

Recruitment and Selection: Meeting the Leadership Shortage in One Large Canadian School District

by [Anthony H. Normore](#), Florida International University

Introduction

Despite the millions of dollars invested in leadership development programs across North America, an increasing shortage of adequately prepared administrators continues to loom in face of challenges confronting public schools (Canadian Association of Principals, 1999; Educational Research Service, 1999, 2000). Developing a more comprehensive source of information about barriers to attracting good candidates and about ways in which school districts, professional associations, and institutions of higher education can contribute to ensuring that these candidates are prepared and ready to move into leadership positions is an investment that would pay high dividends to our public schools and the children they serve (Bartel, 1994; Begley, 2000; Daresh, 1997; Dufour, 2001). Due to the lack of interest in the administrator role, and inadequate leadership preparation of individuals within the ranks, school districts report challenges in recruitment and selection processes for school leaders (Grimmett & Echols, 2000; Leithwood & Duke, 1999; Leithwood, Jantzi, & Steinback, 1999; Seyfarth, 2002).

It is not surprising to find a parallel concern for the recruitment and selection process of school administrators due to the continuing recognition of the importance of the school principal. In the past, it was relatively easy to attract teachers into the ranks of school administrators because male educators saw administration as a normal part of career advancement. Traditionally, if teachers wanted to earn more money, achieve higher status, or earn greater respect, they would leave the classroom and move toward a principalship or some other administrative role (Carlson, 1972; Stout, 1973; Warren, 1989; Weindling, 1992; Weindling & Earley, 1995; Winter & Dunaway, 1997). Today, fewer teachers are likely to see administration as a way to improve their salaries, prestige, or respect among other colleagues. The complexities, changing demands and expectations within administrative roles have caused a shortage in applicant pools. Consequently, an urgent need for district personnel to deliberately invest time, energy, and money in developing good recruitment practices and policies as a way to attract more qualified leaders of education is at the fore (Baltzell & Dentler, 1992; Coffin & Leithwood, 2000; ERS, 2000; Herman, 1994; Normore, 2001; Rebore, 1992).

The purpose of this study was to investigate a recruitment and selection program used to attract and retain aspiring and practicing school administrators in North Western School District (pseudonym) - a large urban Canadian school district in Ontario. The district recently developed and implemented a recruitment and selection program in attempts to meet the leadership shortage for its schools. For purposes of the article, recruitment and selection refers to the processes and strategies school districts engage in to attract future leaders. The article will focus on: (a) a description of the recruitment and selection efforts, and; (b) perspectives from the participants about the process and its effectiveness, followed by a discussion. An analysis of the findings is presented and linked to the literature. Implications for practice and policy are discussed.

Framework

Policymakers and "education engineers" have spent more than two decades looking for "magic bullets" that fix schools. Crews & Weakley (1995) stated:

Show me a good school and I'll show you a good school leader...when you poke into the inner workings of a successful school, you will find-without fail---a skillful leader who understands how to transform educational practice, not just transact educational business (p. 5).

In 1992, a special report from the National Association of Secondary School Principals called for "all stakeholders to unite in a rational attack on the common problems associated with the recruitment, identification, selection, preparation, and development of school administrators" (p.34). Since that call major efforts have resulted in revisiting the role of school leaders to determine ways for development of a knowledge and skill base for the preparation of future school administrator (Thompson, 1993; Van Berkum, Richardson, & Lane, 1994). Although the value and importance of school administrators are well-known in the literature it warrants reiteration.

Role of the school administrator: changing demands and expectations

The role of the principal in successful schools has transcended the traditional notion of functional management,

power, behaviour style, and instructional leadership. Today's principals face more complex expectations forged by a very different student population and a new generation dissatisfied with the educational status quo. At a time when many view the schools as one of the few intact social organizations, students arrive with very different attitudes, motivations, and needs than students of generations past (Ashby & Krug, 1998; Victor, 2001). Research indicate that successful schools have principals who establish a productive and professional school culture, have a clear vision, are knowledgeable about teaching and learning, and protect schools from demands that make it difficult for schools to operate on a professional basis (Beeson & Matthews, 1992; Daresh, 2000; Hall & Mani, 1989; Hall & Mani, 1992; Murphy, Beck, Crawford, Hodges & McGaughy, 2000; Renihan, 1999; Sergiovanni, 2001; Tekeste, 1996). Principals in less successful schools seem to perceive their role to be more that of a middle manager (Cascader, 1998) while principals in highly successful schools view themselves as educational leaders who contribute heavily to school improvement and school effectiveness (Hallinger, 1996; Hallinger & Heck, 1998). Peterson (1999) states that effective principals are vital to successful restructuring, to change and improvement (Fullan, 1995, 1998, 2000), and are clear on expectations for student learning (Schlechy, 1990).

