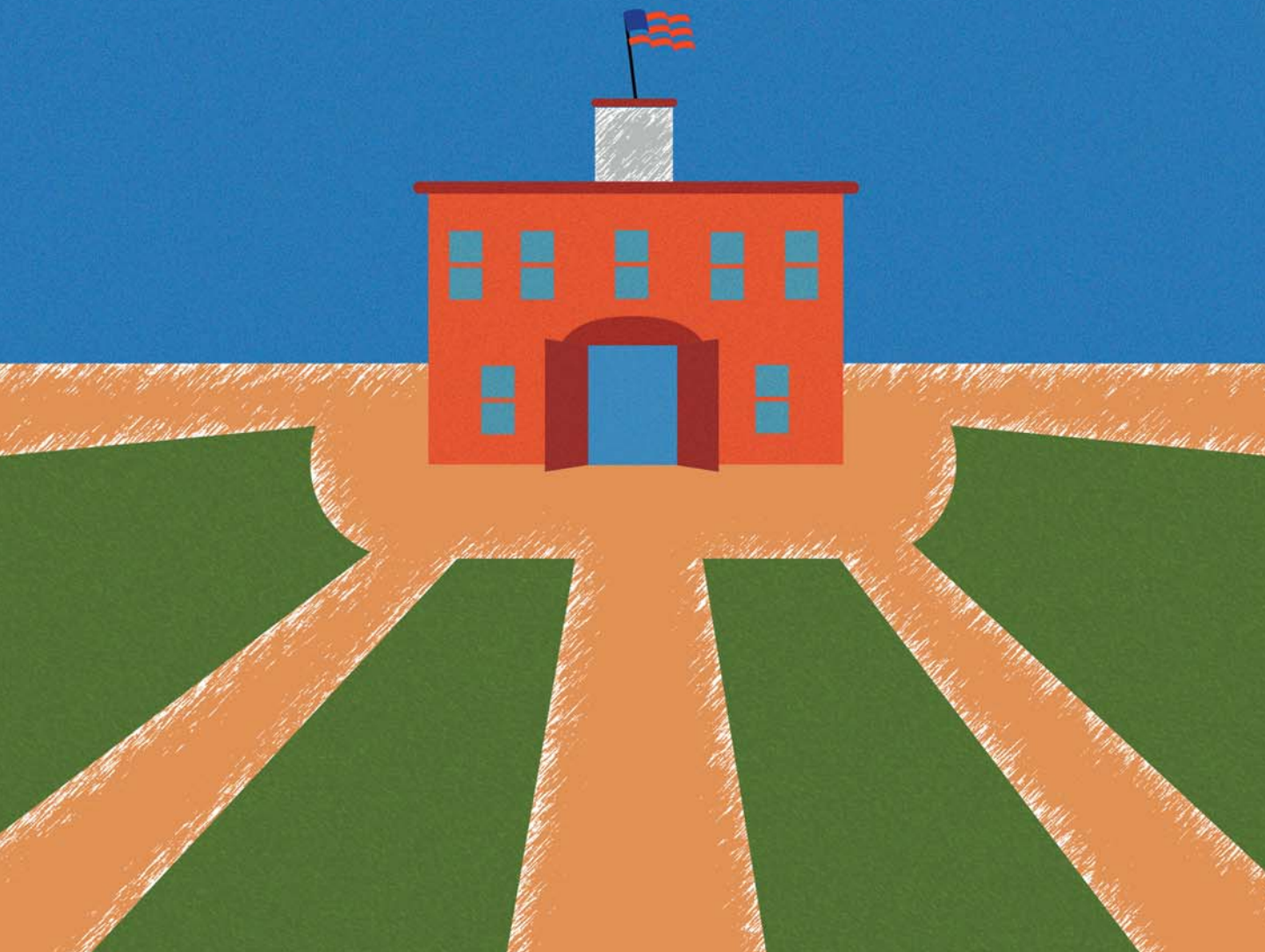


*Better Leaders for
America's Schools:*

A MANIFESTO



Better Leaders for America's Schools: A Manifesto

WITH PROFILES OF EDUCATION LEADERS AND
A SUMMARY OF STATE CERTIFICATION PRACTICES

May 2003



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Foreword

For America to have the great schools it needs, those schools must have great leaders – and so must their school systems.

This much is obvious. So is the reality that many U.S. schools don't have the caliber of leadership that they need today and that this problem is worsening as current principals and superintendents retire, as accountability demands escalate in the No Child Left Behind era, and—frankly—as the job of public-school leadership grows more difficult and unappealing. The hours are long, the duties many. The pay isn't great. The position seldom comes with authority equal to its responsibilities. One's bosses may be fickle, unpredictable and political. And one may or may not possess the skills, experience and knowledge needed to succeed.

Turning this situation around is plainly a huge challenge for American education but one we dare not shirk. The key question is where to find the kinds of principals and superintendents who can lead our schools to excellence.

As usual with vexing policy dilemmas, the education field has developed a conventional wisdom about how to resolve this one. And as too often happens, the conventional wisdom in this case boils down to: more of the same. We're told to improve the quantity and quality of school leadership by adding more formal training and certification requirements to those already in place. We're advised that one must first teach before one can possibly lead teachers. And we're cautioned, therefore, that the best if not the only place to look for tomorrow's leaders is within the ranks of today's educators.

As happens far too often in American education, however, this conventional wisdom turns out to be wrong, or at least incomplete. We will undoubtedly find some of tomorrow's great education leaders in the usual places, trained and licensed in the old, familiar ways. But we won't find enough of them there. And there's no reason to confine our search to the usual places.

The alternative approach—open more gates, welcome people from many different directions to enter them, minimize the hoops and hurdles and regulatory hassles, look for talent rather than paper credentials—has already taken root in public-school teaching (where it's often termed “alternative certification”). It's taken root in America's pri-

vate and charter schools. And in a dozen or more communities it's begun to take root in the superintendent's office, as leaders with such unconventional (i.e. non-education) backgrounds as New York City's Joel Klein, Los Angeles's Roy Romer, San Diego's Alan Bersin and Philadelphia's Paul Vallas strive to transform their cities' vast and challenging school systems.

Why, we ask, should such leaders be viewed as rare exceptions? And why not begin to think about the leadership of individual schools—i.e. the principal's post—in similar fashion? Why not simply seek the best leadership talent for our schools wherever it can be found?

The signers of this manifesto want American public education to consider that possibility, not as a wholesale change of course but as a promising experiment that ought to be tried in schools, school systems, perhaps entire states that aren't getting what they need from the traditional pipeline. The signers recommend lowering the barriers to entry for prospective leaders, recruiting individuals with outstanding skills from many directions, helping them acquire—from many sources—the specific knowledge that they need to lead the revival of education in America, and engaging them on terms that make it possible truly to lead, not just administer.

Deregulating the path to school leadership makes sense in its own right. It also parallels the path that many states have begun to follow to strengthen their teaching force. The Thomas B. Fordham Foundation and Thomas B. Fordham Institute have been proud to help mark that path by encouraging “outside the box” thinking about the preparation and certification of educators. Four years ago, we issued *The Teachers We Need and How to Get More of Them: A Manifesto* on behalf of several dozen state officials, prominent analysts and veteran practitioners. It argued that “for teachers, as for the schools in which they teach, the surest route to quality is to widen the entryway, deregulate the process, and hold people accountable for their results – results judged primarily in terms of classroom effectiveness as gauged by the value a teacher adds to pupils' educational experience.”

In July, 1999, that manifesto became the first chapter of a volume entitled *Better Teachers, Better Schools*, which strengthened the conceptual and research foundation for a bold new approach to teacher quality.

Today, we find the case for a bold new approach to public-school leadership even more compelling. To present that case as completely as possible, the present volume contains three parts. First is *Better Leaders for America's Schools: A Manifesto*, which

reflects the views of dozens of individuals from many parts of the education and policy worlds. The initial signers of this manifesto are named on page 42. Others wishing to sign on can do so by surfing to the document on the Thomas B. Fordham web site at www.edexcellence.net/manifesto/manifesto.html and following the directions on the screen.

To illustrate the kinds of people who can make their way into positions of school leadership when the rules change, the second section of this volume profiles six unconventional but outstanding principals and superintendents. Lawrence Meyer, a former reporter and editor at *The Washington Post*, crafted these perceptive sketches.

Emily Feistritzer, President of the National Center for Education Information (NCEI), authored the third part, which summarizes the findings of a major survey that NCEI undertook to determine, for all fifty states, the requirements by which public school principals and superintendents are presently certified and to ascertain what—if any—procedures are in place for people from unconventional backgrounds to enter such positions. (The full survey can be found on-line at www.ncei.com.)

All three parts of this volume—indeed, this entire project—were supported in substantial part by the Broad Foundation, which not only made a grant to the Thomas B. Fordham Institute to cover much of the cost but which also provided immensely valuable advice, leads, encouragement and collegueship. We are proud to publish this volume in conjunction with such a terrific partner, whose many efforts on behalf of strengthening America's public education leadership are among the most promising developments in the field. Special thanks are due not only to Eli and Edythe Broad for inspiring, funding and leading those efforts, but also to ace Broad Foundation staffers Dan Katzir and Becca Bracy. At the Fordham Institute, program director Terry Ryan did most of the heavy lifting. This project and volume could not have happened without his keen intellect, resourcefulness, boundless energy and infectious good cheer. He joins me in thanking Lawrence Meyer for his good work both in writing the profiles and in helping wordsmith the manifesto, and Emily Feistritzer and her team for yeoman work on the state survey.

We're also greatly indebted to the 14 individuals who brainstormed with us in December 2002 and subsequently helped to shape the manifesto. They include Mike Casserly, Executive Director of the Council of the Great City Schools; Michael Podgursky, Professor of Economics at the University of Missouri-Columbia; David Steiner, Department Chair at the Boston University School of Education; Sandra Stotsky, Deputy Commissioner of Academic Affairs at the Massachusetts Department

of Education; Frederick Hess, Resident Scholar at the American Enterprise Institute; Scott Hamilton, Managing Director of the Pisces Foundation; Stacey Boyd, former President and CEO of Project Achieve; Allen Grossman, Professor of Management Practice at the Harvard Business School; the Broad Foundation's Dan Katzir and Becca Bracy; Leo Klagholz, former New Jersey State Commissioner of Education; Jon Schnur, President of New Leaders for New Schools; Ann Higdon, CEO and Superintendent of the ISUS Trade and Technology Prep Charter Schools; and Mary Lee Fitzgerald, Director of Education Programs at the Wallace-Reader's Digest Funds.

Thanks, too, to Fordham Institute research director Marci Kanstoroom and finance director Eric Osberg for their timely comments, editorial suggestions, and managerial support; to staff assistant Katie Somerville for her apt and thorough help; and to Emilia Ryan, who designed and laid out this publication in both its electronic and printed editions.

The Thomas B. Fordham Institute seeks to improve the quality and effectiveness of American elementary-secondary education and to deepen the understanding of educators, policymakers, journalists, parents and the general public with respect to the problems that impede high quality education in the United States and possible solutions to those problems. It shares staff, offices and trustees with the Thomas B. Fordham Foundation and is designed to advance the education reform ideas that it also shares with the Foundation. Further information can be obtained from our web site <http://www.edexcellence.net/tbf institute/index.html> or by writing us at 1627 K St., NW, Suite 600, Washington, D.C. 20006. (We can also be emailed through our web site). This publication is available on the Institute's web site. Hard copies can be obtained by calling 1-888-TBF-7474 (single copies are free). The Institute is neither connected with nor sponsored by Fordham University.

Chester E. Finn, Jr., President
Thomas B. Fordham Institute
Washington, DC
May 2003

Introduction

Four years ago, my family established The Broad Foundation because we believe there is no more important contribution to our nation's future than a determined, long-term commitment to improve public education. We decided to focus the Foundation's efforts on areas that no one else is specifically focused on -- improving governance, management and labor relations in the nation's largest urban school districts. These are essential, often overlooked, elements in American education that will lead to higher academic achievement for all students and to greater economic opportunities for the next generation.

Superintendents and principals are key to ensuring that all children achieve at high levels.

Unfortunately, too many current and aspiring education leaders have grown up in mediocre, failing or only incrementally improving school systems. Well-meaning educators often find themselves hired as school or school system CEOs with the required credentials but without the appropriate training or experience to successfully lead these complex organizations.

Superintendents – and increasingly principals – are responsible for personnel, facilities, financial planning, human resources, management, budgeting, labor relations, organizational development and, above all else, they are responsible for the education of our children. This is serious, urgent business – the business of providing a world-class education to every student in every classroom in every school in every district. We must get it done.

That is why it is so important that our urban public schools have the best and the brightest leaders at their helm, regardless of their professional backgrounds or paper credentials. Our nation's education system needs more highly qualified leaders – from all walks of life.

