PAVING THE PATH TO THE URBAN SCHOOL PRINCIPALSHIP

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Securing a sufficient supply of highly effective school principals is critical to the success of U.S. schools, especially at-risk and hard-to-staff schools.

This Research & Policy Brief describes the principal pipeline through a focused review of the research.

It shares findings from a series of four focus groups of 74 aspiring school principals and discusses the implications for policymakers and others who are working to improve the supply of high-quality principals.

Contents

"It's possible. I want my principalship to be marked by that saying: 'It is possible.' Regardless of a child's background, with good education, children can be successful in school, in college, in work, and beyond."

—*Aspiring principal, University of Illinois–Chicago*

INTRODUCTION

The central goals of federal education policy are to achieve equity of educational opportunity and proficiency in educational outcomes for all students—regardless of gender, ethnicity, income, language of origin, disability, or geography. The means to achieve these goals rely in part on the ability of states and districts to provide every student with an effective teacher in every subject. It is becoming unmistakably clear, however, that this task can be accomplished only if states and districts also provide every school with an effective leader.

School leaders—specifically principals—can cultivate or impede the conditions for effective teaching. Indeed, researchers have estimated that principals exert more influence, both directly and indirectly, on student achievement test scores than any other school factor besides the teachers themselves (Leithwood, Louis, Anderson, & Wahlstrom, 2004). Therefore, attracting, preparing, and supporting exemplary school leaders is a central challenge for those working to improve the quality of teaching and learning in America's schools. The challenge is especially pressing among schools and districts in which equity of opportunity and outcomes remains a distant goal.

This Research & Policy Brief focuses on what it takes to attract talented and experienced individuals to the principalship. It describes what inspires some people to start on this path, what gives them pause, and what deters others entirely. Using the research literature and results from four focus groups of aspiring principals in three major cities, this brief describes the steps along the pathway to the principalship as well as the characteristics of the individuals taking the journey. Based on these sources, it provides some suggestions for influencing changes in policy and practice to increase the supply of high-quality school leaders.

FOCUS GROUPS OF ASPIRING PRINCIPALS

In fall 2007, Learning Point Associates conducted a series of four focus groups of 74 aspiring school principals. The focus groups were conducted in three major cities: Washington, D.C.; Chicago; and New York City. Focus group participants were enrolled in leadership preparation and certification programs. (See "Focus Group Composition" on page 2.) They shared their thoughts about the principalship—what appeals to them, what concerns them, and what motivates them at this stage of their career to pursue the position.

Focus Group Composition

Between mid- and late-September 2007, Learning Point Associates researchers conducted four focus groups of aspiring principals, targeting three major cities: Washington, D.C.; Chicago; and New York City. The participants were enrolled in principal preparation programs conducted through Trinity University–Washington, the University of Illinois–Chicago, New Leaders for New Schools, and the New York City Department of Education with Bank Street College. Table 1 shows the focus group information for each program.

Table 1. Focus Group Information

City	Host Program	Program Type	Number of Participants in Focus Group
Washington, D.C.	Tomorrow's Leaders Program, Trinity University–Washington	University-based preparation program	25
Chicago	Urban Education Leadership Program, University of Illinois–Chicago	University-based preparation program	8
	New Leaders for New Schools—Chicago Program	Nonprofit third-party preparation program, working in collaboration with institutions of higher education (IHEs)	22
New York City	New York City Department of Education, with Bank Street College	Local education agency (LEA)/IHE partnership preparation program	19

A total of 74 individuals participated in the focus groups. More than half of the participants were from underrepresented or minority groups. In sessions that ranged from 30 to 90 minutes, participants were asked to share what attracts, deters, and motivates them to pursue the principalship at this point in their careers. The participants then identified the top five deterrents, discussed these deterrents in-depth in small groups, and offered their policy recommendations in response to those deterrents. Responses were coded and grouped according to emergent themes.

The findings from these focus groups, shared in this brief, should not be construed as representative of all urban principal aspirants. But because the composition of the focus groups was varied and represented three geographic regions, the issues discussed can at least be safely understood to be the views of many urban principal aspirants.

For additional details about the focus group methodology and participants, refer to the Appendix.

THE NEED FOR SMOOTHER, WIDER PATHS TO THE URBAN SCHOOL PRINCIPALSHIP

Aspiring principals come from many walks of life, taking diverse paths to the principalship. Nearly all have been teachers at some point in their career, but some are business leaders and a few are merely concerned citizens looking to make a difference in America's schools (Gates, Ringel, Santibañez, Chung, & Ross, 2003). Most obtain administrator certification through a "traditional" path—taking courses at an accredited college or university with a period of internship at a local school (Levine, 2005).

Meanwhile, a significant and growing number of "alternative" paths have been created. Programs such as New Leaders for New Schools (www.nlns.org) and the Principal Residency Network (www.loftedu.com) have abbreviated course-taking requirements but more lengthy supervised internships (often called *residencies*), as well as ongoing support and mentorship for principals in the first two years after they have completed their coursework and internship (Anderson & Louh, 2005; Davis, Darling-Hammond, LaPoint, & Myerson, 2005).

THE CURRENT SITUATION

The movement to expand the number and types of pathways to the principalship has been spurred in part by a widespread perception of an impending shortage of qualified principals due to retiring Baby Boomers, growth in the number of schools, and increased accountability that places principals under tremendous pressure and may be driving numerous individuals from the principal's office. According to several recent large-scale empirical studies, however, this shortage has not yet occurred (see The Wallace Foundation, 2003). A RAND study of the national *Schools and Staffing Survey* (Gates et al., 2003), for example, found no evidence of a nationwide shortage of people certified to serve as principals. Also, a survey of 83 districts in the state of Washington revealed an average of 17 formally qualified applicants for every principal

vacancy (Roza, 2003). Finally, according to a 2001 Public Agenda survey (Farkas, Johnson, Duffett, & Foleno, 2001), 59 percent of superintendents reported that there was no shortage of principals in their district and 67 percent said that principal turnover is "not considered a serious concern" (p. 22).

In fact, reports show that the number of individuals qualified to become principals far exceeds the numbers of existing principal vacancies. In a study of the career paths of principals in New York state, for example, the number of individuals under the age of 45 and certified to be principals exceeds the number of principalships by 50 percent (Papa, Lankford, & Wycoff, 2002). The Illinois Education Research Council (DeAngelis, 2003) found that of those individuals who held Type 75 administrative certification in Illinois, only 40 percent were practicing administrators; also, 31 percent applied for, but did not hold, an administrative position; a full 29 percent did not even apply for an administrative position within two years of certification. What accounts for this apparent oversupply of administrators coupled with reports of shortages of high-quality candidates in high-needs schools?