Expectations of the principal's role include instructional leader, disciplinarian, supervisor, fundraiser, public relations expert and fiscal manager (Dufour, 2001; Hewitt, 1988; Keedy, 1992; Lyons, 1999; Nye, 2000; Sackney, 1991). More accountability and responsibility have been added to the job over the years causing some of the best principals to be bogged down to the extent that they have lost much of their leadership, rather than management, quality (Benson, 2001; Boesse, 1989; Chirichello, 2001; George, 2000a, 2000b; Institute of Educational Leadership, 2000). One area of significance for effective leadership in schools focuses on opportunities to engage in knowledge construction and skill development in leadership preparation.

Knowledge and Skills

In response to the need for a current image of the administrator role, some staff developers and researchers have proposed a leadership profile resource to support principal training and preparation that conforms to new knowledge, skills, functions and current expectations (Begley, 2000; Hallinger & Heck, 1998; Johnson, 2001). It seems appropriate that these dimensions become an integral part of the recruitment and selection process of school administrators. Begley (2000) explored different dimensions of leadership profiles of professional practice as a foundation for expert school leadership practices. The key dimensions of knowledgeable school leadership as outlined by Begley (2000) include the principal as manager, program leader and learning facilitator, school-community facilitator, visionary, and problem-solver. Understanding these dimensions is key to effective leadership.

According to some researchers some school districts have engaged in portfolio development with aspiring and practicing school administrators and have made it a part of their professional development training and ongoing renewal strategies (Daresh & Playko, 1992) that involve peer sharing, reflective activities, and self-assessment of progress. The purpose of the portfolio is to assist in the shaping of effective aspiring and practicing administrators to create stronger schools by using it as a professional tool and a performance review tool (Miklos, 1988; Miller & Kantrov, 1998; Normore, 2001). This appears to have promise and could likely attract more candidates to the pipeline for school administration as it prepares them for the selection process.

Attracting, Screening and Identifying

Effective recruitment and selection of school administrators continue to be one of the more challenging human resource tasks in educational organizations (McCarthy, 1999; Pounder & Young, 1996; Pounder & Merrill, 2001). Castetter and Young (2000) suggest that, as competition increases for filling administrative vacancies, finding qualified, talented personnel to conduct the work of educational systems requires a recruitment process that must be an extensive and aggressive program directed toward placing and keeping a qualified and satisfied individual. Researchers indicate that effective recruitment practices and policies enable school boards to find the best candidate for their schools (Caldwell & Tymko, 1990; Castetter & Young, 2000; Castallo, Fletcher, Rossetti & Sekowski, 1992; Herman, 1994; Rebores, 2001).

The personnel function becomes especially important when recruiting and selecting new administrators. A critical role for human resource management is how to elicit positive reactions from candidates when discussing administrative roles (Castetter & Young, 2000; Castallo et al., 1994; Herman, 1994). When opportunities are presented to school personnel to move towards careers in administration (i.e., tapping shoulders of potential candidates), often a negative reaction occurs (Pounder & Merrill, 2001; Seyfarth, 1999). People without school administrative experiences have negative perceptions and views of the role of the school administrator. In attempts to attract and support individuals to the school administrator's position it is necessary to identify what barriers prevent potential candidates from applying to the pool. Job complexity and workload are perceived by

school districts as the two considerations having had the greatest impact on the number of applicants for administrative positions (Renihan, 1999; Robinson, 2000). Other factors include poor remuneration as it relates to demands and expectations of the job and lack of resources and support structures in place (Castetter & Young, 2000). Many highly qualified, competent, and talented teachers dismiss careers in administration because they do not want to sit in an office all day, hassle teachers, discipline students, work with irate parents, or push paper—all activities frequently associated with the stereotypical role of the school administrator. Until some alternative image is understood, or at least some support and resources put in place, a problem of pre-screening and identification will not likely improve.

