

Recruitment and Retention of Quality Principals: Essential for Successful Schools

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Two significant problems attend principal preparation today: the quality and experience of candidates for preparation and the “y’all come” attitude of programs driven by demands for enrollments. These issues are abetted by a long history of non-selective practices in accepting candidates into preparation programs and the distinct lack of systematic recruitment of the best possible candidates for principalships, particularly for urban and other schools with low-achieving student populations. Further, issues related to preparation provided for countless numbers of people who never use their credentials suggest significant changes in how candidates are recruited and selected.

Introduction

Continuing national pre-eminence in a world economy requires a commitment to quality not in evidence recently, particularly in American public education. Yet, since publication of *A Nation at Risk* (National Commission on Excellence in Education, 1983), performance of America’s schools has been questioned seriously and remained an important agenda item for policymakers and education officials (Fuhrman, 1993; Good, 2000). Although educational policymakers have mandated educational reforms, educational policies have limited direct impact on what actually happens in schools (Fuhrman, 1994; House, 1998; O’Day & Smith, 1993; Smith & O’Day, 1991; Tyack & Cuban, 1995). Rather, the actions of principals and teachers—those individuals who lead schools and meet daily with children—most directly affect school success (Adams, 1999; Donaldson, 2006; Fullan, 2001; Marks & Louis, 1999), and research on high-performing schools shows a direct link between student achievement and effective principal leadership (Cotton, 2003; Hallinger & Heck, 1998; Leithwood & Jantzi, 1999; Marzano, Waters, & McNulty, 2005). Important short- and long-term tasks that principals must accomplish also have been identified (Bellamy, Fulmer, Murphy, & Muth, 2007; Davies, 2006; Leithwood & Riehl, 2003; Marazza, 2003; McEwan, 2003; Wong, Nicotera, & Guthrie, 2007). Yet, even though quality principals choose quality teachers, which makes an important difference in educational outcomes even in characteristically low-achieving schools (Baker & Cooper, 2005), we tend to admit

and train virtually anyone who seeks to be prepared as a teacher or principal who meets the most minimal academic requirements.

Such practices are contrary to the beliefs of policy makers and educational officials in 49 states who regulate who can become principals: They believe that “only well-prepared and qualified individuals” (Young, Petersen, & Short, 2002, p. 153) should lead schools. Nevertheless, the requirements for initial certification as a school leader vary considerably state by state and systematically fail to specify performance criteria that might warrant potential for successful leadership. Instead, common requirements include successful completion of an approved preparation program (31 states), a graduate degree (44 states), teaching certification (30 states), and teaching experience (39 states). Although three years of teaching experience is most common, the range is from 2 years (Alabama, Illinois, Indiana, Missouri, Nebraska, Ohio, Oklahoma, Oregon, Texas, Utah) to 7 years (New Mexico). Only 28 states require supervised internships prior to initial certification (Toye, Blank, Sanders, & Williams, 2007). Whereas 49 states regulate initial certification, entry into the field of educational administration actually appears “informal, haphazard, and casual” (Murphy, 1992, p. 80) because prospective candidates typically self-select into preparation programs.

We argue here that our continuing reliance on “*admission* rather than *selection* procedures” (American Association of School Administrators, p. 1960, p. 83) to generate candidates for principal preparation programs contributes significantly to the unsuccessful performance of many schools. That is, even the best preparation programs, too often driven by institutional demands to maintain enrollments over quality admissions, as well as the entry into the preparation business of for-profit institutions, have affected the overall quality of those available to assume principal positions nationwide. Further, we argue that we must engage in selective recruitment of potential school leaders, using performance criteria, and select only the best of those recruits, guaranteeing them practice-oriented preparation experiences that ensure their readiness and capability to lead effective schools. The following self-description by a candidate in a university-based preparation program (Browne-Ferrigno & Muth, 2004) points clearly to one criterion for more effective recruitment and selection of quality principal candidates:

My supervisor courted and hired me. From the first day I went to work for her, she has mentored and supported my professional growth in all areas I started training for a principalship when I started as a classroom teacher. I was asked to do jobs and fill roles from the very beginning of my current position 5 years ago. Now, I need the credentials. (p. 474)

In this case, the candidate’s preparation began early, and her later experiences in her formal preparation program broadened, deepened, and polished her knowledge and skills. When she finished her formal program, she was confidently ready and able to be an effective principal.

In the following sections we analyze research on criteria for effective principal practice, problems related to placing quality principals in schools that need them, how principal candidates tend to be admitted and might better be recruited and selected, and criteria that might facilitate the selection and preparation of higher-quality candidates. Finally, we recommend ways to look at systematic improvement of recruitment and selection processes, pointing out that there are problems of quality inherent in a system which treats the preparation of its teaching force with the same indifference to quality.