We should look for superintendents and principals within our K-12 education system, but we should also seek out talented leaders from other fields. We should create alternative pathways for school and school system administrators – as has been done for teachers – so that managerial talent from all sectors can more easily make the transition into public education. Rather than create bureaucratic barriers to entry, we should focus on strategic recruitment, induction and measures to hold leaders accountable for results once they are hired.

The Broad Foundation is pleased to be a sponsor of *Better Leaders for America's Schools*, which goes beyond the conventional wisdom and offers solutions to challenge the status quo. We appreciate the excellent work done by Chester Finn and his colleagues at The Thomas B. Fordham Institute and the National Center for Education Information on the following manifesto and companion documents. We hope that this volume will serve as a catalyst to improve the quality of leadership in our nation's public schools. In particular, we hope that this spurs state and district leaders to open avenues for outstanding professionals from all careers to take on and succeed in leadership roles in schools and districts across the country.

Eli Broad, Founder
The Broad Foundation
Los Angeles, CA
May 2003

Better Leaders for America's Schools: A Manifesto

Executive Summary

Premise: for America to have the great schools it needs, those schools must have great leaders—and so must their school systems.

Problem:

- America’s schools face a leadership crisis.
- Despite a surplus in many places of people “certified” for administrative positions, our schools too often are not being led by qualified men and women.
- A certified administrator is not necessarily a qualified leader.
- Tightening requirements will not improve the situation.
- Bureaucratic requirements with little relevance to the task at hand discourage the leaders we need from entering our public schools.

Solution:

- Conventional certification requirements for public-school principals and superintendents should be radically reduced, and replaced by criteria that stress leadership qualities rather than simply an education background.
- Candidates for school-leadership positions should be recruited from inside and outside the education field, trained as necessary, and evaluated according to the results they achieve.
- School districts should play a major role in shaping the training of their school leaders—and obtaining that training from many providers, not just colleges of education.
- Principals and superintendents should be well compensated—at levels that encourage able people to assume and retain such posts.
- Superintendents and principals need sweeping authority over the personnel and operations of the schools for which they are responsible.
- Principals and superintendents who fail to produce the needed results after a reasonable period of time should not be retained.

Overview

America's public schools face a paradox. Even as states report a surplus of formally credentialed candidates for administrative positions, many schools and school systems cannot find the exceptional candidates that they need to lead them. Our public-education system confronts a leadership famine amidst a feast of "certified" leaders. This unhappy situation results from a flawed arrangement that annually confers administrator licenses upon thousands of educators who have scant interest in actually serving as school superintendents or principals and who, even when interested, often lack the exceptional leadership qualities so urgently needed in today's schools.

We cannot afford for it to be that way. It need not be that way. And in some places this dysfunctional arrangement is beginning to change. Just as many state and local governments have embraced innovative ways of recruiting and training teachers, allowing into their classrooms talented men and women who lack conventional credentials, so are some of the nation's largest school systems—including New York and Los Angeles—beginning to welcome able people with unconventional backgrounds into leadership roles.

We applaud these developments. America will not have the great schools it needs if we adhere to the view that the only way to improve school leadership is to layer more formal training and certification requirements atop those that have not worked in the past. That is a formula for failure.

Today's conventional training and certification requirements for prospective school leaders are already so burdensome that they deter many educators with leadership qualities from moving into key administrative roles, while virtually barring proven leaders from different professions. More such requirements are destined to yield more disappointment and fewer great leaders. Hence it's time to think about a different solution: One promising way to improve our schools is to *lower* the barriers to entry for prospective leaders, to search high and low for able people, to provide them the skills and knowledge they need to spearhead the effort to give America's children a superior education—and to engage them on terms that make it possible truly to lead, not merely to administer or manage.

Instead of erecting higher hurdles to entry, we should pursue two simultaneous courses. First, we should strive to locate and develop strong leaders within the educa-

tion field by recruiting proven educators with leadership qualities who may not now be seeking such roles because of insufficient salary or because of constraints that make the job of running a school or school system unappealing. Second, we should cast a wider net, seeking prospective school leaders wherever they can be found. In this document, we primarily address the second path, but it is clear that the two strategies are interconnected, particularly when it comes to creating workable terms of employment for tomorrow's school leaders.

To advocate opening the system to non-educators is not to deprecate today's school leaders or to suggest that some of tomorrow's leadership cannot be found within the profession. It is simply to recognize that many schools, school systems, and states face a shortage of quality leaders and that this problem is growing more acute. The solution is not simply to do more of what we have always done. If we are serious about leaving no child behind, we must also leave none of America's 92,000 public schools behind in the quest for effective education leaders.¹

The Problem

If two decades of research into school effectiveness have reached any reliable conclusion, it's that successful schools invariably have dynamic, savvy, and focused leaders—women and men who are capable of rallying educators, parents, children, and community members to achieve shared goals. Yet far too many U.S. schools and school districts lack such helmsmen. A worsening shortage of top-notch principals and superintendents in public education—especially those willing to work and able to succeed in potentially difficult urban and rural situations—poses a significant barrier to our national commitment to educate all children to the limits of their abilities. “Many principals are leaving [the job] earlier and getting out as soon as they can. States are reporting shortages of qualified candidates,” says Vincent Ferrandino, executive director of the 30,000-member National Association of Elementary School Principals.²

A recent survey of school superintendents found that fewer than two in five were satisfied with their principals' ability to make tough decisions, delegate responsibility, engage teachers in developing policies, or spend money efficiently. When filling a principal's position, 60 percent of superintendents agreed they must “take what you get.”³ Nor is the situation satisfactory in every central office. In Wisconsin, for example, a state with 431 superintendents, 65 of them changed in 2001 and 79 more changed during the first ten months of 2002. In other words, Wisconsin saw one in three of its superintendents leave their posts within the past two years.⁴ At a time when Congress has set a twelve-year timetable for bringing every American student to “proficiency” in core subjects, we delude ourselves if we think we can transform thousands of weak schools into strong ones without paying urgent attention to those who lead them.

The core issue, however, is not one of quantity: Most states have plenty of people licensed as school administrators, often more than they have positions to fill. The urgent problem is quality. Our conventional procedures for training and certifying public-school administrators in the United States are simply failing to produce a sufficiency of leaders whose vision, energy, and skill can successfully raise the educational standard for all children.⁵ State certification laws and regulations ordinarily set forth myriad requirements for public-school principals—requirements, incidentally, from which private schools and most charter schools are exempt—that typically include years of prior teaching experience; education-school courses in school administration,

pedagogy, psychology, and philosophy; graduate degrees; and ongoing training. In most places, a parallel set of requirements applies to candidates for the post of school superintendent.

These requirements amount to a paperwork and regulatory labyrinth that deters some able leaders from even entering, while failing to prepare those who do enter for the actual challenges of producing outstanding academic results in today's schools. When it comes to school leadership, we conclude that more—more requirements, more regulations, more courses, more credentials—is not the same as better. *Being certified* is simply not the same as being *qualified* to lead a school or school district successfully in an era of results-based accountability.

Principals

The principal's job has changed profoundly in the decades since the familiar certification regimen was put in place. At that time, its main tasks were supervising teachers, managing the building, and dealing with parents. If the school was tidy and orderly, the staff content, the parents quiescent, and the downtown bureaucracy untroubled, the principal was assumed to be doing his or her job. Today, however, while all of those old responsibilities endure, the principal's main task has evolved into something very different: to develop a vision of learning; to build a school culture and instructional programs conducive to learning for all pupils; to manage staff, students, and parents with needs and problems that did not exist or were largely ignored in the past; and, above all, to produce excellent academic results as gauged by external measures such as state proficiency tests keyed to statewide academic standards.

All of these results are supposed to happen with little additional money—and in the midst of burgeoning red tape and tightening constraints, as special programs proliferate, budgets become more complex, federal, state, and local rules proliferate, bureaucracies grow more unwieldy, and collective bargaining contracts constrict independent administrative action even more, particularly with respect to personnel.

Today's principals face a daunting situation: they shoulder greater responsibility than ever before—now typically including politics, security, public relations, finances, personnel, and technology. They have, in effect, become CEOs of small public businesses whose chief product is learning. They are profoundly accountable for their results. Yet they have scant authority to make and execute important decisions, and they are not paid much.

Superintendents

As the principal's job has been redefined, so has the superintendent's. No longer does he or she merely "run" a "system." Doing that job well today means intervening in faltering schools, mediating between school and state, collaborating with business, civic, and municipal leaders, engaging in complex labor relations, making tough decisions about priorities, finding resources, and selecting first-rate leaders for every school in the system. These skills are the core of what superintendents must do in today's world—but they're not taught in colleges of education, and no amount of credentialing can create them, either.

Catching the Wave

When it comes to teachers, America has begun to depend less on traditional credentialing. Notable changes have occurred recently in the pathways into public-school classrooms. New recruits from outside the traditional ranks are starting to make their mark. Following alternative routes, prospective teachers can bypass or shortcut the traditional training and licensure procedures. Since the early 1990s, a number of states have partially deregulated their teaching professions. The result has been an infusion of enterprise and innovation in the ways that teachers are recruited and trained. All but three states now have alternative routes to teacher certification for individuals who already have a bachelor's degree, usually in a field other than education. Approximately one-third of new teachers are entering via these unconventional routes.

Many of them are proving to be terrific classroom practitioners, willing to tackle some of the toughest school challenges. As Secretary of Education Rod Paige has observed, “alternate routes to certification demonstrate that streamlined systems can boost the quantity of teachers while maintaining—or even improving—their quality.” For example, since 1990 the Teach For America (TFA) program alone has recruited close to 9,000 outstanding college graduates to work in some of the nation's most troubled public schools. A recent evaluation of the program found that “A typical TFA corps member earned a grade-point average of 3.4 out of 4.0, and 87 percent of recruits have leadership experience.”⁶ TFA candidates take part in an intensive five-week summer training program, practicing their classroom technique under the guidance of master teachers by day and attending workshops and discussion groups in the evening. These recruits, from a variety of academic disciplines, have directly influenced the lives of more than 1.25 million students. Many have remained in the classroom, even as others have gone on to found and lead schools and to occupy other positions of increasing influence throughout K-12 education.

Nobody claims that alternative certification will solve all the problems of the teaching field. But we already see that this experiment has not failed.⁷ It has been worth trying—and we should continue refining, developing, and evaluating it even as we also work at myriad reforms of the traditional system. Pragmatism is at the core of the American experience—try something and, if that doesn't work, try something else, but, as Franklin D. Roosevelt argued in the midst of another domestic crisis two generations ago, “Above all, do *something*.”

As with teaching, so with school leadership. Promising reforms should of course be undertaken in the traditional arrangements for recruiting and training school leaders. But that cannot be the whole story, not at a time when the needs are so great and when there's no convincing evidence that any one strategy will work in every situation. In school leadership as in teaching, we must also try bold new approaches. One such approach is to dispense with the traditional reliance on prior teaching experience, education-school courses, and other hallmarks of the credentialing system. Instead, public education should focus on the only measure worth considering—results in the classroom. As we accept the premise that teachers should be held accountable for classroom-level results, we would do well to take the same approach with administrators: Hold them accountable for what they and their schools produce, rather than requiring them to jump credentialing hurdles that may bear no relation to the actual skills and talents needed to succeed in the tasks at hand.

The idea of reducing the entry barriers for educational leaders is less revolutionary than it seems. A recent survey by the National Center for Education Information (NCEI) shows for the first time what states are already doing by way of alternative certification for public-school administrators. In the past five years, Michigan and South Dakota have stopped requiring certification of either principals or superintendents. Six more jurisdictions (Florida, Hawaii, North Carolina, Tennessee, Wyoming, and the District of Columbia) no longer issue certificates to superintendents. In these places, local school systems set their own leadership requirements. Eleven states have already created explicit “alternate routes” to certification as public-school administrators. Three more, while not terming the process “alternative,” have programs for nontraditional candidates to assume positions of school leadership.⁸ Fully 20 percent of the 58 superintendents in the Council of the Great City Schools are nontraditional, including those now serving in Chicago, Denver, Los Angeles, Miami-Dade County, New York, Philadelphia, San Diego, Seattle, and Toledo. California has recently enacted a law that allows educators to become principals faster by passing a test rather than taking two more years of university course work.⁹

Though these unconventional entry paths are not yet widely used (especially for school principals), their very existence shows that American ingenuity and pragmatism are starting to operate in this domain, too. In fits and starts, something interesting and important is happening: Public education is opening itself up to talented men and women who seek to enter school leadership from nontraditional backgrounds. Common sense is breaking through the red tape as education starts to experiment with the approach that most successful modern enterprises have adopted to boost their per-

formance and productivity: Set high standards for the results to be achieved; identify clear indicators to measure progress toward those results; and then be flexible and diverse about the means by which the desired results are pursued. This strategy in education is sometimes called “standards based” or “systemic” reform. The “No Child Left Behind” legislation enacted in early 2002 adopts this approach while reinforcing the conviction that great schools are not apt to flourish unless led by great principals and superintendents.

