



Benchmark

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Comprehensive School Reform at the Helm: The North Carolina Instructional Leadership Reform Program

By Helen Janc & Deborah Appelbaum

Introduction

The development of the whole school reform concept, in many ways, parallels the evolution of thinking about principal leadership over the past decade. Under Comprehensive School Reform (CSR)¹, schools are increasingly being asked to use data to plan for improvement and to fortify instruction and professional development by using research-based practices. At the same time, the idea of a strong principal has shifted from the traditional one—focused on discipline, working with parents and staff, record keeping, special education, and accountability, among other diverse roles—to that of, first and foremost, an instructional leader with a vision for reform.

Under this new vision of leadership, principals guide school planning and decision-making based on data and are keenly aware of the nature of instructional practice occurring in the school. With the No Child Left Behind (NCLB) legislation, expectations for principals as instructional leaders have been ratcheted up even further. At the intersection of these two movements—CSR and principals as instructional leaders—

¹ Comprehensive School Reform and CSR are used interchangeably. In this article, CSR refers to the federal legislation.

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the North Carolina Instructional Leadership Reform Program (ILRP) is preparing principals of CSR schools to be both instructional and reform leaders. The ILRP is notable not only for the depth of information and training encompassed in the program, but also for its overall support for CSR districts and schools through technical assistance and evaluations. Drawing from lessons learned from the first year of the pioneering ILRP, we discuss in this article the role of the principal in CSR and the ILRP. We conclude with insights for other states as they support principals in their leadership of CSR schools.

The Role of the Principal in CSR

Principals, particularly those working in a CSR context, are now asked to have a firm understanding of the change process, to understand and interpret data, to investigate instructional strategies and their research base, select appropriate approaches, and negotiate with contractors and model developers. Effective CSR principals thoroughly understand the reform strategies that have been adopted and have made the time commitment to, for example, attend professional development sessions on reading instruction if that is the core goal of the school's reform strategy. These successful principals may have spent time focusing on tasks they were not responsible for in the past, such as negotiating for release time for teachers so they can fully participate in training and planning meetings.

One of the central goals of CSR is the creation of a common culture—a common language, philosophy, set of values, and common goals—throughout the staff, students, and parents in

the school community. The creation of this common culture is what seems to hold together successful CSR programs at schools. This type of change can be profound and is not easy to do. By attending the Instructional Leadership Reform Program, principals dig into this issue of culture and learn effective strategies for transforming and sustaining productive cultures that support student achievement.

Leadership Training for CSR

Training principals to be effective CSR leaders means encouraging principals to be team members of their schools rather than isolated authority figures. Roland Barth (2000)², in his article “Learning to Lead,” states that “principals have a great capacity to stimulate professional growth and improve practice in their colleagues.” The CSR approach to principalship reflects Barth's philosophy of change in both school culture and practice, encouraging principals to engage in a hands-on approach to governance, focused on the instructional design, curriculum alignment, assessment data, teacher satisfaction, and student achievement. The goal of such training is to incorporate practical knowledge and mentoring, bridging the gap between the administrative and instructional leadership approaches, and reflecting the internal school culture to external groups, such as parents and community leaders.

The ability to train principals as change agents has become a crucial element for the success of individual schools, especially those implementing CSR. The Principals' Executive Program (PEP), an organization housed at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, along with the North Carolina Department of

² Barth's (2000) article “Learning to Lead. Educational Leadership for the Twenty-First Century: Integrating Three Essential Perspectives” can be found in the *Educational leadership reader*.

Public Instruction (NCDPI), have taken on the challenge of training principals to be executives and instructional leaders who continue to improve their schools through community collaboration.

