



**Report of the
Task Force to Evaluate and Redesign
Preparation Programs and Professional
Development for School Leaders**

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October 2003



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***Funded by the Wallace Foundation – State Action for Education Leadership
Project (SAELP)
with
Project Direction from the Commonwealth Policy Institute (CEPI)
of
Virginia Commonwealth University***

The Task Force to Evaluate and Redesign Preparation Programs and Professional Development for School Leaders

As school divisions across Virginia meet the demands of standards-based reform and the recently enacted *No Child Left Behind* legislation, they are facing another crisis in the making – the impending retirement of school administrators – by some estimates, as many as 40 percent in this decade. To make matters worse, there has been a sharp decline in the pool of candidates qualified to assume leadership positions. As a result of these and other concerns, the Department of Education collaborated with the Commonwealth Educational Policy Institute (CEPI) at Virginia Commonwealth University (VCU) in the preparation of a grant proposal for the reform of educational leadership which resulted in Virginia becoming one of only 15 states to receive a \$250,000 State Action for Educational Leadership Policy Project (SAELP) grant from the Wallace Foundation. To carry out one of the SAELP-VA initiatives, Superintendent of Public Instruction, Jo Lynne DeMary, recommended that a Task Force be established to evaluate and redesign preparation programs and professional development for school leaders. Dr. William C. Boshier, Dean of the VCU School of Education and Executive Director of CEPI, served as principal investigator with the support of CEPI staff members.

Members of the Task Force concluded their deliberations with 12 recommendations that focus on programs for: (1) preparing new school leaders; (2) partnerships for supporting school leaders; and (3) high-quality professional development for school leaders. The Task Force recommendations are as follows:

- 1. Develop a model core curriculum for principal preparation programs that is consistent with the administrator performance standards and evaluation criteria established by the Guidelines for Uniform Performance Standards and Evaluation Criteria for Teachers, Administrators, and Superintendents.*
- 2. Require a comprehensive internship of at least 300 clock hours; joint supervision would be the responsibility of participating school divisions and partnerships with institutions as a component of the initial school leadership program.*
- 3. Ensure that adjunct faculty members are an integral part of each institution's school leadership program.*
- 4. Establish a more effective and uniform evaluation of principal preparation programs for continuing accreditation.*
- 5. Require the **School Leaders Licensure Assessment (SLLA)** for initial licensure of school leaders.*
- 6. Establish local and regional leadership academies to prepare and support school leaders and to provide ongoing high quality professional development.*

- 7. Implement an induction/mentor program for school leaders.*
- 8. Study the feasibility of establishing a two-tier licensure system focusing on initial preparation and proven student and school achievement.*
- 9. Develop a marketing campaign to inform the public about the complex role of school administrators in fostering student and school achievement.*
- 10. Provide compensation for school leaders that is commensurate with the complex demands of the job.*
- 11. Provide high-quality professional development based on best practice, including targeted training activities in which school leaders and leaders from other enterprises study leadership issues together.*
- 12. Collaborate with institutions of higher education to reflect the service demands of the region to be served in principal preparation programs.*

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Task Force to Evaluate and Redesign Preparation Programs and Professional Development for School Leaders

BACKGROUND

The Value of School Leadership

High stakes accountability promises to make a profound impact on nearly every aspect of public education. Probably no individual has experienced the impact of the accountability movement more directly than the public school principal. No role has changed more dramatically.

There was a time when school principals were expected simply to manage schools; as long as discipline and order prevailed, everyone was happy. Principals were the people who moved students from grade to grade at an orderly pace while policies were decided at “higher levels.” When did the change start? Probably as early as the 1960s when the federal government began to focus on school curriculum, but most certainly with the publication of *A Nation at Risk* in the early 1980’s, which greatly heightened the perception that schools needed to improve.

Principals moved from the background as policy managers to the foreground as instructional leaders. The duties of the building manager were still part of the job and principals began to feel overwhelmed. School districts, states, and the federal government geared up to provide principals with the necessary knowledge and skills needed as instructional leaders. But the responsibility for school success was still a responsibility the principal could share with others – parents, the community, the students themselves.

Increasingly, however, state accountability systems are placing responsibility for school success and student achievement squarely on the principals’ shoulders. The school manager of the past is not prepared to change what students are taught, how they are taught, and what students are learning. Today’s principals face tough curriculum standards for an increasingly diverse student population and shoulder responsibilities that once belonged at home or in the community. Today’s principals face the possible termination of their schools if they do not show fast-paced student achievement.

Facing new roles and challenges, principals require new preparation and should be guided into their positions by highly competent, professional, and ethical mentors. A recent *Public Agenda* survey found that 69 percent of principals and 80 percent of superintendents believed that typical leadership programs are out of touch with the realities of what it takes to run today’s school systems. More than 85 percent of both groups believed that overhauling preparation programs would help improve leadership. A survey conducted in Virginia revealed that 88.3 percent of principals reported that their graduate education had been of “much value” (40 percent) or “some value” (48 percent) to their preparation as principals (DiPaola & Tschannen-Moran, 2001).