Expanding the Pool

Although we believe that many school districts could benefit from our recommendations, our most urgent concern is with the schools and communities that are least well served by traditional arrangements for identifying, recruiting, training, licensing; and employing principals and superintendents. For their sake and that of their students, it's time to try different approaches.

In those places that are willing to innovate, we propose expanding the pool of potential school leaders by simplifying entry requirements to a bare minimum, introducing competition for training future leaders, and radically altering the terms of employment for those leaders. We urge a system that allows a wide array of talented, creative, and committed individuals to be freely considered for leadership roles in public education. That does not mean we are scrapping standards. To the contrary, we would hold school leaders to the highest standards, but these should be stated primarily in terms of school effectiveness, not the paper credentials possessed by the man or woman who occupies the principal's or superintendent's chair. In short, we propose streamlining the credentialing process so that more energy and resources focus on how school leaders perform and students achieve.

The School Leader as CEO

Private and charter schools already enjoy this flexibility when selecting their leaders. They can search for excellence in a broad, deep pool of candidates. More than one in ten of their principals have not previously been teachers.¹⁰ Yet traditional public school educators have been wary of allowing non-educators through this widened gateway. (A recent Public Agenda survey of principals and superintendents reported “overwhelming resistance to bringing in leaders from outside education.”)¹¹ On average, traditional public-school principals spent 12.8 years teaching before taking the school helm and virtually none came to the job without K-12 teaching experience.¹²

Just how necessary is this? Why do private and charter schools frequently dispense with it? The usual rationale for requiring teaching experience is that the principal is first and foremost the school's “instructional leader.” But let's look closer. There's no denying that a school's principal is responsible for its instructional leadership, along with much else. The core of the job is ensuring a high quality curriculum, effective

teaching in every classroom, and satisfactory academic performance by the school's pupils. But that does not mean the principal must be the "best" teacher or "principal teacher" in the school. He or she *may* assume this task directly or may instead function as the school's CEO, delegating to others—a vice principal, head teacher or dean of instruction—the weighty and complex task of designing, delivering, and supervising curriculum and instruction.

This point bears repeating. The modern term is "distributed leadership." It means that a school's leadership team must possess a great many crucial abilities and forms of expertise, instruction foremost among them. But it does not mean that the person occupying the principal's office must be an instructional expert—so long as others on the leadership team are. Though small schools may have small teams, in many of today's schools several people belong to that team—and in vast high schools they may number a dozen or more. Considering the myriad demands made on the leaders of today's schools, let's face the fact that success is apt to hinge on a team effort that goes beyond a single education "superhero" who does it all.¹³

Note, too, that in many contemporary schools, relatively little of what principals do relates directly to instruction. They are more like field commanders of an army engaged in conflicts on many fronts. As Marc Tucker and Judy Coddling report, "Principals refer to themselves as 'one-minute decision makers' because they have a minute or less to decide an issue before they are confronted with the next one."¹⁴ The day simply isn't long enough for principals to focus nonstop on the specifics of effective instruction. Their big job is to lead an organization in which others can focus all day long on that core mission.

In many lines of work, nonprofit as well as commercial, the CEO is well compensated for taking on myriad demands and long hours. Yet public-school principals are not paid very well. In Indiana, for example, experienced teachers make \$50,000 or more a year while the average salary for principals is about \$60,000. Yet principals in Indiana's 1,882 public schools, like principals across the country, usually work ten to twelve months of the year, meaning that they earn less per day than a veteran teacher.¹⁵ In California, a teacher with fourteen years of experience and a master's degree can earn as much as \$80,000 a year, equivalent to a beginning high-school principal.¹⁶ Compared to other occupations, the pay difference between school leaders and their team members is very thin. On average, principals make about 1.75 times what teachers earn, while in manufacturing the difference between managers and workers is 2.8, and in law the difference between a first-year full partner and a paralegal is 2.73.¹⁷

In fact, however, pay is only a small part of the story. In most lines of work, an organization's CEO has sweeping authority to make and implement decisions. His span of authority keeps pace with the extent of his responsibility. Yet in today's public schools, principals are being given more responsibility without a commensurate increase in their authority to make decisions on such things as spending, staffing, and instruction. Is it any wonder that a 1999 survey of California superintendents found 90 percent reporting a lack of candidates to fill their most recent high-school principal jobs?¹⁸

It's clear that many changes will be needed in public education if the principal's job is to carry both the authority and the compensation that match its responsibilities. Some of these changes will be difficult to make. But we can start with one that's obvious and relatively easy: Expand the pool of potential school leaders—as is already being done to provide alternative pathways for teachers—to include many more people than the traditional certification system allows.

It is no more essential for every education leader to be a teacher than for the CEO of Bristol-Myers Squibb to be a chemist. In any organization, the similarities between technical and leadership roles and skills are incidental and the differences fundamental. When it comes to schools, leadership is so much a function of talent and prior leadership experience that it's a mistake to accord technical training a central position in the selection process. A parallel can be drawn to the MBA. Business school can surely hone the skills of a prospective or current corporate leader, but leadership capability is often found outside such programs and may or may not be created by them. Much the same can be said of journalism, the formal study of which may strengthen the skill-set of a reporter or editor but cannot create talents that don't previously exist in people.

A Faulty Pipeline

Though many of them turn out to be good at their jobs, traditional school leaders are groomed in a system that is both insular and linear. In fact, the way they are now prepared is a significant part of the problem.

According to standard public-education practice, teachers—and other insiders such as librarians and coaches—who wish to be principals *nominate themselves* by jumping through the certification hoops. Typically, a teacher takes administration courses at a school of education in the evenings, on weekends, and during the summer in order to obtain the appropriate state license. Then the teacher, if he or she truly wants to shoulder the burdens of school leadership, applies for a principal's position. Once a principal, he or she may take more courses and, if the opportunity presents itself, perhaps move into the district office. With a little luck, decent political skills, and ample ambition, an ascent to the superintendent's desk may follow. This process demonstrates an educator's perseverance, but it does little to spot and enhance leadership skills.

America faces no shortage of teachers willing to jump through the leadership-certification hoops, but we face an acute shortage of quality leaders for our schools. It's surprising to note that many states actually have a surplus of people with administrator certificates. Yet school systems in many of those states cannot fill their principal vacancies with suitable candidates because few who hold the certificates are actually interested in the challenges of leading schools. In Illinois, for example, according to the NCEI study, about 1,300 educators *annually* receive certification as school principals, although the state has a total of only 3,000 public-school principals. Nearly half of the people in Massachusetts who receive certification as principals do not seek jobs as administrators.

Nevertheless, even as the state's education schools continue to crank out a surfeit of "certified" principal candidates, schools in Chicago and other Illinois cities struggle to find and hire *capable* individuals as leaders. One reason for this anomaly: In most states, teachers who get certified as principals automatically move up the pay scale whether they move into the principal's office or not. Thus licensure becomes a way to fatten one's paycheck, not to enlarge one's responsibilities. Moreover, many states subsidize the licensure process itself, not just by contributing to enhanced salaries but also by underwriting the public universities in which most of the training occurs and, in

many places, reimbursing teachers for whatever tuition expenses they incur while attending those subsidized training programs. The public thus contributes generously to a process that ultimately fails to yield the school leaders we need.

In too many instances, moreover, the instruction these would-be administrators receive in the course of the training-and-certification cycle has little bearing on the problems that real school leaders face. And the school districts for which they work have little voice in determining their course of study. Harvard education professor Richard Elmore describes a “cartel” that controls access to school administration, running that system not to benefit schools but rather themselves. “It’s an unholy alliance,” he writes, “of colleges of education, state departments of education, and local education agencies that have created a credit-hour accumulation system to supply revenue to colleges and universities to supply a large reserve pool of unqualified people and to promote the certification process at the state level.”¹⁹

This cartel surely benefits the colleges and the teachers who avail themselves of it to secure higher pay, yet it fails to produce the leaders that our schools need even as it discourages would-be leaders from taking the plunge. Christopher Lund, a former Teach For America volunteer who became the youngest school principal in Los Angeles, points to a prevailing belief “that you had to occupy certain positions before you became a principal. That’s why I think there are very few young principals, because of the hoops you have to jump through.”

We need to change that mindset. Expanding the pool of candidates for school leadership positions to include talented younger teachers and people from other backgrounds would bring new energy, ideas, and skills into our public schools. Breaking the cartel would also bring healthy competition to education schools, as other suppliers vie with them to provide school leaders with the training they need. A few top schools of education, including Harvard’s, are already partnering with business schools to bring different insights into education-leadership programs. But such collaboration remains rare.

If we are to experiment with changes in the traditional system, what should we focus on? We consider first the characteristics of leadership; then the changes we advocate for bringing more men and women with those qualities into our public schools; and then the changes in their role that will be needed for topnotch leaders to produce the results we seek.

Successful Education Leaders

Among the essential qualities that any leader must have are energy, a sense of direction, and a determination to succeed that inspires others to perform. A leader may not personally possess every skill or expertise needed to perform every task in the organization, but he or she must be able to convey a sense of urgency to those who do perform the work. A leader must be able to define a goal and direct the institution's effort toward its realization.

No definition of educational leadership encompasses all the qualities that come into play in different circumstances. There's no one model. There may be hundreds. A style of leadership that achieves enormous success in one setting may fail in another. As Frederick Hess, resident scholar at the American Enterprise Institute, notes: "There is no one style of 'corporate' leadership, and there neither is nor should be a unique 'educational leadership.'"²⁰

Recognizing that diversity, let us examine more closely some of the essential qualities that superintendents and principals need in order to achieve excellence in their schools.

Superintendents

The Council of the Great City Schools found in a study²¹ of large urban school districts that had improved academically and reduced their achievement gaps that their superintendents were often marked by:

- **Clear vision.** Successful superintendents possess clear vision about what an effective school district looks like, a strong belief system in the worth and capacity of all children, a strong will, personal humility, and a keen sense of mission to raise student achievement.
- **Strong leadership.** Superintendents are driven to produce results, and are able to translate their vision into clear goals, rally the support of others to attain them, and create and sustain a sense of urgency for improving student performance.
- **Relentless focus.** The most effective superintendents are also able to focus their own energies and the energies of others over a prolonged period on improving

student achievement in ways that are unrelenting and that are not distracted from the core mission of the school district.

- **Political acuity.** Superintendents in school districts large and small are required to establish priorities and balance often conflicting interests, manage the expectations of their school boards and mayors, handle the well-being of staff, communicate clearly, share credit, absorb blame, and negotiate among disparate community groups.
- **Personal accountability.** Superintendents have a strong sense of personal accountability for the success of their students; they insist on the accountability of others for results and establish strong data systems to monitor progress on the district's goals.
- **Effective management.** Superintendents are capable of managing complex, multi-layered organizations. They insist on operational excellence and financial integrity, and pride themselves on identifying talented staff and organizing them into an effective unit.
- **Fortitude.** The superintendent must, in Churchill's words, "never surrender." The task will always be great and the work often lonely, but, as Seattle's Joseph Olchefske says, "This is the hell I have chosen."

It's a daunting list of attributes, yes, but not one that's confined to educators. To be sure, school superintendents, particularly in large urban communities, operate in a unique political stew of determined employers, vigilant press, aggressive unions, and neighborhoods fractured by race, language, income, and religion—all contending (often with scarce resources) over the one thing they care about most, their children. But the skills needed to negotiate this landscape are not unique to educators.

Individuals with these abilities can be found in many walks of life, among men and women who have succeeded in myriad careers and professions. They are not so very different from the attributes needed for outstanding leadership in business, health care, the military, higher education, and government itself. They do not originate in university classrooms, though they may be burnished there. Yet these are the traits that employers of school superintendents should insist on—and screen for.

People who possess these skills should be welcome in public education, and a few already have been. Consider, for example, Joel Klein, a lawyer, in New York City; Roy Romer, a former governor, in Los Angeles; John Fryer, a retired Air Force general in Jacksonville, Fla.; Paul Vallas, a former city budget director, in Philadelphia; Alan

Bersin, a former federal prosecutor, in San Diego; and onetime phone-company executive Paula Dawning in Benton Harbor, Michigan.

