



The School Leadership Pipeline Series:

Meeting Colorado's Demand for Excellent Leaders

PART

1
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DONNELL-KAY
FOUNDATION

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Recognizing the central role that school leadership plays in advancing student achievement gains, the Donnell-Kay Foundation conducted a survey of Colorado’s superintendents and leaders of Colorado’s charter management organizations (CMOs) to better understand the school leadership landscape in our state. The goal of this project is to inform ongoing state and district efforts to build a robust human capital pipeline to educate our state’s students. Based on the results of the survey and subsequent research, the Donnell-Kay Foundation is releasing a series of policy papers.

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Introduction



The Donnell-Kay Foundation strongly believes that recruiting, developing, and supporting high-quality school leaders can be a major leverage point for improving education. Over ten years ago, the foundation helped to fund a report titled: *“Principals in Colorado: An Inventory of Policies and Practices.”* This report examined the evolving role of school leaders, pathways into leadership, challenges associated with the job, and issues around pipeline shortages. During the fall of 2012, the Foundation surveyed the state’s superintendents and charter network leaders to better understand the principalship in Colorado today.

Some key findings of the survey include perceptions that there is a shortage of quality leaders to run Colorado’s schools, that the quality of principal preparation is extremely poor, and that professional development and accountability are levers to improve the quality of leadership. Information gathered in the survey, as well as research into national trends and promising practices on school leadership, serve as the basis for the report recommendations.

The Case for Prioritizing School Leadership

In recent years, Colorado has had a great focus on teacher effectiveness – with good reason given teachers’ immense impact on student achievement. However, if we are serious about teacher effectiveness, we should be serious about leadership effectiveness. While having a high-quality teacher in the classroom is essential for student success, to achieve teacher effectiveness at scale, schools need excellent leaders to create a cohesive culture of high expectations and shape a vision of academic success for all students. *The bottom line is that quality school leadership is necessary for school improvement.*

There are many outstanding school leaders doing important work in schools across our nation and in Colorado. Yet, there are still not nearly enough quality leaders (both in the pipeline and currently working in schools) needed to ensure that all students achieve to their fullest potential. This may be due in large part to the demanding and ever-changing role of the school principal.

The Case for Prioritizing School Leadership

Today, school principals are “asked to lead in a new world marked by unprecedented responsibilities... where they are the front-line managers, the small business executives, the team leaders charged with leading their faculty to new levels of effectiveness.”¹ Despite being asked to do more, leaders often lack the training, autonomy and resources to do their jobs well.

In an effort to ensure that our state, districts, and schools can best attract, train, support, and retain quality leaders, it is important to ask the following questions – many of which are posed in a recent Center for Reinventing Public Education (CRPE) report:²

1. Are principals being adequately prepared to take on the challenges that face schools and meet the formal standards set forth by regulation?
2. How do we ensure an adequate supply of quality leaders to run schools? And specifically, how do we get the right principals to the schools that need them in order to have a sustained impact on improving education?
3. What are the most effective policies to ensure quality and optimal operating conditions along the entire principal pipeline?

These are some of the key questions we hope to explore and answer in this series of policy-focused papers.

School leadership must be a priority for Colorado. Having high quality leaders is a key leverage point for improving our state’s schools. Until Colorado’s governor, lawmakers, state and local school board members, superintendents, community, and business leaders get serious about rethinking the role of the school principal, training candidates for success, and supporting talented people in that role, we will continue to have schools that languish and fail to serve our students well.



Today, school principals are “asked to lead in a new world marked by unprecedented responsibilities... where they are the front-line managers, the small business executives, the team leaders charged with leading their faculty to new levels of effectiveness.”¹

¹ Hess, Frederick M. and Kelly, Andrew P. *Learning to Lead: What Gets Taught in Principal-Preparation Programs*. Teachers College Record. Volume 109 Number 1, 2007.

² Campbell, Christine and Betheny Gross. *Principal Concerns: Leadership Data and Strategies for States*. Center for Reinventing Public Education (CRPE). September 2012.

The Colorado Context

State Laws

Largely because of its strong history of local control, Colorado has not had a robust history of developing, attracting, supporting, or retaining school leaders from the state level.

In recent years, policy progress at the state level has begun to take shape. Since the state is implementing important policy and regulatory levers with regard to principal preparation, program approval, and certification of school principals, increased attention is a welcome development.

Most notably, S.B. 191, Colorado's educator effectiveness reform law passed in 2010, requires that all principals be evaluated annually. These evaluations are based on the seven quality standards for principal leadership developed by the State Educator Effectiveness Council and the School Academy Leadership Board.³ The Colorado Department of Education (CDE) and the Department of Higher Education (DHE) began work in 2011 with educator preparation programs to align their programs to the new principal standards and are continuing that work.