Effective Principals: An Essential Key to Educational Improvement

The importance of effective principal leadership is articulated clearly in national standards guiding administrator preparation and practice (Council of Chief State School Officers [CCSSO], 1996; National Policy Board for Educational Administration, 1989, 2002). Effective school leadership also is evident in ten skills—setting instructional direction, teamwork, sensitivity, judgment, results orientation, organizational ability, oral communication, written communication, development of others, understanding own strengths and weaknesses—practiced by exemplary principals (National Association of Secondary School Principal [NASSP] Leadership Skills Assessment, 2001). These inextricably related proficiencies assure that human energy within schools “is transformed into desired student academic and social growth” (Grogan & Andrews, 2002, p. 234).

An example of this “human dimension of educational reform” (Boyer, 1986, p. 26) is principal decision making related to instructional programming. Although sometimes constrained by district directives and categorical program rules (Portin, Alejano, Knapp, & Marzolf, 2006), principals must assure that all classrooms in their schools have qualified teachers—those possessing not only requisite professional credentials, but also content knowledge and instructional training in their assigned subject areas (Ingersoll, 2001b; National Commission on Teaching and America’s Future [NCTAF], 1996; No Child Left Behind Act of 2001). Despite policy requirements, out-of-field teaching by novice and even veteran teachers continues to be widespread (Ingersoll, 2003, 2008; Richardson, 1985). When working conditions also are unsatisfactory (e.g., poor administrative support, classroom intrusions, limited participation in decision making), teachers often leave the district or profession (Ingersoll, 2007; Ingersoll & Smith, 2003). The annual national cost of teacher *attrition* (exiting the profession) and *migration* (transferring to other schools) is estimated to be \$7.34 billion (NCTAF, 2007). When expenses associated with preparing newly licensed, but not hired, teachers are added, the estimate of lost resources is truly staggering (Ingersoll, 2001a).

Recruiting and retaining qualified teachers assures student learning gains (Education Trust, 2004; Sanders & Rivers, 1996) as well as dimin-

ishes variation in instructional quality and decreases teacher turnover within schools (Hanushek, Kain, O'Brian, & Rivkin, 2005). Although teacher quality links directly to graduation from competitive undergraduate institutions and teaching experience (Clotfelter, Ladd, & Vigdor, 2007), teacher quality can be enhanced and sustained by principals' appropriate use of instructional supervision approaches (Glickman, Gordon, Ross-Gordon, 2006; Nelson & Sassi, 2005), subjective assessments of teacher performance (Jacob & Lefgren, 2005), and resiliency-building strategies (Henderson & Milstein, 2003; Pryor & Pryor, 2005). Teaching quality also is influenced by principal expectations: "the greater percentage of teachers appointed by a principal with high academic goals, the higher the student test score gains" (Brewer, 1993, p. 287). Many principals, however, do not understand these conditions for high-performing schools because they did not attend such schools themselves (Baker & Cooper, 2005), and such elitism tends to be eschewed in favor of more egalitarian conceptions (Allen, 2003, 2005), a conundrum for policy makers and educators who rightly seek simultaneously to improve schools while enhancing diversity.

Thus, high-quality principals can lead to better prepared teachers working toward better learning outcomes (Baker & Cooper, 2005). So, another aspect of the recruitment of future school administrators should target high-quality teachers—those who work with principals who set high academic goals, maintain learning-supportive environments, and model exemplary leadership.

No Shortage of Principal Candidates

Contrary to earlier reports of impending shortages of principal candidates (Educational Research Service, 1998; McAdams, 1998; National Association of Secondary School Principals, 2003; Roza, 2003), the proliferation of preparation programs during recent decades has increased enrollments of students in educational administration and leadership (Hess, 2003; McCarthy, 1999), which in turn has increased the supply of principal candidates by approximately "2 to 3 times the number of job vacancies" (Grogan & Andrews, 2003, p. 237). Although districts began reporting difficulty filling positions vacated by retiring principals in the late 1990s, more recent research on principal supply and demand has found "little evidence of a nationwide crisis in the market for certified school administrators" (RAND Research Brief, 2003, p. 1). Rather, "much of the problem resides within districts where selection criteria conflict with desired attributes" (Roza, 2003, p. 56).

As a result, what is problematic for many districts is filling administrative and teaching vacancies in high-need schools characterized by low-accountability test scores, limited resources, and high staff turnover (Gates, Ringel, Santibanez, Ross, & Chung, 2003; Knapp, Copland, & Talbert, 2003; Roza, 2003). The greatest challenge in finding principal replace-

ments occurs in schools located in isolated, economically distressed areas with “high concentrations of poor and minority students, low per-pupil expenditures, and low principal salaries” (Roza & Swartz, 2003, p. 2). High-need schools most desperately need exemplary principals and quality teachers.

Placement Opportunities and Limitations

School administration becomes a career aspiration for many teachers who seek greater responsibility or organizational mobility. Gaining an administrative position, however, requires successful merger of an aspirant’s “attributes or capabilities and the organization’s efforts” (Ortiz, 1982, p. 146). Sometimes, two candidates “with identical training may be very different in their ability to ‘fit’ a particular vacancy in a school district” due to “idiosyncratic leadership preferences” (Painter, 2005, p. 9). Although rarely voiced publicly, discrimination due to gender, age, and ethnicity is evident in research on the principalship (Black, Bathon, & Poindexter, 2007; Doud, 1989; Gates et al., 2004; Papa, Lankford, & Wyckoff, 2002; Ringel, Gates, Chung, Brown, & Ghosh-Dastidar, 2004).