Principals

If superintendents are education's field marshals, principals are its front-line officers. They, too, must bring certain crucial strengths to their positions. As the country loses patience with nonperforming schools and as demands mount to measure educational performance and hold people to account for it, we can no longer afford principals who are glorified managers and disciplinarians yet who shoulder little responsibility for their schools' performance. But here, too, what one typically learns in a university-based "leadership training" program—and what a state certification bureau looks for—are a far cry from the qualities that matter most to those actually selecting a school's principal. It's character that matters most, not credentials. Among the most important of those attributes:

- **Leadership.** A principal must take charge of inspiring and directing a team of diverse people and solving institutional problems to ensure student learning.
- **Focus.** The principal must take steps to ensure that the school's curriculum and teaching are aligned with state expectations—and stay that way.
- **Political savvy.** For principals, especially, all politics is local. They must operate in a political environment, advancing the interests of their schools while maintaining the trust and respect of teachers, students, parents, and neighborhood.
- **Sense of urgency.** The principal must create and sustain a sense of mission for the school, including high expectations for every student.
- **Managerial competence.** The principal runs what is, in effect, a midsized business. The typical principal manages 30 professionals, 14 support staffers, and a variety of outside vendors that provide services to the school, as well as a multimillion dollar budget and the care of hundreds, even thousands, of "clients."
- **Resourcefulness.** The principal must be able to accomplish goals while staying within budget and, when necessary, raising additional funds or leveraging other resources.
- **Energy, resilience, and dedication.** A principal has to work long hours, attend to myriad details, make important decisions on the spot, and withstand pressures from above and below. Without commitment, anybody's spirit would flag under the constant demands.

- Effective use of data. “Effective principals use multiple sources of data as diagnostic tools to assess, identify and apply instructional improvement,” according to the National Association of Elementary School Principals. They use “data to assess student achievement and factors that affect it. They know how to communicate the meaning of data and lead the school community in using data constructively to improve teaching and learning.”²²

Where can candidates be found who are generously endowed with these many and exacting qualities? Some, to be sure, can be recruited from the ranks of educators. But why stop there? They can also be found in the military, in business and higher education, in private and charter schools, in other branches of public administration, and in the nonprofit worlds of foundations and community organizations. In short, candidates may be anywhere and everywhere, so we dare not narrow our field of vision by requiring everyone to be a veteran public-school educator. It’s precisely because leaders with these vital attributes are scarce that we cannot afford to reject anybody who may possess them simply because he or she lacks conventional state certification.

Our Proposal: Qualifications, Not Credentials

Hiring a superintendent or principal is one step in a process that begins long before the final handshake. It includes four essential elements: certification, recruitment, training, and terms of employment. We consider each in turn.

Certification

It is a fundamental mistake for those doing the hiring to equate being certified with being *qualified* to lead. We see certification not as the end but the beginning of the process, serving the limited purpose of making a candidate eligible for consideration for a leadership post. It does not say anything about that person's likely effectiveness in a particular role. Those vital parts of the selection process are the responsibility of the people who employ school leaders, not the job of the state. Accordingly, we urge a bold reduction in statutory and regulatory barriers to entry into positions of public-school leadership.

Today's typical certification requirements include some or all of the following for principals and superintendents: a minimum number of years' teaching experience; specified academic courses; a graduate degree in education; a graduate degree in administration; a graduate degree in any field; on the job training, etc.

Because such requirements limit entry without assuring quality, we urge states to dispense with them, at least on a trial basis. We would pare the state's certification role to these bare minimums:

- For would-be principals, the state should require a bachelor's degree, a careful background check, and passage of a test of basic laws and regulations pertinent to the principal's job, including health and safety standards, special-education requirements, Title I funding regulations, etc. (The test may come after a person is provisionally hired and trained, as described below.)
- For aspiring superintendents, we believe that the state should require only a college education and a careful background check.

Slashing the red tape of state-level certification does not, however, mean anyone can walk in and take up the challenge of leading schools and school systems. Even as

the state allows the pool to widen, those hiring principals and superintendents should become more selective about whom they actually choose and the standards to which they hold their school leaders.

Recruitment & Selection

The mantra of those hiring school and school-system leaders should be simple: *Recruit for essential skills and attributes first. Supply the specialized knowledge later.* More specifically, school boards should seek people with manifest leadership capabilities bolstered by a solid track record of leadership success. School-specific knowledge and skills can follow. When hiring superintendents or principals, the foremost task is to identify potential leaders from the widest pool of possibilities. We should be seeking candidates with the attributes described above—attributes most apt to have been demonstrated through successful previous leadership roles.

If troubled schools are to be transformed, if we are to provide all our children with the kind of education that they deserve, we cannot continue to let nature take its course and hope that a sufficiency of such leaders will spontaneously emerge. They must be spotted, courted, recruited, and developed, as in all successful organizations. Duval County, Florida, Superintendent John Fryer, a retired Air Force general, observes, “The military spends an enormous amount of money on developing leadership management skills. There is not a systemic approach to that in education. That’s one of its weaknesses...You have a teacher who spends 20 years in a classroom who might move up to be vice principal and suddenly starts learning about budgets and all that and suddenly someone says, ‘You’re a principal. Build a team.’ Nobody really taught them.”

To find strong leaders for all our schools, we dare not continue waiting for people to nominate themselves. School districts must evaluate their needs and survey the talent available to meet those needs. The school board or governing authority must take the initiative in finding, grooming, and selecting its future leaders. As Tucker and Coddling of the National Center on Education and the Economy also urge, “School districts should play a major role in determining who the candidates for training will be.”²³

A recruitment policy presupposes that the recruiter takes the initiative. To do that well, school systems will need a far-flung network of advisers and informants that reaches well beyond their own communities and traditional sources. This outreach effort ought to be ambitious, not just the “old boys’ network” and education-school

placement offices that have typically been relied on. The traditional way of finding candidates for leadership positions may have been sufficient for yesterday's education system, but it's obviously not a promising path to find new talent or foster needed changes in schools and school systems.

We recommend new approaches to identify people with outstanding leadership potential. Executive search firms may help but more is apt to be gained by spreading the word across the land that public education is an enterprise that seeks, employs, and rewards great leaders. Something of the sort has begun to occur in a handful of urban school systems like New York, Los Angeles, Seattle, San Diego, Jacksonville, and Benton Harbor, Michigan. It can happen in many more places. "If raising community optimism about its schools and its neighborhoods is one of the most important roles of the superintendent," write Larry Cuban and Michael Usdan, "then boards of education responsible for the selection process may well want to include candidates from outside education who have been similarly inspiring in their work settings, for example writers, religious leaders, community and labor organizers and politicians."²⁴

America already has an underground market in experienced principals and superintendents who do a good job in one place and are then recruited to another. After all, the strongest evidence that a person will be an effective school leader is previous success in that role. Today, however, much of that market occurs within school systems—and among suburban systems. If we want our most challenging schools to have a good shot at engaging the very best leaders, this "marketplace" needs to become as vigorous and visible as the competition for corporate executives.

Training

Once identified as plausible candidates, how should inexperienced people be prepared for the responsibilities of public-school principals—and how can people with solid experience in one kind of school get the additional training they may need to do a first-rate job in another setting? Who can best judge what knowledge they need and how to provide it?

Today, graduate schools of education, responding to legislative and regulatory demands, offer a menu of courses that may or may not be relevant to the day-to-day realities of school leadership. People who dine from that menu then get hired as principals, regardless of whether their skills, experience, and academic courses have readied them for the issues they will confront on the job. As Hess points out, "a national survey of 1,400 middle school principals found that more than a third had taken no

coursework focused on middle school educational practices and that more than 70 per cent had taken two courses or less.”²⁵

There’s a better approach. School systems themselves, say Tucker and Coddling, should determine “what the form of the training will be and what the major action projects will be.”²⁶ Moreover, any training program should be firmly grounded in the day-to-day reality of running schools, drawing on what works in education, business, the military and other fields emphasizing leadership training.

Events may be moving ahead of theory. Inspired leadership programs, such as New Leaders for New Schools, the Knowledge Is Power Program (KIPP), and the Broad Residency in Urban Education are starting to train people from many walks of life to serve as leaders in schools and school systems. In New York City, an institute for new principals has been created that offers a corporate-style training and incentive program for our largest city’s would-be principals.²⁷ Similar programs are emerging in school districts elsewhere to help meet a shortage of quality leaders that has, according to *The New York Times*, left some states struggling to find permanent principals for as many as one-fifth of their schools.²⁸

We applaud these innovations, many of them initiated by school systems, philanthropists, and entrepreneurs who resolved to take direct action to meet an acute societal need rather than leaving it to education schools and state certification regimens. School systems may find suitably trained leaders emerging from national programs, or they may opt to design their own training expectations for leaders, then provide that instruction directly or outsource it to third parties while supervising closely to ensure that the course of study doesn’t tail off into the old courses that old professors have taught for decades.

Any number of approaches could be tried. Especially for potential principals without an education background, school systems could opt for an apprenticeship, mentoring, or residency program that takes place largely within successful schools under the tutelage of proven school leaders. Other school systems may launch leadership training academies that blend book learning with internships. Or they could contract with a school of education, a corporate training center, a business school, another school system, or a specialized nonprofit group to provide instruction that follows a course of study tailored to the school system’s singular needs. The state could play a role in this process to ensure a measure of reciprocity from one district to another—creating some essential commonalities in these training programs (and tailoring the state principals’ certification test to those elements) even as they are customized for particular school

systems, perhaps even for particular jobs within those systems. The primary aim is to make sure that all such training arrangements are relevant to the job ahead and are of high quality. As with most efforts, the best way to ensure relevance, flexibility, and quality is to eliminate monopoly control—what Elmore terms the “cartel” approach—of training and open it to multiple providers and to competition among them.

For principals with prior experience leading schools, some specialized training may also be needed to prepare for the challenges of new schools or for changing circumstances within familiar schools. (Most of today’s principals, for example, would likely benefit from a crash course in “No Child Left Behind.”) Here, too, the best judge of what extra training is needed is not a distant bureaucracy or university but the school system doing the recruiting and employing. And here, too, the needed training can come from a wide array of providers. All that is needed is recognition of that possibility—and some imagination in exploiting it.

The training of superintendents, however, is somewhat different. Theirs is a broader view, more concerned with the expectations of the state, the cross currents of the community, and the priorities of the board to which they report. Political skills are a matter of judgment and experience, thus difficult to teach. They can be strengthened, however, with programs akin to those available to elected officials and corporate executives that provide seminar like forums for school leaders to work out common, real-world challenges. The marketplace has room for more of these kinds of programs. For example, prospective superintendents can profit from programs like the Broad Center for Superintendents, which conducts intensive sessions on such topics as student achievement and reinventing schools for success, using management and instructional data for decision making, the governance-management team, and planning and leading systems change.²⁹

Terms of Employment

Putting all of this effort into recruitment and training will be for naught unless steps are taken to ensure that principals and superintendents have the authority to lead their schools in ways that will make them successful. We are not referring to cosmetic changes. Principals need far more authority over staffing, budgeting, hiring, spending, day-to-day maintenance, and purchasing. Principals need far greater latitude to pick their teams if they are going to be held accountable for the results. Too many superintendents, for their part, do not have the power to hold people responsible for their results. Superintendents need much greater control over district curriculum, testing and assessment, and the means for holding people accountable for student achievement.

For Principals

Principals need the tools to do their jobs. They are being held to account for their schools' performance. If they are to succeed in boosting that performance, they must be able to make essential decisions about how their schools will operate: to hire (and discharge) faculty on the basis of school need and individual performance rather than by seniority (and unconstrained by tenure rules), to deploy staff members when and where needed, and to reward exceptional performance. They must, to be sure, follow reasonable procedures and not indulge in caprice, patronage, or corruption—but they also must, at the end of the day, be in charge of those who belong to their team.

Authority over personnel, however, is only part of the answer. Principals also need greater control over scheduling, discipline, budgeting, use of technology, and instruction.

Results-based education means holding principals to a high standard for their schools' academic results; installing clear indicators to measure a school's progress toward those results; and equipping the school's leader with the flexibility and freedom to pursue those results as he or she thinks best. But it's a conditional freedom, one that lasts as long as it truly yields results. Principals must be evaluated on the basis of their schools' performance. Those who succeed should be retained, renewed, and rewarded. Those who fail to measure up after a reasonable period (which should be negotiated into their initial contract) should not be retained.

For Superintendents

The median term of service for superintendents nationally is about six years,³⁰ while urban school superintendents stay in their posts an average of 2.5 to four years depending on how one counts.³¹ Superintendents report to school boards that are sometimes elected, sometimes appointed. Elected boards are formed with at-large or regional members, sometimes both. Appointed boards have members chosen by mayors or city councils, and a small number of boards now have both elected and appointed members. Regardless of what kind of school board a superintendent reports to, he or she should be in harmony with the board's vision for change, should be clear about the district's goals for student performance, and should be given a reasonable period of time in which to attain those goals.