Common Recruitment Procedures for School Administrators

Most school districts have two pools of candidates from which to recruit: internal and external (Castetter & Young, 2000; Herman, 1994; Rebore, 2001). If there are enough qualified candidates internally, external recruitment may not be needed. Recruitment activities involve organizing staff, generating applicant pools, matching individual talents with interests and opportunities, and adjusting and developing personnel (Castetter, 1992, p.109). According to Rebore (2001) recruitment practices are affected by factors in the school division and its community including size of school district, geographical area, other employment conditions in the community, working conditions, salary levels, fringe benefits, and fluctuation in student population. It has been demonstrated that well-designed recruiting programs that pay attention to these factors result in greater employee commitment, high productivity, and higher quality of work (Castetter, 1992, p. 112). By recruiting high quality school administrators, schools become more effective and, therefore, the goal of excellence is more attainable (Lezotte & Peterson, 1991; Renihan, 1999; Sackney, 1991). It is especially important to consider how the demands of the position, expectations, and responsibilities of school administrators are evolving in order to recruit and select the appropriate administrators.

Selection Procedures for School Administrators

The selection process is the key activity wherein decisions are made about which personnel will fill positions that become vacant (Castetter, 1992, pg. 147). Selection requires a position-matching plan designed to link available personnel with the position requirements. Selection procedures are usually structured around information relating to the work history of the candidates and their education and training (Lipham, Rankin, & Hoeh, 1985; Tekeste, 1996). Interestingly, some research (e.g., Bales, 1997) indicate that the confidence school districts may have in their administration training programs does not ensure that top notch individuals will be selected. Additionally, according to Haller, Brent and McNamara (1997), "graduate programs in educational administration seem to have little or no influence on the attributes that characterize effective schools" (p. 227).

Some of the selection procedures include resumes, pre-screening interviews often done by telephone, employee testing, reference checks and consulting services (Anderson, 1988; Baltzell & Dentler, 1992; Castetter & Young, 2000; Herman, 1994; Stout, 1973). Ross (1989) observed that for some school districts, routinely favouring the selection of administrative applicants with experience in curriculum consulting roles is the most promising. According to the National Association of Secondary School Principals (ERS, 1999) the selection of school administrators needs to be based on "qualities of leadership rooted in established knowledge, skills and professional growth that result in dedication to good instructional practice and learning" (p. 100). It means that an appointee should already "have established his or her credentials or shows promise of performing as a leader once in the post" (ERS, 1999, p.101). Furthermore, professional development of administrators enhances growth and integrity if planned with the dynamics of the administrative career and stages of development in mind (Pounder & Merrill, 2001). "Age, stage of career, life's experiences... make up the total person" (Fullan, 2000, p.27) and generally a decision to enter into administration occurs in mid-career (Hargreaves & Fullan, 1999).

Ontario education context: principals' qualifications

For purposes of understanding boundaries of this research it is important to understand the contexts of Canadian education. While the contexts in terms of governance structures between American and Canadian education may be somewhat different in nature it seems appropriate to reiterate that there is no federal presence in education in Canada, except for aboriginal and higher education. Each province has its own control over education. Principals in Ontario at this time must hold, as per Regulation 184/97 of the Ontario College of Teacher's Act of 1996, principals' qualifications. This is open to two different groups of teachers: those who meet the Ontario prerequisites and want the Ontario College of Teacher's accreditation, and those who are ineligible for accreditation but who require principal's preparation for their job. Certified teachers in Ontario who want to obtain accreditation from the Ontario College of Teachers to become school administrators must make the following prerequisites:

- * an acceptable university undergraduate degree;
- * 5 years of teaching experience;
- * qualifications in three teaching divisions, one of which must be the Intermediate division, two specialist qualifications; or
- * a Master's degree or its equivalent; or
- * one specialist qualification and one-half (five courses) of a Master's degree.

After completing these requirements, teachers are eligible to have this qualification entered on their Ontario Certificate of Qualification, with the Ontario College of Teachers. This program qualifies them to be appointed to the position of principal or vice-principal in the public education system in Ontario (Canadian Education Center, 2002). While Ontario requires prospective principals to have both a graduate degree and provincial certification programs, most provinces in Canada do not with the exception of New Brunswick and Manitoba. However, nearly all states in the U.S. have certification requirements. Moreover, within provinces, school districts have considerable latitude regarding principal preparation programs.

In the past some school boards in Ontario relied upon the teachers' federations to provide leadership training for aspiring administrators. It was a mutually agreeable relationship that provided the best training possible for future leaders and allowed for the selection of principals from within the ranks. This changed in 1997 with the removal of the principals and vice principals from the federation. There are no longer local leadership components within the teachers' federations of Ontario. In addition, many school boards did not have practices in place for the purposes of recruiting administrators. Present practice guidelines deal only with the selection process. The policies deal with some or all of the following areas: advertising of positions, criteria for selection, composition of the selection committee, application procedure, selection process, short lists, preparation for the interview, career planning and projected vacancies and the weight of the interview and summary (Normore, 2001).