The new quality standards require principals to demonstrate:

- **Strategic leadership**
- **Instructional leadership**
- **School cultural and equity leadership**
- **Human resource leadership**
- **Managerial leadership**
- **External development leadership**
- **Student growth leadership**



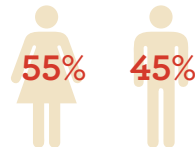
SNAPSHOT OF PRINCIPALS IN COLORADO (2011)

46

The average age of a principal

\$80,135

The average salary for a principal



Percentage of principals based on gender

85.5%

of principals are white

9.6%

are Hispanic or Latino

2.7%

are African-American

9.6 years

The average teaching experience of a principal

19%

The annual principal turnover rate

6 years

Average time principals serve in a principal role (with 3 of those years at a specific school)

Source: Colorado Department of Education.

³ The School Academy Leadership Board was created by legislation in 2008. It is charged with proposing a statewide system to identify, recruit, train, and induct qualified public school leaders; recommending changes to Colorado's standards for school principals and induction program standards for principals; and creating a principals' leadership academy.

The Colorado Context

The past few legislative sessions have also produced a series of educator identifier laws to better understand educator preparation and performance. The following new laws are related to educator quality and preparation:⁴

- **House Bill 1065 (2009):** Established a unique educator identifier that enables CDE to link teachers and principals, along with their preparation and professional development, to their students' outcomes.⁵
- **Senate Bill 36 (2010):** Allowed CDE to track educator preparation programs and student outcomes so the state can identify programs that most effectively prepare educators to be great teachers and leaders.⁶
- **Senate Bill 245 (2011):** Extended oversight of educator training programs at all institutions of higher education, required an amount of field-based training for students in educator training programs, and required higher education institutions to track the placement and performance of graduates from educator training programs in order to improve those programs.

These existing laws and structures set a good foundation for improving leadership quality. However, the work is still far from complete.

State Oversight

Both CDE and DHE oversee and sanction the 12 traditional principal preparation programs in the state, which include: Adams State University, Argosy University, Colorado Mesa University, Colorado State University, Jones International University, Regis University, University of Colorado at Colorado Springs, University of Colorado at Denver*, University of Denver*, University of Northern Colorado*, University of Phoenix*, and Western State Colorado University. (Note: Programs with an "*" have the largest number of people enrolled in their principal preparation program).

In 2012, there were 859 *enrollees* in Colorado's traditional principal preparation programs. There were 166 principal program *completers* in 2011 and 393 in 2012.⁷

Colorado state law does allow for alternative preparation programs for principal training, and there are currently ten in operation, with 18 enrollees. Most of the alternative route programs serve rural principal candidates through a Board of Cooperative Educational Services (BOCES)⁸. The State of Colorado only reviews preparation programs once every five years.

⁴ Source: Colorado Children's Campaign.

⁵ The unique identifier has been established and is assigned at the time of employment. During the 2013 legislative session, HB 1220 was passed in an effort to protect individual educator performance data, but is intended to provide greater access to aggregated data.

⁶ With the assignment of the educator identifier, it is possible to "backward map" the performance data to the in-state program where the leader completed. CDE is waiting on reliable data to start the tracking process.

⁷ These numbers represent the number of candidates *eligible* for licensure; the state does not track who applied for and received a license. Source: Colorado Commission on Higher Education Report: *Program Results for Educator Preparation AY2011-2012* (March 2013).

⁸ A list of current alternative preparation programs can be found here: http://www.cde.state.co.us/cdeprof/Licensure_alt_desigagenciesprincipal.asp.

Key Finding I: Shortage of Quality Candidates



Survey Data:

Recruiting and retaining school leaders are challenges. The majority of district superintendents and CMO leaders view recruiting and retaining excellent leaders to be substantial challenges. Nearly 50 percent of respondents identified recruiting and retaining quality principals as top challenges and another 35 percent identified these as mid-level challenges.

While these findings were similar across geographic setting, larger districts indicated greater challenges with recruiting quality leaders, while Charter Management Organization (CMO) leaders indicated a greater challenge with retaining quality leaders. Plus, leaders in districts with higher state accreditation scores have higher retention rates and tend to report fewer problems recruiting principals.

Major shortage is anticipated. District and charter leaders anticipate a major shortage of quality leaders to lead our state's schools, particularly our most challenging schools, now and into the future. Half of all respondents reported a lack of high caliber candidates for current openings, and almost three-quarters anticipate a shortage of quality candidates to fill future openings. Positions in high-poverty schools are viewed as most difficult to fill, with 63 percent of respondents indicating a shortage.