Interesting trends in principal characteristics appear in findings from two recent national surveys. The results of one recent study, the National Center for Education Statistics (NCES) 2003–2004 schools and staffing survey (Strizek, Pittsonberger, Riordan, Lyter, & Orlofsky, 2006), indicate that public school principals identified themselves predominately as Caucasian (82%). These principals on average have 7.8 years experience as school leaders and remain on average 4.3 years at the same school as its head administrator. They typically gained their leadership experience by working as assistant principals or program directors (68%), club sponsors (52.7%), athletic coaches or directors (33.9%), department heads (35.6%), or curriculum specialists or coordinators (23.4%). The NCES results also suggest that demand for principals varies according to district size: Although the average number of newly hired principals for all public school districts is 0.7%, the percentage is higher for districts with 20 or more schools (2.8%) and more than 10,000 students (2.5%) and lower for districts with 5 or fewer schools and student enrollments less than 5,000 (0.6%).

Results from another national study, conducted by the RAND Corporation at the time of the NCES survey, indicates that the average age of public school principals increased from 47.8 years in 1988 to 49.3 years in 2000, suggesting that public schools “are now less likely to hire people under 40 into a principalship than they were a decade ago” (Gates et al., 2003, p. xiv). The study found “no evidence that administrators left [the field of education] to take jobs in other sectors of the economy” (p. xv), “that the more-experienced principals were choosing not to work in urban schools serving larger populations of disadvantaged students” (p. xvi), or “that there is a nationwide crisis in the ability of schools to attract and retain school administrators” (p. xvii).

Placement Deterrents

A national study of the career plans of 860 candidates in educational administration programs at 52 doctoral-granting institutions (Bass, 2004) elicited main inhibitors to their becoming principals: (1) perceived job-related stress, (2) time and work requirements, (3) accountability testing, (4) family responsibilities, and (5) excessive paperwork. Gender and race also appeared to influence their career-path decisions: Females more often than males cited inhibitors such as concerns for personal safety, lack of job security, political pressure, and fear of failure. Caucasians more often than African Americans or Hispanics identified isolation from students and alienation from teachers as reasons for not becoming principals.

Candidates' self-perception of their readiness for the principalship is another reason that they do not seek placement. Deterrents include individuals' youth, limited teaching experience, lack of leadership experience, difficulty making role-identity transformation from teacher to administrator, preferences to remain in the classroom, and limited opportunities to work closely with administrators (Begley & Campbell-Evans, 1992; Browne-Ferrigno, 2003; Browne-Ferrigno & Muth, 2004, 2006; Crow, 2006; Crow & Glascock, 1995; Gronn & Lacey, 2005; Schmidt, 2002). Stereotypical role conceptions of the principalship, gender-based discrimination, and few role models or mentors of the same gender or ethnicity of an aspirant further hinders placement success (Grogan & Andrews, 2002; Larson & Murtadha, 2002; Young & McLeod, 2001).

Other deterrents include discouragement by family members (Hancock, Black, & Bird, 2006) and the perception by teachers, both those holding administrator credentials and those not, of the principalship "as an unpleasant task undertaken by individuals substantially different from themselves" (Howley, Andrianaivo, & Perry, 2005, p. 773). Socialization and job-demand issues likewise influence principals' decisions to leave school administration (Hertling, 2001; Williamson & Hudson, 2003). The demands of the contemporary principalship often "decrease a school leader's sense of efficiency and heighten [her or his] feelings of isolation, insecurity, and intensity" (Casavant & Cherkowski, 2001, p. 71); the resulting dissatisfaction and ineffectiveness observed by teachers also may affect a potential candidate's interest in becoming a principal.

Selective Recruitment into Principalship

As indicated above, effective preparation for the principalship in our minds begins with tapping potential candidates early in their teaching careers (Browne-Ferrigno & Muth, 2004). What is needed, though, is the development of systematic criteria from such identifications that clearly relate to principal effectiveness in working with and through effective teachers to improve student-learning outcomes: "It is imperative that leadership preparation programs recruit and train candidates who have the skills and desire

to assume administrative positions in schools” (Whitaker & Vogel, 2005, p. 8). Such skills and desire, we contend, can only be measured by early performance in leadership tasks that involve successful work with teachers who are the primary focus of attention of effective principals. Unfortunately, even when universities and districts have close relations, the most capable candidates often are overlooked because informal recruitment processes are idiosyncratic and often haphazard (Anderson, 1991). We suggest, as have others, that “a structured and thoughtful approach [to candidate development] can increase a district’s chances of hiring quality principals” (Schuleter & Walker, 2008, p. 14).

