Introduction

The educational challenge of the 21st century is to achieve higher levels of learning for all children. This theme has become the overarching issue on the nation's domestic policy agenda as evidenced by the bi-partisan passage of NCLB. The policy levers engaged to address this challenge include increased accountability through state developed testing systems, increased competition through parental choice, and increased investment in improving teacher quality. There remains, however, another important policy lever that has been overlooked: investment in school leadership quality and stability.

The purpose of this policy brief is to inform policymakers at all levels about how leadership quality can help us rise to meet the educational challenges of the 21st century. As policy makers work to support the improvement of student learning, they should be cognizant of how quality leadership impacts learning in our schools and the possibilities for further strengthening school leadership and the preparation of school leaders.

This policy brief provides information about three important questions:

- *What do we know about the relationship between effective leadership, teacher quality, and student learning?*

- *What do we know about how to prepare quality leaders?*

- *What do we need to do to ensure further improvements in leadership preparation?*

The answers to these questions will help us leverage the impact of quality leadership to improve schools for all children. We conclude this brief with some policy recommendations in the aforementioned three areas.

What do we know about the link between effective leadership, teacher quality and student learning?

While teachers have a direct impact on student achievement, principals typically have an indirect, albeit powerful, impact on student achievement.

Much of the recent attention on increasing student achievement and decreasing the achievement gaps has focused on the critical relationship between effective teachers and student achievement. Indeed, Sanders and Horn (1998) asserted that the "single largest factor affecting academic growth of populations of students is differences in effectiveness of individual classroom teachers" (p. 27). With the adoption of NCLB in 2001, all states were required to provide each student a highly qualified teacher, as well as to equalize teacher quality across schools (ECS, 2007). However, most states have failed to meet the teacher quality standards set forth by NCLB (Peske & Haycock, 2006), and there is little evidence that policies and programs focused on increasing the number and quality of teachers, such as teacher pay schemes, financial incentives, alternative certification, and mentoring and induction programs, have come to fruition (ECS, 2007; Peske & Haycock, 2006; Fuller & Brewer, 2005).

A growing body of research has found that principals strongly influence teacher quality—and, therefore, student achievement-- through recruiting and retaining high quality teachers

One overlooked aspect of increasing teacher quality is the role of the principal. Historically, principals have been viewed as managers rather than leaders. Contemporary views of school leadership, however, place the principal much closer to the heart of schooling process--teaching and learning (Zigarelli, 1996). Indeed, a number of researchers have found that school leadership has an impor-

tant impact on schools and student achievement (see, for example, Heck & Hallinger, 1999; Leithwood, Louis, Anderson & Wahlstrom, 2004; Waters, Marzano & McNulty, 2003). Further, a recent report from the National Staff Development Council (Killion, 2000) claimed that "strengthening school leadership" is essential for meeting the challenges facing schools (p. 1).

While teachers have a direct impact on student achievement, principals typically have an indirect, albeit powerful, impact on student achievement. Based on the results of an analysis of research conducted between 1980 and 1995 on principals' effects on student achievement, Hallinger and Heck (1998) identified four "avenues of influence" (p. 171) through which principals influence both individuals in schools and the systems within which individuals work, thereby influencing student outcomes. Specifically, principals impact teacher and student performance through influencing the purposes and goals of the school, the school structure and social networks, the people, and the school culture. The two avenues through which principals most directly affect student achievement are (a) the creation of a school culture focused on learning and characterized by high expectations for all students and (b) recruiting and retaining high-quality teachers. Indeed, as noted by Papa and his colleagues (Papa et al., 2003, p. 11), principals "have the

potential to importantly shape the environment in which the students learn [as well as influence] the quality of the teaching work force." More specifically, principals can play a leading role in designing and supporting school social contexts that support teacher and student learning in ways that lead to improved student outcomes (Copland, 2003; Ervay, 2006; Hanushek, 1971; Miller & Rowan, 2006; Goldring & Rallis, 1993; Leithwood & Montgomery, 1982; Rosenblum, Louis & Rossmiller, 1994; Smylie & Hart, 1999).

There is wide consensus among researchers and policymakers that teachers are the single most powerful school factor affecting student achievement. A growing body of research has found that principals strongly influence teacher quality—and, therefore, student achievement--through recruiting and retaining high quality teachers (Fuller, Baker, & Young, 2007; Grissmer & Kirby, 1987, 1997; Ingersoll, 2001; Levy, et al., 2006; Miller & Rowan, 2006; Papa, Lankford, & Wyckoff, 2002; Williby, 2004). In fact, Fuller, Baker, and Young (2007) found that Texas elementary schools in which principals decreased teacher turnover and increased teacher quality had positive impacts on gains in student achievement over time. A number of recent studies have found that principals strongly influence teacher turnover which has a significant impact on student achievement. For example, a series of studies by the Center for

Teaching Quality (see http://www.teachingquality.org/twc/whereweare.htm) using statewide surveys of teachers have found that leadership and leadership behavior profoundly influence the retention of teachers at a school across all different types of local and state settings. Indeed, Berry and Fuller (2007) found that specific principal behaviors can double the likelihood of a teacher staying at a school after controlling for student characteristics and achievement.

