Pathways for Performance: Recruitment and Selection, University Preparation, Licensure, and Professional Development for School Principals

This manuscript has been peer-reviewed, accepted, and endorsed by the National Council of Professors of Educational Administration as a significant contribution to the scholarship and practice of school administration and K-12 education.

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The need to recruit, prepare, and develop the next generation of educational leaders challenges states and localities everywhere. The complex demands of current educational reform initiatives have been articulated in national and state reports detailing the changing conditions of schools and provide compelling evidence for the necessity of new abilities and sensibilities at all levels of the profession. This article reports on research which examined four locations along the career continuum of school principals in Minnesota: 1) recruitment and selection, 2) university preparation programs, 3) licensing and certification, and 4) continuing professional development. We also include 18 specific policy recommendations.

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Introduction

Recruitment, preparation, and development of the next generation of education leaders are a challenge for states and localities across the country. The complex demands of current educational reform initiatives have been articulated in national and state reports detailing the changing conditions of schools and provide compelling evidence for the necessity of new abilities and sensibilities at all levels of the profession (Darling-Hammond, LaPointe, Meyerson, Orr, & Cohen, 2007; Leithwood, Seashore Louis, Anderson & Wahlstrom, 2004; Pont, Nusche, & Moorman, 2008). In response, states have recognized that they bear responsibility to design and nurture the pipeline through which future educational leaders will emerge. This research attempts to describe some of the challenges faced in one state (Minnesota) by listening to the voices of practitioners and stakeholders, and by exploring their understandings of the education workplace. In this manuscript, we utilize our narrative inquiry into principals and other stakeholder perspectives to articulate the experiences of school leaders at a time of new curricular requirements, increasing diversity, and greater demands for accountability and to provide recommendations for a coherently designed pathway for school leadership.

Our research and report on principal preparation and development in Minnesota challenges educational leaders to move away from a command-and-control approach. We articulate principal pipeline policies that emphasize responsibility for stewardship and transformative experiences associated with inquiry into human-centered systems. The experiences described foster recognition of the need for individual and collective learning through collaborative processes that include meaningful experiences that build a professional community of learners (Danzig, 2009; Spillane & Seashore Louis, 2002). The development of professional communities in schools creates the foundation for transformative experiences and systemic change. Spillane and Seashore Louis (2002) argue that one factor in creating a community of learners is social trust, which provides a "foundation on which collaboration, reflective dialogue, and deprivatization of practice can occur" (p. 94). In a community of learners, no single person is expected to master everything. The entire school or institution, rather than a single person, works to build what might be described as collective and collaborative expertise.

Methods

Specifically, this article reports on research which examined four locations along the career continuum of school principals in Minnesota: 1) recruitment and selection, 2) university preparation programs, 3) licensing and certification, and 4) continuing professional development. The research is based on interviews with Minnesota educators and stakeholders followed by literature review to identify key issues and best practices related to each location across the career continuum of school principals. The research moved through the four distinct stages, each of which is described in greater detail in the final report (Danzig, Black, Donofrio, Fernandez, & Martin, 2012).

Research was conducted as result of a contract awarded by the St. Paul Foundation in support of the Minnesota Board of School Administrators (BOSA). Upon awarding of the contract, the principal investigator and team members met with the Executive Director of BOSA, members of the BOSA Collaborative (which included

Administrators, University Faculty, and Teacher leaders), and leadership from the Minnesota Department of Education, and the St. Paul Foundation. Key strategies were developed and interview protocols for different respondent groups were prepared concerning principal recruitment and selection, preparation, licensure, and professional development. During the last week of November 2011, a team of five researchers conducted approximately 30 interviews with individuals and groups of one to five respondents who were identified and recruited through the Minnesota Board of School Administrators. Initial interviews were conducted at the Minnesota Department of Education, while subsequent interviews were conducted by phone or in person (when possible) with individuals identified as having particular expertise or knowledge in one of the four areas. Interviews were tape recorded and transcribed for analysis. Following transcriptions, all interviews were coded and selected text was excerpted for possible inclusion into the final report. A series of narratives were written to capture and reflect the major themes that were part of these conversations.