Thus, a perspective which includes early identification of potential leaders, providing them with systematic, supervised, and evaluated experiences, and connecting them to highly selective and practice-oriented preparation programs seems a favorable alternative to our current non-selective practices. Further, early identification and exposure to the realities of the principalship likely will increase the odds significantly that those selected and formally prepared actually will become school leaders, lessening greatly the huge numbers who are prepared who never practice. The resources lost (Muth & Browne-Ferrigno, 2004) can be used to enhance recruitment and selection processes as well as the quality of preparation programs.

Recruitment and Selection of Quality Principal Candidates

Amid myriad calls for reform of preparation programs (Achilles, 1987; Barnett & Caffarella, 1992; Coleman, Copeland, & Adams, 2001; Griffiths, Stout, & Forsyth, 1988; Hill & Lynch, 1994; Milstein, 1992; Murphy, 1992, 1993; Schmuck, 1992), arguments have been made against and for standardizing program criteria (English, 2006; Van Meter & Murphy, 1997). As well, recommendations have been made for developing better, stronger, and more relevant admission criteria connected to standards or preferred outcomes (American Association of School Administrators, 1960; Creighton, 2001, 2002; Creighton & Jones, 2001; Creighton & Shipman, 2002; Stout, 1973). Despite these calls, arguments, and recommendations for selective admission, we still have a field suffused with inertia, traditionalism, exploitation, and laissez-faire attitudes. That is, the field of educational administration and leadership continues to use non-selective approaches to determining admissions to educational administration and leadership program programs nationwide.

Table 1 lists typical criteria and explanations, which show that programs generally admit students as long as they meet minimum academic criteria for grade point average (GPA, both undergraduate and graduate), Graduate Record Examination (GRE) scores, letters of recommendation, and sometimes writing samples or interviews (Browne-Ferrigno & Shoho, 2003, 2004; Creighton, 2002; Lad, Browne-Ferrigno, & Shoho, 2007). Even while the table does not suggest that programs do not admit many students

Table 1
Analysis of Criteria for Admission of Students to Leadership-Preparation Programs.

Traditional Criterion	Arguments for the Criterion	Arguments against the Criterion
Graduate Record Exam (GRE)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • provides national norms • supplies comparative data 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • non-predictive of commitment to profession • non-predictive of on-the-job performance
UGPA	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • indicator of successful academic preparation, required by some states (Browne-Ferrigno & Shoho, 2004; Creighton & Jones, 2001; Lad, Browne-Ferrigno, Shoho, & Gulek, 2007) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • not related to or an assessment of potential for leadership (Browne-Ferrigno & Shoho, 2004)
GGPA	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • indicator of successful academic preparation (Browne-Ferrigno & Shoho, 2004; Creighton & Jones, 2001; Lad, Browne-Ferrigno, Shoho, & Gulek, 2007) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • not related to or an assessment of potential for leadership (Browne-Ferrigno & Shoho, 2004)
Letters of Recommendation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • cited by many programs as important (Browne-Ferrigno & Shoho, 2002) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • such letters may tap potential but often are written by those not able to judge (Lad, Browne-Ferrigno, Shoho, & Gulek, 2007)
Open Enrollment	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • we “need numbers to survive” • we need “students fill courses” (Browne-Ferrigno & Shoho, 2003, p. 16) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • taking all comers is inimical to program excellence (Murphy, 1992) • professionalism comes from selectivity (American Association of School Administrators, 1960; Stout, 1973)

Note: This table originally appeared in Browne-Ferrigno and Muth (in press).

who exceed these minimal requirements, such indicators cannot predict fully student performance in academics, and they are virtually useless in projecting performance in administrative practice. As Bridges (1977) indicated years ago (and we seem to have ignored or forgotten since), academic expectations—individual work, written analyses and explanations, a contemplative pace—conspire to work against the very skills—collaboration, oral engagement, and quick action—necessary to be a successful field practitioner. The drive seems more to populate university classrooms than to ensure quality experiences that lead to quality school outcomes.

In addition, internships remain the typical fare, providing limited exposure to administrative activities under the part-time guidance of a field mentor with only occasional visits—if any—by professors; such training experiences simply are inadequate (Heller, Conway, & Jacobson, 1988) for the level and complexity of engagement necessary for effective administrative practice. In this light, candidates’ academic experiences probably do

not compensate for (1) the shortcomings of such experiences, (2) the idiosyncratic exposure of candidates to a range of roles and models in such internships, and (3) the limited capacity of the field, including school districts, to support full-time preparation. Thus, those who do enter the profession inevitably are forced to wait for on-the-job experiences to learn skills required for effective practice, perhaps taking three or more years to become comfortable with expectations and their performance.

Further, professors generally are incomplete role models for practitioners because success in academe cannot be equated with success in the field, and mastery of university expectations does not translate well into skills required for practice (Bridges, 1977). Too often, the skills “that make practitioners effective [are invalidated by the university], making clear [to practitioners] . . . the irrelevance of university-based education for seasoned administrators” (Barnett & Muth, 2008, p. 12; see also Black & English, 1986; Haller, Brent & McNamara, 1997).