Research Methods

This study adopted a case study design. The design was selected because of the exploratory nature of the inquiry (Merriam, 1998; Stake, 1995; Yin, 1994). Qualitative procedures were used to collect data, including semi-structured interviews, observation/fieldnotes, and document analyses. Data were gathered during the 2000-01 school year. North Western School District was in its initial stages of implementing recruitment and selection strategies as part of their leadership planning efforts to meet the school leadership shortage in the province. Consistent with standards associated with naturalistic inquiry, all data were coded, and the constant-comparative method was used involving inductive analyses simultaneous to data collection (Glaser & Strauss, 1967; Glesne & Peshkin, 1992; Miles & Huberman, 1994; Strauss & Corbin, 1998).

Data Collection

The primary data collection procedures included semi-structured and focus group interviews. Supplementary sources included documents, anecdotal data, and reflections. Data were collected over a period of eight months during 2000-2001. Twenty-four site visits were conducted. The site visits included seven interview visits and seventeen observations (i.e., training sessions, workshops, in-services). The use of a combination of observations, interviewing (both focus group and individual) and document analysis, allowed for validation and cross-checking of findings (Patton, 1998, p. 244). A journal of field notes was used to record impressions and observations during the research. The element of structure from the conceptual framework and the open-ended dimension allowed for the mining of new data and openness to fresh observations and new concepts (Merriam, 1998).

Semi-structured interviews. Six individual interviews were conducted in total: district director, superintendents and educational staff development officers. Three focus group interviews (5 participants for each group with a mix of male and female) were conducted with principals, vice-principals and aspiring administrators. For purposes of inclusion and diversity the sample of participants was based on the following set of criteria: (a) panel (elementary, secondary); (b) setting (rural, urban); (c) gender, and; (d) stage of development (candidate, vice principal, principal).

Observations and Field Notes. Seventeen observations were conducted. During each round of data collection

central office was toured and informal conversations were held with different individuals. Observations included workshops and training sessions, conferences, and meetings. These unstructured observations and conversations with school administrators and central office personnel provided an opportunity to gain an in-depth understanding of the school districts' culture and history (Wolcott, 1988).

Document analyses. Documents were a third source of data and provided essential information. During each site visit pertinent documents related to district demographics, leadership development workshop handouts and materials, recruitment and selection protocols, school district reports, memos, marketing materials, and district accountability reports were collected and reviewed.

Data Analysis

Progressive data analysis was conducted during data collection to determine the need for further probes and gave direction for follow up in subsequent site visits. Interviews were transcribed. All data (interviews, observations, and documents) were coded by listing themes and concepts which related to the conceptual framework. Multiple readings yielded themes and patterns within the case. Matrices were developed for each perspective (senior administrator, candidate, vice principal, principal). Constant comparison of the data to the framework, revisiting the literature, as well as reorganizing and combining subsets of responses produced overarching categories. The combination of three data sources and four perspectives allowed for triangulation.

The Case of the North Western School District

The school district is one of the largest in Ontario with just under 65,000 students in approximately 100 elementary schools and a little under 20 secondary schools. There are approximately 200 school administrators and 6,000 employees in total. The majority of schools are in urban areas; 25% of the schools are in small, rural towns. Diversity in the student population is flourishing as recent arrivals flow out to the area from a major nearby city. The school system is organized into several geographical areas and 15 families (a secondary school and feeder schools) with a superintendent responsible for each area.

Nature of recruitment and selection of school administrators

The school district's leadership steering committee (i.e. practicing school administrators and senior administrators) collaborated with administrators over a period of three years (since 1998) in developing a leadership profile and a plan for leadership development and succession planning. The recruitment and selection project, headed by an experienced principal within the district, was part of the leadership development process and based on several descriptors from the leadership profile document: *leader, learner, manager, and communicator*. When asked to describe the purpose of recruitment and selection, one senior administrator stated:

The recruitment process is really a deliberate attempt to give a flavour of what the job would be like as an administrator. It's a supply and demand scenario where the demand far exceeds the supply of individuals ready or even interested to fill the vacancies that are coming at us. A lot of people have said they would not have been interested if our recruitment activities were not in place.

A vice-principal explained what the drawing features were in the recruitment program that stimulated his/her interest:

Knowing that there is some training at the board level at no personal cost has been really the deciding factor for me to becoming an administrator.