Though the superintendent's job is complex and multifaceted, the employer's premier goal may be as straightforward as assuring that every child in the district attains proficiency on the state's annual assessment test. This is a clear and well-defined goal

that allows benchmarking for success. By tracking state test scores and other measurable goals, it is possible to tell if a district is moving in the right direction and how far it still has to go. The superintendent's employment contract should be tied to such results.

But it's unreasonable to hold executives accountable for results if they aren't able to select their own teams and deploy resources as they think best. Too often superintendents are faced with school board interference in the hiring and firing of central-office staff and principals. School boards should be considered to have one, and only one, employee—the superintendent—whom they hold accountable for meeting broad districtwide goals. Superintendents, for their part, must be given authority to select their staffs and school principals. The superintendent, in turn, must hold them accountable. In New York, Chancellor Joel Klein, presumably as a prelude to discharging nonperformers, has given out grades from A to F to school principals. Of more than 1000 principals, as many as 100 received Fs and another 80 to 100 received Ds.³² In Seattle, thanks mainly to attrition, Superintendent Olchefske has been able to hire 70 of that system's 100 principals, based not on seniority or other union requirements, but on criteria that he believes will carry his vision to fruition. They are, effectively, his team and share in that vision.

Paying the Price

If we want better school leaders, we must expect to pay them better. School principals typically work at least a 60-hour week and an eleven-month year and, as earlier noted, in many school systems senior teachers earn as much as or more than their principals. Much as we value and should reward fine teachers, it is a fact that those who lead them will need to be paid substantially more if we are serious about finding and keeping great leaders. As a starting point, we propose that principals' base pay be at least 150 percent of what their schools' highest-paid teacher receives, with the possibility of an additional 50 percent in performance-related bonuses. Some principals, as a result, may earn as much as \$180,000 a year, money well deserved by those who perform well.

Although we advocate increasing pay and power for principals, they have no right to employment in the absence of performance. Initial contracts for principals should be no longer than three years, with annual performance reviews during that period. And while principals should be encouraged to participate in professional organizations, they must—always—be deemed part of the management team and not engage in employee-style collective bargaining.

Successful superintendents should be well compensated, too, and this is beginning to happen. The average superintendent's salary rose roughly 10 percent from 1997-98 (\$101,519) to 1999-2000 (\$112,158).³³ This trend is likely to continue. Competition for a declining supply of quality leaders will bid up the price for superintendents, as it should. Salaries in some of the nation's major cities now exceed \$300,000. Those cities are now attracting top talent. As salary levels rise, it makes even more sense to open the door to talented individuals from outside education who will be attracted by competitive pay.

Conclusion

The United States is approaching a crisis in school leadership. Nearly 40 percent of its 92,000 principals are eligible to retire in the next four years. In many school systems, two-thirds of the principals will reach retirement age during this decade. And those are the leaders we already have—which for many schools is not the same as the leaders we need.

Ominous as this crisis is, it also presents an opportunity, a chance to give a fair test to new approaches to finding and employing leaders for our public schools. It coincides with the greatest pressure we have ever seen for those schools to produce stronger academic results—and for their leaders to be held to account for those results. This convergence—the opportunity to engage many new school leaders and the obligation to deploy school leaders who will be highly effective—creates the window for bold innovation.

For at least a generation, as American public education has stagnated, the conventional wisdom about leadership has focused on an old idea: certify educators to fix the problem. Today, two decades after we were pronounced a “nation at risk” as a consequence of the lackluster performance of our schools, we must face the fact that the conventional wisdom is wrong. It’s too inbred. It has relied on educators to decide the requirements for rising within the field of education—effectively barring the door to everyone else. Despite good intentions and honest effort, no evidence yet shows a correlation between the credentials required of school leaders and the results produced by their schools. In fact, a surplus of credentialed candidates to be principals is being produced while schools founder without effective captains at their helms.

The signers of this document appeal to America’s common sense, its pragmatism, and its passion to do right by its children. Too many of our schools turn out students who are ill equipped for the world in which they will work and live. The shortage of truly qualified school leaders is worsening. The solution is not to impose yet more requirements but to enlarge the talent pool, to welcome into leadership posts the best men and women who can be found wherever they are today, to provide relevant training, to offer them attractive and workable terms of employment, and to hold them to account for their schools’ results.

Endnotes

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- ³ Public Agenda, “Trying to Stay Ahead of the Game: Superintendents and Principals Talk about School Leadership,” (Washington DC: Public Agenda), 2001.
- ⁴ Associated Press State and Local Wire, “Wisconsin faces school superintendent shortage,” Associated Press, December 28, 2002.
- ⁵ The difficulties facing segments of American education have been well chronicled at least since the publication of the “Nation at Risk” report in 1983. More recently, it was noted that “38 percent of fourth graders cannot read at the basic level, which means that they cannot read and understand a short passage from an age-appropriate book. In some school districts in this country this figures rises to more than 70 percent.” Buzz Bartlett, “The Keys to Literacy,” edited by Susannah Patton and Madelyn Holmes, (Washington, DC: Council for Basic Education), 2002, p. 6.
- ⁶ Margaret Raymond and Stephen Fletcher, “The Teach For America Evaluation,” *Education Next*, (Spring 2002), p. 63.
- ⁷ For example, the first independent evaluation of Teach For America teachers’ effect on student performance showed the impact of having a Teach For America teacher was decidedly positive. “Teach for America: An Evaluation of Teacher Differences and Student Outcomes in Houston, Texas,” *CREDO*, [Macke Raymond, Stephen H. Fletcher, Javier Luque], August 2001.
- ⁸ For details refer to table one at the end of this document, and to the full report located on the NCEI website at www.ncei.com.
- ⁹ Jacquie Paul. “Fast-Track Test Keyed to Recruit Principals,” *Press-Enterprise*, January 11, 2003, p. B6.
- ¹⁰ The numbers are 12.6 percent in private schools, 10.7 percent in public charter schools, as of 2002, according to the National Center for Education Statistics, “Schools and Staffing Survey” (Fall 2002), p. 10.
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- ¹² National Center for Education Statistics.
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- 15 Editorial, “Principally it’s a very tough job.” *News-Sentinel* (Fort Wayne, IN), (January 22, 2003), p. E1.
- 16 Paul, p. B6.
- 17 These numbers come from the National Survey of Salaries and Wages in Public Schools; the National Association for Law Placement, Inc.; and the U.S. Department of Labor, Bureau of Labor Statistics.
- 18 1999 Association of California School Administrators Survey.
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- 22 National Association of Elementary School Principals, *Leading Learning Communities: Standards for What Principals Should Know and Be Able To Do*. (Alexandria, VA: NAESP), 2001, p. 55.
- 23 Tucker and Coddling, p. 25.
- 24 *Powerful Reforms with Shallow Roots: Improving America’s Urban Schools*, edited by Larry Cuban and Michael Usdan, (New York: Teachers College Press), 2002, p. 71.
- 25 Hess, p. 18.
- 26 Tucker and Coddling, p. 25.
- 27 New York’s plan builds on the experience of other cities, and is modeled on the management-training program that John F. Welch Jr. created for General Electric when he became its chief executive. The program, in which new principals will shadow veterans, will be financed in part by a \$15 million donation from the Wallace-Reader’s Digest Funds. For more information go to Abby Goodnough, “Plan to Lure Top Principals to Bad Schools,” *New York Times*, (December 12, 2002), p. B1.
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Initial Signers

(as of May 1, 2003)

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Should you want to become a signatory to this manifesto please surf to www.edexcellence.net/manifesto/manifesto.html and follow the online instructions.

* *My one reservation about the recommendations made in this manifesto, concerns the qualifications for principals of small schools. I believe that, for schools with fewer than 500 students and/or those without an assistant principal who has responsibility for instruction, the principal must be expected to function as instructional leader and therefore school districts filling such principalships should be required to select candidates with previous teaching experience.*

Profiles of Education Leaders

*By Lawrence Meyer
Writer and Consultant*

Paula Dawning

Superintendent, Benton Harbor Public Schools, Benton Harbor, Michigan

Paula Dawning did not come to her job as superintendent of the Benton Harbor school system from a political background, nor from one in education. She arrived after spending 23 years as an executive with AT&T, working in sales, marketing, engineering, and human resources.

And yet, as she starts out (in the fall of 2002) as the Benton Harbor school superintendent, she finds the political aspect of her new job “huge.” The system is facing growing deficits and she must find ways to raise more money, or cut costs.

“I know I’m going to have to ask for a bond issue,” she said just after schools opened in late August. “I’ve got to build a broad base of support and credibility. I’ve been on three radio shows in the last week; I’ve been on every television station that feeds this area. And I’ve only been here six weeks.”

As a result, she finds that she is never “off duty.” The job is “excruciatingly public... You are on twenty-four/seven.”

“People want you to come to all kinds of events on the weekend. And people think that they need to speak to you. They want you to sit on boards to allocate money; they want you to visit their churches and speak to them; they want you to be keynote speaker [at] banquets where it is important for them to understand what is happening in the school district. As a school superintendent, you have a fairly unique position, particularly in a smaller community where you impact property values. And if you say no too many times, people view that as you are not open.”

Dawning, who holds a bachelor’s degree from St. Mary’s College in South Bend, Indiana, a master’s in education from Boston University, and an MBA from the University of Michigan, did not come to Benton Harbor to be a status quo administrator.

“My district was in need of significant change. As a non-traditional candidate, I am a change agent,” she says.

When she left AT&T, she says, “I knew I wanted to do something that was different. I knew I felt particularly fortunate and blessed in my career, and I wanted to do something that would help others realize their dreams and give back.”

Not certain initially what she wanted to do, she received an e-mail about a program of The Broad Foundation to train school superintendents from non-educational backgrounds. “As I researched that,” she says, “it became clear to me that that was a very effective way for me to do what I wanted to do next. I started in education and I was coming back to education. It made a lot of sense to me to apply business skills to the business of education.”

She was accepted into The Broad Foundation’s program and began the one-year training, which was run for the foundation by the Michigan Leadership Institute, in the fall of 2001. Before she had completed the program, she was asked by the Institute, which was also handling the search for a superintendent for the Benton Harbor schools, to apply for that job.

She applied and got the job. What she also got were some major headaches. According to a recent Standard & Poor’s report on the school system, “Benton Harbor Area Schools generate exceptionally below-average student results with exceptionally above average spending per pupil.” The district struggles with low test-scores, a low graduation rate, and a high dropout rate. In fact, things have been so bad recently that the state of Michigan has come very close to taking over the running of the Benton Harbor school system.

This situation has created some obvious negatives, but also at least one plus. “I feel fortunate that I have a team that has been waiting for a leader to arrive,” she says. “And they understand that this has to happen because there are consequences if it does not happen.”

Both her education and training in business management, she says, will help her accomplish the needed changes. Her business training, she says, helps her to put benchmarks in place to measure performance so she can make mid-course corrections when necessary; yet she has ready access to education expertise. The school system has an assistant superintendent for curriculum and instruction and also a director of curriculum. Dawning says she relies on them for guidance and works closely with them.

Coming from a business background, “particularly coming from a sales background,” and aware that, in today’s world, there are choices in education, she talks about “marketing” her school system. “The marketing of the school district when you have choices—charter schools, vouchers and all that—you appreciate the messaging, the customer focus because our customers in many respects are our children and their parents. We need to be aware that that’s why we exist. That’s not a mental model that exists in a focused way in education at the current time.”

In business, she says, “You have a greater sense of urgency. And you have a systems approach to organizational structure and problem solving. That’s the way I look at things, programmatically. That’s sort of been the approach I’ve taken since I’ve been here.” Her approach is to build teams “that are empowered to get things done, versus the education model that tends to allow more autonomy for lots of different people. When you need to move a system, you have to get teams in alignment with a shared purpose to move the whole team forward, which then moves the whole district forward to the benefit of the children.”

The professional educators in her school system have been “very excited” about her approach. “They’ve offered me a great deal of encouragement. They’re happy to see me here, putting children first.”

“I can speak their language and that’s a plus. I gave an opening day talk and even I was surprised. They interrupted me constantly during the talk with applause. That wasn’t necessary for them to do. So I take it that I was hitting on key points that matter to them.”

If leadership is what the Benton Harbor schools needed, Dawning says she can meet the need: “I think I’m a leader,” she says. “I can point the way. I can empower people.”

John Fryer

Superintendent, Duval County Public Schools, Jacksonville, Florida

John Fryer, superintendent of schools for Duval County, Florida, spent more than 30 years in the Air Force, but he does not see giving orders as the way to bring reform to education.

“If you’re going to institute reform,” says Fryer, a retired major general, “you have to drive it from the top but you also have to have buy-in from the bottom for it to work... You have to have intelligent people that want to do what you want them to do.”