Throughout its twenty years as a principal-centered program, PEP has provided school leaders with programs such as the Central Office Leadership Program (for central office administrators), the Developing Future Leadership Program (for teacher leaders), and the Higher School Performance Program (for leaders of low-performing, non-CSR schools). PEP provides leadership programs for high school principals, assistant principals, career principals, new principals, and principals as technology leaders. Additionally, PEP provides concurrent support service including the Instructional Symposium, School Law Symposium, Orientation Session for New Principals and Assistant Principals, School Improvement Workshop, Technology Seminar, Education Law in North Carolina (ELNC) legal seminar, and the Library Services seminar. Together, these programs provided principals and staff with 868 events last year and generated attendance of 32,565 participants (Principals' Executive Program, 2003).

To support the success of CSR schools, North Carolina has spent significant state resources to assist schools engaging in comprehensive school reform. In 2003, NCDPI invited all of the principals of CSR schools to attend the voluntary ILRP, housed at PEP, in its inaugural year. Today, graduates of the ILRP work in all 117 North Carolina school districts, buttressed with enhanced skills and knowledge for leading CSR schools.

The Instructional Leadership Reform Program (ILRP)

The need to train principals and staff in leadership programs and seminars emerged after the 1996 North Carolina accountability measures. In 2003, this need was accentuated by Drs. Andy and Hathia Hayes' CSR State Evaluation reports, which revealed the specific need for a program to help principals address issues pertaining to research-based models. Soon thereafter, a partnership of the North Carolina Department of Public Instruction, the University of North Carolina at Wilmington, and PEP was formed to create the Instructional Leadership Reform Program. Through the recommendations of Dr. Jerry Jailall, North Carolina's CSR Coordinator, and Dr. Ken Jenkins, PEP director, ILRP was created to educate principals on the complexities of CSR.

The Instructional Leadership Reform Program (ILRP) at PEP helps principals to positively change their school culture and increase student achievement while undergoing comprehensive school reform. The main goals of this program are to help principals conceptualize model-based reform and take steps to institutionalize the reform practices and strategies. In order to ensure principal effectiveness in sustaining CSR in their schools, the school leaders receive instruction on establishing clear goals and benchmarks for model implementation, aligning the curriculum and instructional pieces of the external model to match state curriculum and standards, conceptualizing the school under the model, working with model providers, aligning and integrating professional development with model requirements and school needs, and creating the teacher time needed to implement the model. Through the

coursework, ILRP amplifies knowledge of school management, broadens school administrators' perspectives, and redefines their role as school leaders. Table 1 outlines the ILRP program objectives.

Principals who participate in the ILRP make a substantial commitment. The ILRP is a rigorous residential training course that requires one hundred instructional hours and fulfillment of all program requirements. The program combines lectures, workshops, seminars, and group work in order to train principals to be effective leaders, CSR experts, model administrators, and data analysts. As principals begin their coursework, they are divided into CSR networks, stratified by grade levels, CSR models, and needs assessments. They are encouraged to collaborate with their team and are supplied with a collection of CSR resources that includes Cicchinelli and Barley's "Evaluating for success—Comprehensive school reform: An evaluation guide for districts and schools," Costa and Kallick's "Getting into the Habit of Reflection"

from *Educational Leadership*, Jailall's "Guide to CSR grant funds," Peterson's *The shaping school culture fieldbook*, the Principal Projects' "The reflective principal: Inquiry as a tool for school improvement," Andy and Hathia Hayes' "Writing CSR Goals and Benchmarks," and Walter and Hassel's *Guide to working with model providers*.

As they begin their program, the principals learn through interactive classroom lectures about the CSR legislation, the 11 Components, data analysis and evaluation, model implementation and institutionalization, as well as ways in which to create a common school culture that would sustain CSR. Additionally, to ensure that principals are self-sufficient and comfortable with CSR grant writing, Dr. Jerry Jailall from NCDPI and Drs. Andy and Hathia Hayes, state CSR grant evaluators from the University of North Carolina-Wilmington office, train principals through the following courses: Guidelines for Grant Supervisors, Guidelines on Technical Assistance Contracts from CSR

Table 1. The ILRP Program Objectives

- **Instructional leadership** - focusing on North Carolina Standard Course of Study and Comprehensive School Reform components.
- **Model interaction** - working effectively with model providers to implement CSR in their schools.
- **The change process** - helping principals create a vision of reform in their schools.
- **Instructional technology** - teaching principals how to make data-driven decisions.
- **Research based strategies for school improvement** – educating principals in data analysis and evaluation.
- **External coaches** – assigning retired principals/administrators to the local CSR charter schools to mentor principals.