The majority of interview participants were solicited by the Minnesota Board of School Administrators, with emails sent to various principal groups and professional organizations. Additional interviews were held with people named as important education leaders in Minnesota by the BOSA, the St. Paul Foundation, and other respondents during the interviews. The initial emails inviting people to be interviewed were sent by the BOSA and included: 1) BOSA Collaborative members (university faculty and other higher education administrators), 2) BOSA Board members, 3) principals, 4) superintendents, 5) Minnesota administrator professional association leaders (Minnesota Elementary School Principals Association (MESPA), Minnesota Association of Secondary School Principals (MASSP), Minnesota Association of School Administrators (MASA), 6) charter school directors, administrators, and advocates,7) Minnesota community foundation leaders (i.e. Bush Foundation), 8) executives with private leadership development programs (i.e., *New Leaders*), 9) parents, 10) teacher leaders and union representatives, 11) school board members, 12) elected state legislators and U.S. Congressional staff, and 13) Minnesota state Department of Education officials. More detailed information on methods may be found at: http://spa.asu.edu/files/pdf/faculty/prncplpthwysappx.pdf/view.

Recruitment and Selection of Principals

Both individual decisions and system structures affect the choices of potential principals and therefore must be considered by school districts and preparation programs who desire to attract and select the most qualified principal candidates (Leithwood & Riehl, 2003; Myong, Loeb, & Hornig, 2011; Wallace Foundation, 2012). Challenges to recruitment and selection of principals included two contexts in which the capacities and responsibilities of principals are enacted: state standards and local district culture.

Targeted Recruitment of Particularized Skills and Experiences

The participants' responses indicated that leadership preparation programs could better contribute to the preparation of school leaders in three ways: 1) Reach agreement about and identify the desired skills and experiences of the applicants for entry into leadership preparation programs. 2) Apply these criteria to the recruitment and selection processes. 3) Work closely with schools and districts that employ graduates, to ensure that graduates are successful in finding jobs for which they have been prepared. These combined efforts would help teachers and others thinking about entering school administration gain a richer understanding of what it means to be a school administrator earlier on in their careers, and learn what is required to qualify for entry into leadership preparation programs. The interviews and literature review in this section also raise the possibility of greater concern for social responsibility that is part of principals' work, and an *ethic of care* as a priority for school leadership in the 21st century.

Targeted Recruitment of Women and Teachers of Color Into the Principalship

Approximately 13-15% of teachers in Minnesota schools are teachers of color and the percentage of principal licenses issued to candidates of color during the past five years is even lower. Criticisms related to an underrepresentation of women and minority applicants were expressed by multiple respondents, who stated that many of the teachers most often encouraged to enter principal licensure programs looked very much like the recommending principals and that an 'old boy network' limits new talent, particularly for women and teachers of color. Without specific efforts to the contrary, self-selection and sponsorship will continue to contribute to the reproduction of a largely white population of Minnesota school principals.

Demands on Principals are Limiting Entry in the Pathway

Respondents suggested that the principal's job has become less manageable given time, money, and resource constraints, resulting in lower satisfaction and greater dissatisfaction. Principals said that their work inside of schools changed significantly over the last 10 years with new state and federal mandates, greater demands for accountability, and the constant pressure of school reform initiatives. Changing external conditions such as demographic shifts, widening achievement and technology gaps, funding disparities, and social, political, and economic conditions of poverty were also mentioned as factors contributing to overall reduction in work satisfaction.

Principal Recruitment: Mentors Encourage Potential Future Leaders

Recruiting school principals is a multi-step process that includes identifying potential candidates, encouraging them to pursue preparation coursework that leads to licensure, and following through with the preparation-program selection process. From the start of these steps, it is often the case that individuals who pursue the principalship have done so based on a recommendation or suggestion made by another individual within the educational setting. This may include a current principal, assistant principal, or other teachers who recognize leadership qualities in their colleagues.

Self-Selection and Identification

Teachers are often attracted to the principal position because of an interest in influencing and improving education within the school and education policy more generally. This interest may evolve from demonstrated leadership within the classroom and evolve into work outside the classroom which broadens an individual's leadership skills. Factoring in the decision choices of potential principal candidates is a critical first step in attracting and retaining qualified principal candidates. School districts have the ability to use what is known about succession management to "grow their own" principals. The downside to this policy is that it can lead to reproduction of like candidates, as principals tend to promote others who look like them. If selection is accomplished with greater attention to diversity, it is also an opportunity to engage others not typically represented in the principal's role.