Eighty-two percent of district/network leaders report that a principal has left their district in the last five years – with most leaving to fill other principal positions in this state or choosing to retire. There does not appear to be a large drain of school leaders to schools outside of Colorado.

Formal succession planning and incentives are scarce. Eighty-two percent of responding superintendent and charter network leaders spend time and energy identifying teachers who show leadership promise. However, only one-third have formal succession planning systems in place.

“Principals have an extremely difficult job and the stresses that come with it are not for everyone. We may be asking them to do too much and being an instructional leader is the most important aspect of their job... The new educator effectiveness law will make this more important than ever because of the time demands for evaluations and observations. In the long run this will improve instruction but will also reduce the number of people that want to become principals.”

~ Survey Respondent

Key Finding I: Shortage of Quality Candidates

“At the macro level, many individuals with strong leadership potential elect not to pursue a principal’s position – especially mid-career and veteran teachers – because the compensation will be about the same, or in some cases lower, than what they would earn as a teacher. In high poverty schools and those on priority improvement/turnaround, these challenges are further exacerbated by the heightened risk of being fired for not improving student achievement.”

~ Survey Respondent

Very few districts/networks offer performance or differentiated pay to either attract or retain quality leaders. There are a few exceptions. In some larger districts, differentiated pay is offered to principals working in both turnaround and alternative schools. A few charter networks report providing performance pay for student achievement gains.

Promising Research and Trends:

DATA

Recently there has been a national call to action for states to track and use data for clarity around leadership needs. In addition to the CRPE report, a recent National Conference of State Legislatures (NCSL) report on school leadership laws adeptly points out, “Robust data systems can facilitate successful recruitment and selection processes. States can access, use and analyze data to track the supply and demand for principals, project impending retirements, and track principal preparation program enrollment and completion rates.”⁸

A 2013 report by the George W. Bush Institute’s Alliance to Reform Educational Leadership (AREL), provides a useful guide

for states wanting to take a more active and data driven role in supporting the supply of high-quality school leaders.⁹ Without strong data systems and information, the report concludes it is challenging to approve effective principal preparation programs, establish standards for receiving and keeping a license, and monitor principal quality.

It is critical for states to know which schools and districts are having trouble finding and keeping great school leaders and why: retirements, hard-to-staff schools, location, or other factors. These questions can begin to be answered with better and more intentional data collection.

ROLE & FLEXIBILITY

Another emerging national trend is the rapidly changing role of school leadership and how states and districts are working to create the right policies and practices to keep up. In an *Education Week* article, “Turnover in Principalship Focus of Research” (2009), then University of Texas researcher Ed Fuller provided insight into the principalship, saying, “We think the job has outgrown the ability of one person to handle it. Nobody is staying long enough to make connections or shepherd reform through.”

⁸ Shelton, Sara. *Strong Leaders, Strong Schools: 2010 School Leadership Laws*. National Conference of State Legislatures. 2011.

⁹ Briggs, Kerri; Cheney, Gretchen Rhines; Davis, Jacquelyn, and Kerry Moll. *Operating in the Dark: What Outdated State Policies and Data Gaps Mean for Effective School Leadership*. AREL, 2013.

Key Finding I: Shortage of Quality Candidates



In order to attract talented individuals to the profession, states and districts are rethinking the role of the school principal and how it can be made more inviting and sustainable. New leadership models, such as co-leadership and teacher leadership models, will be examined in-depth in a later paper of this series, as this is particularly important for hard-to-staff schools, including turnarounds and high-poverty schools.

Efforts to increase the flexibility and autonomy of principals and leadership teams are key tactics to making leadership roles more attractive. In Colorado, innovation schools and charter schools provide school leaders more autonomy with regard to staffing, use of time, budgeting, curriculum, and other responsibilities.

Building a Large Corps of Well-Qualified Candidates for the Principalship

- Create job descriptions that clearly spell out what principals need to know and do to drive better instruction.
- Improve “pre-service” principal training.
- Establish selective hiring procedures that identify the most promising future leaders and match them to the right schools.
- Ensure that hard-to-staff schools get top-quality leaders.

Source: The Wallace Foundation.

INCENTIVES & HUMAN CAPITAL

In addition to rethinking the role of the school leader, policies and practices that incent quality people to enter and remain in the profession are also being considered.

Many states have opened up the profession to non-traditional candidates¹⁰ seeking to lead schools. However, there are still some limiting state licensing requirements in Colorado that require documented evidence of three or more years of full-time successful experience working as a licensed or certified professional in a public or non-public school in the U.S. to lead a traditional public school (see sidebar, page 10).