Program Providers, Working with CSR Model Providers & Technical Assistance Partners, Nuts & Bolts in Implementing the CSR Program, Red Flags in Comprehensive School Reform, Completing the CSR Grant Application, and Partnership for Reform: Win-Win Relationships.”³ Seminars such as John Mangieri’s “Power Thinking for Leaders,” a personality test that evaluates principals’ decision-making abilities, and lectures such as Kent Peterson’s session on “Shaping School Culture in an Era of Accountability” help tie together the program’s major objectives.

By addressing the CSR components, model implementation, technical assistance, grant writing, and NCLB requirements, principals gain a holistic sense of their responsibilities and CSR requirements. This year alone, ILRP has graduated forty-two principals. (See Table 2 for a profile of the ILRP 2003 Graduating Class on page 6.) The majority of the principals are highly experienced. More than 80% of the participants had more than 10 years of experience, yet half of them had only been in their current positions for less than two years. Most of the principals serve in public schools with a student body that is primarily African-American, with 69% of the students eligible for free and reduced-price lunch. Next year, the ILRP will continue the program with both beginner and advanced CSR sessions for new and experienced principals. To create and sustain connections, ILRP aims to create a strong, state-wide mentoring network that would match new CSR principals with more experienced, often retired principals in their districts to serve as mentors and provide hands-on aid to support school principals.

Surveys from the first graduating class of ILRP offer additional insight into how CSR principals can be effectively supported. Principals would like an opportunity to visit other CSR schools and create a network between experienced and novice CSR principals, especially those applying the same school reform model. The principals hope that the PEP staff would maintain its hotline, which currently links CSR principals to the ILRP office staff, by expanding the services into a network where past and present classmates can interact and contact one another for advice. Also, the survey indicates a need to integrate teacher leaders into the program. Program directors are currently considering different ways to serve this need within the program without deviating too far from the core goals.

In planning for the future, ILRP leaders are searching for ways to offer principals rigorous quantitative training that would enable them to collect, analyze, and understand student achievement data generated for state assessments and other purposes. Principals, newly faced with pressures for data evaluation, would like to receive more practical training on how to assess Adequate Yearly Progress, write evaluation forms, and problem solve.

Implications of the ILRP for State-Based Principal Training Programs

The education community has for decades recognized the importance of training principals; however, many programs remain embedded in a traditional, managerial training mode. A recent *Education Week* article, “New Age Principals” by William Price, points to this dis-

³ Over the course of the last two years, NCDPI will have awarded a grand total of \$7,883,897 – 20 new grants totaling \$1,878,561 and 63 continuation grants totaling \$6,005,336. This award is made subject to the availability of Federal Comprehensive School Reform Demonstration funds (CSR-D-PRC 40) and Funds for the Improvement of Education (FIE-PRC 41).

Table 2. Profile: ILRP 2003 Graduating Class

The first ILRP graduating class was comprised of a diverse group of 42 principals (the data reflects the number of individuals unless otherwise specified):

- **Years of education experience:**
2: 2-5 years, 5: 6-10 years, 14: 11-19 years, 21: 20+ years
- **Time in the current position:**
15: <1 year, 6: 1-2 years, 14: 3-5 years, 7: 6-10 years
- **Ethnicity:**
25: African-American, 17: Caucasian
- **Gender:**
25: Female, 17: Male
- **Ethnic makeup of schools:**
70% African-American, 1% American Indian/Pacific Islander, 25% Caucasian, and 4% Hispanic
- **School type:**
32: Public, 7: Charter, 3: Public Alternative
- **School level:**
12: Elementary, 14: Middle School, 16: High School
- **Free and reduced-price lunch:**
69% average

parity. “Both current principals and those entering the principalship for the first time find that they are ill-prepared to manage an infrastructure that supports instruction and has as its constant focus the technical core of teaching and learning.” According to Price, most principals enter their positions without training in information management, data analysis, and curriculum alignment to standards. A new study conducted by the Charlotte Advocates for Education⁵ supports similar claims. The most common concerns made by principal trainees include requests to learn how to provide effective professional development, build teams within schools, effectively work with internal and external communities, understand policies, procedures, and roles that principals face on a daily basis, and above all, be effective leaders.

