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To help their new principals succeed, more school districts are capitalizing on the

expertise of their senior administrators by adding mentor programs to the mix of practical training programs for beginning principals.

School boards and district officials recognize that formal preparation for the principalship must include a practical component that can impart real-life skills. This part of principal training is usually termed an apprenticeship or internship, and its success, or lack of success, resides in myriad factors. The effectiveness of this hands-on training has become more important as the growing shortage of school leaders threatens the quality of education in the United States.

Ironically, education itself does not seem to be the limiting factor in the principal shortage, since nearly half of the nation's public school teachers have earned advanced degrees. But relatively few of these teachers-the natural pool for future leaders-have expressed interest in becoming principals. This lack of interest, combined with U.S. Department of Labor projections that 40 percent of the country's 93,200 principals are nearing retirement, highlights the need to call on the graying generation of school leaders to become mentors to those who will be entrusted with our schools (Blackman and Fenwick 2000).

This Digest examines the nature of mentorships and discusses how these relationships can prepare principals for the next stage of their careers.

WHAT IS MENTORING?

Mentoring takes its name from Homer's Odyssey. Ulysseus, before departing for Troy, entrusts his son to a wise friend, Mentor. Mentor serves not only as a counselor to the prince during Ulysseus' twenty-year absence, but also as guardian and guide. Most important, Mentor does not replace Ulysseus in the parental role; rather, Mentor, with the help of the goddess Athena, helps the young prince to understand and embrace the difficulties that lie before him.
The task of the mentor, then, is to define a unique relationship with his or her protege and fulfill a need unmet by any other relationship (Samier 2000). The best mentors are teacher/sages who act to the best of their ability within plain sight of the protege and who engage in a compassionate and mutual search for wisdom (Bell 1996).

Although mentoring has existed for thousands of years, it is only in the last thirty years that mentor-protege relationships have received increasing academic and professional interest. Much of this research initially focused on "classical mentoring," in which a protege, more by chance than by merit, found a mentor willing to serve as guide and counselor. Although valuable in the relationships that it fostered and the leaders that it produced, such mentoring tended toward "like producing like," which meant that women and minorities frequently fell to the wayside. Formalized mentoring programs helped correct these inequities, but these artificial unions usually lacked organizational support and even engendered resentment among mentors who had little or no say in choosing

their proteges (Samier 2000).

Increasing evidence suggests that matching an intern to the appropriate school and to the right mentor are critical components of the intern's education. Districts must therefore be ready to work closely with these programs to ensure that their schools benefit from an appropriate match (Cordeiro and Smith-Sloan 1995).

Although advanced university education will continue to dominate preparatory requirements, such training must be combined with in situ practice-of the right length, at the right place, with the right mentor-to help new principals acquire the practical knowledge and characteristic behaviors that typify successful principals.

WHAT ARE SOME EXAMPLES OF PRINCIPAL-MENTORING PROGRAMS?

Numerous school systems have begun principal-preparation programs that produce effective leaders. For example, Albuquerque Public Schools' Extra Support for Principals (ESP) program originated in 1994 when a group of elementary, middle, and high school principals examined how best to develop a support system for new principals. The resulting program features a coordinator who examines beginning principals' backgrounds, asks them to supply a list of experienced principals with whom they would like to work, and then matches them with veteran leaders. Results indicate that new principals, as well as their mentors, benefit significantly from ESP (Weingartner 2001).
Another program, established by the Southern Regional Education Board's Leadership Academy, focuses on developing effective leadership styles that will have a direct impact on schools. An important component of the academy is the mentoring program, which assigns an external peer coach to each district team. The coach, who is a skilled leader in education, provides technical assistance and collects information from participants to help them develop as leaders (Crews and Weakley 1996).

Many school systems such as Albuquerque's have looked within to establish mentoring programs. The key to any approach is for educational leaders to recognize the uniqueness of their circumstances and to establish a program that reflects their community's needs.

