



Building a 21st Century U.S. Education System

Executive Editor
Bob Wehling

Associate Editor
Carri Schneider

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CHAPTER 9

View from the Trenches: Two Practitioners Reflect on the Need for a National System of Educational Leadership Preparation

Carri Schneider & Ted Zigler

Introduction

When the Center for Reinventing Public Education detailed its findings on current licensure requirements for educational leaders in its 2005 report prepared under a grant from The Wallace Foundation,¹ our intuition as practitioners was confirmed. Based on an in-depth analysis of principals' licensure content in all 50 states, researchers found that current licensure programs do not reflect a focus on learning and that the requirements themselves are uneven across the country and misaligned to the diverse needs of America's students (Adams & Copland, 2005). This important report shed light on the need to reconsider leadership preparation in our country and motivated us to pen this collaborative chapter. As two former practitioners and current academics in Educational Leadership, we bring our perspective "from the trenches" as we issue a national call to action. It's our firm belief that redefining our "core business" as educational leaders is a necessary and often-neglected aspect of the call for systemic reform of American public schools. That is, we believe that in order to truly provide all children with equal access to a high-quality, world class educational opportunity, all educational leaders must be equally prepared to meet the challenge. As such, we need a more universal and unified system in place that can properly train and support educational leaders on their missions in schools across our country.

To build our case, our chapter begins with a background section that reviews the current state of educational leadership preparation in our country and summarizes the strong relationship between educational leaders and student achievement by briefly surveying recent research findings in these areas. The background section ends with our proposal for a more nationalized system of educational leadership preparation before moving into the discussion. In the discussion section, we further lay out the details of our proposal by addressing three concomitant goals: 1) to re-establish our "core business" as educational leaders; 2) to re-conceptualize how we define "leadership" and "preparation"; and 3) to acknowledge current roadblocks and critiques of our proposal. In the final section, we conclude with a review of our case and our vision for the national system of educational leadership that is necessary to truly provide each and every American child with equal access to a high-quality, world-class public education.

Background

Over the years, numerous reports have produced similar results as to the lack of consistency among educational leadership programs. Across the United States programs differ

by focus, design, length, accreditation, philosophy, organization, and so forth, as well as the necessary requirements for completion related to experience, education, and practice in the field. Since we know that educational leaders can either positively or negatively influence the achievement of their students, we call attention to these discrepancies as a way to bolster our proposal for a more consistent, national system.

Current State of Leadership Preparation

Currently, multiple sets of standards have become commonplace and only add confusion to the already complex framework of standards necessary to prepare good educational leaders. To illuminate this problem, let's turn to Ohio as an example. In Ohio, there are standards being used by principal preparation programs guided by the Interstate School Leaders Licensure Consortium (ISLLC), Educational Leadership Constituent Council (ELCC), and newly written (2005) Ohio Principal Standards, which are intended to supercede the ISLLC and ELCC standards in Ohio. Subsequently, in order to reconcile all these standards, a "crosswalk" had to be formed to connect the new Ohio Standards with the ISLLC and ELCC principal standards, expectations from accrediting agencies such as the National Council for the Accreditation of Teacher Education (NCATE) and the Teacher Education Accreditation Council (TEAC), along with the Licensure Exam (Praxis II). Adding to this complexity, in the state of Ohio, there are currently 22 institutions that prepare candidates for principal licensure, and the programs look very different from each other. Across the country, states are experiencing similar problems. Many states have developed their own standards, in answer to the need for school reform. As preparation programs wrestle with these various standards, licenses, and accrediting agencies, many colleges and universities have created multiple methods for delivery of curriculum such as satellite programs off-campus and distance learning opportunities online and via video-conferencing. Is it any wonder that, among all of these complexities, university faculty often feel "frozen," not knowing how best to proceed? Some may use this confusion as an excuse in order to avoid change. Which standards will be used next? The push and pull comes from many directions. Who will oversee the programs being offered online from out-of-state institutions, which may use different standards and a different accrediting agency? We are becoming more fractured at a time when we should be coming together as a nation to develop answers in a "flat world" that has nations competing with other nations in economics and knowledge. It is obviously time to make a change.