Our successive, almost generational failures to shift focus can be explained by many factors, including the field’s obeisance to “liberal arts and sciences” approaches to graduate education that deny those of more practice-oriented professions such as architecture, engineering, law, and medicine. Moving away from this tradition requires a simple but radical change in perspective: determining what those in preparation need to know and be able to do to be successful as practicing principals, ceding to schools and districts important pre-preparation skill and knowledge development that help identify and prepare candidates for university-based programs, and focusing university programs on what they do best to prepare pre-professionals to integrate the knowledge and skills of effective professional practice. Moreover, the field has opined for years about such standards, even creating standards that lead us in this direction (e.g., CCSSO, 1996; Murphy, 2005; National Policy Board for Educational Administration, 1989, 2002; Van Meter & Murphy, 1997).

Nevertheless, we so far seem unable to address the situation in which we find ourselves: admitting people to programs in which we seek to ingrain knowledge, skill, and dispositional standards that are totally disconnected from any criteria used to select candidates. The standards are OK for evaluating actual preparation, but they are not relevant for recruitment and selection. Then, we compound this with teaching strategies that are virtually deaf to our knowledge of adult learning and professional practice (Barnett & Muth, 2008; Browne-Ferrigno & Muth, in press; Browne-Ferrigno, Muth, & Choi, 2000; Muth, 2000; Muth et al., 2001). Even being forced to align curriculum with reasonable program standards, albeit problematic empirically (see English, 2006; Murphy & Vriesenga, 2004, 2006), our programs still fail to confront Bridges’ (1977) admonitions.

Re-Thinking Recruitment and Selection

According to the research on admissions practices over the last 45 or so

years, most states require state-issued credentials for administrator practice. At a time when instructional leadership by principals is emphasized (CCSSO, 1996; Institute for Educational Leadership, 2000), it is surprising that 11 states do not require verification of teaching experience as part of their certification procedures (Browne-Ferrigno & Shoho, 2003, 2004; Toye et al., 2007). At the time of these analyses, 31 states required completion of an approved preparation program, and some of these adhered to one or more state or national preparation standards, including those developed by the Interstate School Leadership Licensure Consortium (Murphy, 2005). Nevertheless, “little progress has been made in resolving the deeply ingrained weaknesses that have plagued training systems for so long” (Murphy, 1992, p. 79), and this is most apparent in how people are selected for these programs. Focused recruitment, if it occurs at all, and selection processes continue to be “informal, haphazard, and casual” (p. 80).

The American Association of School Administrators (1960) took this same position almost 50 years ago, finding that preparation programs used “*admission* rather than *selection* procedures” (p. 83), thereby limiting professionalism and potential impact of preparation. For too many decades, entrance into principal-preparation programs has required only a “B.A. and the cash to pay the tuition” (Tyack & Cummings, 1997, p. 60), despite some careful and proactive efforts (Crow & Glascock, 1995; Murphy, 1999; Pounder & Young, 1996). Nevertheless, today most admission processes in educational administration remain as they were in the 1960’s (Creighton & Jones, 2001). Of 450 programs surveyed, only 40% required teaching credentials or K–12 teaching experience, and 60% permitted program completion while candidates were simultaneously “satisfying the minimum years of teaching experience required for state certification” (Browne-Ferrigno & Shoho, 2004, p. 178). Clearly, many preparation programs do not consider “first-hand knowledge and understanding of the school setting, students, teachers, administrators, and instruction” (Creighton & Jones, p. 24) relevant to success in school administration or necessary to understanding program expectations. Such actions constitute a “disservice to the candidates themselves . . . [and] a disservice to the teachers, students, and community members in the schools these aspiring principals will someday attempt to lead” (p. 24). Thus, we cannot assume that those who enter our programs are “able and willing to assume responsibilities as educational administrators of P-12 schools and districts” as we might want to believe, not when 50 percent or more of those who achieve certification or licensure as school administrators never use their credentials (Muth & Browne-Ferrigno, 2004).

Impediments to Effective Recruitment and Selection

Based on recent studies, admission to educational administration and leadership preparation programs, aside from traditional university-based criteria (e.g., GPA, test scores, letters of recommendation), often becomes a

matter of having enough warm bodies to fill classes in programs totally dependent on FTEs. Anyone is accepted who applies and meets the minimum academic standards, regardless of career aspirations, abilities, or experience. One outcome of this random process is that many program graduates never use the certificates or licenses that they earn, costing states, districts, and universities significant resources that could be used otherwise (Muth & Browne-Ferrigno, 2004). Besides generating considerable waste, this laissez-faire approach forswears excellence, professionalism, commitment, and rigor—and students know it as do policy makers and school districts.