In addition to reforming programs, the nation is also facing a looming shortage of school leaders. Many schools across the nation will open this fall without a principal. In some areas, one in every five principals retired or resigned last year. In Virginia, one large urban school division reported that 40 percent of its principals will be eligible to retire in 2004 and fewer and fewer teachers are seeking degrees in administration. The National Association of Secondary School Principals (NASSP) recently released a national study in which 45 percent of school districts reported a severe shortage of qualified candidates for principals for all levels, but particularly at the secondary level.

The *American School Board Journal* describes the job of principal as “among the nation’s most demanding and thankless jobs.” The executive directors of the National Association of Elementary School Principals (NAESP) and NASSP said, “We know the reasons for the dearth of applicants [to principal programs and positions]. The hours are too long, the pay is too low, and the hassles are too many. Principals’ control over resources and staffing is too little, and the time for their real work – education – is catch as catch can on a normal school day. Threats of legal action and worry about violence hang over them continually. Nationwide pressures to raise test scores – and flunk students or deny a diploma if they fail – are exacerbating their pressures.”

Need to Redesign School Leadership Preparation Programs

In an address to principals of the Norfolk public schools, Superintendent John Simpson summarized the issues very effectively. He said, “The challenges that you face as school leaders have changed significantly in recent years. Your formal training at the university may not have prepared you adequately for the job as it is today. These responsibilities and challenges include the ability to:

- build a team and collaborate with teachers to move a plan forward.
- create an instructional vision that all stakeholders support and have a strong desire to achieve.
- read and analyze educational research and make the connection to practice in the schoolhouse.
- support and develop leadership skills in others, and advocate for those ready to assume leadership positions.
- communicate orally to share research with others in a clear and coherent manner for understanding.
- analyze various types of data, lead discussions with stakeholders, and draw conclusions to lead to continuous instructional improvement.
- develop the determination and stamina to see a project/initiative to successful implementation and completion.”

According to the recent Southern Regional Education Board (SREB) report, **Preparing a New Breed of School Principals: *It’s Time for Action***, the present time provides an opportunity to redefine “school leader.” This report, available on the SREB Web site (www.sreb.org), goes on

to establish what successful school leaders need to know and be able to do and follows with a detailed discussion of how effective school leaders should be prepared and developed.

Addressing Virginia's needs in school leadership is the Virginia State Action for Education Leadership Project (VA-SAELP) otherwise known as LEADERS Count – in Virginia Schools. VA-SAELP, operated through the Commonwealth Educational Policy Institute (CEPI) at Virginia Commonwealth University and supported by a National State Action for Educational Leadership Project grant, reports to the Commission to Review, Study, and Reform Educational Leadership. The commission, which was suggested by the CEPI to focus on the changing roles of school leaders, was created by the 2002 session of the Virginia General Assembly. HJR 20 and SJR 58 established the two-year, 21-member commission to review, study, and reform educational leadership. At the commission work session held on June 3, 2003, the Task Force to Evaluate and Redesign Preparation Programs and Professional Development for School Leaders, a 15-member group led by the Superintendent of Public Instruction and the Executive Director of the State Council on Higher Education for Virginia (SCHEV) to examine policy and practice issues in school leadership, presented recommendations to redesign preparation programs, deliver high quality professional development, and support school leaders. The task force recommendations are summarized in the next section.

TASK FORCE RECOMMENDATIONS

1. *Develop a core curriculum for principal preparation programs that is consistent with the administrator performance standards and evaluation criteria established by the Guidelines for Uniform Performance Standards and Evaluation Criteria for Teachers, Administrators, and Superintendents.*

Rationale: The Uniform Performance Standards and Evaluation Criteria were developed in response to the Education Accountability and Quality Enhancement Act of 1999. The Board of Education adopted the guidelines on January 2, 2000, to provide guidance in developing performance evaluation criteria for school personnel, including school administrators. The evaluation criteria, organized by the following five major categories, reflect the primary responsibilities of school principals:

- 1) Planning and Assessment – assess instructional programs and personnel;
- 2) Instructional Leadership – focus on the areas of personnel, curriculum, and staff development explicitly for enhancing instructional programs and student achievement;
- 3) Safety and Organizational Management for Learning – establish a climate to ensure safety and meaningful student learning;
- 4) Communications and Community Relations – use effective communication to promote continuous improvement of programs and services; and
- 5) Professionalism – demonstrate commitment to professional ethics.

With the Uniform Performance Standards and Evaluation Criteria as the core curriculum, principal preparation programs will provide the knowledge and skills that are essential for the preparation of effective school leaders, including a strong foundation in the principles of effective leadership, the use of data to determine needed change in classroom instruction, the scope of legal issues and requirements, and the identification of research-based best practice.

