principals*, suggests that school districts are *not* getting the best, for four possible reasons:

1. insufficient attention to principal preparation;
2. a too-limited pool of capable candidates;
3. nonspecific vacancy announcements and selection criteria; and
4. inadequate screening and selection techniques.[22]

Principal preparation may be something that school boards think of as someone else's job. As previously discussed, there are actions state policy-makers and higher education can take to improve principal preparation. But school districts and their boards also have a role to play.

Just as all future teachers will come from the ranks of current students, so many future administrators will come from the ranks of current teachers. For that reason, one way to improve principal preparation and expand the candidate pool is to seek district employees with leadership potential and to foster that potential.

This can be done by appointing potential leaders to head task forces and committees for planning and decision making; providing opportunities for internships and other leadership training; using potential leaders as liaisons with parent and community groups; using teachers as trainers, team leaders and acting administrators, etc. These techniques have special potential for recruiting women and minorities, who may have had fewer opportunities for leadership.[23]

Hosting internships is another way to identify capable candidates and contribute to their preparation. Administrative internships for graduate tudents are probably a net benefit to school districts, and if one in five yields a schoo principal who can start with some familiarity with the district, the benefits are substantial.

The assistant principalship is also an obvious but often overlooked source of future school leaders. Unfortunately, assistant principals often spend more time in routine duties and paperwork than in developing

their leadership and management skills.[24] Handling student discipline and managing the attendance system are important, but these types of tasks must not be allowed to so monopolize the assistant principal that there is no opportunity to join meaningfully in schoolwide decision making or to manage projects. In short, assistant principals must be where the action is, if they are to grow and develop as leaders.

In addition to these internal strategies, school districts must expand the pool of candidates through extensive outside recruitment. A mix of internally and externally developed leadership ensures continuity while introducing new perspectives. Effective outside recruitment may involve using the State Education Department's Job Network, advertising in education journals or newspapers outside of the immediate area, and networking at conferences and through state associations.

In seeking candidates for the principal's demanding job, a board must consider the nature of the incentives that it has to offer. Generally New York compares favorably with the rest of the nation.

One recommendation to increase the supply of talent is to make beginning principals' salaries competitive with top teachers' salaries, which have risen at a higher rate than principals' in some of the last few years.[25] On the other hand, school boards also wish to keep high-quality people in teaching. Local salary schedules must somehow strike an appropriate balance, so that talented teachers are not siphoned into administration, but talented leaders and managers are not discouraged from making the move. As increased teacher professionalism takes hold, there actually may be more movement back and forth from teaching to administrative or quasi-administrative roles.

Criteria and Screening

In line with the "match" between principal and school, it should be clear that the more well thought out the needs of the school and the criteria for selecting the principal, the more likely the district is to achieve a good "match." Laura Fliegner suggests that vacancy announcements should provide information about:

- needs to be filled by whomever takes the position;
- important characteristics of the existing staff; and
- the nature and needs of the student population.[26]

Planning vacancy announcements should be part of a process of developing criteria for the job, a process that takes place well before screening and interviewing. If the board and the superintendent are clear on district goals and the needs of the position being filled, they are unlikely to be misled into hiring the wrong candidate. Here is where input from staff and the community served by the school can be useful.

Principal selection may be one of the most visible actions of district leadership. Public confidence is increased if the selection process is per-

ceived as open, accessible, and fair with explicit and agreed-on criteria.[27] However, it is important that those criteria *be* explicit, so that selection does not become a personality contest or district feud.

Ultimately, staff and citizens should be advisory only; the superintendent and the board bear the final responsibility for the candidate they select. On the note of responsibility, here are a few points (suggested by Laura Fliegner and Mark Anderson)[28] that boards should check for in the hiring process, even though the lead actor in that process is the superintendent:

- Preliminary screening should be used to eliminate applicants who do not meet minimal criteria.
- Blind screening of all remaining candidates, using a standard scoring form and the criteria agreed on by the district leadership, can help to eliminate possible bias.
- Screeners from outside of the existing administrative team can help to introduce alternative views.
- Background checking is essential. A site visit to the candidate's district can help to build a realistic picture of the individual's competence.
- Using a cross-section of people from the district as interviewers can help to eliminate biases and supports the impression of openness and fairness that the board wishes to present.
- Interviews that are structured are more reliable, since each candidate is asked the same well-thought-out questions.
- The use of simulations, written exercises and situational questions will help to give a sense of the candidates' competencies.