¹⁰ Non-traditional candidates refers to individuals with no-prior teacher or school experience who may come from sectors outside education.

Key Finding I: Shortage of Quality Candidates

As CRPE points out, states might “consider a limited number of input requirements (for example, background checks and bachelor’s degrees) and let districts develop interview screens that seek out particular beliefs and orientations (for example, a belief that every child can succeed, a focus on results, and evidence of persistence), instructional knowledge, ability to use data, and leadership skills to inspire but also critique performance.”¹²

Below are other examples of policies and practices that states and districts are employing to ensure a pool of qualified school leaders:

- States such as Indiana and Tennessee have partnered with New Leaders for New Schools to pilot a training toolkit for principal managers and superintendents on how to hire great school leaders. The state superintendent is then expected to certify school leaders hired through this method.
- Chicago public schools has secured millions in private philanthropy to provide bonuses for principals who demonstrate effectiveness (through student growth as well as qualitative evaluations). They are also screening new candidates through “day in the life” simulations designed to assess their ability to manage real-life scenarios.
- Maryland now requires the State Board of Education to establish a program to support locally negotiated incentives (financial or other incentives) for highly effective classroom teachers and principals to work in hard-to-staff schools.¹³

CDE Principal Licensing Requirements

To become a licensed principal in a Colorado public school,¹¹ one must:

- Hold a bachelor’s or higher degree from an accepted, regionally-accredited institution of higher education.
- Complete an approved principal preparation program at an accepted institution of higher education or an approved alternative principal program.
- Provide documented evidence of three or more years of full-time successful experience working as a licensed or certificated professional in a public or non-public elementary or secondary school in the United States.
- Achieve a passing score on the PLACE principal content exam.

Source: Colorado Department of Education

¹¹ Note: Charter school principals are not required to have a principal’s license. A 2009 CDE Report: *Charter Leadership in Colorado*, reported that about 50% of charter school principals hold a CO principal license.

¹² Campbell, Christine and Betheny Gross. *Principal Concerns: Leadership Data and Strategies for States*. Center for Reinventing Public Education (CRPE). September 2012.

¹³ Shelton, Sara. *Strong Leaders, Strong Schools: 2010 School Leadership Laws*. National Conference of State Legislatures. 2011.

Key Finding II: Current Principal Preparation is Low Quality

Survey Data:

Principal preparation was identified as low quality. Only one in ten district/CMO leaders believe new principals are well-prepared for their jobs. Less than five percent felt that principal preparation was “outstanding” in preparing leaders for instructional leadership and student growth.

Specialized training for working in various types of schools (e.g. high-poverty schools, turnaround schools, alternative schools (AECs), new schools, or innovation schools) is viewed as important, but not extremely important. Specialized training for working in high-poverty schools received the highest importance rating of 60 percent, with turnarounds coming in second with a 50 percent importance rating. Only 4 percent of respondents believed principals were trained “extremely well” or “well” to work in high-poverty schools.

Although superintendents and charter network leaders cited specific preparation programs that they judged to be the best provider of quality principal training, very few of them actually used published data or formal evaluations to make such judgments. Half rely on personal experience.

Principal preparation for key skills does not match need. Instructional leadership and student growth were identified as the most important school leader competencies, with 75 percent of respondents indicating they are extremely important. Unfortunately, superintendents/CMO leaders reported that the performance and preparation for these competencies do not match the need. Only one in five district/CMO leaders felt the performance of today’s principals was “outstanding” (top rating on a five point scale) in these extremely important competencies.

“...Too many [prep] programs are focused on theory and fail to help students make the connection between theory and reality. Theory is only that, a theory, until it is put into practice and made to work in any given situation based on the circumstances.”

~ Survey Respondent

“We need to revamp the credentialing process in universities and colleges. It is often commented on that the easiest masters degree is in administration. We need more rigor and more focus on well-rounded principals. Perhaps greater internships and oversight of the probationary period...”

~ Survey Respondent

Promising Research and Trends:

Research and anecdotal evidence reveal that, in general, both teacher and principal preparation programs are of poor quality. In 2005, Arthur Levine, the former President of Columbia University’s Teachers College, published an exposé on educator training programs across the nation writing that the majority of leadership-based training programs “have turned out to be little more than graduate credit dispensers.”¹⁴

¹⁴ Levine, Arthur. *Educating School Leaders*. The Education Schools Project, 2005, 31.