Another vice-principal was happy that the recruitment process was open to anybody interested in pursuing the role of administration:

There is no pre-selection...so when they say recruitment it means this is open to everybody-including those who want to self-select.

A senior administrator explained his viewpoint on recruitment:

We do everything in our power through the recruitment program to help prepare them for the selection process by introducing them to preparation and training activities such as mentoring

and job-shadowing opportunities. This draws a fair number of candidates for vice-principal pool at elementary grades. We still have a shortage in our elementary schools but not in our secondary schools.

There are five areas implemented in the district's leadership development plan: *Recruitment, PAR Selection, Training, Professional Development, and Career/Professional Growth Portfolio*. In each of these five areas there are organized teams led by a cross section of elementary and secondary principals and vice-principals (District Document). The program is overseen by the superintendent responsible for leadership development. Each team is responsible for its own activities. According to one vice-principal, "it has moved away from being superintendent directed to administrator owned and lead".

Recruitment. The teachers who are interest in educational leadership and are considering a PAR position (Position of Added Responsibilities) are encouraged to join the steering committee in this new board initiative. They became part of a study group consisting of four to six teachers led by a facilitator who was a practicing administrator. Each group is responsible for its own learning with a broad agenda consisting of an examination of educational issues and case studies. Facilitators help by suggesting topics and speakers designed to enhance each member's personal vision of leadership. In addition, workshops are offered throughout the year. These workshops are opened to all facilitator groups. Throughout this initiative, participants can gain a better understanding of the application process for the vice-principal pools.

The recruitment process involves a mentoring partnership. There are several practicing school administrators engaged in mentoring potential candidates who at some point in their career, plan on pursuing the role of a school administrator. The mentors meet as a group and learn how to be effective mentors through discussions and exchanging ideas. They organize workshops for all the candidates who sign on. In addition these mentors do some of the training at that time to introduce candidates to the Administrative Services Procedure Manual. The mentors meet with selected number of potential administrators in a small group, and discuss issues that arise within that group. One of the workshops given is the PAR selection process. Its purpose is to ensure awareness of the procedure involved once a candidate is determined ready to apply for the vice-principal pool (transcripts)

PAR Selection. Originally this sub-committee was responsible for a system wide review of the PAR selection process through input from the district's system administrators and from several large school boards throughout the province of Ontario. As a result, a new process was piloted in the fall of 1999 and reviewed again in spring, 2000. The PAR Selection Committee developed a standard template for feedback following the selection process to vice-principal candidates, both elementary and secondary, for use in the pool selection process. A major task of the committee was to develop a profile of leadership for the district that aligned itself with the system plan and based on Standards of Practice developed by the Ontario College of Teachers (District Documents).

Training. The goal of the training team is to develop and align effective training programs to address the needs and requirements of candidates in the PAR selection pool and all practicing administrators. The project team surveyed all administrators and pool appointees regarding their perceived training needs and then identified the essential knowledge, skills and attitudes required by school administrators. Training opportunities are made available for all administrators, some specifically designed for the elementary panel, some at the secondary level and some joint sessions. Specific training programs are also available to new PAR pool appointees. The training team developed a three year cyclical training program by monitoring and addressing the successes and recommendations of the training programs.

Professional Development. A series of professional development sessions are offered by the professional development team. The theme for 2000-2001 professional development year was "Leading and Learning". The learning opportunities made available to elementary and secondary administrators throughout the year included keynote speakers, participation in networking groups, and improvement and renewal opportunities for administrators' knowledge and skills as leaders (District Documents). By participating in these planned ongoing learning opportunities, administrators were able to engage in a review of their personal and professional development needs within the context of their current educational realities.

Career Portfolio. The objective of the career portfolio team is to review the concept of a Career Portfolio for administrators and then make recommendations to all stakeholder groups regarding the use of a Career Portfolio for the district's administrators. The project members engaged in an extensive review of current research and available information. They conducted a comprehensive study of best practices in both educational and private business settings. The district mandate included the need to define the purpose and meaning of a career portfolio and determine the essential components. In March, 2000, the project team met and decided to change the portfolio title from career portfolio to professional growth portfolio. In 2000-2001, a pilot group of 32 administrators from both elementary and secondary panels volunteered to experiment with growth portfolios for

the project team (District Documents).