A likely explanation for such obeisance to tradition and avoidance of alternative conceptions and practices is the long-standing tradition in public education that teachers are interchangeable, none better than another, with commendations achievement eschewed to not elevate one teacher over another (Labaree, 2006). If those who admit teachers to principal preparation programs support this ethos, assuming that applicants do not differ in ability, then it is possible to believe that anyone who steps forward is equally likely to succeed. While this perspective is somewhat facetious, it reflects an underlying problem in public education, and to expect a system—teacher unions and their members, districts and schools, universities, and state departments and other regulators—to behave differently without significant intervention is naive: Too many interests, vested in the status quo, find success in what they currently do, even though that success does not square with local, state, or national reform preferences (Fry, O’Neill, & Bottoms, 2006; Hale & Moorman, 2003; Hess, 2003; Usdan, 2002). Reform from within, however, while extremely difficult, is not impossible (Labaree).

Even so, “equality” of expectations for school leadership is dysfunctional, if any credence is given to any of the critics cited earlier. In contrast, those who enter educational administration and leadership programs must distinguish themselves by what they know, what they can do, and what they can get done through others to ensure that all children learn (Bellamy et al., 2007). Instead of taking everyone and anyone and running them through academically oriented programs, preparers should seek out those with special abilities and experiences, who might not consider a career in educational administration and leadership or even those who might not otherwise “pursue careers in educational organizations” (Daresh, 1984, p. 43). Such highly promising and select individuals could then be provided, *before entering formal preparation programs*, intense and broad exposure to what constitutes effective administrative and leadership practice in effective schools where all students learn.

Recommendations for Practice

In Table 1, we summarized current methods of admitting students to educational administration and leadership programs and suggest in our commen-

Table 2
Alternative Criteria for Selection of Students into Leadership-Preparation Programs.

Non-Traditional Criterion	Arguments for Inclusion of Criterion	Arguments Against Inclusion of Criterion
Advanced Degree	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • increase functional credibility • increase leadership legitimacy • supply broad-based skills • facilitate more specific and intense focus in principal preparation programs 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • elitist • unnecessary as current programs can address such background adequately • would limit available students • would keep some very good people out of leadership positions
Teaching Experience	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • greater understanding of teaching, learning, and school functioning • possible wider range of experiences • greater maturity and insight • more likely committed to administrative/leadership career 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • loss of potential “stars” • ideas and insights not stunted by experience • greater creativity • “new blood”
Leadership Experience	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • insights about how to lead schools • experience in leadership • “know” what getting into • experience working with and through adults 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • principal-preparation programs support and develop such experiences • teacher-leader experience not the same as preparing for or being a principal
Commitment to Administration and Working with Adults	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • demonstrated commitment to school administration and leadership as a career • prior successful work with adults in educational settings 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • principal-preparation programs inculcate such commitments • all teachers work with adults in various settings and ways

Note: This table originally appeared in Browne-Ferrigno and Muth (in press).

tary that the prevalent “y’all come” approach is not conducive to developing a strong profession. To change our practices, we offer a different set of criteria in Table 2. These criteria suggest that educational administration and leadership program leaders need to discuss alternate qualifications in order to revise program admissions practices into recruitment and selection processes. While many of the criteria in Table 1 will necessarily need to be minimum entry criteria—as long as our programs are affiliated primarily in universities—Table 2 provides criteria that might lead the field “to identify, attract, recruit, and screen candidates for leadership preparation” (Young, 2004, p. 49).

Both studies of current preparation programs and the disparate criteria in Tables 1 and 2 suggest changes that might better align our practice with the effective outcomes that we desire. In each case, current admissions and preparation practices are all too likely to ignore or to support costly admin-

istrative training that never advantages our schools or their leaders. In each case, asking different—even difficult—questions about the backgrounds and preparation needs of our leadership candidates might help us implement new answers and thus build a stronger profession.

Question 1: Are program candidates motivated to enroll for administrative training or over-credentialing simply to justify salary increases? District salary schedules typically reward teachers who take additional credits. To gain these professional development raises, many teachers take courses in educational leadership, earn administrator licenses, or complete graduate programs in school leadership. Estimates of the numbers of credentialed administrators who do not accept administrative posts run as high as 250,000 nationwide and 5,000 statewide (Muth & Browne-Ferrigno, 2004), though data have not been gathered to reveal the full extent of this lost training.

These administrator and leadership students dutifully attend courses, participate in class discussion, write papers, pass exams, and engage in administrative practica and internships (Labaree, 1999). Certainly, some of these students may begin their studies with optimistic intent yet, through growth of self-awareness or changes in life or work circumstances, realize that administrative work will not be their career choice. And certainly, we train such students with our own optimistic intent, believing that what they learn about leadership will improve their contributions to the schools where they work and the children whom they teach. However, the cost of such optimism is high, consuming limited personal, private, and public educational resources with limited return to the organizations and taxpayers who fund it and also optimistically expect benefits for schools, students, future employers, and the educated citizenry (Muth & Browne-Ferrigno, 2004).