Key Finding II: Current Principal Preparation is Low Quality

Several other studies since that time go on to confirm such observations. One study reviewed the content of the nation's principal preparation programs and revealed that

“just 2 percent of the 2,424 courses addressed accountability in the context of school management or school improvement and less than 5 percent included instruction on managing school improvement via data, technology, or empirical research.”¹⁵

In their report, “A New Approach to Principal Preparation,” the Rainwater Leadership Alliance (RLA) features top-notch leadership training programs.¹⁶ All of the RLA programs are “highly selective and establish clear criteria and rigorous processes to evaluate applicants.”¹⁷ They cite the following key elements for quality principal preparation (with a continuous cycle of program evaluation):

1. Developing a Principal Competency Framework
2. Building a Candidate Pool
3. Selecting Candidates
4. Training and Developing Fellows
5. Supporting Principals

The AREL at the Bush Institute also has created a collaborative network of principal preparation programs, each committed to the Institute's nine competency standards which include, “implementing a more rigorous principal selection process, targeted principal training, a meaningful clinical leadership experience, and continuously evaluating graduates' effectiveness in raising student achievement.”¹⁸ Get Smart Schools in Colorado is one of AREL's featured leadership training programs doing promising work training leaders to work in autonomous, turnaround, and high-poverty schools.

Many charter schools and CMO networks (similar in size to many rural districts and BOCES) create their own year or two year-long principal training programs. This is an economical training path and preferable to ensure a seamless transfer of the organization's core values, mission, and culture. Sometimes this practical training year in an administrative support role is supplemented with university coursework for licensure purposes, but not always. The practical learnings received during this “resident” year often prove invaluable for developing future leaders. Below are some local and national models with strong internal leadership training programs:

- Achievement First
- Denver School of Science and Technology
- KIPP Fisher Fellowship
- Strive Preparatory Schools

¹⁵ Hess, Frederick M. and Kelly, Andrew P. *Learning to Lead: What Gets Taught in Principal-Preparation Programs*. Teachers College Record. Volume 109 Number 1, 2007.

¹⁶ RLA featured programs include: Gwinnett County Public Schools; Long Beach Unified; RICE University's Education Entrepreneurship Program; University of Chicago at Illinois; the University of Virginia's Darden/Curry Partnership for Leaders in Education; Knowledge is Power Program (KIPP); the NYC Leadership Academy; New Leaders for New Schools and the School Leaders Network.

¹⁷ Cheney, Gretchen R.; Davis, Jacquelyn; Garrett, Kelly; Holleran, Jennifer. *A New Approach to Principal Preparation: Innovative Programs Share Their Practices and Lessons Learned*. Rainwater Charitable Foundation, 2010.

¹⁸ <http://www.bushcenter.org/education-reform/alliance-reform-education-leadership>.

Key Finding II: Current Principal Preparation is Low Quality

Opening up the field to individuals with leadership qualities and strong beliefs about the educational success of students, while also creating rigorous and selective programs may help foster a high-quality principal corps. Education author and scholar Rick Hess believes the way we select, train, and induct educational leaders is problematic, calling it, “insular, self-selecting, and largely theory-based.” Hess calls for recruiting a much more diverse, deeper, and richer pool of candidates that have exposure and learn from peers outside K-12 education.¹⁹

In addition to the programs featured in the RLA report, below are some specific examples of unique and outside-the-box teacher training programs that could be applied to leadership programs.

- **The Relay Graduate School of Education in New York City** is currently a teacher training program, but many of the values and focus areas could be translated into a principal preparation program. Relay focuses on a practical, not theoretical, approach to training its teachers, and it is the first ever program to require its graduates to demonstrate K-12 achievement in the classroom prior to obtaining a degree. The program also incorporates technology for feedback and for classroom use.^{20, 21}
- **University of Southern California’s Rossier School of Education (MAT@USC) and Western Governors University (WGU) Teacher’s College** are fully online degree programs that offer the potential to “transform the industry into one that has lower costs and higher quality, and is more widely accessible.”²² These programs are attracting large numbers of non-traditional students, especially from rural areas. The WGU courses are competency based, charges a flat rate of \$2,890 for each 6-month term, and students can take as many courses as they want. In Colorado, University of Northern Colorado, University of Phoenix, Adams State University, Western State College, and Regis University have online programs (or options to take coursework online).
- **The Office of Reform and Innovation in Denver Public Schools, in partnership with the Susan and Michael Dell Foundation**, has created the Residency for the Educational Development of DPS Intrapreneurs (REDDI). The REDDI program offers a year-long, full-time paid residency to aspiring leaders to learn from highly successful charter schools that run their own leadership training programs. The residents then return to lead district schools, including innovation schools.