By his account, the Duval County school system, which includes Jacksonville and has about 128,000 students, was in bad shape. So was the community. A locally sponsored study found that 47 percent of the adult population were functionally illiterate, incapable of filling out a simple job application. “That didn’t get produced by a great school system,” Fryer says.

Fryer had flirted with education for much of his career in the Air Force and then in civilian life. He holds a bachelor’s degree and a master’s in political science. In addition, he served as commandant of the National War College in Washington, D.C. and interim president of the National Defense University. While at the War College, he initiated a tutoring program at a nearby public school where he, along with others from the college, helped primary school students.

After leaving the Air Force, Fryer served as executive vice president of a private company, where he again got involved with public education, helping the local school system win a grant.

He says he enjoyed being around educators. “I liked the people. I liked the culture. This was a group of people that I really enjoyed being with. They started asking me questions about the curriculum. It was obvious to me that they were looking for leadership.”

In 1995, Fryer met John Stanford, another retired general, who was then superintendent of the Seattle school system. (Stanford has since died.) “When John came to Seattle,” he remembers, “that was the first thing that drew me to the idea of being a superintendent. I never would have thought about it in all my life except John had done it. I said to my wife, ‘That’s a job I could really get excited about and I think I have a lot of tools that I’ve developed over my life that I could employ.’”

A few years later, he got his opportunity. Duval County was looking for a new superintendent.

“It was like a lightning bolt struck me,” he says. “This all came together. My interest had been piqued in public education. I saw that leadership was important.... I’m the kind of guy who likes a challenge—a big one. I had run large organizations. I had been in education, albeit not K-12 very much. I just said this must be it.” He called the chairman of the school board and she encouraged him to apply. “They were hoping to find someone who was a little out of the box.”

He applied and got the job.

Fryer sees his ability to think strategically as one of the strengths that he has brought to his position. “Just by the very nature of how [school systems] get funded,” he says, administrators tend to think in terms of tactics. “You... have these multiple programs overlapping and not necessarily having any strategic sense or integration or coherence and you have multiple funding streams and reporting requirements and the result is it focuses everybody at the tactical level, just keeping up with all that stuff. And the first thing to do is to get everybody to draw up to the strategic level and think about the whole set of problems as a strategic problem.

Fryer says he took up his job in 1998 “with five priorities that I call my ‘High Five.’ It’s still the organizing thrust of the district.” He ticks them off in rapid succession:

- Improving academic performance
- Improving the safety and discipline of the environment in which teachers work.
- Developing learning communities where the whole organization becomes a learning organization.
- Building high-performance management organizations at the district and school levels.
- Developing accountability systems that really enable you to see what’s happening in your school system and hold people accountable.

To put this strategy into practice, Fryer went out to sell his program to the teachers and principals. He spent hours at each school meeting with faculty. He required an 80 percent “buy-in” for a school to participate. In the end, fourteen schools were chosen to implement the changes that he and his staff fashioned.

Selling the program was crucial. “When I grew up in the Air Force, it wasn’t just command authority,” he says. “Most of the fighting is done in the Air Force by offi-

cers who all have degrees and many have graduate degrees. You don't just tell them what to do. If it doesn't sound too smart, they might not follow you. I was used to persuading people that the way we were going was the way we ought to go."

After the first year, he sent the teachers and principals from the initial fourteen schools out to sell their colleagues. "Teachers had to convince teachers and principals had to convince principals," he says. The following year, another 49 schools signed up.

Fryer says there should be room in education for administrators who come from outside the system, but he is not categorical on the subject. "There are some people--who have different experiences who certainly can apply their talents if they've run large organizations and they understand education--who can do this job. But there are many fine educators who can do this job."

"The military spends an enormous amount on developing leadership management skills. There is not a systemic approach to that in education. That's one of its weaknesses...You have a teacher who spends 20 years in a classroom who might move up to be vice principal and suddenly starts learning about budgets and all that and suddenly someone says, 'You're a principal. Build a team.' Nobody really taught them."

Although he came to office as a reformer, Fryer did not engage in wholesale replacement of staff. "You know," he says, "in the Air Force nobody ever gave me the opportunity to fire everybody. I had to make a team out of what I had. So, though a few people thought I would come here and fire people and put new ones in, I saw a lot of good talent here. We just needed to begin to work together. We needed to learn to think strategically. We needed to get focus. We needed to take on this idea of systemic reform and have a pacing toward it that would get us where we wanted to go over time."

This strategy has resulted in students making steady improvements on the Florida Comprehensive Assessment Test, though Duval County is still below the state average in both reading and math.

One of his first tasks as a leader, Fryer says, was "creating a sense of urgency."

"My point to teachers, to principals, to everybody is, look, there's no guarantee that public education is going to continue as we know it. We've got a lot of work to do and it's like being in a competitive business. First and foremost, the whole world is changing around us. There's a demand for different kinds of skills today. We can't just educate 25 percent and have them go off and run great things. We've got to educate most of our children to high-level skills."

“Secondly, there are a lot of threats out there. There are vouchers and charter schools. Like any good business it has competition. And I don’t have a problem with that. I don’t focus on vouchers being a problem or fighting that. I want to produce a great school system. So that’s actually helpful. To say, ‘look, those things are out there and may take over your job if we don’t compete well.’”

Jennifer Henry

Principal, Chicago Academy, Chicago, Illinois

At 29, Jennifer Henry may well be one of the youngest school administrators in the country. Still, she has more than ten years' experience working in education and a master's degree in business administration from the Kellogg School of Management at Northwestern University.

While still in high school, Ms. Henry had worked in "Making Waves," an after-school tutoring program in her native Marin County, California. After graduation in 1995 from Georgetown University, where she majored in American Studies, Henry was hired to run "Making Waves," where her job involved raising \$500,000 to run the program, running a summer school and hiring the faculty for it, designing and implementing the curriculum, as well as worrying "about the facilities, and communicating with the parents, and making sure the buses ran on time...It was very much like the job of a principal."

Her summer staff consisted of 60 full-time people. During the school year, she managed a staff of four and more than 100 volunteers.

She ran that program for four years, also teaching in a part-time, unpaid position at an independent high school. "I learned a lot. My learning curve always remained vertical," Henry says, "and always around leadership."

Realizing that she needed to know more about leadership and how to run an organization, she applied and was accepted to the Kellogg School. She was there for two years. Between her first and second year, she had a job with Procter & Gamble, and she could have gone to work for them after receiving her MBA, "marketing salty snacks to teen-agers," she says with a chuckle. But that wasn't what she wanted.

What she wanted to do was to return to education. Finding a job in education administration, however, was not so easy. "I called school districts around the country and, especially when they heard I had an MBA, they'd say things to me like, 'Well, we can transfer you to our business department, we need an accountant.' I would even call charter schools ... and the minute I mentioned I had an MBA, they would steer me to their books."

As she realized that she would need an administrative certificate to be an administrator, she was also reluctant to go back to school to earn it. “I really felt like I was ready to roll my sleeves up and get back into schools,” she says.

When Henry heard about an organization called New Leaders for New Schools, a program that would help her get an administrative certificate by working for a year hand-in-glove with a principal in a school, she applied and was accepted.

Shortly into her fellowship, she had lunch with Jon Schnur, CEO of New Leaders. He asked her what kind of school she wanted to lead, and, when she told him, he put her in touch with the Chicago Academy, a brand-new “contract school” governed by the Academy for Urban School Leadership under contract with the Chicago Board of Education.

So it was that in October 2001, Jennifer Henry found herself as the new executive director of the Chicago Academy, working with its principal, Dr. Donald Feinstein, then in his eighteenth year in the Chicago school system.

“This is what I always dreamed of doing,” Ms. Henry says.

The Chicago Academy is the city’s first contract school. It is a public school, grades pre-K through seven, with 450 students chosen from the surrounding neighborhood. Its teachers are from the Chicago public school system and are paid directly by the Board of Education. The Board also handles its purchasing and other financial transactions. The only difference between the Academy and other public schools, according to Henry, is that the Academy is governed not by a public school council but by the board of the Academy for Urban School Leadership under a contract with the Board of Education.

The Chicago Academy is charged with a dual mission: to serve as a neighborhood school and as a training institute for teachers. Its 18 certified “mentor-teachers” are assisted by 32 “residents,” all of whom have undergraduate degrees but lack teaching certificates. After a one-year residency, they will earn a teaching certificate and a Master of Arts in teaching. They are then placed in teams of four or five in carefully selected under-performing schools where the Academy supports them with five years of professional development and further training.

Henry says she has an excellent relationship with the school’s faculty. “I think this year has been wonderful. I think I have the trust of my faculty. I have credibility with them. I built that through building one-on-one relationships, spending a

lot of time at the beginning of the year listening and learning from them. It also didn't hurt that, when I came to this school, I came with a \$361,000 grant that I got for them.

"I think that they could see that I was bringing something to the table. And I think that they value the skill set I've brought from not only my business school training, but also from my previous leadership experience."

What she brings to the table, she says, includes the ability to supplement the public funds the school gets by raising money. Besides the \$361,000 grant from the Chicago Community Trust—\$200,000 for planning the teacher training program and \$161,000 for curriculum materials and supplies for the school—she recently won a \$1.5 million federal grant for the Academy for urban school leadership, to be spent over five years. In addition, she says she and board chairman Martin Koldyke have raised another \$2 million for the school.

In public, Henry says, her training and experience give her an "ability to communicate the vision of our academy...where we're going in the long term and what we need to do in the short term to get there. I'm very focused on outcomes. I'm really into backward mapping, [deciding on a goal and then figuring how to accomplish it] which is what successful educators do. That's what great teachers do in their classrooms. That's also what successful businesses do."

Her MBA has helped her to "better organize my thoughts" and her training in strategic planning "can help my problem solving skills tremendously." She also finds that making analogies between what the private sector does and how it applies to education enhances her communication with the Board of Education.

At the same time, she acknowledges that she has "limited experience in the classroom." Fortunately, she says, all of the teachers at the Chicago Academy "are superb teachers." She spends a lot of time talking with them. "I'm just a sponge listening to their experiences."

Although Henry says her management training serves her well, she does not discount the importance of classroom experience for school administrators. School leaders should, in her view, have classroom experience. "I still believe, with my MBA, that the most important thing a school leader can be is the instructional leader," being able to step into a classroom, observe a teacher in action and make suggestions that will help a teacher become more effective.

She also believes that the Chicago Academy is a model that can be applied universally as a vehicle for reforming education—bringing together excellent teachers and letting them teach and train more teachers, who in turn can go out and replicate the experience.

Henry is satisfied. “This is what I always dreamed of doing.” But this is not the end of her education ambitions: “I want to be a superintendent.”

Christopher Lund

Principal, Robert F. Kennedy Elementary School, Los Angeles, California

Two years ago, when he was 31, Christopher A. Lund was the youngest principal in the Los Angeles Unified School District. Now, at 33, he is merely one of the youngest, after working as a teacher and administrator in the LAUSD for 11 years (since 1991).

If becoming a principal was less than a long, hard struggle for Lund by conventional measure, he says he found it “a long process” and that, if he had been allowed, he would have stepped into administration earlier. “I was frustrated by the perception of being young for the position, that I wasn’t deserving of the position,” he says.

After working as a teacher and an “out of classroom coordinator” in the LA school system, Lund received a master’s degree in education administration from Pepperdine University. He became an assistant principal at the Robert F. Kennedy Elementary School in East Los Angeles on a waiver and then took the necessary examinations to qualify as a principal.

Within less than a year, when the top position at his school became open, Lund applied for it and, after winning a vote of 98 percent approval from parents and teachers in the school—65 percent approval was required—he, in fact, became the principal.

Lund says his program of study at Pepperdine was excellent preparation. Pepperdine is one of several schools offering the required courses to reach “Tier One” in the two-tier process to becoming a school administrator in Los Angeles. “Personally, I think it’s one of the best programs in southern California,” Lund says. “They do a fantastic job of emphasizing administrative responsibility as well as leadership in terms of personal, organizational leadership.” That part of his preparation, he says, had added value.

From what he understands about other programs, however, they offer less—even though they meet the city and state requirements. The Cal State program, for example, lacks the leadership element that Pepperdine offers, but focuses instead on “nuts and bolts” rather than training administrators to be “change agents,” as he puts it.

The Tier Two course, which is required for educators after they assume administrative positions, Lund says, offers little more by way of professional growth. “In essence,

you're serving time." Nonetheless, public-school administrators in California must go through the process. "It's a mandate," he says. "It's something you have to do, so you get it done."

Lund became an educator more or less by accident. After growing up in the Chicago suburbs, he graduated from Northwestern University in 1991 with a combined major in international studies and Spanish literature. Facing a sagging job market, he applied and was accepted into Teach for America, then in its early days. He accepted a teaching position in Los Angeles.