The goals of administrators in the district are reflected and supported through the use of the professional growth portfolio. A professional growth portfolio for all administrators is important "because a portfolio provides a platform for reflective practice and directed self-improvement" (Principal). This process is meant to enhance administrator, teacher and school effectiveness and according to one senior administrator "will ultimately lead to improved student learning". In addition the portfolio facilitates and supports the establishment of mentoring programs which are advocated by the Ontario Principal's Council. It also supports future direction of the Ontario College of Teachers as a link to the re-certification process and accountability (District Document). The portfolio was developed and included as an integral part of the selection process.

Perspectives about the Program

In terms of job description and the role of the school administrator there was a general consensus among the participants. According to one principal "there is no written standardized job description, at least not to my knowledge, for the principal or vice-principal role". From the interview data it appeared that the vice-principal and principal role differed only in the level of authority. While a vice-principal stated "It is important that the school district administrators know and understand what the needs are for individual schools and that roles, functions, and expectations be in conjunction with those needs", a senior administrator stated "we have the philosophy of training all leaders to be system leaders They are recruited to the job to support the districts goals and objectives...that each administrator should be able to deal with all situations in all schools across the district".

While school administrators are expected to help with recruitment of candidates, many of the participants felt that this was not happening as much as it should have been. According to one senior administrator, "school principals and area supervisory officers are expected and encouraged to identify potential future administrators, regardless of career stage, within the teaching ranks of their schools...we have to still work on that area because many of our principals figure they have done their expected task in identifying a potential administrator if they "tap" the shoulder of only one teacher. Some of them don't do it a second time and feel they have done what is expected of them" Age varied among participants as well. A vice principal and principal indicated:

I wasn't interested in administration until my principal suggested I get my name in for the pool and start training. After all, I have been teaching now for 16 years and believe me being an administrator was never something I considered (vice-principal).

Some people have had only just a little bit of opportunity in this last little while to get onboard, and some of them haven't got that "system perspective" down yet. Many are young and inexperienced with 3-5 years teaching. Most are in the middle of their careers. The younger ones talk a very narrow school focus. They're still very much in their classroom...a classroom focus as opposed to the greater focus of the school. So, it's harder for them to make the transition to vice-principalship (principal).

In terms of financial support for recruitment activities there was a specific budget allocated to the supervisory officer who was in charge of leadership development. It was identified as a high priority and allowed for more candidates to the applicant pools. According to the supervisor in charge of leadership development, "We have a team in place for the recruitment and selection activities made up of principals and vice-principals both new and veteran...the team arranges for different keynotes such as Michael Fullan and Steven Covey to lead professional development seminars... more and more candidates are applying to the pool for vice-principals but we are still short for the elementary panel". Two other perspectives followed:

The interest in developing "quality leaders" was part of why I became involved...now with the shortage of administrators in the elementary vice-principalship we have more vacancies than we can fill. But our recruitment program is bringing many more people onboard now than ever in the past and that's largely due to the funding (senior administrator).

The recruitment activities that are offered are excellent opportunities. This was part of preparing for the selection process. If the district didn't have this in place I would be less interested in applying for the pool (vice-principal).

It was widely believed that having knowledge and skills in a broader scheme of the administrator role included the principal as leader, learner, manager, and communicator. Embedded in the leadership qualifications procedure were the formal qualifications required of the school administrator.

In terms of promoting internal versus external candidates into administrative roles there were contractual considerations. Instead of promoting external candidates for administrative roles immediately there were occasions when administrators from outside the district were hired on as teachers and then eventually moved into an administrator role. There was a recent practice of the district to allow unqualified candidates to fulfill the role of "interim administrative" positions with conditions attached. Since it was widely believed by the district that development of leadership skills was the responsibility of every leader at every level it was determined that a skills profile for administrators would be included in a leadership section of the newly revised teacher performance appraisals. The purpose of this newly added section to the teacher appraisal protocol was to develop a formal mentoring program, a leadership program which was brought to discussion for acting vice-principals. There was an agreement with the teachers federations in determining the interim vice-principals since they were formally unqualified and seeking their qualifications. The Ontario College of Teachers also played a vital role whereby they needed to give written permission to the district to allow interim positions to be filled by unqualified candidates. It was agreed that these interim administrators could return to the federation after one year without penalty if they decided not to continue in the role. Two senior administrators explained the promotion procedure:

I think we'll have to put a process in place to promote candidates from outside our own district. At the moment we promote only internal candidates for school administration...nobody from outside since we feel it's our own district's investment of time and efforts and money.

Contracts certainly play a role in the recruitment process. We are in good relationships with the Ontario College of Teachers and the Teachers' Federations. For our interim or "acting" vice principals we must have approval from the teachers federations before putting them in acting roles....especially now that administrators and teachers are no longer in the same unions.