Although there is a growing body of evidence on the positive relationship between school leadership, teacher quality, and student achievement, we need further investments in high-quality research that examines these relationships in a multitude of contexts across a number of years. In particular, we need to focus more attention on these relationships at the elementary school level (Miller & Rowan, 2006). Further, because of the ever-changing social, economic, and political contexts that vary dramatically across local and state contexts, we need to invest in large-scale and longitudinal studies that seek to identify the specific, observable, and measurable leadership characteristics that are associated with improvements in teacher quality and retention, and ultimately student achievement (Ballou & Podgursky, 1998; Hanushek, 1971; Miller & Rowan, 2006; Wayne & Youngs, 2003).

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WHAT DO WE KNOW ABOUT HOW TO PREPARE QUALITY LEADERS?

UCEA and UCEA-affiliated researchers have taken a leadership role in seriously examining how we currently prepare educational leaders, identifying some of the best practices from the field, and recommending changes that need to be made in preparing educational leaders.

UCEA sponsored research and other research in this area has demonstrated that selected program characteristics are not only more effective for the preparation and development of educational leaders, but that they also yield better graduate outcomes .

As consensus has grown about the impact of school leadership on school improvement and increasing student achievement, increasing attention has been focused on how we prepare educational leaders. For example, publications such as Education Week, New York Times, and USA Today have published articles focusing on the perceived inadequacies of leadership preparation programs (Young, Petersen, & Short, 2002). Beyond the concerns shared by the general public and media, educational leaders themselves have shared serious reservations about the current quality of leadership programs (Stanford Educational Leadership Institute, 2007). This type of outcry, when coupled with dynamic shifts in schools and society, has led to the belief within academia that substantive changes to leadership preparation programs are required (Young, Peterson, & Short, 2002).

UCEA and UCEA-affiliated researchers have taken a leadership role in seriously examining how we currently prepare educational leaders, identifying some of the best practices from the field, and recommending changes that need to be made in preparing educational leaders. Indeed, UCEA has created and sustained a number of efforts to examine and improve the preparation of educational leaders.

Specifically, UCEA has created the Joint Research Task Force on Educational Leadership preparation, the Task Force on Evaluating Educational Preparation programs, Program Evaluation and Technical Assistance Project, and nine Research Centers focusing on a variety of topics, including those that examine leadership preparation practices.

UCEA sponsored research and other research in this area has demonstrated that selected program characteristics are not only more effective for the preparation and development of educational leaders, but that they also yield better graduate outcomes (Jackson & Kelly, 2002; Davis, et al, 2005; USDoE, 2005). These program characteristics are delineated in Table 1.

These program characteristics can be collapsed into several core programmatic pillars that directly facilitate effective leadership preparation: (a) clear focus on specific knowledge and skills linked to a set of values and beliefs, (b) effective selection strategies, and (c) adequate resources and staffing. Programs with such features yield better graduate outcomes—in what they learn and their career advancement, and, in turn, how they practice leadership and foster school improvement (Orr & Orphanos, 2007).

Table 1. Features of High Quality Leadership Programs

Research-based content that clearly focuses on instruction, change management, and organizational practice.
Coherent curriculum that links all aspects of the preparation experience around a set of shared values, beliefs, and knowledge about effective organizational practice;
Rigorous selection process that gives priority to under-served groups, particularly racial/ethnic minorities.
Cohort structures that foster collaboratively learning and support.
School-University collaborations that create a seamless and coherent program for students.
Field-based internships that allow individuals to apply their new knowledge and skills while under the guidance of expert leaders.
Supportive organizational structures that support student retention, engagement and placement.
Systematic process for evaluating and improving programs and coursework.
Low student-faculty ratio (i.e., 20-1) and active, student-centered instruction.
Full-time tenure-track faculty members who make significant efforts to identify, develop, and promote relevant knowledge focused on the essential problems of schooling, leadership and administrative practice teach
Professional growth opportunities for faculty.

(Darling-Hammond, et al, 2007; Jackson & Kelly, 2002; Orr, 2007)

WHAT DO WE NEED TO IMPROVE LEADERSHIP PREPARATION?

While a growing amount of attention has been directed to identifying research-based innovations and best practice in university-based leadership preparation programs (Davis, et al, 2005; Jackson & Kelly, 2002; Orr, 2006; Southern Regional Educational Board [SREB], 2005; US Department of Education [USDoE], 2005), there is still much to be learned about improving the preparation of school leaders. To improve our knowledge in this area, leadership preparation programs need to improve their abilities to engage in high-quality, systematic, and longitudinal evaluations of their efforts and researchers need to focus more closely on the linkages between selection, preparation practices, leadership behaviors, and student achievement.