¹⁹ http://blogs.edweek.org/edweek/rick_hess_straight_up/2012/03/educational_leadership_for_a_new_era.html

²⁰ <http://www.relay.edu/>

²¹ The New Teacher Project and New Leaders for New Schools also have teacher and leadership training programs that focus on educator effectiveness and academic results *prior* to a teacher candidate obtaining a teaching license.

²² Education Next: Online Teacher Education a “Disruptive Innovation” that Delivers Quality at Lower Cost: <http://educationnext.org/online-teacher-education-a-%E2%80%9Cdisruptive-innovation%E2%80%9D-that-delivers-quality-at-lower-cost/>

Key Finding III: Professional Development and Accountability are Levers for Change

Survey Data:

Professional development and accountability are seen as levers to improve quality.

Superintendents and charter network leaders saw increased professional development (78 percent) and accountability for performance (74 percent) to be the most effective policy levers in increasing quality in school leadership.

Principals in the worst schools lack a professional development support system. Principals newly appointed to turnaround or priority improvement schools are *least* likely to be identified for professional development support. Even when they are identified as needing help, they do not always receive it. District and CMO leaders also noted that struggling new principals are most likely to receive extra support.



“...Being a principal is unlike any other job. Until a person gets a position and has real live experience, it is hard to understand what it takes to be an effective principal...”

~ Survey Respondent

Promising Research and Trends:

There is a great deal of literature discussing the importance of developing fair and reliable evaluation systems that hold principals accountable for student progress and also inform their ongoing professional development (see page 15). Evaluation as an accountability tool is well under way in Colorado. As mentioned earlier, the passage of SB 10-191 requires that by 2013-2014 all principals in Colorado receive annual evaluations, with at least 50 percent of a principal's evaluation to be determined by student academic growth. Even with the new Colorado state law, districts with principal evaluation systems in place for some time can continue to use them as long as they meet certain criteria.

Key Finding III: Professional Development and Accountability are Levers for Change



The Charlotte-Mecklenburg district in North Carolina relies heavily on coaching to bolster new and veteran principals. Because of its success in developing a stronger corps of principals, the district has shifted emphasis in coaching from “intervention” for principals who are not meeting performance expectations to a focus on helping principals who are “good” to become “great” and developing strategic plans for their schools.²³

The New Schools Ventures Fund published a report in 2008 called, “Principal Development: Selection, Support and Evaluation, Key Strategies from NewSchools’ Portfolio Ventures,” examining high-performing charter networks and non-profits such as Green Dot Public Schools, New Leaders for New Schools, and Achievement First. While largely focused on a charter school and charter management organization audience, the tools and conclusions have value across the sector.²⁴

On the evaluation side, the NSVF report recommends that school systems/networks develop clear and explicit performance criteria; align criteria with the organization’s mission; and ensure buy-in from each principal. It goes on to recommend combining formal and informal evaluations, with frequent and detailed feedback. Evaluations are not only being used to help inform employment decisions, career planning, and professional development, but also to provide feedback to licensing institutions on graduates’ performance to drive program improvement. On-the-job learning supports and professional development are seen as key factors in reducing principal turnover and in increasing principal success, if done well.

Key Elements for Principal Support

- Develop fair, reliable performance evaluations that hold principals accountable for student progress and inform their ongoing training (currently in progress in many Colorado districts and ongoing at the state level with S.B. 191).
- Offer mentoring to novice principals and professional development to all principals, so school leaders improve throughout their careers.
- Provide school leaders with timely, useful data and training on how to use it.
- Enable principals to devote sufficient time to improving instruction and to making the best use of that time.
- Plan for orderly turnover and leadership succession.

Source: The Wallace Foundation.

²³ The Wallace Foundation. “Districts Matter: Cultivating the Principals Urban Schools Need.” February 2013.

²⁴ <http://www.newschools.org/files/PrincipalDevelopment.pdf>.

Key Finding III: Professional Development and Accountability are Levers for Change

On the principal support side, the NSVF report organizes support into different buckets:

- A. Coaching/Mentoring:** on-the-ground, individualized support;
- B. Cohorts:** collaborative learning through peer groups; and
- C. Targeted Training:** professional development focused on skills and content.

The NSVF report effectively highlights the distinction between principal development and school improvement. The toolkit indicates that at Achievement First there are two issues involved in principal support: how is the school doing and how is the principal doing? These are two very different questions that both deserve attention, but require different approaches of action. This emphasizes the importance of finding the time and resources to focus on both school level achievement issues and also individualized coaching for leaders based on their specific leadership needs.



Strive Preparatory Schools, a high-performing network of charter schools in Denver, uses five domains with an evaluation rubric for all of its school leaders. Below are sample standards within each domain.