At the core of promoting the most capable administrators was the selection process based on the pool announcement. According to all participants in the study administrator selection begins with the declaration of a vacancy. There is no specification in the vacancy announcement of the particular school where there is an opening since the philosophy encompassed the need for system-wide administrators. Rather, the announcements call for applications for the various pools in general. One candidate asserted that "the district would most likely attract appropriate candidates if they listed information concerning the special needs and characteristics of a school in the vacancy announcement". While a senior administrator claimed that "selectors assess and try to match candidate's skills and leadership styles with the particular needs of a school in order to select the right person for the job," this appeared to contradict the goal of system-wide leader preparation to which the same senior administrator made reference to earlier. Other participants in the study reiterated that the district needed to include in its pool description:

- * the "needs" that must be met in different schools by whoever fills the position;
- * important characteristics of the existing staff, student's family background, cultures, extra curricular concerns and feelings about school; and
- * information about other executives in the school system.

As a candidate and a vice-principal emphasized:

It would have been helpful for me if I had some time to explore the new school to get an idea of the culture before being placed (vice-principal).

There needs to be consultation and more time to prepare with candidates before placing them in any school as vice-principal (Candidate).

Despite what all senior administrators and the majority of other participants referred to as a "well-structured process of recruitment and selection" there was no structured preparation program included in the process after candidates were recruited. One principal indicated "there needs to be something in place to formally monitor the recruitment process". Instead, professional development and training needs were based on surveys that "project teams" distributed to their colleagues. Once a need was identified the appropriate project team set up a plan of action and arranged professional development to meet the particular needs. One principal felt she was spending far too much time away from the school site.

To me I see it as a pendulum right now. I really feel like I'm PD'd to death. It's coming at me from so many angles. And nothing is in the school. It's all out of the school. So I am never

there. (principal)

A common practice in North Western School District was rotating principals. Central office administrators believed that a policy requiring the rotation of administrators every three to five years kept all administrators alert and helped in the transplantation of change initiatives from one school to another. However, principals were generally frustrated with this procedure. Two similar perspectives follow:

The thing that worried me is this system of rotation the district has. I am unsure if I want to move from a school after a short time there especially if I see things are working. It takes awhile for a change to occur...and to suddenly be told I have to move without any consultation at all? (principal)

After working hard to help move a low achieving school to becoming an improved school in 4 years I was transferred to another low achieving school for the same purpose. I need a break before I burn out (principal)

Discussion

Previous research has suggested the importance of considering factors such as time, money and energy, in promoting a larger pool of interested and qualified candidates (Anderson, 1988; Caldwell & Tymko, 1990; Castello, 1992; Castetter, 2000; Coffin & Leithwood, 2000; IEL, 2000; Herman, 1994; Miklos, 1996; Pounder & Young, 1996; Rebore, 2001). An allocation of leadership development funding is available in this school district to help promote recruitment and selection activities. While the funding is made available to support the recruitment and selection activities and have allowed for more individuals to enter the candidate pool for administration, the "time" factor needs more attention since many felt that they engage in too much professional development that takes them away from their school sites. However, to avoid engaging in professional development "overload" the school district needs to rethink and revisit its key priorities in professional development to limit time from school sites.

The data indicate that while North Western School District was drawing more candidates overall, an inadequate number of candidates is still a problem to fill the vice-principal vacancies in the elementary panel. This was considered largely due to the high number of elementary schools in the district. It would be wise for the school district to consider a monitoring system to help determine how to address the shortage of candidates for vice-principal pools at the elementary level. It is quite possible that elementary school teachers might be less interested in the ongoing rotation from school to school because elementary schools, even more than other levels, are connected through community that would be disrupted by a stream of principal shifts over time.

Contrary to the literature on secondary school candidates (ERS, 1999; Pounder & Merrill, 2001) the district has an adequate number of candidates to fill vice-principal vacancies in the secondary panel. This is largely due to the small number of secondary schools in each district. Additionally, there are generally adequate numbers of principal candidates to fill principal vacancies in the elementary panels.

Prior to a new placement, there is uncertainty as to which school in the district a new assignment will be made. Despite senior administrators knowing which vice-principals and principals will be retiring or leaving the district at the end of each school year there is no planned opportunity for predecessors and successors to have discussions because of the uncertainty of which administrator will be placed and at which school. In support of previous research (Daresh, 1997; Seyfarth, 1999) newly assigned administrators, including candidates, vice-principals and principals, are frequently placed in new schools without adequate prior knowledge of the new school culture resulting in unclear expectations and role confusion.