Most recently, separate reports on programs and licensure by the Wallace Foundation (Adams and Copland, 2005), Columbia's Arthur Levine (2005), Vanderbilt's Joe Murphy (2006), and the Stanford School Leadership Study (2005) have looked at principal preparation programs and called for moving all programs to a more consistent, coherent program with all programs having essential elements, being learning focused, having portability, and containing adequate support. We are suggesting, based on these ideas and participating in the field, there is a need for a consistent, coherent national program for principal and teacher-leader preparation.

Educational Leadership and Student Achievement

As we will explain in the next section, a national system for educational leadership preparation is an integral part of a new system for American public education that will be needed to provide each and every student with an equal access to a high-quality, globally-competitive education. As such, it is this inextricable link between educational leadership and student achievement that bolsters our argument. Simply put, the leader of a school or district can “make or break” the achievement of the students since s/he is primarily responsible for supporting, motivating, and encouraging the teachers, staff, students, parents, and other various stakeholders. In today’s post-No Child Left Behind school, the task of instructional leadership has gained increasing importance on the list of administrative duties. This type of leadership, which places student achievement as the focus of the principal’s duties, is made more difficult by additional responsibilities such as monitoring and supervising, handling student discipline, attending and leading meetings, writing grants, observing and evaluating teachers, participating in community events and civic organizations, completing directives from the board of education, evaluating building data, making financial and budgetary decisions, implementing and facilitating change, addressing parent and community concerns, garnering support for school-related issues, carrying out the school’s mission and vision, etc.² Therefore, it is no surprise that instructional leadership often takes a back-seat to more “pressing” issues, such as the angry parent or disruptive student. Later in this chapter, we will make the case that “leadership” itself must be re-conceptualized under the new 21st Century system of American public education. Before doing so, it is important to begin with a quick scan of the research that provides evidence for the strong connection between educational leadership and student achievement.

To acknowledge the ways in which a school or district leader can either positively or negatively influence the success of his/her students is to acknowledge that the preparation of our future educational leaders is just as important as the preparation of tomorrow’s teachers. Our intuition based on conventional wisdom and our own experiences is confirmed by research that verifies this connection. The Leithwood, et. al. (2004) report, “How Leadership Influences Student Learning,” commissioned by the Wallace Foundation, provides two key insights into the relationship between leadership and learning that inspire our repeating them here. They found: 1) “Leadership is second only to classroom instruction among all school-related factors that contribute to what students learn at school; and 2) Leadership effects are usually largest where and when they are needed most.” (p. 3) Similarly, Cotton’s (2003) book also details what the research says about the relationship between school administrators and the achievement of their students. Key points from her analysis also bear mentioning. To summarize, Cotton (2003) concludes: 1) research that connects strong administrative leadership to student achievement dates back to the 1970s; 2) such research has been further confirmed and developed by more recent research; 3) the large body of research in this area comes in various forms and functions and differs by design, subject, participants, and type of outcome; and 4) there are many characteristics of educational leaders that influence students.³ Finally, it’s important to note that, while many administrative decisions certainly influence student achievement directly, many of the ways in which the school leader affects student learning is more indi-

rect in nature. For instance, consider the role that the educational leader must serve to motivate and inspire the teachers, staff, and students. One example of this type of connection between a less observable leadership quality and student achievement is through what is known as “collective efficacy.” Goddard (2001) defines collective efficacy as the perceptions of the individual members of a school that the group as a whole can successfully influence the success of its students. Clearly, the principal or superintendent serves as the person with the most control over the school or district sense of collective efficacy. Multiple studies⁴ have shown the strong positive correlation between leadership-inspired characteristics such as collective efficacy and student achievement.

