

PREPARING AND DEVELOPING EFFECTIVE SCHOOL LEADERS

“High-achieving nations...make intensive, consistent investments in teacher and leader development.”¹⁹

RESEARCH FINDINGS:

To attract and keep the right leaders, particularly in low-performing schools, states and districts should draw on the following effective but underutilized approaches to preparing them for the job and creating the right incentives and conditions to support their success:

- **Provide better, more selective training for principals to prepare transformative leaders whose goal is to significantly improve teaching and learning and to turn around failing schools.**
 - Proven effective practices in the preparation of future school leaders include:
 - Selective recruitment to identify expert teachers with leadership potential;
 - A challenging, coherent curriculum that focuses on instructional leadership, the ability to change the culture of schools and improve the skills and effectiveness of teachers;
 - Active, student-centered instruction that integrates theory and practice, problem-based learning, budget exercises, hiring and effective data use; and
 - Well-designed and supervised administrative internships that provide real opportunities for aspiring principals to experience leadership first-hand.²⁰
 - Graduates of the NYC Leadership Academy – which incorporates the above practices – were placed in extremely low-performing schools and improved their schools’ academic performance at higher rates than other new principals in English-language arts and at comparable rates to non-Academy trained principals in math.²¹
- **Don’t ignore state policies that can affect principal training.**
 - Experts have raised serious concerns about the quality and relevance of the leadership preparation provided by many university-based programs – which are where most of our principals are trained – and about the speed and effectiveness of state actions to address those shortcomings.²²
 - Collaborative efforts by state and local leaders have shown promise in improving these training programs in some states. About 200 such programs located in Wallace-funded states have either been forced to redesign their programs to align with new leadership standards and to what’s known about effective training practices or, less frequently, have been shut down for failing to do so.

¹⁹ The Wallace Foundation, *Education Leadership: A Bridge to School Reform*, 2007, transcript of address by Linda Darling-Hammond, 19

²⁰ Linda Darling-Hammond et al., *Preparing School Leaders for a Changing World: Lessons from Exemplary Leadership Development Programs*, Stanford Educational Leadership Institute, 2007, 6; also see The Wallace Foundation, *Becoming a Leader: Preparing School Leaders for Today’s Schools*, 2008

²¹ New York University Institute for Education and Social Policy, *The New York City Aspiring Principals Program, A School-Level Evaluation*

²² Southern Regional Education Board, *Schools Need Good Leaders Now: State Progress in Creating a Learning-Centered School Leadership System*, 2007, 2

- **Encourage school districts to better exercise their own “consumer” power to influence the training of the school leaders they will eventually hire.**

Some districts are becoming more “discerning customers” by:

- Being more selective in hiring program graduates (Chicago, Fort Wayne, IN and Louisville, KY);
- Using contracts and other inducements to influence universities to improve their program content and delivery (Louisville, St. Louis, Providence, Chicago and Springfield, IL); or
- Becoming competitive with universities by starting their own district-level preparation programs (New York City, Providence, Fort Wayne, Boston and Springfield, MA).²³

- **Provide more and better mentoring for new principals once they’re hired.**

- More than half the states and many districts have recently introduced mentoring for principals – a sharp reversal of a long-held “sink-or-swim” attitude toward novice school leaders.²⁴
- In the absence of quality criteria, however, mentoring can be just a “buddy system” that fails to propel the progress of new principals as effective leaders of learning.
- States and districts should ensure that mentoring is focused on student learning. (For example, the NYC Leadership Academy guides its mentoring by using a Leadership Performance Planning Worksheet, which identifies key behaviors linked to successful instructional leadership. The Worksheet has been used to mentor nearly 1,000 new principals in eight states and districts.)
- To attract high-quality mentors, states and districts need to provide enough funding for stipends and to train mentors to perform their roles effectively. One example: Missouri recently began to provide such training and has done so for more than 600 mentors statewide.

- **Enhance peer and district support for both novice and veteran principals.**

- Recognizing that effective instructional leadership requires regular, sustained support for both novice and veteran principals, central office staff in some urban districts are providing individual support to school principals as well as creating networked groupings where peer principals can support each other.²⁵

²³ Findings are from an upcoming report by the Education Development Center on how school districts can influence the quality of university-based leader preparation programs, expected for publication later in 2009.

²⁴ The Wallace Foundation, *Getting Principal Mentoring Right: Lessons from the Field*, 2007, 3

²⁵ See Bradley Portin, Michael Knapp, et al., *Leadership for Learning Improvement in Urban Schools*, Center for the Study of Teaching & Policy, University of Washington (available at www.wallacefoundation.org in October 2009) and Margaret Plecki, Michael Knapp, et al., *How Leaders Invest Staffing Resources for Learning Improvement*, Center for the Study of Teaching & Policy, University of Washington (also available on Wallace’s website in October 2009).