Levine (2005) suggests that because 96 percent of public school districts in all 50 states award salary increases for teachers who earn advanced degrees or course credit beyond a master's degree, many administrator preparation programs enroll students who have no interest in pursuing a principalship but instead are interested in improving their salary step. Indeed, in the Illinois Education Research Council study, the majority of individuals who held certification but not an administrative position cited "moving up the pay scale" as a "very important" reason for obtaining Type 75 certification (DeAngelis, 2003, p. 6). This situation has resulted in a large pool of qualified candidates who are uninterested in applying for administrative positions.

PROJECTED SHORTAGES OF PRINCIPALS

Nevertheless, a nationwide shortage of individuals who not only are qualified for the position but also would be effective in it *and* willing to take on the position in high-needs schools may still be looming. Gates et al. (2003) found that the principal force

is aging, which could lead to future shortages as principals become eligible for retirement. In a study of the career paths of principals in New York state, Papa et al. (2002) found that up to 60 percent of principals may retire in the next five years. Both groups of researchers suggest that district hiring practices, which favor older new principals, may be exacerbating this trend, in addition to retirement programs that create incentives for early retirement. Moreover, public opinion research (Farkas et al., 2001; Harris Interactive, 2001) indicates that the dissatisfaction of principals with their jobs and accountability pressures may portend greater than anticipated shortages.

The *quality* of the current and future principal supply also is in doubt, although no studies have adequately examined this issue. A report on superintendent and principal perceptions of school leadership quality issued by Public Agenda (Farkas et al., 2001) gets at this topic partially, painting a mixed picture: Only one in three superintendents reported the quality of principals in their districts to have increased in recent years; 36 percent of respondents said principal quality had remained level, and 29 percent said it had deteriorated.

Even if the most optimistic projection of an abundant, high-quality principal supply proves true, the well-established fact is that this supply is not equitably distributed. Some districts and schools are now experiencing critical shortages of principal candidates. Schools in poor communities—with high concentrations of racial and ethnic minorities and parents with low incomes—are experiencing difficulty in recruiting candidates as well as convincing principals to stay (e.g., Advocates for Children and Youth, 2007a, 2007b). Moreover, in a study conducted in North Carolina (Clotfelter, Ladd, Vigdor, & Wheeler, 2007), principals of high quality—as measured by their standardized test scores (including both teacher certification examinations and the School Leadership Licensure Exam), the competitiveness of the principal's undergraduate institution (as measured by Barron's ratings), their experience (as measured by the length of time since they had been first certified to be

assistant principals), and their leadership rating (as measured by a survey of teacher working conditions)—were found to be inequitably distributed as well. The North Carolina schools in the highest poverty quartile had the principals who scored consistently lower on all of these measures; principal experience was the only measure that was not statistically significant (Clotfelter et al., 2007).

At-risk and hard-to-staff schools are more likely to experience difficulty in recruiting candidates in addition to having higher principal-turnover rates. Urban schools, in particular, encounter greater difficulties in recruiting and retaining qualified principals (Papa et al., 2002). In analyses conducted in North Carolina (Gates, Guarino, Santibañez, Brown, Ghosh-Dastidar, & Cheng, 2004) and Illinois (Ringel, Gates, Chung, Brown, & Ghosh-Dastidar, 2004), schools with a larger proportion of minority students had higher rates of principal turnover than did schools with fewer minority students. According to a study of Washington school districts, some districts had 40 applicants per principal vacancy, while those with higher concentrations of poor and minority students had, in some cases, fewer than three applicants (Roza, 2003).

Finally, increasing options for teachers to become school leaders without leaving behind the classroom poses potential additional factors that could lead to a smaller pool of prospective principals. Expanded opportunities for teacher leadership (such as becoming a coach, mentor, or reading specialist) may fulfill teachers' aspirations for school leadership without their having to move into the principal's office. Although it is too soon to tell, this trend may be having two parallel effects: lowering the supply of individuals interested in the principalship while at the same time changing the nature of the principalship itself. If more people in the organization are taking on responsibilities nominally held by principals, the principal's role as a "leader of leaders" may have an unforeseen potential negative impact on the attractiveness of the job.

WHAT MOTIVATES CANDIDATES TO START ON THE PATH TO THE PRINCIPALSHIP?

The 2003 *MetLife Survey of the American Teacher* found that 15 percent of teachers were either "somewhat interested" or "very interested" in becoming a principal and 4 percent were "extremely interested" (Harris Interactive, 2003, p. 68). Similarly, a 2007 Learning Point Associates survey of 500 teachers found that 31 percent expressed an interest in becoming a principal at some point. These percentages are not very large, but they do raise the question: Why, given the challenges and the demands of the role, do individuals pursue the principalship?

The aspiring principals in the focus groups conducted by Learning Point Associates had a variety of answers to this question. They all, however, seemed to peer down the path to the principalship to its end and saw the role as holding immense possibility. They believed that principals can have a profound impact on the lives of children and on the viability of a school and a community. They wanted to become a principal so that they too could make a difference.

ATTRACTIONS OF THE PRINCIPALSHIP

The aspiring principals identified five aspects of the job they found particularly attractive: giving back to the community and transforming children's lives, developing and realizing a vision, leading and supporting teachers, wielding influence, and progressing on a career path.

The Principalship as an Opportunity to Give Back and Transform. Focus group participants repeatedly said they view the principalship as an opportunity to give back and transform children's lives as well as the community. Several participants spoke of restoring the school to a "lighthouse" position in the community. For aspiring principals raised in the inner city or who spent their early professional lives in the city, the desire to return and effect change was both urgent and

compelling. Many of the participants felt that it was time to stop waiting for others to fix the schools or blaming others for their failure, but that instead it was time to take charge and do it themselves; as one said, "If not me, then who?" During the course of their careers, they said, they had developed strategies to address perceived deterrents to leading high-minority, high-poverty urban schools (with deterrents such as low levels of parental involvement, violence, and poor student and staff morale), and had the desire to put these strategies into action.

Principal Characteristics

- In the 1999–2000 school year, there were approximately 83,909 public school principals (Gates et al., 2003).
  - More than 99 percent of those principals had previous teaching experience (Gruber, Wiley, Broughman, Strizek, & Burian-Fitzgerald, 2002).
  - Their average age was 49 (Gates et al., 2003).
  - Their average amount of teaching experience was 14 years (Gates et al., 2003)
- In the 2003–04 school year, the average amount of principals' teaching experience was 13 years (Strizek et al., 2007).

The Principal as Vision Owner. Many of the focus group participants said they sought the principalship because they believed they knew what was needed to make a great school and they wanted to put that vision into action. Many had developed a mental framework for reform that includes organizational restructuring, model programs, professional development, and external networks. In their current positions, some said they can implement their vision only in a piecemeal manner or must watch as their superiors take credit for their ideas. A current guidance counselor who was training to be a principal in Washington, D.C., said, "We do a lot to make our principals look good: Keep records, schedule, [and] manage student discipline issues. I'm tired of seeing my ideas go out the door, and the principal gets credit. I want to own my ideas." For many participants, the principalship provides the authority and opportunity to fully bring to life their own mental models of how a school should function for students, teachers, parents, and families.