Overall, there is a wide corpus of research, spanning decades, that evidences the connection between student achievement and educational leadership. If the educational leader’s influence has such an impact on student achievement, why is the preparation of future school administrators in such a confusing state of disarray? Why do we continue to tolerate a complicated, often-contradictory set of competing standards for preparation, licensure, and professional support that perpetuate an uneven system of educational leadership? It is time to seriously consider deep, structural changes to our current educational system as we move toward a more unified, equitable system for all students. It is our opinion, as practitioners and academics, that a national system offers our most promising hope.

Our Proposal for a National System

If educational leadership is essential to student achievement and increasing the student achievement of all American students is our goal, it therefore follows that we must have a system in place that also provides all future educational leaders with equal access to high-quality preparation and professional support. As clearly evidenced by the aforementioned research, this is simply not the case for today’s administrators. Since current preparation, induction, and professional development programs for educational leaders vary from state-to-state, city-to-city, and even district-to-district, it is ludicrous to expect that all leadership programs are created equally. We therefore propose a national system for educational leaders that addresses high-quality preparation and ongoing professional support for practitioners. Such a program is not only essential to the need for high-quality educational leaders across the country, but also critical to the successful implementation of proposed national standards for students and teachers as recommended by many of today’s leaders whose voices are shared in this book. Without a completely nationalized approach to American public education that addresses all parts of the system – students, teachers, and leaders – we are doomed to fall off the edge of our increasingly “flat world”.

Discussion

To set the stage for our proposal, we first offered our readers some background information on the current state of educational leadership, the connection between leaders and learning, and our initial call for a national system of American public education. In this section, we present key points from our discussion on these issues. Here, we lay out our vision for the ways in which we must re-define many features of educational leadership, including the re-establishment of our “core business” as well as our definitions of funda-

mental concepts such as “leadership” and “preparation.” We end this section with an acknowledgement of the potential roadblocks and inevitable criticisms of our plan. Just as the two of us communicated with one another and our various friends and colleagues about these issues, it is our hope that this section will stimulate further discussion among our readers. We see our partnership as a small model for the larger collaboration and communication that will be necessary if we are to move American education forward.

Establishing Our “Core Business”

What is the “core business” of programs of educational leadership? If we believe that our “core business” is helping schools perform better by preparing strong school leaders, then we need to be embedded within schools and school districts. If we believe that our “core business” is school reform and reform sustainability, for the sake of improved student achievement, then teacher education and educational leadership programs must work together for this end. Schools of Education and Educational Leadership must re-connect not only with each other, but with the school districts to eliminate the “disconnect” that principals and teachers talk of, when referring to their university training and support. We must return to our “core business” of improving schools and helping teachers and principals to help their students. That is our “core business.” Writing on little-read topics, researching on the periphery of anything important, preventing research in school districts, and maintaining the status quo of the university or the school district is NOT our “core business.”

Cloke and Goldsmith (2002) in their book, *The End of Management and the Rise of Organizational Democracy* believe that “Democratic theory makes it clear that management as a system will predictably reinforce hierarchy and bureaucracy, autocracy and injustice, inequality and privilege; that it will block self-actualization, reduce personal freedom, and exhaust ethics and integrity; that it will sap the spirit, deplete the soul, and seek to conquer the very environment that supports it” (p. 38). Large bureaucracies are slow to change and adapt and that management from only the top will not result in speedy reforms or adaptability by an organization. The leadership must come from the top and the bottom. The leadership must come from multiple sources all at once. How do we make that happen?

Zimpher & Howey (2004) talk of system to system reform, referring to teacher education and school reform by school districts. We contend that this is a good start, but for true reform, this should be system to system to system, meaning teacher education programs to educational leadership programs to school district reform movements. America can no longer wait for one program to change, or one school district, or one school building, and then have the others slowly react to this change over time.

All parties need to be together with changes for schools and universities (legislators, policy-makers, universities and colleges, public and private, school districts, teacher unions, principal organizations, public and private schools, charter and community schools; all should be at the table; none can work independently of the others. The change must come from all directions at once, and this can only be lead on a national level from a

single platform. This needs to be led on a national level by people like Nancy Zimpher, Bob Wehling, Joe Murphy, Diane Ravitch, and others like them who all have the reputation and the expertise to make this work, with the support of the Department of Education.