1) Vision and Results –
Articulates and maintains a clear vision for school focused on student achievement and college-readiness.

2) Management and Influence –

Demonstrates effective management of and delegation within the Campus Administrative Team. Sets clear goals and expectations for staff then manages performance of staff through meaningful evaluations.

3) Teaching and Learning –
Ensures vibrant and talented teaching staff through thoughtful management of human capital.

4) Operations and Resources –

Demonstrates thoughtful and strategic prioritization in the allocation of resources.

5) Community and Culture –

Ensures a school culture where students and staff operate and interact within the framework of the school values.

Recommendations

Information gathered in the Donnell-Kay Foundation survey, as well as research into national trends and promising practices on school leadership, serve as the basis for the recommendations of this report.

Although the state role in Colorado has largely been limited to preparing and licensing school principals, the Donnell-Kay Foundation advocates for both accelerating the pace and enhancing the quality of these efforts, and for a greater state role in this arena.

A bolder state role should focus on using data to better understand school leadership needs and effectiveness of preparation programs across the state. This role should also focus on how best to support and partner with districts and CMOs to attract, prepare, evaluate, and support talented school leaders for Colorado's schools. Ultimately, if the state legislature and the governor deem school leadership a priority and they thoughtfully engage with districts and the charter sector to solve this issue of quality leaders, great achievements will be seen in Colorado's schools.

At the same time, districts have flexibility to make changes without having to wait for action at the state level. The following recommendations address actions that can be taken at both the state and district levels.

State:

1. **The governor and state legislature should fund and ensure a robust system in place at the Colorado Department of Education (CDE) and the Department of Higher Education (DHE) to collect, track, and assess data about school principals, including training, in Colorado.**
 - The “Principal Concerns” report by CRPE should be used as a framework for collecting the appropriate data and doing a robust analysis of principal needs in Colorado.
 - Colorado should report and use data already required as part of the educator effectiveness bills current in statute.²⁵ Once data is available, provide annual public report cards with grades for the preparation programs.
2. **The governor and state legislature should strengthen principal preparation and licensure by reducing barriers of entry into the profession for non-traditional candidates and increasing freedom for principal training programs.**
 - Focus less on inputs for principal candidates and more on outputs. Open up the profession to qualified applicants from all professions and backgrounds – like charter schools currently do – not just those who have experience working in a public or non-public school (e.g. certain former military personnel could be extremely equipped to take on school leadership roles, given their extensive leadership training).

²⁵ Due to some unforeseen data complexities, information about principal preparation programs has been delayed already nearly two years. While it is important to ensure data fidelity, it is also important to prioritize this work. Colorado needs to effectively evaluate and support preparation programs and close training programs that aren't producing a quality principal corps.

Recommendations



- Enable and support CDE to reduce regulation and rules around educator preparation programs and licensing to innovate based on what professionals know works best and on outcomes.
- Make the principalship more attractive by incenting preparation programs to train leaders to work in innovative and autonomous environments. Provide additional resources to districts that support quality innovation schools (per the Innovation Schools Act).
- Fund and support programs that prove to be effective training principals to work in high-poverty schools and school turnarounds, including charter training programs that are willing to develop and train candidates for all types of schools, including traditional and innovation schools.
- To better support our rural schools and districts, incent quality principal preparation programs to deliver training online or through a blended learning approach (e.g. Khan Academy, WGU, USC’s Rossier School of Education, and several existing Colorado preparation institutions).

3. The Colorado Department of Education should utilize state tools and incentives to provide more opportunities for high-quality principal training, selection, and support.

- In partnership with qualified organizations, create a state-supported online “school leader workforce clearinghouse” for prospective school leaders to be matched in schools and districts looking for good talent (e.g. LinkedIn, or MyEdMatch for principal openings). This service would link employers and job seekers with particular skill sets and training appropriate for specific schools, as well as helping to fill rural leadership needs. This site could also be used as a clearinghouse for proven methods of professional development and support.
- Establish a program to support locally negotiated incentives for highly effective principals to work in hard-to-staff schools.
- Provide districts with strategic tools and technical assistance to aide superintendents and district hiring managers with best practices in hiring for principal openings.

Recommendations

District:

1. Build a corps of qualified leaders.

- In rural areas, use a charter or CMO network “homegrown” model for training future leaders. Larger districts can also create homegrown programs (e.g. the DPS REDDI program), while simultaneously pursuing a rigorous external recruitment strategy (e.g. Get Smart Schools). Create formal systems for succession planning.
- School boards should encourage their districts to partner with non-profits and leading experts to provide strategic tools and technical assistance to superintendents and district hiring managers around best practices in hiring for principal openings (e.g. hire early, top candidates usually apply for positions early in the hiring process).
- Create a more robust local, tiered licensure system based on performance (e.g. initial, professional, and master principal license). Provide increased opportunities for pay and/or flexibility based on leadership performance.