What he thought would be a short experience turned out to be a career. "I actually went in and kind of felt called to it," he said.

It was after he became a teacher, in his third year in the LA school system, that he says he became aware of a principal's potential for effecting change. He was teaching in a school in East Los Angeles that had had three principals in five years. "Basically," he says, "what I saw was how one person in that titular position can change the dynamic of an entire institution. It amazed me, but it also intrigued me in that change can be for the better, or it can be for the worse. So, I basically saw an opportunity to have a greater impact than what I was having in the classroom. I saw administration as a way of impacting an entire school."

LAUSD's procedures for becoming a principal are "thorough," but Lund isn't convinced that they serve a purpose. "They're certainly challenging," he says of the tests, "but I'm not sure that the caliber of administrators [in LA] is better than other districts."

There is, or used to be, a belief in the school system, he says, "that you had to occupy certain positions before you became a principal. That's why I think there are very few young principals, because of the hoops you have to jump through." He says the "hoops" consist not just of the tests but also "the unwritten code of administration" that a would-be principal has to serve in certain antecedent jobs before he or she can become a principal.

He says he didn't avoid those steps—he simply served the bare minimum of time to fulfill the requirement.

Although Lund says he experiences frustrations with the school system, he is also learning how to operate within it. He builds relationships, he says, and "I don't take no for an answer." He still sees himself as an "agent of change" but "in such a behemoth system...there's only so much you can change."

Lund is also active in the charter school movement; an activity that he knows wins him little applause among the old guard. He sees his activity as a “unique way to work outside the system and still be part of a public education system...pushing public schools to compete.”

At his own school, the Robert F. Kennedy Elementary School, Lund’s strategy seems to be working. Although the school is 200 points below the target score of 800 on the state’s Academic Performance Index, it was “about average” when compared to similar schools on the basis of its 2001 scores. In 2001-02, it showed a 50-point gain in its Index score, meeting its growth target.

To initiate change, Lund says, a principal must be a strong organizational leader as well as an instructional leader. “How do you move a school that has had 30 years of under performance history with children who are on all national accounts at a disadvantage on multiple levels?” he asks. “You have to be able to understand those things and change a school culture and you’re not going to change a school culture just by being a manager. You need to be a strong leader. Pull people on board, establish a vision that people can buy into and help create and move people in a positive direction.”

Joseph Olchefske

Superintendent, Seattle Public Schools, Seattle, Washington

Joseph Olchefske took office as superintendent of Seattle’s public schools with a mandate for change. In fact, he was part of that change—a superintendent with less than three years of experience in education.

Olchefske, who began as chief financial officer for the school system in 1995, became its chief operating officer in 1997 and was appointed acting superintendent in 1998 when Superintendent John Stanford became ill. After Stanford’s death later that year, Olchefske was named superintendent of a school system that now has about 50,000 students, 7,000 employees and a budget of \$435 million.

With a bachelor’s degree from the University of Chicago and a master’s in city and regional planning from Harvard’s Kennedy School, Olchefske had no background or special interest in education when he became Seattle’s CFO in 1995 at the suggestion of Stanford, a retired Army general who had just been hired as superintendent.

Olchefske says he has never found his lack of conventional education credentials to be a problem. “I didn’t have to spend any time learning what was. I had to figure out what could be. In that sense, there’s a huge advantage for a non-traditional superintendent because ...I could just ask the simple question, ‘Why do we do this?’”

He has continued and amplified the program of reform initiated by his predecessor. Following that agenda, the Seattle school system has decentralized its operation. Students can vote with their feet, opting to attend any public school in the system. Schools that fail to attract students run the risk of being closed. (To date, one school has been merged with another and a second merger is under consideration.)

The Seattle school system features a “Freedom Agenda” initiated by Olchefske that allows individual schools filling vacancies to hire teachers according to each school’s needs. Any teacher, regardless of seniority, can apply for a position and the school can hire any one who meets the state’s standards.

The school system also adopted a “Performance Agenda” with a clear set of standards for students, teachers, and administrators. Olchefske recently described the relationship between the two agendas: “The Freedom Agenda and the Performance Agenda create a tight-loose management model, and the two are inextricably linked.

To start, the Freedom Agenda creates authority and power in schools. It challenges principals and teachers to design and deliver customized education for students and communities. If the reforms stopped there, we would have created chaos. We would have a laissez-faire model where schools are empowered [yet] without guidance and boundaries. This is the reason we implemented the Performance Agenda. It defines the nonnegotiable goals, the standards to which we must hold ourselves. It communicates to teachers and principals where they must end up. In all, the two sets of reforms interact to create the right environment for excellence,” Olchefske noted in a recent interview with the Harvard Business School.

“The new meaning of schools” in the 21st century, he says, is based on “a core set of higher level skills that every child has when they leave the system so they can be high-functioning members of an information age economy. And our system was never designed to do that. So, to me, the core purpose is around what I call ‘the every child agenda’—how we can create high achievement ... universally because the world, the citizenship, the economy in the 21st century demand it.”

Because of attrition and retirements, Olchefske has been able to hire 70 of Seattle’s 100 principals and 23 of the top 25 administrators. As a result, he says, there is little resistance at the top to the model he is trying to create. He describes the teacher union as being “progressive,” taking positions from “helpful to neutral” on the changes he has sought.

“The biggest problem is ‘out there.’” he says. “It’s parents. It’s the community. It’s our own memory of what school is. ‘What do you mean you’re not going to have a six-period day? What do you mean you’re going to give credits without having to attend a class? What do you mean I have to pass this test or I’m not going to get a diploma? What do you mean I have to go to school longer?’”

The superintendency is a political job, Olchefske says, and he defines his role “by saying I only do three things and I need to be expert in three things: I need to be expert at vision and strategy. Number two, I have to be expert in communications in all of its forms—formal and informal. And, third, I need to be expert at personnel and a small number of very important personnel decisions. And everything else I have to hire for.”

“I think the key thing is the ability to attract really strong people and being unabashed about hiring them.”

Olchefske works six days a week, typically from 8 a.m. until 10 p.m. Last year (2001-02), he attended 85 PTA meetings to present his vision and to explain the changes the system was making.

Prior to joining the school system, Olchefske was an investment banker with Piper Jaffray in Seattle. He says he took a 50 percent pay cut to come to work for the school system, a decision he says he regrets only when paying his bills.

“The work continues to be truly beyond complex,” he says. “I do believe that it’s the most difficult job that exists given its complexity, but this is the hell I chose. I’m enjoying it. I don’t have any trouble getting up in the morning.”

Academically, the changes he has instituted seem to be paying off. Reading and math scores for fourth, seventh, and tenth graders have all improved since he took the helm in Seattle. Perhaps as a result, his lack of education credentials, he says is “increasingly an irrelevant criterion. I think really the test is around the leadership capabilities of the person, the vision that they can bring and the energy and discipline that they can bring to accomplish that vision. And one of the things I’m proudest of is that people don’t consider me a non-educator anymore.”

No good deed goes unpunished, however. Olchefske’s tenure in Seattle has drawn its share of controversy and problems. In October 2002, he disclosed that the district had overspent its 2001-02 budget by \$22 million and faced a shortfall in 2002-03 of \$12 million. Some within the school system tried to nudge him toward the exit door but in early November the school board voted to retain him as superintendent. The board—and much of the Seattle community—sees him as a man who solves a lot more problems than he causes.

*Epilogue: On April 14, 2003, Mr. Olchefske resigned as Seattle's Superintendent, saying the \$34 million financial shortfall that occurred on his watch created an environment so toxic it detracted from his ability to lead the district effectively. What appears to have happened is that Olchefske's agenda of uniformly high expectations for every child roiled the Seattle Education Association, which bided its time until news of the district's financial problems surfaced, then pounced. According to the **Seattle Post-Intelligencer**, "The financial crisis quickly became a lightning rod for a broad range of gripes about everything from standardized report cards to Olchefske's leadership style and his hiring of principals." The outsider's perspective that gave Olchefske a clear-eyed view of the system's needs and fresh approaches to meeting them also got him branded as one who didn't appreciate the "culture of education."*

Vanessa Ward

Principal, Omega School of Excellence, Dayton, Ohio

Vanessa Ward did not set out to found a charter school, or any school, for that matter. Her original plan was much less ambitious: to run an after-school program where children could be tutored and helped to strengthen the weak spots in their education. From there, it just grew.

Although Reverend Ward has worked in education for two decades, she did not rise to her current position through the regular public K-12 system. An ordained minister with a master's degree in theological studies from the United Theological Seminary in Dayton, Ohio, Ward worked at the seminary as director of trans-cultural studies and taught a course on trans-cultural globalization.

At the same time, she served as director of Christian education in the Omega Baptist Church, where her husband, Daryl, is the pastor. She also supervised an after-school program for children in the church “and realized that the time we spent with the children was not sufficient. The kids were coming with such poor skills that we really couldn't get into helping them. And so, in that frustration, we said we actually needed to do more than this after-school program. We actually needed to start a school.” She was asked to form a task force to study the issue and come up with a proposal.

Out of that effort, the Omega School of Excellence emerged. It is a public charter school (in Ohio they're called “community schools”) with an annual budget of about \$1.2 million.

The school has a mission: “Our focus is to prepare leaders for the 21st century. And that's a big task. The whole sense of getting students academically prepared plus emotionally and with a sense of commitment and responsibility to their community is of the essence for me. That's what I do all day in my ministry: empower people to make a difference. And I don't think you start when they graduate from high school, but you really start with them when they're young.”

Vanessa Ward was the founder and is now principal of Omega, which opened in 2000 with 93 students in grades five and six. In its second year, the enrollment grew to 147 students and a seventh grade was added. In 2002-03, an eighth grade was added along with another 53 students. Eventually, the school will have about 240 students. Classes range in size from eighteen to 20 students. It's a secular public school, current-

ly housed within the building used by Omega Baptist Church—a building that, not long ago, was occupied by Temple Israel.

Students at Omega attend school from 7:30 a.m. until 4:30 p.m. Monday through Thursday and until 3:30 p.m. on Friday. Rev. Ward's school is built around the well-known KIPP (Knowledge Is Power Program) model developed by Michael Feinberg and David Levin.

Omega started with a dean of instruction with 30 years of experience in the Dayton school system, and she reports to Rev. Ward. That person has become dean of students and the school now also has a curriculum director and a part-time school treasurer to handle its finances.

One of the gaps in her experience as principal of Omega, Rev. Ward says, is her lack of previous management background. "This is a business. It's a startup business. I think most persons who are in education don't necessarily come with those gifts—managing budgets and forecasting, insuring that you're making the best decisions fiscally to allow a startup business to survive."

She says she tries to deal with her lack of management experience by looking to "people who know what they're doing, having resources, finding those resources, soliciting their support, bringing on a team of people who can carry this through. By having a treasurer who has experience and is assured of having really clean audits, good books. That's a great blessing that I think a number of schools have challenges with."

She also looks to her board for advice and support and has sought assistance from Dayton's School Resource Center, which provides management support for charter schools. She also took a ten-week course in management at the Dayton Area Chamber of Commerce.

Ward says that not coming through the education establishment is both strength, and a weakness. "I basically don't know what can't be done. I don't have the limitation of 'Well, we did it that way before and it didn't work.' I actually believe that every kid can learn and should learn. There are times when I feel like that's the motivation and it takes us to the next level and there are times when I feel like I'm out here by myself, that maybe what I'm thinking is not realistic or what I'm aiming for can't be done. But then there's a part of me that says it has to be done."

Ward estimates that more than three quarters of her time is spent with students, parents, teachers, and the community, "working through a mission, first of all defining it and shaping it. I'm a builder. My husband and I have been blessed, ... to start things

from nothing, literally with a vision and an idea and a commitment and passion and work really hard, roll up our sleeves and do it.”

Her own children attended a prestigious private school in Dayton. “What I saw that my kids had—the education they had—was excellent; the teachers they had are excited; the teachers go above and beyond expectations to make sure that their students learn. And I said, ‘Why can’t that be possible?’ I mean every child deserves that, whether their parents are able to finance it or not. They deserve it. I really keep before me what I’ve seen happen in that school as a model. ... And whenever I think about what can be done and I push the mark a little bit, it’s because that’s the benchmark for me. The teachers do give those extra hours and it’s not all about their salaries, and it’s not all about people being there because it’s a safe place. They’re there because it’s a place where everybody wants their kids to be there. You know they pay for it. They pay tuition for their kids to be there. And I’m getting that here at the Omega School. The parents are here because they want their kids here. And, therefore, they make the effort. When I say we’re having a parent-teacher conference, I have 97 percent show up for those. Parents are responding. It’s a community of support that I had always heard was not present in the public schools—but I’m getting it.”