To respond to the challenges raised in the research related to recruitment and selection, we provide four recommendations:

1. Devise programs/processes to ensure efforts to recruit principal candidates of color. Pilot programs with state support for districts utilizing positions such as Teacher on Special Assignment and other full time administrative positions.
2. Support organizational and distributed leadership, not just principal leadership, by supporting pathways for teachers to continue to serve in leadership roles without leaving the classroom. This may entail support for salary scale credit of master's degrees in educational leadership/administration.
3. Support regional and metropolitan collaborations across school districts, universities, state agencies, and professional organizations to recruit principal candidates in shortage areas.
4. Give greater weight to face-to-face screening and selection of applicants, as interviews serve as indications of commitment on the part of applicants and institutions to select the most qualified candidates; it also allows university programs to evaluate the strengths and weaknesses of applicants first hand, and devise learning strategies based on what applicants bring from their previous experiences.

Principal Preparation

Despite the criticisms attributed to preparation program content and structure among respondents, there was overwhelming recognition of the value and importance of sustaining preparation programs and reforming them to better align with the challenges of contemporary school environments. Programs with greater quality tend to be more selective in recruitment, including a focus on high-potential candidates with demonstrated classroom leadership and dispositions and skills that align with preparation program standards (Davis, Darling-Hammond, LaPointe, & Meyerson , 2005; Fuller, Young, & Baker, 2011).

Researchers have identified specific and well articulated program components that are found in effective programs in school administration, which include: 1) unified program theory, 2) standards-based curriculum, 3) candidate recruitment and selection, 4) engaging program content, 5) active instruction, 6) quality internship, 7) cohort structure and other supports, 8) program organization, 9) candidate assessment and program evaluation, 10) knowledgeable and competent faculty, 11) faculty professional development, and 12) collaboration (Orr, 2011; Peterson, 2002; Sanders & Simpson, 2005). Of particular significance are well designed and conceptually supported high-quality internship experiences which enhance graduates' leadership skills, reflectiveness, and career intentions to become principals or school leaders (Perez, Uline, Jonson, James-Ward, & Basom, 2011).

Explicit Application of Concepts in a Timely Fashion

In general, there was greater criticism of programs and coursework when the application of theory to practice was not explicit. These connections may require greater planning, experience and expertise (Perez, et. al, 2011). Many principals also expressed concern over the gap between the time that licensure program courses were taken and the opportunity to do administrative work, as they pointed to many years of separation between the time when courses were taken and their first full-time administrative assignments.

Emotional Management and Resiliency

A second topic area that was mentioned by the principals related to emotional knowledge. There was agreement that principals need skills related to working with large numbers of people in bureaucratic settings and the emotional costs of the work. Balancing professional and personal life and avoiding professional burnout were part of managing emotional work of the principal. A few principals also said that they needed to be stronger advocates for children and families, and that their pre-service programs covered little in this area.

Criticism of Internship Experiences

The responding principals criticized the internship experiences. Many reported that their site mentor had received no formal training, nor did they see evidence of collaboration between the mentor and university program. Principals also noted other problems related to the internship; first and foremost was the concern that it was almost impossible to experience a high quality administrative learning experience while still working full-time as a teacher. The leaders of the professional associations also suggested that more relevant course connections, specific to the events experienced during the internship, were needed. They expressed concern that the internship lacked consistency from one licensure program to the next, and that almost all activities or time spent counted towards the required hours. University faculty members also talked about their concerns with the internships and wide variations among individuals and within and across programs. As detailed by the principals, university faculty members also understood that interns are typically full-time teachers responsible for classroom instruction, and as a result internship hours were accomplished in addition to normal teaching responsibilities.
Considering these findings, we put forth the following recommendations:

1. Require reflective practice in regards to learning that best serves a preparation mission agreed upon by faculty and district partners that is tied to and measured through standards.
2. Require university preparation programs to schedule annual reviews of assessment data, i.e., student evaluations, peer evaluations, accreditation reviews, etc. with a group of practicing principals and/or principal associations for program improvement.
3. Require university coursework in working with diverse populations.
4. Provide formal training and approval of site mentors to work with interns and require mentoring experience with numerous individuals with differing expertise.
5. Begin internships early in the graduate program to ensure coursework is taken while leading as an intern and applying what is learned in school settings.
6. Seek alternative methods for interns to have release time from classroom duties to focus on the internship experience.
7. Require a significant amount of the internship to be concerned with meaningful leadership activities, including leading a significant action research project rather than simply carrying out duties.
8. When feasible, require part of the internship to be undertaken in schools with diverse populations-this can be coordinated on a local and regional basis by universities, regional professional organizations, and the applicable state agencies.