For some focus group participants, building leadership seemed to them to provide the authority to put into practice valued programs and principles. As one New

Leaders for New Schools resident said, "As a guidance counselor, I didn't feel I had the authority to take initiatives to the community. I had to wait for approval. As a principal, I [will] have that authority." A Trinity University resident said that as principal, she would have the authority to "hire more 'me's' "—good teachers like herself. She discussed the importance of knowing what good instruction looks like and of identifying effective teachers by their practice. Other participants agreed and added that they wanted the authority not only to hire more effective teachers but to ferret out weak teachers.

The Principal as a Leader and Supporter of Teachers. Participants in all four focus groups strongly expressed a commitment to support teachers. They indicated that teachers' hard work and knowledge are often overlooked by administrators and that teachers should be part of the school decision-making process. Participants said their principalships will be marked by listening to teachers and valuing their ideas and efforts. They embraced the idea of nurturing a community of learners where good practice is routinely examined, discussed, and groomed. "I want to help motivate and push teachers," said a New York City resident, "so that no teacher is left behind." A New Leaders for New Schools resident captured the prevailing message when she said, "I want to work with people who get excited about learning and create an environment over time that is enthusiastic for learning."

The Principal as Wielder of Influence. The ability to influence individuals and education decisions at the classroom, building, community, and district levels appeals to large numbers of aspiring principals. "I want to influence more than my classroom," said one focus group participant. "I want to work with 550 families instead of 30," said another participant. Participants also want to influence district leaders. "[As a principal], you have direct access to education reform at the district level. You have a broader influence," added another participant.

The Principalship as a Step on the Career Ladder. Several focus-group participants described the principalship as a stepping stone in their career advancement plans. A common theme across all four groups is that the principalship is a necessary next step

in career advancement. "I've exhausted all the other opportunities. This is the next job for me," said a New Leaders for New Schools resident.

In summary, participants in the aspiring principals focus groups extolled the position of principal. They believed that the person in the principal's office has profound influence on the quality of schooling that students receive, and perhaps that the principalship was a point of entry for a career with even broader influence. And for these reasons, these idealistic individuals took the first steps down the path to the principalship.

DRAWBACKS OF THE PRINCIPALSHIP

Despite the attractions, these aspiring principals were all too aware of the drawbacks of the job. Participants cited the inability to balance work and home life as the primary drawback to the principalship. In addition, they named accountability pressures that were out of proportion with their authority, lack of parental support, less job security, and the loss of close interaction with students. They also mentioned the politics and bureaucracy associated with large urban systems. Indeed, in two of the focus groups (in Washington, D.C., and Chicago), a number of individuals said that they were reconsidering the principalship altogether, after having learned more about the demands of the position.

The ideas voiced by the focus group participants— both the attractions and the drawbacks—are echoed in other research studies. (See "Research-Identified Attractions and Drawbacks of the Principalship" on page 7.)

Steps and Supports Along the Principalship Path

The Leadership Pathway Map (on pages 10–11) represents the five essential steps along the pathway to the principalship: identification, preparation, district recruitment and hiring, beginning support and mentoring, and ongoing support and incentives. It also includes the supports that are necessary for each step, from attracting potential leaders to evaluating and supporting school leaders through the entirety of their careers. These supports are especially important in challenging environments, such as urban schools, but they are relevant for any state or district wishing to improve or sustain the quality of leadership for any of its schools.

Identification

Informed by the literature and the focus group findings, the Leadership Pathway Map begins with the critical and largely overlooked step of identifying potential leaders from among either current teacher ranks or from professionals honing their skills in other careers. As Gates et al. (2003) point out, current hiring and certification practices make teaching experience essentially a prerequisite in nearly every district. Participants in the focus groups conducted by Learning Point Associates held various positions prior to entering their principal preparation programs. (See "School Leadership Positions Held by Aspiring Principals" on page 8.)

Preliminary findings from a study of principal and superintendent views on effective leadership suggest that there is a "marked preference" for recruiting school leaders from within education (Public Agenda, 2008, p. 8). The authors write, "Nearly all of the principals and superintendents interviewed believed that the best source [for new leaders] was young teachers or vice principals—an education 'farm team' so to speak" (Public Agenda, 2008, p. 8). Respondents indicated that "working educators were seen as having a commitment to schools and an expertise in how children learn and what good teaching means—

Research-Identified Attractions and Drawbacks of the Principalship

The attractions and drawbacks identified by the focus groups echo findings from structured principal surveys that required respondents to choose from among a researcher-developed list of incentives and deterrents.

Attractions
A study using a large survey of teachers in Ohio found that the most salient incentives for pursuing the principalship include the following: (1) the "anticipated satisfaction of 'making a difference' as a principal"; (2) the "ability to affect the lives of a greater number of children"; (3) the "opportunity as a principal to implement creative personal ideas"; (4) the "chance to have a greater impact as a principal"; and (5) "improved annual salary as a principal" (Howley, Andrianaivo, & Perry, 2005, p. 465).

Drawbacks
In this same study, the most salient deterrents to the principalship were as follows: (1) the "anticipated stress about having less time at home with family members"; (2) "anticipated stress associated with having to 'play politics'"; (3) "principal's increased responsibility for local, state, and federal mandates"; (4) "accountability for societal conditions beyond an educator's control"; and (5) "decreased opportunity to work with children directly" (Howley et al., 2005, p. 465).

A study by Educational Research Service (1998) indicated the results of a survey issued by the National Association of Elementary School Principals (NAESP) and the National Association of Secondary School Principals (NASSP). Approximately 400 administrator respondents cited the following reasons as possible deterrents to the principalship: job stress, time commitment, accountability and testing pressures, inadequate funding, insufficient compensation, and societal problems that make an instructional focus difficult.

qualities that 'outsiders' may not possess" (p. 8). In a wider survey of principals, Farkas et al. (2001) found that 90 percent of principals believe that school leaders must have teaching experience in order to be a successful principal.

According to Farkas et al. (2001), 67 percent of current principals currently play an active role in the identification and encouragement of future school leaders. Indeed, the focus group participants underscored the power of encouragement from current administrators as a key motivation for their pursuit of the principalship. The majority said they were personally encouraged or tapped to pursue the principalship by an acting principal. A University of Illinois–Chicago resident said, "I've had good and bad leadership. Initially, I wanted to pursue the principalship, but my [building] leader did not encourage me. In my new school, I am receiving tremendous support and encouragement to pursue [the principalship]." As one New York City assistant principal cautioned, though, "Until you believe you're ready, no matter what your cheerleaders—your mentors, peers, even students—say, you won't take the next step. One way to help me believe is to prepare me." Other participants pointed to their current principals as role models, not only for the kinds of leaders they hope to be but also as showing possibility: As one resident said, "I

see now that it's possible—possible to balance [the principalship] with family, possible to make change, possible to make a difference."