2. *Require a comprehensive internship of at least 300 clock hours; joint supervision would be the responsibility of the participating school divisions and partnerships with institutions as a component of the initial school leadership program.*

Rationale: According to program evaluations, the internship is considered by many practicing principals to be the most valuable component of their preparation. Surveys of practicing principals also reveal that a part-time internship or one that is phased in across the program is not as valuable as a comprehensive internship under the supervision of a trained mentor. Professional judgment and wisdom increase with experience. Guided experience contributes to the development of professional wisdom which, when combined with empirical evidence, contribute to the best decisions about how to improve instruction and increase student achievement. School divisions should be encouraged to sponsor internships that are developed in partnership with the

institution. Internships should consist of real life experiences of the principal and should not be spent on “house-keeping chores” that do not focus on student achievement.

3. *Ensure that adjunct faculty is an integral part of the institution’s principal preparation program.*

Rationale: Students tend to attribute great credibility to adjunct instructors who are viewed as coming “directly from the trenches.” Although the advantages of hearing about contemporary schooling cannot be overlooked, they are strengthened when presented in the context of a program framework. Institutions must take appropriate measures to provide orientation and support to adjunct instructors to ensure that the level of rigor and quality of instruction required of regular faculty is also required of adjunct instructors. Institutions also need to insure that adjunct instructors are provided the opportunity to participate actively in program implementation such as receiving regular program communication, student advisement, and access to on-site office space, and other resources.

4. *Establish a more effective and uniform evaluation of principal preparation programs for continuing accreditation.*

Rationale: Currently, all professional preparation programs in Virginia must submit annual reports to the Department of Education and include an on-site review, minimally every five years. Trained teams that develop a report of findings, which is submitted to the Board of Education with recommended action, conduct the on-site reviews. The development of a special evaluation rubric to determine the effectiveness of the principal preparation programs is being planned and should be implemented with program reviews in 2004.

5. *Require the School Leaders Licensure Assessment (SLLA) for initial licensure of school leaders.*

Rationale: While numerous assessments should be used to determine the suitability of candidates for school leadership positions, including appropriate screening measures prior to admission to programs, a single assessment for licensure such as the SLLA, will allow performance comparisons across programs. Feedback from practicing administrators reveals that effective school leaders need to complete unique learning experiences in which they develop different perspectives on leadership skills that will enable them to handle the challenges of the principalship. Entrance into most programs is based on self-selection without in-depth screening or outreach to talented individuals. One report indicates that only 6 percent of programs require a personal interview. Even more surprising is that only 40 percent of programs nationally require prior teaching experience. Assessments could be utilized at the beginning of programs, as well as during and at the conclusion, to determine suitability for the demands of the position and to identify strengths and weaknesses to be addressed during the program.

6. Establish local and regional leadership academies to prepare and support school leaders and to provide ongoing high quality professional development.

Rationale: There are many affective domains that must be addressed in the preparation of school leaders. Conflict management and resolution, innovation and risk-taking, ambition and energy, coping with adversity, integrity, insight, and relationships are just a few. Although there is a knowledge base that institutions should provide, leadership academies may provide the best arena for the exploration of these domains. The academy setting would also allow the development of a cohort of qualified leaders who support and challenge each other to meet the needs of all learners. Leadership academies may also serve as internship providers.

7. Implement an induction/mentor program for school leaders.

Rationale: Research has shown us that strong mentoring during a teacher's induction period helps retention and effectiveness. The same should prove true for new principals. Mentors provide opportunities to help new administrators make the shift from teacher to principal, to link theory with actual practice, and to develop professional judgment. Essential to the success of mentor programs is the selection of the mentor – not all principals can be effective mentors. If, during the internship, the individual is given busy work that is disjointed and not connected to real work responsibilities, the mentoring period becomes even more important as an opportunity for gaining knowledge about the job and for reflecting on experiences and decisions.

8. Study the feasibility of establishing a two-tier licensure system focusing on initial preparation and proven student and school achievement.

Rationale: The system would be composed of an initial license and a professional license. With an initial license, a new principal should be assigned a mentor, attend activities and seminars at a leadership academy, demonstrate the ability to enhance student achievement at the school level, and take required assessments before progressing to the professional license.

9. Develop a marketing campaign to inform the public about the complex role of school administrators in fostering student and school achievement.

Rationale: A public service campaign or announcements should be developed to enhance the perception of the value of the school principal. Talented and motivated leaders, who will energize communities, inspire teachers, and create meaningful learning environments must be attracted to the job of school principal and be adequately supported in the induction period.

10. *Provide compensation for school leaders that is commensurate with the complex demands of the job.*

Rationale: As increased accountability measures become the responsibility of school principals, serious dialogue must take place around increased funding to raise their salaries to attract and retain the most highly qualified leaders.

11. *Provide high quality professional development and targeted training activities in which school leaders and leaders from other enterprises study leadership issues together.*

Rationale: The role of school leader is a career-long collaborative endeavor that must be supported by high quality professional development. Activities must be planned, must be rigorous and systematic, and promote continuous inquiry and reflection. The activities must focus on student learning and achievement, school-wide educational improvement, leadership, subject content, teaching strategies, and use of technologies and other essential elements in teaching to high standards.

12. *Collaborate with institutions of higher education to reflect the service demands of the region to be served in principal preparation programs.*

Rationale: Institutions of higher education should become more entrepreneurial in service delivery and structure school leader preparation programs to support the goals and objectives established by school divisions.

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