Leadership preparation programs across the country need to increase their capacity to gauge their impact, identify successes and areas for improvement, or determine how well they prepare aspiring educational leaders particularly underserved racial/ethnic groups and communities for productive careers and educational improvement. Specifically, programs need: (1) access to better evaluation models— measures, methodology and instruments—to evaluate the impact of their preparation on graduates' subsequent leadership work; (2) technical assistance in building their capacity to incorporate evaluation research and support continuous program improvement efforts; and (3) a database of evidence for benchmarking performance over time and within regional and institutional contexts. With more accessible evaluation resources and support, programs can make research-based program improvements, integrate evaluation practice into their work, and investigate benefits for all graduates and the school communities they will lead.

Researchers primarily need more funding and access to better data. Examining the relationships between and among program selection strategies, specific preparation program activities, placement as school leaders, leadership behaviors, and improved teacher and student outcomes across varying contexts and over multiple years requires significant amounts of funding. In addition, researchers have little access to quality data sets on principals. States and many school districts not only lack data on teachers and school leaders, but the ability to link these data to specific schools and the children they serve (Corcoran, 2007).

Because of the insufficient funding and data, researchers are limited in their ability to delineate problems and appraise effectiveness of policy options

CONCLUSIONS

The available research is clear: school leaders make a clear and demonstrable impact on student achievement through several avenues of influence. The most important of these avenues are creating a positive school environment characterized by high expectations for teachers and students and recruiting and retaining high-quality and effective teachers. Further, we know that preparation programs with specific characteristics are more likely to develop effective school leaders than programs with other characteristics. Yet, there is much more we need to know about the relationships between preparation program activities, leadership behaviors, and improved teacher and student outcomes. UCEA is dedicated towards continuing working on improving preparation program practice as well as engaging in high-quality research that is useful in improving preparation programs and school leadership practices.

POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS

We believe immediate policy action can be taken to support the efforts of UCEA and other organizations in improving the quality of leadership in our schools. These recommendations are delineated below.

NATIONAL LEVEL:

Support increased funding for research and development projects in educational leadership preparation programs through the Fund for the Improvement of Post Secondary Education (FIPSE) and the Institute for Education Sciences (IES).

While there has been an increase in research in the area of effective school leadership and leadership preparation, there is far, far more that needs to be learned. Only through significant investments at the national level will such research be undertaken in a high-quality manner.

Expand the data collected in federally supported surveys and data bases, such as the School and Staffing Survey.

We need to know far more about the characteristics of principals and principal stability over time. The questions regarding school leadership in the Schools and Staffing Survey should be reviewed and a Principal Follow-Up Study should be implemented to ascertain the extent to which principals return to the same school and the reasons behind

their decisions.

Encourage states to create data infrastructures that identify the preparation and employment patterns of individual school leaders over time.

Most states lack the data infrastructure to track the preparation and employment of individuals as school leaders over time. Such data is absolutely necessary for program improvement and evaluation efforts as well as larger research studies about school leaders.

Support UCEA's efforts to develop a Center for Leadership Preparation Program Evaluation, Training, Research and Development by:

Learning more about UCEA's Evaluation Project

Assisting UCEA in disseminating information about this project

Assisting UCEA in securing funding for this project

STATE LEVEL:

Visit leadership preparation programs in your state and engage in discussions with students and faculty about the strengths, weaknesses, and needs of the programs.

In conducting such visits, encourage programs to benchmark their characteristics and efforts with research-based findings of effective practice. Sponsor hearings on the state of educational

leadership and leadership preparation and embrace these issues as on-going legislative concerns.

A continuing and collaborative dialogue with preparation program leaders and school leaders in the field are necessary to inform policymakers of the pertinent issues as well as fostering a culture of evidence-based practice in preparation programs.

Support the adoption of state level licensure, certification and program approval policies that align with the research-based indicators of quality preparation outlined in this brief. The adoption of such policies will provide preparation program leaders and policymakers a common metric by which they can assess effectiveness and engage in collaborative discussions about how to best improve leadership practice.

Provide funding to state education agencies to develop high-quality databases that track individuals through preparation programs and into the field.

High-quality databases that contain the characteristics of teachers and administrators, the preparation programs from which teachers and administrators graduate, and the characteristics of employing schools and school districts that can be linked over time using a common identifier are crucial in improving research in the areas of leadership preparation programs and leadership practice.

University Council for Educational Administration

Because Quality Leadership Matters

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UCEA is a consortium
of research/doctoral granting institutions committed to advancing the preparation and practice of educational leaders for the benefit of schools and children. We fulfill this purpose by:

*promoting, sponsoring, and disseminating research on the essential problems of practice,

*improving the preparation and professional development of school leaders and professors,

*influencing policy and practice through establishing and fostering collaborative networks.

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