Re-conceptualizing “Leadership” and “Preparation”

Just as we must rethink how we define our “core business,” we must also re-conceptualize how we think about “leadership” and “preparation.” In today’s context, we must expand our understanding of the educational leader beyond the traditional authority figure of the principal, superintendent, or administrator. Instead, we must consider new types of instructional leadership within various educational contexts, such as teacher leaders, team leaders, and so on. Similarly, we must redefine how what we see as “preparation.” The current models of leadership preparation that usually ends with degree completion are out-dated and inadequate. It is our belief that the only way to provide equal access to a high-quality education for all American students is to ensure that each student has the benefit of a well-prepared instructional leader. As such, new preparation programs must be created that do more than award a license or degree in educational leadership.

Schools are doing their best to change and adapt, and are doing good work. But they simply cannot change fast enough to keep up with the world around them. Thus, the problem is that the good work is not good enough! One can see examples of business not changing fast enough either, despite their attempts to change and adapt. So one can agree this is not an easy task, and is one that needs a national tone set, and a national organization or group to drive it. Schools need a flat model of leadership with many leaders (teachers, principals and community members) in order to change quickly and to change in a manner that meets the needs of each individual community. Only with teachers and principals leading together, side-by-side, can one get the strength and the quickness to adapt rapidly to society's changes.

For the quickest, sustainable change reforms, school organizations need the leadership to be in many people, from many sources, from many viewpoints, all working together toward a common goal: helping all students. Teachers and principals working side-by-side allows for many leaders, with diverse viewpoints, to accumulate the strength needed for quick reform and sustainability of successful school reform movements. No one group “owns” the leadership of schools. No one group can do this incredibly difficult job alone. Teachers and principals need each other, and the students need to have them both working together.

For this reason, it is necessary to redefine the principal's job description, as it has become too big and too complex for one person. School communities expect that one person to be “superman” or “wonder woman,” being able to handle all problems, accommodate all populations, and drive student achievement—oh, and also to cover football games on Friday night! Conger & Benjamin (1999) in their book, *Building Leaders: How Successful Companies Develop the Next Generation*, believe that today's need is for “change-agent leaders” who are inclusive (shared leadership). It is not easy to do both of those at once: change organizations quickly while using a shared leadership model, thus, one starts to understand the complexity of the principal's position.

The partnership of teacher education programs and educational leadership programs in institutions are capable of creating the leadership for schools that can move school reform to the tipping point. This move would actually strengthen both institutional programs, while modeling the leadership that is necessary in schools. Both programs should be working together to prepare candidates for the principalship and for teacher leadership alongside the principal. The focus in the past, and a very narrow focus at that, has been for programs of educational leadership to prepare only those interested in being principals. Rare is the program that intentionally prepares teacher leaders to work alongside principals. Educational leadership programs as the name states, should teach school leadership for both teachers and principals, and they should learn and practice side-by-side.

Zimpher & Howey (2004) continue to lead the call for a full working partnership of the university and the public schools, charter schools, community schools, and private schools. This must include more cross-over between departments within institutions. All entities must start working together, rather than seeing each other as adversaries, for the good of all of the students. The competition can no longer be seen as the city nearby or the state next door. The competition is other countries, acting as national bodies in their reform and endeavors. The push to a national education plan, working together as one "educational organization" with many delivery models, agreeing on one set of high standards and licensure for all educational leaders, can bring about a world class education opportunity for all children.

This national plan would consist of a unified vision for each element that is critical to the building a system that can provide equal access to a high-quality education for all students – including national standards for students, teachers, and school leaders. Accordingly, the national plan must be flexible and have what Adams and Copland (2005) refer to as "portability." Large urban districts often need to grow their own leaders, as they require leaders that understand the urban community, the teachers' union, and the problems of large school size, while small rural schools, whose community revolve around the school and its activities, have somewhat different societal needs. But all states have similar educational goals principal standards, with the skills and knowledge to aid student learning being much the same regardless of the area or state. Thus, a national system of educational standards and leadership practices that is "portable" would cross those lines and allow mobility and accessibility for schools to obtain the excellent school leadership needed. A national system can work!⁵

Acknowledging Current Roadblocks & Criticisms

It's not easy to turn a ship the size of American public education. However, we do not intend to let current roadblocks and inevitable critiques of our proposals stand in the way of our vision for the future of America's students. While we can't anticipate each and every obstacle, there are several potential areas we wish to address at this time.