At the 2007 Summit on Connecting Teaching and Leading sponsored by Regional Educational Laboratory (REL) Midwest, an expert on educational leadership suggested that the field needs to create "continuums of leadership that start in the classroom" (Steiner, 2007, p. 5). Allowing teachers to take on leadership roles early in their careers may be one important step in the process. Unfortunately, how precisely to create "continuums of leadership" and the effectiveness of the "grooming" practices currently in place are, so far, little understood.

Nevertheless, a few small-scale studies provide clues about what characteristics administrators should look for in prospective candidates for leadership positions: risk taking, collaboration, role modeling, strong instructional knowledge and expertise, reflection, and interpersonal skills (Lieberman, Saxl, & Miles, 1988; Snell & Swanson, 2000; Wilson, 1993; York-Barr & Duke, 2004). Katzenmeyer and Moller (2001, as cited in York-Barr & Duke, 2004, p. 267) list the following indicators of a teachers' preparedness for school leadership: (1) demonstrating excellent professional teaching skills, (2) having a clear and

School Leadership Positions Held by Aspiring Principals

Focus group participants indicated that they had held numerous and diverse school leadership positions prior to entering their principal preparation program. Following is a list of some of these roles:

- Afterschool coordinator
- Area reading coach
- Assistant principal
- Associate director of activities
- Athletic coach
- Bilingual lead teacher
- Content (e.g., social science) coordinator
- Curriculum coordinator
- Dean of students
- Guidance counselor
- Individualized education program coordinator/director

- Induction and literacy coach
- Interdisciplinary grade-level team leader
- Lead teacher
- Local School Council representative
- Mentor teacher
- Partner teacher with New Leaders for New Schools
- Reading specialist
- School-based literacy coach
- School-based problem-solving coordinator
- Teacher coordinator
- Teacher union representative

well-developed personal philosophy of education, (3) being in a career stage that enables one to give to others, (4) having an interest in adult development, and (5) "being in a personal life stage that allows one time and energy to assume a position of leadership."

Urban school leaders also should be working to identify promising individuals whose race or ethnicity reflect those of the children they would serve. As Roza (2003) found in Washington state, principals who were the same race or ethnicity as the largest proportion of the student population were more likely to remain in the position for a longer period of time. This study does not speak to the quality of the leadership provided by these principals, but it does suggest that targeting recruitment to particular individuals may have an impact on principal retention.

Preparation

After high-quality prospective school leaders have been identified and recruited into the principal pipeline, the next step along the path is preparation. Several types of preparation and leadership development programs are available: university-based programs; district-operated programs (such as those in Jefferson County, Kentucky; the Leadership Academy of the New York City Department of Education; and the Lead Fairfax program of the school district in Fairfax County, Virginia); third-party nonprofit organizations, such as New Leaders for New Schools; and statewide leadership academies (including the Georgia's Leadership Institute for School Improvement and the Missouri Leadership Program). The effectiveness of these pathways to address the shortage of principals in hard-to-staff schools is currently being explored. Although these programs do seem to usher more principals into hard-to-staff positions, whether these principals stay and are effective has yet to be fully documented.

Focus group participants wished they had more training in the operation of the school, specifically budget management training. Unfortunately, the research base continues to be weak in regard to the particular program features that are essential for developing effective principals. Davis et al. (2005)

found that certain program characteristics are increasingly being recognized as important in developing effective principals. Although these features have yet to be scientifically vetted, they include the following: field-based internships; case- or problem-based instruction; tight collaboration between universities and school districts; cohort groups; and a coherent curriculum emphasizing instructional leadership, change management, and organizational development. Finally, principal preparation that is aligned with the specific environment that the new principal likely will encounter is increasingly recognized as a critical component for high-quality principal training.

Principal Salaries

According to the 2003–04 *Schools and Staffing Survey* (Strizek, et al., 2007):

- In 2003–04, the average salary for principals was $68,900.
- In 2003–04, the average salary for new principals (<3 years) in urban centers was $75,500.
- In 2003–04, the average salary for veteran principals (>10 years) in urban centers was $82,100.

Some observers (e.g., Hess & Kelly, 2000, Levine, 2005) have been critical of current principal preparation programs in recent years, in part because many of these programs do not seem to be adjusting to the changes that a 21st century learning environment requires—for example, the ability to use student outcomes data to make decisions. The need to bolster principal preparation programs is a worthwhile endeavor because those who feel better prepared are more likely to feel efficacious and persist once on the job, as shown in teacher studies such as Darling-Hammond, Chung, and Frelow (2002).

However, enhancing principal preparation is unlikely to fully address the future supply problem because, as noted earlier, many prepared individuals will continue to shun the principalship because of the deterrents that the focus group participants pointed out. Thus, while supporting principal preparation may stem the flow of those leaving the principalship, it will not by itself increase the supply of those entering.

Leadership Pathway Map: *How to Get and Keep*

Identification

Promote teacher leadership.
Identify talented teachers and encourage them to develop their leadership capacity.

Expand supply.
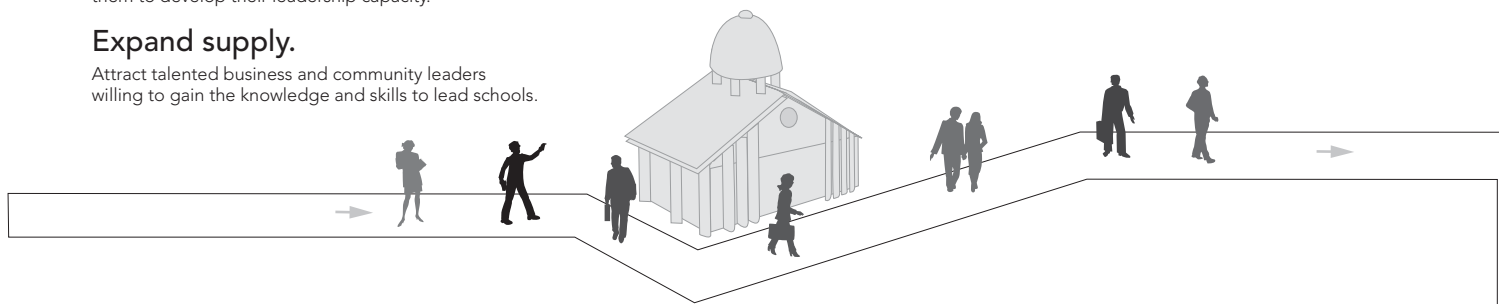Attract talented business and community leaders willing to gain the knowledge and skills to lead schools.
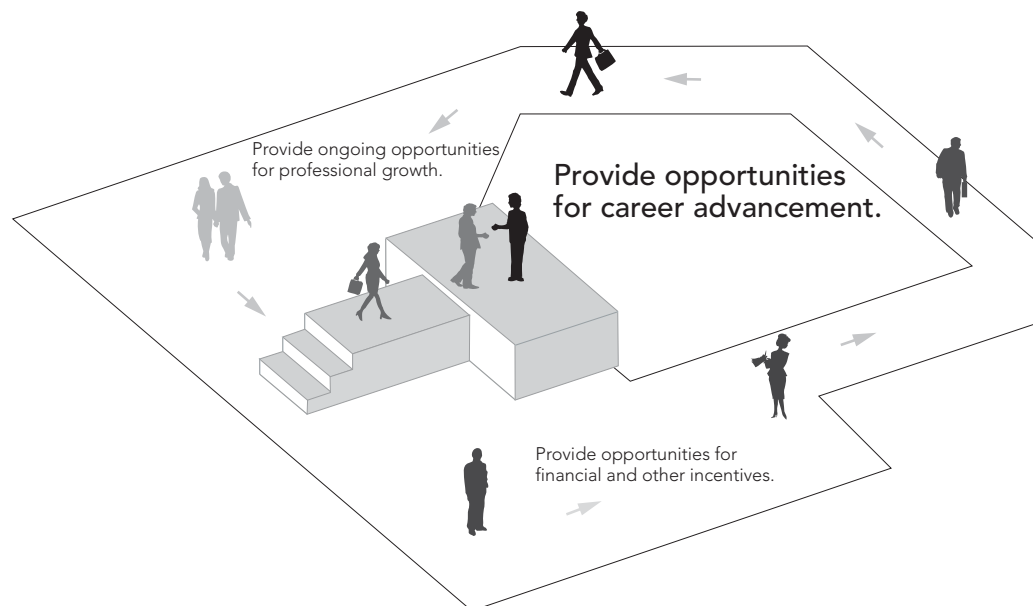
Preparation