Principal Licensure: Interview and Literature Review Findings

The interviews and literature review related to principal licensure indicated broad consensus for the view that the work of principals in the 21st century was becoming more complex. Some respondents viewed the importance of national and state standards as a way to focus attention on what is important in education, and what it means to educate children in 21st century schools. These respondents were critical of slogans such as *racing to the top* and *maximizing student achievement* and viewed the principals' work in collaboration with others, less as an instructional leader and more as an experienced colleague with deep expertise in multiple areas including teaching and learning, curriculum instruction, educational equity, and education policy. Their comments indicated a deeper concern for the human conditions that are negotiated in classrooms and schools and viewed leadership standards and licensing requirements as providing broad policy directions to guide the work of principals, in relation to the work of others, including students, teachers, parents, and community members.

Reducing the Gap Between Coursework and Experience

Whereas programs in many states have 33-36 hour Masters programs requirements for initial educational leadership licensure (Vistaska-Shelton, 2009), we found that Minnesota had a 60 hour credit rule for initial certification. Many certified principals earned master' degrees in areas outside of educational leadership and then sought certification through additional hours in a sate-approved educational leadership program to reach the 60 credit hour mark. Principals in general supported requirements beyond a master's degree for initial principal licensure because they felt that principals needed more time to prepare for the job. They also supported the need for successful teaching experience as an expectation for applicants and for accomplishing the principals' work. They were less supportive of allowing all masters' degrees to be counted equally as part of the licensure program requirements. They preferred to limit the acceptable master's degrees to areas more connected to teaching and learning, and specifically referenced graduate degrees in educational leadership, school administration, curriculum and instruction, guidance and counseling, etc. Others were more critical of rules that required principals to complete a master's degree plus additional 30-36 credit hours in educational administration as part of licensure requirements. Respondents were also critical of the gap between coursework, internship experiences, and first full time administrative positions, which limited the learning that comes from an integration of theory and practice.

Alignment of Teacher and Principal Certification Policies

Teachers represent the overwhelming majority in the pool of principal candidates. Finding ways in which principal and teacher licensure overlap and align would help focus attention on issues related to principal licensure and highlight similarities in the concerns of teachers and administrators. Respondents proposed that having discussions along the lines of tiered licensure would be "refreshing" and that better alignment between teacher and principal licensure would be "well received." One question that was raised, though unanswered, was how a licensing structure could reward excellence in the classroom without pushing excelling teachers out of the classroom into administration. Teachers want some say over who becomes their principal and who leads their schools, and the idea of principals motivating teachers should be based on classroom experience and expertise. Taking great teachers out of the classroom to play an administrative leadership role does not seem to be the only way that principal leadership should evolve over time. Respondent interviews and the literature review support a view of distributed leadership and shared responsibility across multiple participants in an education system that is designed to serve the needs of children. Overlap is noted among the various leadership standards and core competencies that are referenced in the Interstate School Leaders Licensure Consortium (ISLLC) and Educational Leadership Constituent Council (ELCC) standards, and the individual state standards or competencies. State and national standards are often vague and lack context and site specificity. National standards and state competency areas, however, are deemed useful as a way to foster agreement on what is most important for schools to accomplish and help to align the definitions of practice for administrators (and teachers) across schools, districts, and state licensing agencies.

Accountability and Access

Participants wanted to know more about the preparation programs beyond local recognition-they wanted to be able to begin to access program quality when making hiring decisions. In addition, a significant minority of participants argued for alternative pathways to the principalship.

Our research in Minnesota led us to four recommendations submitted to the Minnesota Board of School Administrators:

1. Revise the 60 credit hour rule to allow 36 credit hour principal preparation programs. Use additional needed hours (may be less than 60) in stages or tiesr where practicing administrators are applying new learning on the job.
2. Review current state standards to ensure alignment with new ELCC Standards.
3. As part of reporting on licensure, require that the licensing agency collect and report on multiple indicators of program performances including: level of participation and subscription, faculty expertise, completion and placement rates, location placements after 1 and 5 years, and other formative and summative assessments in use.
4. Maintain a small alternative pathway to attend to local needs and provide added flexibility without bypassing established routes.