The ILRP program addresses concerns of principals by focusing on both professional devel-

opment and CSR. This training provides principals with a networking avenue through which to communicate concerns, receive mentoring, and build managerial and leadership skills. Additionally, the ILRP program ensures that principals are fully immersed in current legislation, student achievement data, and curriculum alignment. As recent Mid-Atlantic Regional Educational Laboratory research has shown⁶, principals who practice instructional and shared leadership are more able to create a positive school culture and sustain reform. Furthermore, principals who are exposed to extensive professional development have a greater tendency to include the school community in a collective effort toward reform preservation and student achievement. ILRP provides this training, enhancing principals’ abilities to be effective instructional leaders, able to understand student needs, interpret data, and build effective school communities.

⁵ The report referred to is *Role of principal leadership in increasing teacher retention: Creating a supportive environment*.

⁶ An example is last year’s report published by McREL (Walters, Marzano, & McNulty, 2003). *Balanced Leadership: What 30 Years of Research Tells Us About the Effect of Leadership on Student Achievement*. This meta-analysis, comprised of 70 studies involving 2,894 schools, finds a strong correlation between principal’s leadership and students’ academic achievement.

To train principals for school reform, it is important to reframe current training practices toward that of experiential learning, giving trainees an opportunity to practice leadership through simulations, reflections, and in the process, reshape how they view their constituencies and their own roles. PEP is one such example that has created a successful program, the ILRP, devoted to educating and training principals as CSR leaders. Table 3 addresses key ILRP model components that should be

considered by other states interested in providing quality CSR principal training.

Conclusion

Today, with the passage of No Child Left Behind and the renewed emphasis on basic skills, accountability, and higher standards, the need for effective principal training has become ever more apparent. The new goals of training

Table 3. ILRP Model Components for CSR Principal Training

- *Apply a certification mechanism*, a graduation ceremony upon training completion that would recognize principals as CSR experts and give them the competitive edge in their districts.
- *Sustain a strong network among districts* through the training, linking principals with local mentors and other reform school principals.
- *Group principals into cohorts* stratified by CSR models, by the CSR experience, or school type. This would allow principals to network and share concerns and ideas with those most closely related to their school reality.
- *Incorporate a variety of teaching methods* into the educational units including lectures, workshops, seminars, reflection periods, laboratory training, and group work.
- *Establish a central training facility* that principals can attend. Consider a residential component by affiliating the training facility with a nearby campus dormitory or a local hotel. The learning environment formed in such a setting would help principals alleviate daily distractions and focus on the curriculum.
- *Form a network of cohorts* that would allow principals to remain in touch after the training session and allow them to serve as mentors to the new generations of trainees. Additionally, connect trained principals with their local, retired principals that can serve as coaches throughout the school years. Finally, designate a hotline outlet where principals facing CSR emergencies can call upon for aid.
- *Create a significant financial state and private support base*. The state funding would directly connect CSR/Title I initiatives to the program and help continue support training efforts.
- *Ensure the curriculum materials provided are current* and include general CSR information, grant writing manuals, and scientifically and evidence-based research studies.

are focused on school restructuring, school-wide goals, and unification of academic culture between the principal, teachers, and students, elevating the role principals play in schools.

To effectively integrate CSR in their schools, as well as to sustain the reform, principals must have a strong professional development and network base. The ILRP example makes a significant contribution to the educational leadership field as it transcends conventional training with more experiential methods. This unique program is a model on how principals can learn about CSR and in the process, become more effective and successful leaders.

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