Provide training.
Align education leadership training and available resources to build knowledge and skills for 21st century educators.

Diversify candidate pool.
Create environments where diversity is the norm and a culture of collegiality prevails.

Ongoing Support and Incentives

Provide ongoing opportunities for professional growth.

Provide opportunities for career advancement.

Provide opportunities for financial and other incentives.

the Best Talent to Lead in the Education System

District Recruitment and Hiring

Focus on the leadership needs of the district.

Match recruiting and hiring to instructional needs at school level.

Seek candidates who want to be leaders.

Determine incentives.

Use fair and efficient hiring practices.

Make an administrative priority of following best practices of qualified human resource specialists.

Diversify environment.

Create a diverse pool of candidates.

Student Demographics

Geographic Area

Grade Level

HR

Align evaluation meaures with effective leadership practices.

Use evaluation practices that are research-based, transparent, and aligned to instruction and improvement.

Beginning Support and Mentoring

Enhance instructional focus.

Provide highly structured support to balance management and instruction.

Improve working conditions.

Allocate administrative responsibilites to other staff.

Create mechanisms that enhance the ability to distribute leadership.
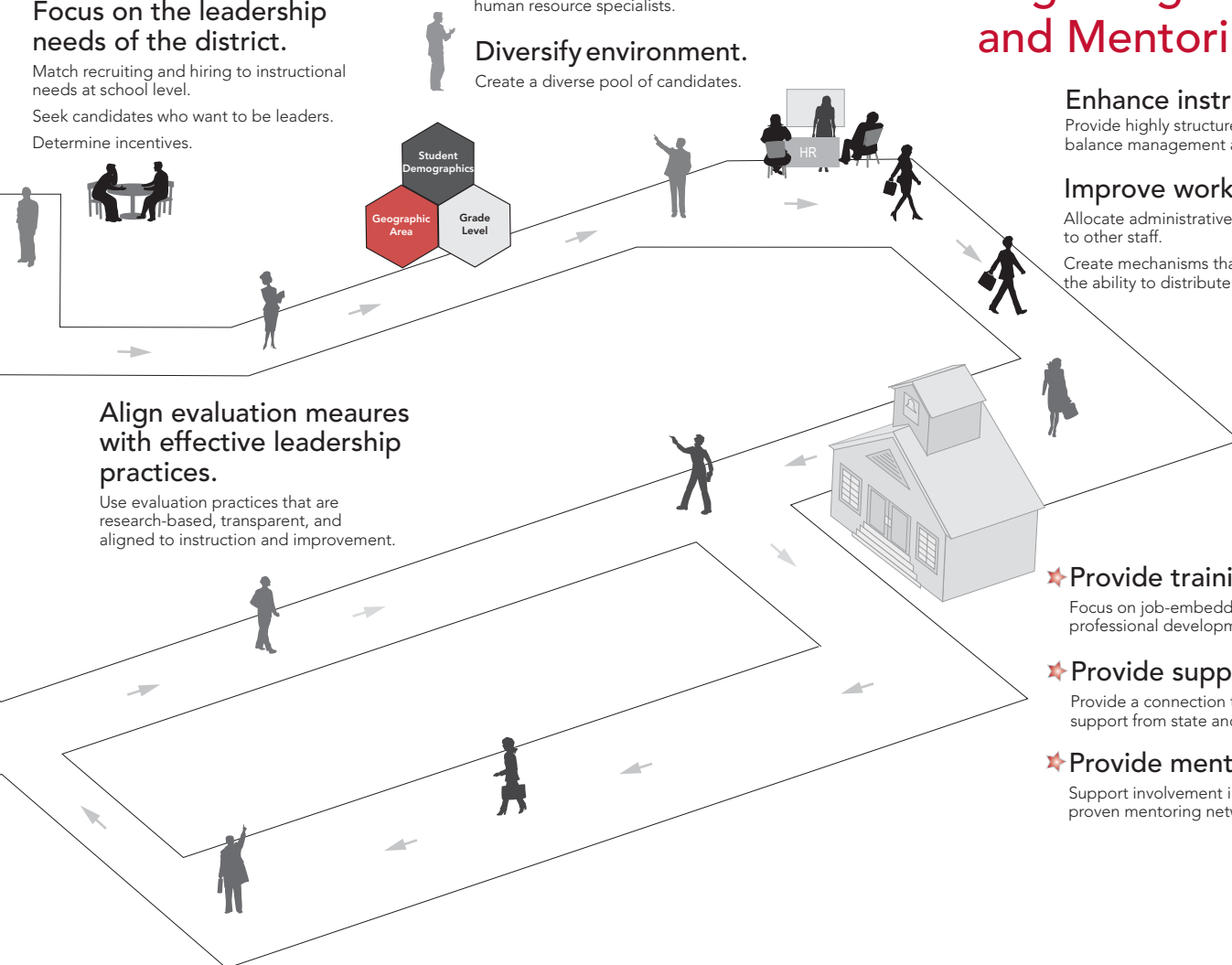
✯ Provide training.

Focus on job-embedded professional development.

✯ Provide support.

Provide a connection to new-principal support from state and district.

✯ Provide mentoring.

Support involvement in a proven mentoring network.

District Recruitment and Hiring

Following (or concurrent with) preparation and training are the district recruitment and hiring processes. In addition to identifying and grooming potential candidates who are internal to the school and district, it is important for districts to recruit as large and diverse pool of candidates as possible from outside the district as well. Financial incentives do play a role in recruitment. Even though the majority of focus group participants did not say money attracted them to the principalship, several did say they are motivated at this stage in their career to pursue the principalship because of the financial reward. One participant from Trinity University said that he is motivated by "more [money] for the level of work I already do."