First and foremost, we want to be clear that we are not calling for a federally-controlled system for educational leadership. Rather, we propose a more unified national system of standards for educational leadership preparation and practice that will be universally rec-

ognized by each state as the exemplar. This system would not be created or controlled by the federal government. Rather, it would be a national plan of unity toward a common, national system of educational leadership standards for preparation, licensure, induction, and professional development. In a world increasingly focused on global competition, it is time that the states band together to create an American system of public education rather than focusing our energy on competing with one another. Currently, we are only as strong as our “weakest” state’s requirements. With a national system of education that provides standards for each aspect of the system, we will be stronger as a nation.

Second, we wish to speak to some of the concerns regarding national standards. We fundamentally believe that standards can be nationalized without being lowered, while simultaneously acknowledging that a national system will need to be flexible in order to meet the individual needs of each state. It is therefore necessary that a national committee with representatives from all stakeholder groups be involved in the creation of these standards, with an eye toward both universality and flexibility.

Third, we know that implementing something of this magnitude will take time. Therefore, we believe that we must begin with and expand upon current pockets of success. Perhaps the best plan is to begin with regional systems and work our way up to something nationwide. We recognize that people and organizations within the current system are accustomed to functioning as islands and icebergs and that work will need to be done to make true collaboration (and not just cooperation) possible. But, we should not let the comfort of our unhealthy habits stand in the way of better decisions that are ultimately best for each of us. It is necessary to create a sense of urgency. We are near the tipping point, but a push on the national level is needed.

We are wasting money by constantly re-inventing standards and licensure in each state. Money is already being spent, as each state moves in its own parallel direction on school reforms, so more money is not as necessary as using the money in a more aligned effort. The right kind of national leadership is needed for this to move in a positive direction and to pull the funding together. Foundations such as the Wallace Foundation and the Gates Foundation could come together to coordinate their work at a national level, improving the targeting of their funding. Federal monies could support an effort like this and do more good than many other current initiatives. Focusing on leadership would be money well-spent!

Conclusion

Phillip C. Schlechty (1997), founder of the Center for Leadership in School Reform, makes an important point: “Too few leaders understand that America’s schools have never performed as we would now have them perform, and of those who do understand these facts, too many behave defensively when confronted with the charge that today’s schools are not meeting the needs of modern society.”

Our collaborative chapter attempts to address these two areas. We have presented the facts based on the current realities of leadership preparation under our current system. Instead of behaving defensively, we have taken the next steps and proposed our vision for

a nationalized system for educational leadership. Accordingly, we urge our readers to move forward with two critical steps. First, we ask you to acknowledge the facts. Our current system is not working. Second, we urge you to confront the facts and take the appropriate action! We believe that the appropriate action with true promise is complete, systemic reform from the current, fragmented, flawed system that perpetuates educational inequality to a new, unified, national system that would provide each student with equal access to a high-quality, world-class public education.

Endnotes

1. Adams, J.E., & Copland, M.A. (2005). When learning counts: Rethinking licenses for school leaders. Daniel J. Evans School of Public Affairs: University of Washington, commissioned by the Wallace Foundation.
2. The work of Marzano, Waters, & McNulty (2005) provides a thorough list of Leadership Responsibilities and Practices.
3. For a complete list of Cotton's (2003) areas in which principals of high-achieving schools are effective, see pages 67-72 of her book *Principals and Student Achievement*.
4. For a comprehensive list of studies that provide "The Collective Efficacy Research Base," see McREL's (2005) Participant Manual for "Balanced Leadership: School Leadership That Works."
5. One celebrated example is England's National College for School Leadership (NCSL).

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