Professional Development and Tiered Licensure

Aspiring principals are rarely able to learn all that takes place in the job before becoming a practicing principal. After a principal completes a preparation program, obtains certification or licensure, and is hired in a principal role, continued active learning becomes part of the process of performing the job of principal. Professional development and participation in advanced learning such as the education doctorate are needed to equip principals with on-going and significant learning that advance education practice.

Need for a System of Coordinated Professional Development

The principals interviewed said that coordinated practices related to continued professional development were sorely needed. Principals felt isolated and on their own to find the kinds of training needed to be more effective on the job. The principals from the metro areas appeared to have more opportunities and funding for professional development opportunities than rural principals. As a group, the principals were not aware of on-going collaborative efforts among school districts, universities, agencies, or professional associations, to meet their professional development needs. They were particularly critical of a "one size fits all" mentality of some of the professional development that they had experienced. The principals expressed needs related to specific skills associated with leading schools with diverse student population, working in communities in which languages other than English were spoken at home, and for the other challenges raised by diversity, such as increasing social cohesion among students in schools.

Tensions Between the Immediate and Long-Term Needs

Professional development provides principals with the opportunities to continue to learn and apply new learning on the job. While principals often report their best learning takes place on the job, there are a number of obstacles that can occur in realizing professional development experiences. Hectic schedules bias principals towards "solution-oriented learning" and prioritizes the needs of immediate problems. Given this challenge to balance immediate learning and application that takes place in response to specific problems or issues with the long-term development of school leadership and practice, principals are challenged to balance professional development opportunities with short and long-term emphasis. Given expectations for accountability and current mandates, the challenge is to find ways to engage in professional development that involves reflection, innovation, and risk-taking actions, beyond compliance. As a result, initiatives to expand professional development opportunities for principals must overcome some of the challenges of the job that emphasize immediacy over longevity.

Through professional development programs and other learning initiatives, principals are able to engage in active learning that strengthens their ability to respond to the needs of the job of principal beyond what is learned in a preparation program. Active learning takes place through the everyday experiences of being a principal, while structured professional development programs aim to formalize active learning and therefore may differ depending on the school district and even the school. Professional development may also be organized differently depending on the connection such programming has to the renewing of licensure, systems of evaluation, and even the degree to which districts support or prescribe specific professional development activities. More specifically, states are increasingly supporting the continuation of learning and professional development in general, as well as through policies encompassed in certification and licensure.

Our research on tiered licensure and professional development resulted in multiple recommendations being made, all of which document the need for collaboration among the various groups responsible for the education, licensing, and professional development of principals;

1. Create a working body of stakeholders, i.e., State Department of Education and state professional organization affiliates, and University professors to jointly design and implement long-term aspiring administrator workshops, continuing professional development programs, mentoring programs, academies, etc.
2. Provide school district mentors who collaborate with university programs and professional organizations in order to support individuals in the first year of their administrative career.
3. Provide support to principals in creating school based administrative teams in order to develop distributive leadership and lesson the stress on beginning principals.
4. Develop tiered licensing pathways to honor multiple ways for achieving and demonstrating expertise.

Conclusion

Our research in Minnesota on the principal pipeline indicates variation in the views of principals themselves and among the various education stakeholders and constituent groups in Minnesota. Changing conditions at the local, state, and national levels have made the job requirements of the principal more challenging and difficult to place within a single frame. Shifting demographics, increased demands on schools, resource constraints, and new accountability mandates, have also made the principal's job more complex, prompting considerations for how to improve the performances of principals and even whether or not talented individuals want to enter the profession in the first place. In spite of these concerns and qualifications, we feel that a systemic approach to principal pipeline development, supported from the bottom up, emerged from the data which combine insights taken from analyzing local contexts, respondent interviews, and literature review on research and practice. This research suggests that professional groups and state policy makers in all states should continue the work of further developing a coherent set of policies developed out of respect for the perspectives of current educational leaders and stakeholders, rather than imposed from above. This will be an arduous undertaking, but one much more likely to highlight the successes and challenges of dedicated professionals who all too often and easily are called to task by "reformers" far removed from the lived experiences of school leaders and the people who help to support and prepare them (Spring, 2011). The difficult and collaborative work of creating pathways for a lifetime of performance for school principals has begun and deserves continuing support by multiple researchers and practitioners.

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