After a district has identified and screened a pool of candidates, it should implement fair, efficient, and effective hiring practices. Several of the focus group participants voiced concern about the hiring process in urban districts, perceiving it to be subjective and inconsistent. In the Chicago focus groups, for example, concerns were raised about the decision-making authority of the neighborhood-empowered Local School Council (which is part of each Chicago public school). In the Washington, D.C., focus group at Trinity University, participants were alarmed that the current school district leadership seemed to capriciously favor hiring candidates trained through an alternative route, rather than the route that they currently were following. Districts, perhaps with state guidance, need to make clear what their preferences are in terms of the kinds of knowledge, skills, and experiences they are looking for in principal candidates, so that those who are working hard to prepare themselves and gain that knowledge and skills do it in a way to meet school and district needs. Overall, participants wished for a more transparent and fair hiring process.

Unfortunately, again, there is limited research on what districts should be looking for in terms of high-quality principal candidates. A study of selection instruments used by five alternative-certification principal pathways found that common promising features of these instruments were as follows: (1) a definition of the ideal candidate; (2) screening criteria that reflect the vision and application requirements; (3) the use of multiple measures such as interviews, on-demand writing, performance tasks, and assessment rubrics; (4) a process that takes place over multiple days to evaluate the candidate in a variety of contexts; and (5) multiple assessors with a variety of perspectives, knowledge, and experiences (Office of Innovation and Improvement, 2004).

A working paper by The New Teacher Project (2006) offers a number of best practices for recruitment and hiring of urban principals based on the personnel observations of hiring practices in three urban school districts; these practices include particular interview questions that address specific competencies—such as, "What does good teaching look like? Mediocre teaching? Poor teaching? How would you work with each?" (p. 6)—as well as performance-based assessments, such as classroom walk-throughs and candidates' evaluation of videotaped lessons. The report also suggests assembling school-based hiring committees to assess the quality of the fit between the candidate and the school.

Beginning Support and Mentoring

After recruiting and hiring well-prepared and high-quality principals, the next step is to make the role more satisfying so that the new principals wish to stay. As The Wallace Foundation (2003) points out, "Merely pouring more, or even better trained, candidates into school systems as currently organized and operated misses the real dilemma underlying what has been characterized as 'the shortage': namely, that untold numbers of would-be candidates … are avoiding these jobs because of the challenging conditions, inadequate incentives, or regulatory hurdles" (pp. 8–9). Focus group participants offered the following ways to address these challenges: organizing supportive cohort-based networks, providing well-trained and accountable mentors, and making sure not to place novice principals in the most difficult environments.

Aspiring administrators seem to be very concerned with the sheer number of hours that principals invest in their jobs. Early morning faculty meetings, late afternoon conferences with individual teachers or parents, evening Board of Education or PTA meetings, Saturday morning basketball games, weekend chaperoning of school dances, and hours of paperwork are all required. In each focus group session, participants discussed the significant time commitment required of the job and the sacrifices they would need to make in terms of their family and personal lives. At the University of Illinois–Chicago focus group, a participant who is now an area literacy coach said, "I am in the best position [in my career], and I still deferred [a principal assignment]. I can't get that balance. As a mother, I simply can't get that balance." Others remained optimistic. A National Board Certified teacher in the University of Illinois–Chicago program said that her current principal demonstrated to her that one can balance work and family and be successful.

Along with the time commitment, participants also described the multiple and often competing demands upon a principal. Many spoke of the need to delegate the managerial responsibilities of their job to an assistant, thus allowing the principal to focus on instructional leadership.

To fully address the challenging conditions of the principalship, however, may require a new conception of the role. Hess (2003) writes of the need to "reconceptualize leadership so that we no longer imagine that each leader must embody the entire range of knowledge and skills the organization requires" (p. 6). The principalship, as it currently is conceptualized, requires that individuals who hold the position are managers of school finances, operations, client relations, as well as the core technical work— instruction. As principals increasingly are held responsible for student outcomes, the latter piece— instructional leadership—must take precedence. At one time, school leaders in America had a longer title: They were known as "principal teachers" (Tyack & Hansot, 1982). This longer title suggests that the role of the school principal was more as lead teacher rather than the multipurpose role that principals play today.

An enhanced instructional focus would enhance the draw of the principalship by making it seem possible to make a difference in children's lives—and thus more satisfying career option—but only if at the same time the principal's job was made more manageable by reallocating some of his or her administrative responsibilities to other individuals in the organization. These changes also would lessen the fears of aspiring principals that they would be held accountable for the improvement of teaching and student achievement but not have the time or ability to focus on that aspect of the organization. As one focus group participant said, "I feel confident about my teaching experience but not about my management or corporate experience."

Principal Gender and Ethnicity

- In 1903–04, 62 percent of elementary school principals and 6 percent of high school principals were women (Tyack & Hansot, 1982).
- In 1972–73, 20 percent of elementary school principals and 1.4 percent of high school principals were women (Tyack & Hansot, 1982).
- In 1999–2000, 55 percent of elementary school principals and 21 percent of high school principals were women (Gates et al., 2003).
- In 2003–04, 38 percent of principals in urban centers were members of an ethnic minority, compared with 18 percent on average for all public school principals (Strizek et al., 2007).

Finally, participants frequently cited distance from students as a deterrent to the principalship. As one focus group participant said, "I want to be a witness to children—to know their names, their life stories." As participants transition to the principalship, they are worried they will have less direct and sustained contact with students than they would like. New Leaders for New Schools participants said this barrier is not insurmountable. They affirmed the principal cohort network as crucial in two ways: encouraging one another to stay connected to students, and holding one another accountable by asking, "Are you visiting classrooms, managing classes, and modeling good instruction?"

Ongoing Support and Incentives

Finally, keeping effective leaders in the principal's office requires ongoing support and incentives. Several of the aspiring principals in the focus groups suggested that salary is an important incentive. When asked directly about salary, however, participants gave conflicting views. On one side were those who agreed with a New Leaders for New Schools resident who said, "My hourly rate is less now than when I was a teacher. Money cannot be a factor; teaching [and leading a school] has to be in your heart." On the other side were those who believe that if the principal's salary were to incorporate "overtime" pay, more qualified candidates would consider the position. All focus group participants agreed that the current salary fails to offset the preparation, investment, and sacrifice required. Several even noted that principals often get paid less than many teachers in the building, leading in their minds to more difficulty in establishing authority. The bottom line, said one participant, is, "If you want me to run the school like a corporation, then pay me like a corporate leader."

Principals need to be adequately compensated for the important work they are doing. Principals working in larger urban districts are paid, on average, more than principals in smaller districts, though the differences are not terribly large (Strizek, Pittsonberger, Riordan, Lyter, & Orlofsky, 2007).