2. Strengthen support for principals.

- Create a strategic framework to determine which leaders may need the most support – new principals, struggling principals (based on growth data), turnaround principals, or principals in particular locations. Articulate how support is differentiated among levels of experience and leaders working in different types of settings.²⁶ (see Appendix)
- Ensure that leadership evaluations are aligned with professional development.
- Focus on placement. What processes are in place to ensure there is a right fit between the candidate and the school? Note: this recommendation will be addressed further in this series.



²⁶ Campbell, Christine and Betheny Gross. “Principal Concerns: Leadership Data and Strategies for States.” Center for Reinventing Public Education (CRPE). September 2012.

Recommendations

- In geographically isolated areas, or in urban areas to maximize support opportunities, use technology to deliver professional development and coaching. There are several teacher feedback and coaching sites online such as Edthema²⁷ and Be a Smarter Cookie.²⁸ Sites like these should be considered for principal development as well.

3. Re-Focus the district to support a corps of quality leaders.

- Prioritize the creation of more quality innovation schools (per the Innovation Schools Act), to better support and increase flexibility for school leaders to do their best work around use of time, budget, and hiring.
- Allow for innovative leadership models, such as co-leadership or shared leadership, especially in hard-to-staff schools.
- School districts must “re-culture” themselves so they focus less on administrative tasks, and more on supporting principals to improve instruction. Central offices need to closely examine every practice, day in and day out, to ensure it helps improve the teaching and learning for all students.

Conclusions

School leadership will be a key factor in the future success of Colorado’s schools. Without a pool of highly talented and capable people leading our schools into the future, our prospects for having a world-class education system grow dim. Our survey results revealed that Colorado’s superintendents and CMO leaders working in the field everyday are struggling with these challenges and are in serious need of a revitalized leadership pipeline. It is imperative that this issue become a top priority for lawmakers, the governor, the Commissioner of Education, state and local school boards, and other key community leaders. We must demand, support, and reward the best from our school leaders. They are the linchpin in the overall success of our schools.

****During the fall of 2012, the Donnell-Kay Foundation conducted an online survey among all superintendents and charter network leaders in Colorado. As people who both hire and oversee school leaders, many superintendents and charter network leaders from across the state graciously shared their perceptions about school leadership issues. The final sample of 56 (31% response rate of 51 district superintendents and 5 EMO/CMO leaders) was a representative mix of Colorado superintendents and charter leaders by district size and setting. This paper is the first in a three-part series based on the survey.*

*The Donnell-Kay Foundation welcomes ideas, feedback, and partnerships around this work. For more information, please contact **Kim Knous Dolan** at kknousdolan@dkfoundation.org.*

²⁷ Edthema: <http://www.edthema.com/>.

²⁸ Be a Smarter Cookie: <http://www.beasmartercookie.com/>.

Appendix

State Principal Data Guide: Data Elements

The *State Principal Data Guide* developed by the Center for Reinventing Public Education helps states monitor the number and characteristics of anticipated vacancies. Some data are available in state administrative data sets and performance data, but record-keeping procedures to their preparation programs are important steps that states need to take with their data. States that understand the value of this material will be able to collect and analyze it in ways that enhance strategic decision-making.

Principal demand	Principal retirements	# and % of principals eligible for retirement in the next 1, 3, and 5 years
	Superintendent retirements*	# and % of superintendents eligible for retirement in the next 1, 3, and 5 years
Principal in need of supports	By experience	# and % of principals in their first or second year of leading a school
		# and % of principals in their first or second year of working at each school performance level in the state
	By performance	# and % principals working in schools at lowest performance level in the state
Principal programs	Performance of traditional preparation programs (e.g., colleges of education)	# and % of principals trained by each traditional program working in the state
		# and % of principals trained by each traditional program working at each school performance level in the state
		# of new principals likely to graduate in the next 5 years from traditional programs that have graduates working in high-growth schools
	Performance of alternative preparation programs	# and % of principals trained by each alternative program working in the state
		# and % of principals trained by each alternative program working at each school performance level in the state
		# of new principals likely to graduate in the next 5 years from alternative programs that have graduates working in high-growth schools

* Superintendent retirements may create principal vacancies if there is an upward shuffling of personnel within the district. (For example, an assistant superintendent fills a superintendent position, and a principal replaces an assistant superintendent.)

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