New Possibilities

One possibility is to require prospective leadership students to earn a graduate degree first in a curriculum-related field (e.g., mathematics, science, ESL, reading) or in an educational core area (e.g., curriculum, educational technology). Such a requirement could meet the needs of motivated teachers who wish to increase their salaries and to advance professionally as well as the needs of schools of education that wish to sustain enrollments and strengthen the educational expertise of local educators. Redesigned leadership programs, instead of skimming through or ignoring broad educational expertise, could begin by assuming its presence. Graduates of such programs could bring to their schools both greater credibility and more appropriate leadership experiences.

Of course, some might object to a prerequisite graduate degree, seeing it as an unnecessary or needlessly rigorous hurdle. However, such a requirement should increase the efficacy of leadership training and reduce its costs by training only those who intend to work in the field. A well-designed ad-

missions procedure should make clear the professional commitment required of prospective students. Likewise, a well-designed program should demand more experience, understanding, and skill of those who wish to prepare the next generation of citizens.

Question 2: Are program candidates too young or too inexperienced as teachers to commit to a career in school leadership? Although age and experience do not guarantee maturity, self-awareness, or ability, they are common paths by which most of us gain insight and develop our skills. When administrative training programs admit teachers with only a few years of teaching experience, especially young teachers who have only recently begun professional employment, no one should be surprised that many of these candidates are ill-prepared for the career commitments expected by their programs (Browne-Ferrigno, 2003; Browne-Ferrigno & Muth, 2004, 2006).

New Possibilities

Instead of recruiting the youngest or newest of teachers, programs might require that applicants enter with at least six years of experience as educators. Practical experience in the classroom or in other educational positions could also bring deeper insight into the ways schools tend to function as organizations and the ways effective leaders guide them. Although a few applicants with outstanding commitment, maturity, and ability well beyond their experience might have to wait a few years for leadership training, a far larger group of prospects would have time to reach such standing and seek admission with the commitment to complete and apply their leadership training.

Question 3: Are program candidates too inexperienced as leaders to benefit from intensive leadership training or to commit to a career in school leadership? Leadership experience, as well as teaching experience, remains a tested way for administrative prospects to discover whether they have the motivation or commitment needed to make a career shift (Browne-Ferrigno, 2003; Browne-Ferrigno & Muth, 2004, 2006). Those who have already accepted leadership tasks, experienced the satisfactions and the difficulties of leading others, and gained school or district recognition for leadership potential might come to a program with more realistic grounding than those without such experience. **New Possibilities**

Although principal-preparation or administrator-training programs are supposed to develop leadership, they are likely to do so more effectively if their participants already know what they are getting into and have experienced enough success to be confident of their motivation and potential. Transitional experiences within a school or through district articulation or collaborative efforts also could clarify the upcoming challenges faced by new administrators. Those who have learned that they prefer working in the classroom rather than at the school or district level or with students rather than their adult counterparts would be less likely to apply for leadership

programs. On the other hand, those who were eager to make the shift in attention required of administrators might be able to develop their abilities with more intensity and focus. In both cases, school and district efforts to encourage such experiences could increase field participation and investment in leadership training.

Question 4: Are program candidates committed to working as school, not classroom, leaders and to working primarily with adult professionals, not students? Many students complete training as principals yet return to their schools committed to classroom work rather than school leadership. Some have loved their teaching experiences and mistakenly enter an administrative program as a next career step, not anticipating the differences between classroom and organizational leadership. Others enjoy children or young adults and are uncomfortable working primarily with adult peers or older adult professionals. Although a training program might well serve as a clarifying experience for such students, this process is expensive for the student and the training institution. It also may deprive others with the requisite motivation from gaining admission slots.

New Possibilities

In our program experiences and studies (Browne-Ferrigno, 2003; Browne-Ferrigno & Muth, 2004, 2006), this uncertain commitment seems to relate to experience and age: Younger and less experienced program participants are more likely to want to return to the classroom, while older and more experienced participants are more likely to desire and be prepared to accept administrative assignments. Whether such differences are related to maturity, classroom competence, professional-growth needs, or more extensive life experience working with other adults, they strongly articulate the importance of grooming prospective administrators and encouraging their readiness.

We might begin simply by asking students about the changes that they anticipate and their commitment to such changes. We might emphasize such factors as we work with district partners to ensure that students have experiential rather than strictly cerebral opportunities to appraise the consequences of a role shift. We might encourage students to deepen their expertise first in other graduate work, then to consider administrative training. Finally, we might directly address adult learning styles and characteristics, modeling such approaches as we teach our students and articulating the principles involved for their future application as school leaders (Barnett & Muth, 2008; Browne-Ferrigno & Muth, in press; Muth et al., 2001).

Summary

Our candid and creative answers to these four questions might well initiate significant program renovations, expend program resources more effi-

ciently and effectively, and improve program outcomes. Beginning with students who have the motivation, knowledge, and experience to become effective educational leaders would dramatically reduce our screening role and its attendant costs. Working with well-prepared students and with engaged district partners from the beginning of a program could dramatically increase our focus on educational leadership itself. Through such changes, we could help more of our graduates to bring long-term educational returns to their schools, districts, and communities.