Nationwide, central city principals report that they receive approximately $80,200 before taxes and deductions. This amount is only $500 more than those working in large towns or on the urban fringe, but $16,500 more than those working in rural or small town districts (Strizek et al., 2007). Average principal salaries across the country compare well to other managerial occupations in other professions but have not kept pace with the salaries of lawyers, judges, or medical professionals (Gates et al., 2003).

To understand with confidence whether such salaries are "buying" the knowledge, skills, and experiences of the kind of principals that schools will need to succeed in the 21st century, valid and fair performance-based evaluation systems must be developed. Such systems would encourage school leaders to be reflective about their own practice as well as give parents and the community confidence in the school principal. Aspiring principals were concerned about the increased demands for testing, data management, and reporting under the No Child Left Behind (NCLB) Act, although many of the focus group participants seemed confident they can meet these challenges. Moreover, they argued for a portfolio of indicators that look at the whole child (academic, social, and emotional well-being) as well as the school-community (e.g., school climate perceptions by students, parents, and community members), as they expressed discomfort with using only student test scores to assess school progress.

Promising Practices for Enhancing the Draw

To attract an even broader array of talented future school leaders who are likely to be as equally well versed in the deterrents to the principalship—particularly the urban school principalship—policymakers and others would be wise to direct their attention toward the end of the path. Certain practices can make the principal's job better and therefore more attractive to those considering making the journey. Following are some examples of practices that show initial promise to make the principalship more attractive by improving the conditions of principals' work. These practices are as follows: (1) divide principals' managerial and instructional responsibilities, (2) provide for and support principal networks, (3) pair empowerment with accountability, and (4) increase principal salaries. Unfortunately, the effectiveness of these practices has yet to be fully and rigorously evaluated; however, the practices directly address the apprehensions and aspirations of the prospective principals in the four focus groups.

1. Divide principals' managerial and instructional responsibilities.

The common thread among the list of deterrents identified by the aspiring principals focus groups was that the demands of the principalship are not commensurate with the rewards—despite having the ability to have a profound impact on children and the community. In addition, these demands may even detract from the principal's ability to have such an impact. One way to address these high demands is to divide the principalship among two, or more, individuals.

For example, an initiative launched in 2003 in Jefferson County, Kentucky, and partially funded by The Wallace Foundation assigns school administration managers to work alongside principals to take over the noninstructional tasks of managing a school. For example, school administration managers reconcile timesheets, order and distribute supplies,

manage transportation schedules, or supervise the playground and lunchroom. Because many current principals are not accustomed to focusing solely on improving instruction, the school administration managers also track how the principals do spend their time after some of their responsibilities are redistributed. Initial anecdotal evidence suggests that both principals and teachers are pleased with this new arrangement and that it may be having an impact on student achievement (Samuels, 2008)

Similar efforts are underway around the country. For example, schools in Talbot County, Maryland, were provided school managers to help carry the load as well (Archer, 2004). Such efforts need to be experimented with, rigorously evaluated, and expanded to schools in urban districts. This idea is not a new one, but it has not been widely implemented—in part because of the extra expense. (See Holland, 2008, for information on how some schools minimize this expense.)

2. Provide for and support principal networks.

Although the literature and findings speak to the high levels of stress associated with the principalship, participants credited cohort networks, residency placement, training, and support as essential for making the principalship a manageable career option. Networks of colleagues can provide leaders the opportunity to grow professionally through collaboration and to reflect upon and develop strategies for achieving the goals that attracted them to the position—giving back to students and the community and influencing change.

For example, the Boston New Principal Support System is one such network devoted to supporting beginning principals. It includes a five-day summer institute for new principals that focuses on both the operational aspects of opening a school and the process of entering a school community and building relationships, analyzing the school culture, and developing a vision for the school. It provides monthly meetings for new principals that provide "just-in-time" training on issues such as managing a budget or hiring teachers, as well as broader discussions on educational

leadership based on the principals' actual experiences in the classroom. This support system was created and implemented in partnership with The Broad Foundation, the U.S. Department of Education, and the University of Massachusetts.

3. PAIR EMPOWERMENT WITH ACCOUNTABILITY.

Participants in the focus groups made clear that having the opportunity to make one's vision of the ideal school a reality was a profound motivation to get started on the path to the principalship. They understood that such autonomy would necessitate strict accountability for their actions. Although none of the aspiring principals seemed to flinch from the accountability that such authority would demand, they feared only that they would be held accountable for things that they could not control and that their success would be assessed only on narrow measures of student learning.

Principal Workload

According to the 2003–04 *Schools and Staffing Survey* (Strizek et al., 2007):

- Central city principals report spending an average of 60 hours per week on school-related activities.
- Principals in general report spending an average of 58 hours per week on school-related activities.

For example, New York City district leaders are currently experimenting with granting their principals greater decision-making authority coupled with a multilayered approach to principal evaluation. New York City Schools Chancellor Joel Klein described the program at the 2007 annual What Works Conference sponsored by the National Comprehensive Center for Teacher Quality. New York City principals now have the authority to choose the types of support they need from their intermediate district offices rather than receiving support whether it is needed or not. These principals also have more power over budgets and programs, as well as access to more money to hire new teachers or guidance counselors.

With this greater authority, principals are subject to annual "quality reviews" that are conducted by teams of experienced educators. Such reviews draw

upon each school's collaborative self-evaluation, as well as conversations with principals, teachers, students, staff, and parents. The reviews include observations of classroom teaching, use of data, planning, programs, design and implementation, and collaborative interaction among school professionals related to academic improvement. Case studies of students making exemplary progress and of students failing to make progress are conducted. The report includes an overall quality score, which is reported on the school's Progress Report (on which schools receive a grade of A to F). These quality reviews, together with progress reports and learning environment surveys factor into a principal's evaluation, which can have an impact on his or her compensation package, professional development requirements, and even continued employment.

The logic behind this program, Chancellor Klein said, was that decisions are best for students when they are happening close to students at the school level. Although it is still too soon to say whether this approach will yield positive outcomes in terms of lowering principal shortages and improving student learning, it mirrors what the focus group participants say they want. This experiment should be closely watched if not thoughtfully implemented in other contexts.
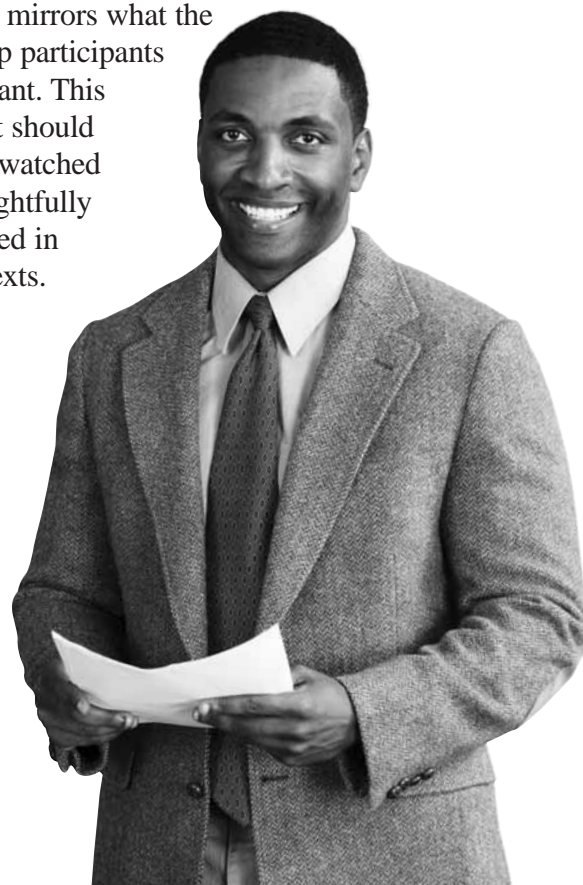
4. INCREASE PRINCIPAL SALARIES.