Central office administrators in the district believe that a policy requiring the rotation of administrators every three to five years keeps administrators alert and helps in the transplantation of change initiatives from one site to the next. While this policy may be credible it lacks any comprehensive dialogue or even planned inquiry related to the purpose or potential outcomes of regular rotation. Ironically, the regularity in the system of administrator transfer may lead to a culture of "sameness" which denies the uniqueness of schools or leaders and possibly results in the opposite of what one can assume was originally intended by system leaders. We could argue that this school district promotes a managerial response to school leadership (Cascadder, 1998), particularly in challenging schools where renewal activities require visionary, sustained leadership over time (Johnson, 2001). Recruiting administrators to the vice-principalship under these conditions might require a support structure other than simply a good mentor.

The literature supports the practice of having two pools of candidates from which school districts can draw: internal and external (Herman, 1994; Miklos, 1996; Rebores, 2001; Renihan, 1999). Contrary to what the research indicates as "best practices in recruitment", only internal candidates are recruited, trained and promoted throughout the ranks of teaching and administration in North Western School District. While occasionally a vice-principal candidate is brought in from outside the school district as a teacher first, then an administrator, it would be wise to consider placing the candidates directly in administrative roles especially if the candidate arrives with external administrative experiences. Although research indicates that some school districts routinely favour the selection of administrative applicants with experience in curriculum roles the most promising (Ross, 1989), this school district do not have any preference except that teaching experience is essential. If the recruitment of candidates to the vice-principal at the elementary level continues to be in short supply, it would seem wise for the district to open up the vacancies for external candidates in order to more adequately meet the challenge of short leadership supply in the elementary schools.

The research that describes administrative candidates (Fullan, 2000; Pounder & Merrill, 2001) presents a picture of those candidates different to those in this study in terms of experience. Only a few of the participants fit into the "mid career" phase of adult development as described in the literature while most were in the beginning stages of their teaching careers with little experience. According to Hargreaves and Fullan (1999) it is often at mid career that achievement and recognition are central development objectives.

Implications for Practice and Policy

The findings in this study have implications for practitioners and policy makers. Current districts' policies on regular rotation of administrators need to be revisited to determine the efficacy of a fixed term appointment to a school. If the school districts continue to enforce this policy, they need to define more clearly the objectives of this management practice and integrate these within the system's mission and vision.

Recruitment and selection involves attracting, screening, and identifying potential leadership candidates. It also involves administrator preparation and support. In order to attract potential administrators within a school district there needs to be a process in place for identifying future leaders. Principals and superintendents need to recognize leadership qualities among their teachers and to encourage them to pursue and prepare for administrative roles. This can be done by engaging in discussions about career goals with potential leaders and recognizing potential leadership skills (i.e., school growth teams, action teams, other committees such as discipline, finance, professional development, curriculum). Principals need to regularly identify potential leadership among their staff and to work with them in their development plans. Recognizing only one potential candidate by an administrator does not meet the expectation. Central office personnel need to ensure that expectations are clear for administrators to engage in serious discussions with their staffs about potential school leadership.

It would seem appropriate to engage in the application process so that potential candidates are made aware of expectations. The application process must be made clear to all aspiring administrators and structured to suit the needs of the individual schools, yet done so within the collective vision of the school district. The application process must be aligned with the selection process and must include any contractual considerations that may hinder and/or support the appointment of any administrator.

The philosophy of promotion also needs to be articulated. Some districts adopt the philosophy of internal promotion, some support external promotion, while others endorse a combination of internal and external promotion. If the leadership candidates continue to be in short supply, school districts will have to consider opening up vacancies to both internal and external candidates.

Implications for Further Research

The school district in this study is in the early stages of leadership development and planning. Consequently, discussions about recruitment and selection are ongoing. It is difficult to surmise the overall outcomes of implementing these recruitment and selection activities and what impact it has on student achievement. We can see the specific steps taken by this school district and can report on the perceptions of the participants, but there is still much in the individual plans yet to unfold before long-term effects can be ascertained. Finding relevant information requires searching under other labels and categories of literature such as effective school districts, educational governance, transformational leadership, and organizational learning. In particular there is a need for research that clearly conveys the links between recruitment and selection for leadership succession and more generalized school district leadership practices. Recruitment and selection cannot be treated as lone concepts in isolation, but rather components of organizational governance and procedural structures within a school district.

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