Discussion

Effective schools need “responsible, assertive, and visible” (Casavant & Cherkowski, 2001, p. 73) leaders who can measurably affect student achievement through the selection of high-quality teachers and by setting academically oriented schools goals (Baker & Cooper, 2005). While it is likely that

Incumbent administrations may identify as future leaders only those educators whose profiles, values, and behaviors resemble their own. Personnel selection research has demonstrated that we tend to search for candidates who are like ourselves. To encourage the selection of potentially strong leaders whose ethnicity, values, or behaviors may vary from the norm, other education professionals—such as teachers, school counselors, and university professors—should participate in the tapping process. (Pounder & Crow, 2005, p. 56)

Additionally, establishing and using criteria such as those in the preceding sections place importance on the types of knowledge, skills, dispositions, and experiences inherent in the very standards which are expected to guide program content and clinical activities.

Thus, university faculties need to work closely with administrative practitioners to help clarify roles that districts can play in the pre-preparation of school leaders. For example, should districts use criteria other than those currently used to select teachers into leadership roles, thus ensuring that they become eligible for nomination to formal preparation programs? If so, what might constitute a set of effective criteria, and how should these criteria align with current preparation standards? Which standards should be emphasized, and what research bases suggest these over others?

As districts consider who might mentor evolving leaders, which principals should be selected and which leadership experiences may be best for potential candidates? Does the answer mean that only certain principals should mentor pre-service leadership candidates or will any principal be sufficiently situated? Do these principals need to be experts in curriculum, instruction, and assessment (Schlueter & Walker, 2008, p. 15) or have some other capacities that will ensure the very best experiences for pre-preparation candidates and both support role success and commitment to becoming principals? Do they need to be supported and rewarded in particular ways to assure that their expertise and supervision have their intended impact?

Further, what do we know about effective principals' attributes and skills—such as intelligence, perceptiveness, and flexibility; organizational and human relations skills; ability to establish rapport with students and teachers; ability to work with and across teams or gain support from parents and community (Hooker, 2000)—that are most likely to provide potential candidates the richest, broadest, and most lasting and positive experiences under their tutelage?

Does a pre-preparation career path exist for effective principals? If yes, might districts be more successful in developing prospective candidates if they emulate those that follow such paths? That is, can we backward map from the experiences of successful principals who had teacher-leadership positions what they generally did for how long and to what effects to suggest strategic paths to leadership that both serve district needs and prepare candidates for the next steps?

In addition to providing stimulating, supportive, and demanding learning environments for future leaders, both pre-preparation and in-preparation, what else do we need to address to ensure that the high-quality teachers pursue and undertake the adult-leadership role as a principal. Programmatically, cohorts continue to shine as a way to encourage and support leadership development (Whitaker & Vogel, 2005, p. 16). As well, districts and university programs need to continue to focus on “targeted recruitment of minorities” (p. 17). Only districts can increase principal salaries to make the job more attractive and restructure the principalship in ways that make it more doable, less stressful, and more likely to be survivable (Whitaker & Vogel)—all in the interest of serving our children and youth better and ensuring that the US retains its capacities to compete globally.

Epilogue

It is no wonder that principal preparation programs have failed to recruit and select the very best people for our public schools, given that teacher preparation provides a similar model from which principal preparers obviously have taken their cues. That is, many teacher education programs tend not to be selective (Allen, 2003) for multiple reasons, including university requirements for large enrollments. That many men and women completing teacher preparation fail to enter teaching (Allen, 2005), particularly graduates of more selective undergraduate programs (Ballou, 1996; Ballou & Podgursky, 1997), signifies a systematic yet mindless waste of resources. That another 50% leave their initial teaching assignments or exit the profession between their third and fifth years in teaching (Allen, 2005; Ingersoll, 2001a; Ingersoll & Smith, 2003) is a national concern. Recent reports published by The New Teacher Project also suggest school and district policies may contribute significantly to the problem of less qualified teachers in urban classrooms (Levin, Mulhern, & Schunck, 2005; Levin & Quinn, 2003), perhaps undermining the potential for developing strong leadership in schools. That is, likely candidates for principal-preparation

programs emerge from the ranks of teachers, and one problem in finding high-quality principals may be a diminished pool of high-quality teachers. Another problem is the pervasive ethos among leadership educators—perhaps adopted from attitudes of teacher educators—that programs must train as many candidates as possible and throw them out there, hoping for the best and that the best stick it out.

It is clear that we have no state or national plans for human resource allocation such that the nation's children, no matter their background or place of residence, receive the very best education possible. It seems, particularly in an increasingly competitive global marketplace, that the US economy's continuing reliance on market functions can lead only to further declines in national capacity to compete effectively. Rather, we educators and anyone else who cares about children, youth and America's place in the world should require ourselves to recruit, select, and prepare only the very best for schools that are radically different from those we know. If not, we doom our children and our country to a rapidly quickening slide into the role of a second-class world power.

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