The aspiring principals in the focus groups clearly were not drawn to the principalship solely because of the salary they were likely to receive. Nevertheless, they indicated that monetary compensation was a significant consideration. Of course, people in general make decisions about their careers based in part on the lifestyle it affords them—whether they are able to pay the rent or mortgage for a house in a neighborhood they like; whether they can save for retirement, send their children to college, or pay for their parents' care; and whether they can spring for the occasional night out. Educators, although many would like to think otherwise, are no different, and there is some evidence that salary differentials are correlated with the number of applicants per vacancy. For example, in the state of Washington, districts with the fewest number of applicants per principal vacancy paid an average of $4,000 less for elementary school principals and $11,000 less for secondary school principals than did those with the greatest number of applicants (Roza, 2003).

One extraordinary example of a district that is rethinking its pay structure for principals is the New York City Department of Education. Principals in New York City receive a $25,000 bonus if they elect to stay in a high-needs school for three years, as well as a $25,000 bonus based on the school's performance. Pittsburgh Public Schools offers a $10,000 bonus to principals who raise student achievement and achieve their school's objectives, as well as a $2,000 raise if they master district-identified best practices. Such salary augmentations are probably out of reach for most districts as they are currently funded, and these experiments have yet to prove their effectiveness in solving the shortages; but policymakers should pay close attention to such experiments because they address aspiring principals' desire to make a competitive salary and, at the same time, assuage taxpayers with the assurance that the money is going to principals who are successful in making their schools better.

CONCLUSION

The aspiring principals in the focus groups were keen to take the lead as urban school principals. Even the most committed, however, had concerns—namely the sacrifice of family and personal life, accountability and assessment demands, and a salary that fails to meet the job's demands. What remains clear is a sense of possibility: Aspiring principals hold to the belief that it is possible to make a difference, not only in the school but in the community as a whole. To make this vision of the possible a reality, state and district school leaders should work together to patch the principal pipeline so that each prospective principal gains the knowledge, skills, and support needed to be successful. Paving that pathway requires creative and thoughtful decision making on the part of policymakers, researchers, and educators.

More research is needed to learn what practices—if implemented rigorously—are likely to be successful in identifying, nurturing, and retaining future urban school leaders. Many of the policy solutions proposed in this brief are not new, but they remain untested. Putting these strategies into effect will require a shared understanding of the problems and opportunities as well as meaningful collaboration among state legislators, institutions of higher education, preparation programs, and state and local education agencies.

This Research & Policy Brief highlighted some of the issues that aspiring principals view as influential in their career decisions. Many of these same factors are likely to be relevant to experienced principals, as well as young people who are still contemplating the merits of different career paths. Given the existing and predicted problems of the principal shortage—particularly for high-needs schools—policymakers must act now to create the long-term conditions that will attract, and not deter, highly effective school principals. Spence and Bottoms (2007) note, "We can no longer afford to rely on the luck of the draw to find the leaders our schools need." America's children deserve far better than that.

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APPENDIX

FOCUS GROUP METHODOLOGY

Three urban school districts (Washington, D.C.; Chicago; and New York City) were targeted to gather field responses to the guiding research questions. Researchers identified principal preparation programs, including area university programs, in each of the three sites that certify large numbers of principals. Four focus group sessions were conducted between mid- and late-September 2007. Focus groups were hosted by Trinity University–Washington, D.C.; the University of Illinois–Chicago; New Leaders for New Schools–Chicago Program; and the New York City Department of Education, Regions 9 and 10, in partnership with Bank Street College.

A 90-minute interview protocol was developed. Due to scheduling complications, however, two of the four focus group sessions were modified on-site. In Chicago, New Leaders for New Schools participants engaged in a 60-minute focus group. In New York City, the majority of previously confirmed participants failed to attend the focus group session. In an adjacent room, Bank Street College—a partner with the New York City Department of Education—was convening its weekly Principal Institute class with aspiring school principals. Bank Street's faculty advisor permitted researchers to facilitate a 30-minute focus group session with her class.

Participants gave their verbal consent to be part of the focus groups. At the close of each session, a random drawing was held to award two modest gift certificates. Data were analyzed along the three main research questions for common themes.

FOCUS GROUP PARTICIPANTS

A total of 74 teacher leaders, aspiring principals, and active principals participated in the four focus groups. Trinity University provided 25 participants, followed by New Leaders for New Schools with 22. The New York City Department of Education provided 19 participants. The University of Illinois–Chicago provided eight participants. Again, due to scheduling complications, demographic data were not consistently captured across the focus groups. However, of the 74 participants, 59 percent were African American, 31 percent were white, 7 percent were Latino, and 3 percent were Asian.

Trinity University participants represented Washington, D.C., and the surrounding Maryland county public, charter, private, and Catholic schools. Six participants were active principals.

At the University of Illinois–Chicago session, participants were in one of four categories: (1) holding Type 75 administrator certification but failing to meet Chicago Public Schools (CPS) eligibility criteria; (2) holding Type 75 certification and meeting CPS eligibility criteria; (3) not holding Type 75 certification and, therefore, not meeting CPS eligibility criteria; and (4) master's degree students or teachers with an interest in the principalship. In this session, one participant was a first-year elementary principal, one was a resident principal, and one had no teaching experience.

All participants in the New Leaders for New Schools focus group were resident principals, a condition of their program. The majority represented elementary school placement.

The New York City Department of Education focus group participants were currently enrolled or had participated in the Bank Street College program.

About the National Comprehensive Center for Teacher Quality

The National Comprehensive Center for Teacher Quality (TQ Center) was launched on October 2, 2005, after Learning Point Associates and its partners—Education Commission of the States, ETS, and Vanderbilt University—entered into a five-year cooperative agreement with the U.S. Department of Education to operate the teacher quality content center.

The TQ Center is a part of the U.S. Department of Education's Comprehensive Centers program, which includes 16 regional comprehensive centers that provide technical assistance to states within a specified boundary and five content centers that provide expert assistance to benefit states and districts nationwide on key issues related to the goals of the No Child Left Behind Act.

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