Induction and Support

The task is not finished when the principal is hired. For the school administrator to achieve the high hopes raised in the interview requires that the communication that began with the advertising and interviewing process must continue after hiring.

It cannot be assumed that the new principal always begins the job with a clear understanding of what is expected. The principalship comprises multiple roles and tasks. Which of these are high priorities with the board and the superintendent must be clarified and communicated on an ongoing basis.

Some district leaders may feel that trial by fire is the best test of a new administrator. But undue stress and lack of support hurt not only the new principal but also the school he or she is in charge of and may lose the district an individual who with time and seasoning will be an effective leader. There are several ways to provide an eased induction into the school and ongoing support to the new principal, such as mentoring by an experienced administrator, frequent contact with the rest of the administrative team, and participation in a principals' center or academy.

Development

For experienced as well as new administrators, continuing education is an important means of support. The challenges that principals confront daily in the form of new state and federal mandates and regulations, as well as new local needs for programs and services, demand continuing information and training.

State and federal support are needed to meet this demand, as in the federally supported pilot project L.E.A.D. (Leadership in Educational Administration Development), which uses principals' centers to train principals in techniques for shared decision making. The appearance of principals' centers is a healthy trend, and one that promises to contribute to principal effectiveness.

Three areas in particular seem to call for principal training. Staff evaluation is a key responsibility of the principalship, yet many principals lack extensive training in that area. Evaluation may be formative, to assist in staff training and improvement, or summative, to inform decision making about tenure and discipline. It may be performed with input from staff themselves, from supervisors, or from central office staff. Whatever the purpose of evaluation and however it is performed, the building principal must be accountable for the performance of building staff. This demands training in evaluation for principals.

The other two key areas for principal training are in effective delegation and staff involvement in decision making. With increasing demands for professional status for teachers, principals must be prepared to use interactive skills and group process. A professional role for teachers can contribute greatly to school effectiveness, but it requires even more adept leadership and coordination than has previously been demanded of principals.

Evaluation

Where administrators bargain collectively, the procedures for administrator evaluation are a mandated subject for negotiations. The standards for evaluation still are established by the employer, however. The process of communication, support and clarification of standards, once established, serves well the need to evaluate administrators. A study of principals in North Carolina showed that principals find the following factors helpful in their evaluation:

- an instrument that makes the criteria for performance clear;
- clearly articulated expectations from the superintendent;
- a superintendent who frequently communicates both satisfaction and dissatisfaction with principal performance;
- a clear understanding of the sources of information used to gather evaluative data, and frequent sampling;
- a superintendent who relies more on sources of information inside than outside of the school and school district.[29]

Note the frequent repetition of the need for clarity: clear expectations, clear criteria for performance, clear understanding of the sources of data being used. Such clarity becomes particularly important for the board in a system that provides tenure for principals. As long as clear expectations are in place, the board can build a case if a previously satisfactory administrator's performance falls below standard. Without clear standards, disciplining a tenured administrator is difficult indeed.

In fact, in an educational system that cries out for accountability, administrator tenure should be replaced by renewable contracts. (Such a change will require legislative action.) For an experienced administrator with a good record, a contract should provide sufficient security while assuring the community that administrators will not become entrenched and slack.

There is the danger that an administrator who has performed well, even brilliantly, in the past, can deteriorate in performance due to personal, financial or health problems, or because of overwhelming new demands on the job. The relative isolation of principals in their school buildings can cut them off from peer support or helpful feedback. Boards and superintendents should be vigilant to identify problems with the performance of individual principals and should encourage them to seek professional or personal assistance in a timely fashion. They also should continue with troubled principals to make clear the expectations and standards for satisfactory performance.

On the positive side, school district leaders also should make sure that principal behavior, which they value, is consistently recognized and rewarded. Too often the reward for good performance is only more demands. Appropriate recognition ensures continued efforts from high performers and encourages all administrators toward more effective leadership.

Conclusion

A principal in every school, as called for by Commissioner's Regulations, is not enough. What every school needs is an effective principal. The demands on the principalship have expanded, and the changes in the teaching profession, in the schools and in society have made the principal, if anything, more essential.

School boards are removed one level from principals in some ways. They cannot directly affect the training and certification of the candidates who present themselves as potential principals. Nor do boards work directly with or supervise principals.

But there is much that school boards can do to attract, support and maintain good principals. This paper has suggested some strategies for doing so. Of all a board's important duties, this is among the most important: to make sure that the basic unit in the educational system, the individual school, has excellent leadership.

Footnotes

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