For example, the shortage of qualified candidates for school-leadership positions led Santa Cruz County to gather local experts to come up with a solution to this problem. These gatherings, entitled "Growing Our Own," arose in part from dissatisfaction over the traditional role played by assistant principals, who were usually assigned a narrow range of responsibilities. Santa Cruz educators decided to reinvent the principal/assistant-principal relationship by establishing a mentor-apprentice agreement that committed the parties to shared outcomes. This program emphasizes teamwork

while pursuing the stated goal of producing future school leaders who have the skills, attitudes, behaviors, and courage to lead public schools (Bloom and Krovetz 2001).

WHAT ARE THE CHALLENGES IN FORMING MENTOR-PROTEGE RELATIONSHIPS?

Artificially constructed mentor-protege relationships can create difficulties. Researchers have long recognized that not all persons make suitable mentors and that the best mentors display certain traits, such as their ability to coach, to sponsor, and to serve as a role model. But even the most accomplished mentors can fail to connect with a protege, resulting in a neutral-effect relationship, at best.
Race and gender issues further complicate the formation of mentor-protege relationships. Ninety-six percent of the nation's public-school superintendents, over 80 percent of school-board presidents, and 60 percent of all principals are white males, whereas more than 73 percent of all teachers (and future leaders) are women (Blackman and Fenwick). Informal mentoring relationships could form easily when most school leaders were white and male.

As recently as 1988, only 2 percent of principals were women, meaning that principals who sought a role model did not have to contend with the complications presented by race and gender (Blackman and Fenwick). In recent years, the composition of the principalship has changed dramatically, with 35 percent of all principals now being women. Many of these women are younger principals who need mentors but cannot rely on traditional avenues for forming such relationships. This same challenge faces the 13 percent of principals who belong to minority groups.

Clearly, school boards, district officials, and universities must work together to help principals, those just beginning and those who have sat in the principal's chair for a number of years, to draw on the accumulated wisdom from which all can benefit.

HOW SHOULD MENTORS AND PROTEGES BE PAIRED?

To avoid unproductive mentor-protege assignments, various tools, such as the Mentor Identification Instrument, have been developed that identify those individuals who possess the needed skills and talents to nurture interns and proteges. By distinguishing those best qualified to mentor, school systems can create an effective mentoring program (Geismar and others 2000).
The decision to pair a mentor with a protege should take into consideration the locations and characteristics of the schools in which the two principals are or will be assigned. All districts have suffered through incompatibilities between schools and principals, and since every district has distinct opportunities and leadership needs, mentorships must

be arranged in such a way to meet these needs.

Urban school districts with high-poverty rates, for example, face particular challenges, and it can be a daunting task to find the person best suited for such positions. One tool that can help urban districts in both selection of new principals and subsequent pairing with mentors is the Haberman Urban Principal Selection Interview. This instrument operates on the belief that the most successful principals are doers and thinkers, and that their career objectives are built on core beliefs. The instrument therefore attempts to identify those who can bring a combination of ideology and action to the principalship. These individuals can then be paired with "Star Principals," those who have demonstrated success in their schools and who exhibit similar characteristics, so that the interns can observe these belief systems in operation (Haberman and Dill 1999).

HOW LONG SHOULD A PRINCIPAL BE IN RELATIONSHIP WITH A MENTOR?

Formal mentoring programs such as apprenticeships and internships vary widely in their duration. Some institutions require fewer than 165 hours, whereas others dictate in excess of 632 hours of internship (Cordeiro and Smith-Sloan 1995).
Researchers are beginning to realize that mentor relationships should not be limited to the early stages of a principal's training. Even established school leaders can benefit from a mentor when trying to navigate the particularly difficult problems that all principals encounter. This ongoing relationship not only gives a leader an added perspective to any problem, it also prepares principals to become a mentor in their own right, thus deepening the pool of experienced persons who can advise future generations (Crow and Matthews 1998).

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