Is Omega’s experience unique or can it be replicated? “I think it’s universally applicable. If you have teachers who want to do it, parents who want to do it and students who start living up to the expectations because you keep raising the bar and saying this is where you need to get. You don’t lower it. You keep it up and you tell them to keep moving—encourage them.”

Despite the resentment that some in the education establishment feel toward reform efforts such as charter schools, Vanessa Ward sees “great change happening, even in our local area.” The Dayton Public School System is in the midst of a major reform initiative that would not have happened without the pressure exerted by the charter schools. Almost 20 percent of Dayton’s K-12 students go to charter schools like Omega. Despite the claims from some in the traditional system that charter schools are stealing their money and children, Ward makes it clear that she’s not negative toward public schools. “I just want all of us to do a better job,” she says. Because Ward cares deeply about Dayton’s children she has decided to do more than just talk about reform. She is now helping to lead it.

Certification Of Public-School Administrators

A Summary Of State Practices

By Emily Feistritzer, President

The National Center for Education Information

States bear responsibility for certifying (or licensing) public school personnel and they go about this in varied ways. For the past two decades, the National Center for Education Information (NCEI) has been tracking and reporting on their approaches to teacher certification, particularly “alternative” routes. That information has had a significant impact on the widening movement to bring people from careers other than education into public-school teaching posts.

Drawing upon that experience, in July-October 2002, with support from the Broad Foundation and the Thomas B. Fordham Institute, NCEI set out to determine what states are doing regarding certification of principals and superintendents. Data came from a thorough telephone and email survey of state certification officials. We asked them to describe the regular routes for certifying school administrators as well as activities (if any) concerning alternatives by which nontraditional candidates might become certified to lead public schools and school systems. If a state reported that it had some form of alternative route for administrators, we obtained a description of entry and completion requirements. We also queried respondents about the degree of interest (if any) evident in their states regarding the idea of bringing nontraditional candidates into public-school leadership positions—and the degree of interest among such people in leading public schools and school systems.

Other survey questions included:

- Is the state experiencing a principal and/or superintendent demand/supply problem?
- How many new administrator certificates (for principal and superintendent) has the state issued in each of the last five years?
- How many new principals and superintendents have actually been hired in the state during each of the last five years?
- Does the state issue any kind of certification waivers for public-school leaders?

Among the more interesting findings:

- As yet, there is no general move afoot to bring people from outside the ranks of traditional educators into school leadership positions, although some large urban school systems have begun to do this at the superintendent’s level and a number of states have begun to create alternative pathways for certifying principals and superintendents.
- Eleven states report having alternate routes of various kinds for both principals and superintendents: California, Idaho, Kentucky, Maryland, Massachusetts,

Minnesota, Mississippi, New Hampshire, Ohio (not used), Tennessee (not used), and Texas (only for people who have been teachers and/or principals). Three additional states – New Jersey, New York, and Oregon – say they don't have alternate routes but actually have programs by which nontraditional candidates may get into administration jobs.

- Four states (Colorado, Georgia, Illinois, and Kansas) have alternate routes for superintendents, but not for principals.
- State certification officials report that many other jurisdictions are “thinking about” alternative routes for school administrators, due primarily to interest expressed by elected officials and the success of alternative routes for teachers. Nearly all states are also considering the possibility of bringing nontraditional candidates into the system as principals and superintendents. Licensing officials report, however, that there is little interest in such innovations at the local level. (This pretty much mirrors the sentiment regarding alternative routes for teachers in the late 1980s.)
- In general, states report no serious shortage of school administrators. However, some are encountering spot shortages, particularly in urban and rural areas. Some states also expressed concerns about the quality of people in school administrator positions. (See table 1 for more details).
- States report they are issuing far more administrator certificates than they have people actually seeking to lead schools and school districts. Many such certificates appear to be going to teachers seeking higher pay. (See table 2 for more details).
- Nearly all states require that public-school administrators have prior teaching and/or related experience in K-12 schools. This follows from the states' view that principals are “instructional leaders,” not “CEO's”.
- Regular certification routes for principals and superintendents consist, for the most part, of post-graduate programs in university departments of school leadership or school administration. These programs vary considerably, however, in requirements for entry, content, duration and exit. For example, some require internships while others rely solely on coursework. Some require exit tests or assessments, though most do not.
- Two states (Michigan and South Dakota) do not require certification of either principals or superintendents. Five additional states (Florida, Hawaii, North Carolina, Tennessee and Wyoming) as well as the District of Columbia do not

issue certificates to superintendents. In all these states, local districts set their own requirements, although these tend to resemble what other states require through traditional certification.

- Hawaii has an alternate route for principals, but not for its superintendent. (Hawaii has only one school district.) Florida passed legislation in 2002 giving local school boards authority to set their own alternative qualifications for persons wishing to become principals.
- Most of the extant alternate route programs are controlled and operated by colleges and universities.
- Very few candidates are going through any of the alternate route programs for administrators that states say they have.

The full survey, and supporting data and analysis, are available at www.ncei.com.

Table 1: State by state overview of administrator certification*

State	1) Is state experiencing a shortage of school administrators?	2) Does state require certification for principals and/or superintendents?		3) Does state have certification waivers for school administrators?	4) Does state have alternate routes to certification for principals and/or superintendents?
		Principals	Superintendents		
Alabama	Some	Yes	Yes	No	Thinking about
Alaska	Maybe future	Yes	Yes	No	No
Arizona	Not aware	Yes	Yes	No	No
Arkansas	Maybe future	Yes	Yes	Yes	No
California	Some areas	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes - New 2002 law, not yet implemented
Colorado	Yes	Yes	Yes	No	Yes (Superintendents)
Connecticut	No	Yes	Yes	No	Discussing
Delaware	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Discussing
District of Columbia	No	Yes (since 2000)	No	No	No
Florida	Maybe future	Yes	No	No	2002 law gives local school districts discretion to set their own alternative qualifications for persons wishing to become principals.
Georgia	Maybe future	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes (Superintendents)
Hawaii	Yes (Principals)	Yes	No	No	Yes (Principals)
Idaho	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes (Limited Approval Alternatives)	Yes
Illinois	Yes - Some	Yes	Yes	n/a	Yes (Superintendents)
Indiana	No	Yes	Yes	No (Emergency)	No
Iowa	Yes	Yes	Yes	No (Conditional)	Proposed
Kansas	Yes	Yes	Yes	No	Yes (Superintendents) - New, started in 2002
Kentucky	No	Yes	Yes	Not available	Yes
Louisiana	Not available	Yes	Yes	Yes (Superintendents)	No
Maine	Yes - Some	Yes	Yes	Yes (Principals)	No
Maryland	Yes (Principals)	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes (Principals)
Massachusetts	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Michigan	No data; Not applicable	No 2/	No 2/	No	No
Minnesota	Yes - Some	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes

State	1) Is state experiencing a shortage of school administrators?	2) Does state require certification for principals and/or superintendents?		3) Does state have certification waivers for school administrators?	4) Does state have alternate routes to certification for principals and/or superintendents?
		Principals	Superintendents		
Mississippi	Yes - Small	Yes	Yes	No (formerly called Emergency)	Yes (for entry-level only - Assistant Principals)
Missouri	Quality Issues	Yes	Yes	No	No
Montana	Not available	Yes	Yes	No	No
Nebraska	No	Yes	Yes	No	No
Nevada	No	Yes	No 4/	No	No
New Hampshire	Yes (Principals)	Yes	Yes	Yes (Permission to Employ - rarely used)	Yes
New Jersey	Yes	Yes	Yes	No	Yes (says no)
New Mexico	Yes - Some	Yes	Yes	Yes (few)	No
New York	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes (Superintendent)	Yes (says no)
North Carolina	Yes	Yes	No	No (Provisional)	No
North Dakota	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes (not used)	No
Ohio	Yes (Principals)	Yes	Yes	Not available	Yes
Oklahoma	No	Yes	Yes	No	No
Oregon	No data	Yes	Yes	Yes (Exceptional)	Yes (says no)
Pennsylvania	No	Yes	Yes	Yes (Emergency)	No
Rhode Island	No	Yes	Yes	Yes (Crossover & Emergency)	No
South Carolina	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes (Permit)	Discussing - no need
South Dakota	No	No 5/	No 5/	Not applicable	No
Tennessee	No	Yes	No	Yes (Permit)	Yes (Principals)
Texas	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Utah	No	Yes	Yes	Yes (Letter of Authorization)	No
Vermont	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Considering
Virginia	Yes (Principals)	Yes	Yes	No (Provisional)	Yes (Superintendents)
Washington	Not available	Yes	No	No	No
West Virginia	No	Yes	Yes	Yes	No
Wisconsin	Yes (Superintendents) Principals - No, but Quality Issues	Yes	Yes	No (temporary Administrator License for Superintendent)	No

State	1) Is state experiencing a shortage of school administrators?	2) Does state require certification for principals and/or superintendents?		3) Does state have certification waivers for school administrators?	4) Does state have alternate routes to certification for principals and/or superintendents?
		Principals	Superintendents		
Wyoming	No -but Quality Issues	Yes	No	Yes (Principals)	No

* This information was provided by state licensing officials from July-October 2002. This is a rapidly changing area. The full report on which this table is based can be found at the National Center for Education Information web site <<http://www.ncei.com/>>.

- 1/ Massachusetts -- Local school districts are reluctant to seriously consider non-traditional candidates to fill school administrator positions.
- 2/ Since 1999, Michigan has not had any state certification of principals or superintendents.
- 3/ Minnesota -- This alternate route has been used for superintendents; not thus far for principals.
- 4/ Nevada issues Administrative Endorsements to both principals and superintendents, but a superintendent may serve without either an endorsement or teacher license. State law allows a district to hire a superintendent without these credentials, but a fully qualified district official must handle duties such as supervision of licensed personnel).
- 5/ In 1995, the South Dakota state legislature repealed the requirement that principals and superintendents be certified.

Table 2: Certificates issued and school administrators employed*

State	1) Number of public schools 2000-01*	2) Average number of initial principal certificates issued per year, 1998-2002**	3) Number of School Districts 2000-01*	4) Average number of initial superintendent certificates issued per year, 1998-2002**
Alabama	1,508	516	128	n/a
Alaska	513	n/a	53	n/a
Arizona	1,652	n/a	410	n/a
Arkansas	1,133	n/a	310	n/a
California	8,570	1,914	985	n/a
Colorado	1,611	n/a	176	n/a
Connecticut	1,167	n/a	166	n/a
DC	184	n/a	19	n/a
Delaware	165	n/a	1	n/a
Florida	3,300	3,769	67	n/a
Georgia	1,946	n/a	180	n/a
Hawaii	261	n/a	1	n/a
Idaho	672	n/a	115	n/a
Illinois	4,092	1,318	894	129
Indiana	1,946	n/a	295	n/a
Iowa	1,534	n/a	374	n/a
Kansas	1,430	304	304	88
Kentucky	1,526	599	176	71
Louisiana	1,503	642	78	36
Maine	697	n/a	282	n/a
Maryland	1,383	46	24	35
Massachusetts	1,602	n/a	349	n/a
Michigan	3,840	n/a	734	n/a
Minnesota	2,108	n/a	415	n/a
Mississippi	1,019	287	152	n/a
Missouri	2,285	747	524	102
Montana	873	n/a	453	n/a
Nebraska	1,276	n/a	576	n/a
Nevada	510	n/a	17	n/a
New Hampshire	526	3	178	1
New Jersey	2,319	n/a	604	n/a
New Mexico	765	n/a	89	n/a
New York	4,260	n/a	703	n/a
North Carolina	2,115	214	120	n/a
North Dakota	537	n/a	230	n/a
Ohio	3,787	n/a	662	n/a

State	1) Number of public schools 2000-01*	2) Average number of initial principal certificates issued per year, 1998-2002**	3) Number of School Districts 2000-01*	4) Average number of initial superintendent certificates issued per year, 1998-2002**
Oklahoma	1,821	n/a	544	n/a
Oregon	1,244	253	197	27
Pennsylvania	3,091	n/a	501	n/a
Rhode Island	325	n/a	36	n/a
South Carolina	1,113	n/a	90	n/a
South Dakota	744	n/a	176	n/a
Tennessee	1,624	663	138	n/a
Texas	7,318	n/a	1040	n/a
Utah	791	464	40	n/a
Vermont	330	n/a	288	n/a
Virginia	1,911	n/a	135	n/a
Washington	2,295	435	296	48
West Virginia	824	n/a	55	n/a
Wisconsin	2,154	n/a	431	n/a
Wyoming	382	n/a	48	n/a
TOTAL	90,582	n/a	14,859	n/a

* Data from the U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics.

** Data from the National Center for Education Information.

The full report on which this table is based can be found at <http://www.ncei.com/>

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