



## An Innovative Look, a Recalcitrant Reality

### The Politics of Principal Preparation Reform

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In the past few years, policy makers, practitioners, philanthropists, and education researchers have exhibited an unprecedented interest in reforming school leadership. New initiatives and programs have focused on recruiting and preparing effective principals and superintendents. Some reformers have proposed radically overhauling the selection or evaluation of school administrators. In early 2000, *Education Week* reported that:

nowhere is the focus on the human element in public education more prevalent than in the renewed recognition of the importance of strong and effective leadership. . . . The remarkable degree to which [groups] are coming together to focus on a single issue is bringing with it millions of dollars in research grants and program funding, with a strong emphasis on reshaping the training and preparation of principals. (Olson, 2000, p. 16)

Do these calls for change represent a wave of reform, washing away the gatekeepers that dictate permissible programs, skills, and personnel, or a tiny wavelet nudging ashore a variety of new practices while leaving institutions and networks largely untouched?

The consensus that there is a dearth of capable school leaders and that traditional preparation programs have not trained administrators to operate in an environment of outcome-based accountability, evolving technology, and heightened expectations has resulted in wide-ranging debate about how to reform recruitment and preparation. School principals themselves make clear the problems with existing preparation, with only 4% citing their university training as the most valuable source of preparation for their current position (Farkas, Johnson, & Duffett, 2003). Educational leadership scholars have noted the wide gaps between the skills that are taught in educational leadership programs and the new demands on school leaders. In *The Principal Challenge*, Tucker and Coddling (2002) argue that even at elite educational administration programs, "there is typically very little connection between the curriculum as taught and the actual demands, conditions, and problems of everyday practice" (p. 13). It is therefore unsurprising "that when principals who are successful in leading their school to substantial gains in student achievement are asked to identify some connection between their capacity and the way they were initially prepared for the job, they are unable to do so" (Tucker & Coddling, 2002, p. 14). States have responded to this criticism by revising regulations, foundations have invested heavily in new programs, and prominent school leadership organizations have joined the call for reform, but to what avail?

The move to reform school administration can perhaps be best understood as encompassing two general schools of thought: those who wish to refine and bolster the existing system of preparation and licensure and those who advocate a move away from licensure and the implicit model of school leadership it assumes. Those who reject a one-best approach to school leadership seek to expand the talent pipeline by reducing the gatekeeping role of state certification processes, welcoming diverse new providers capable of offering more targeted and accessible training, and by importing management lessons from the broader world of public administration (Hess, 2003; Thomas B. Fordham Foundation, 2003). These reformers argue that accountability, information technology, and broader changes in management and organization have fundamentally changed the principalship such that schools should cast a wide net in seeking individuals with useful skills, experiences, and training. Indeed, such reformers have even pointed out that acculturation into the education status quo may leave school leaders from traditional backgrounds reluctant to pursue the radical reinvention and wrenching change that most school systems require (Hess, 2004). Other proponents of radical change have highlighted the need to rethink the principal's job definition. A recent study by the Center for Reinventing Public Education asserts that the traditional "one-size-fits-all posture" toward principal training and methods is obsolete (Center on Reinventing Public Education, 2003, p. 1). In today's changed environment, these reformers have argued that principals must be capable of seven different types of leadership and, because different schools call on some kinds of leadership more than others, districts that treat leaders as "interchangeable commodities" will encounter difficulties (Portin, Schneider, DeArmond, & Grundlach, 2003, p. 44).

The defenders of conventional preparation programs have shown a remarkable willingness to compromise and acknowledge the need for reforming traditional preparation. Kowalski (2004), an education school professor and long-time

advocate of traditional preparation, has heralded the emergence of a new group of reformers from within the education schools. These reformers, whom Kowalski calls the “reform professionals,” reject the radical attempts of the “antiprofessionists” to deregulate the profession but still “encourage substantial reforms in administrator preparation, program accreditation, and state licensing standards” (p. 93). One group of reform professionals, for example, has highlighted the need to infuse school leader preparation with social justice scholarship (Cambron-McCabe & McCarthy, 2005).

The question that comprises the fault line between the proponents of conventional preparation and the more radical reformers, both of whom claim to advocate substantial and fundamental change, is whether the institutional apparatus itself needs to be completely rethought and reinvented in light of larger environmental changes or whether the existing institutional structure needs to be refined by experts in educational administration. The political and policy significance of this debate hinges on whether those modifying regulations and programs are indeed advancing meaningful and constructive reform. Do the changes attracting so many plaudits mark substantive, positive developments, or do they represent marginal refinements to existing practices?

In this article, we use *radical* as a label for those reformers who argue that meaningful reform of education administration requires changes in the three institutional checkpoints that crimp the range of providers and potential leaders to those compatible with status quo practices and modes of thought. The three checkpoints involve the following: who is deemed qualified for school leadership programs, who are the gatekeepers of the profession, and what are the particular skills and knowledge that aspiring school leaders are expected to possess. For advocates of more radical reform, such as Checker Finn (Thomas B. Fordham Foundation, 2003) and Frederick Hess (coauthor of this article), fundamental reform of administrator preparation needs to dramatically reduce the influence of the traditional gatekeepers and expand the permissible range of ideas, skills, providers, and candidates. The real questions, then, in analyzing the current reform movement are as follows: Do these new programs make an active effort to attract qualified candidates who have not traditionally entered school leadership? Have they looked beyond the confines of the schoolhouse to devise content that is equal to the broad managerial challenge and exceeds the training offered by traditional administrator preparation courses? Are the programs themselves structured in a manner that will not unduly deter promising midcareer changers?

In recent years, a small number of new, more entrepreneurial nonprofit and for-profit providers have entered administrator preparation and shown some evidence that they were able to attract strong candidates. These new programs also raise other important questions: How innovative are these programs in reality? How much promise do they have in addressing the need for effective school leaders? What barriers, if any, exist to the expansion of such programs?

The political context of this debate reflects that which took place regarding teacher licensure and teacher quality during the 1990s. Efforts to reform teacher and administrator licensure and preparation “jeopardize adult interests or threaten to displace adults from positions of power and responsibility” and are therefore “the most controversial and hotly contested reforms” (Rotherham & Mead, 2004, p. 11). In both cases, fundamental reforms threaten to destabilize a system in which a number of established constituents, including the schools of education, professional organizations, current practitioners, and state officials are deeply invested. The professional and personal material well-being of the education administration professoriate is built on the existing practice of administrator preparation, leaving them naturally averse to any effort to make radical changes that might weaken their role as gatekeepers. Under the current institutional and statutory arrangement, schools of education and their faculty occupy a privileged position because of strict state licensure requirements (Hess, 2001, p. 16). Changing the system of preparation and licensure of teachers and administrators would strip this group of both status and resources.

Professional organizations of school leaders, such as the American Association of School Administrators, the University Council for Educational Administration, and the National Association of Secondary School Principals, have helped craft existing guidelines; are given a formal seat at the table by organizations, such as the National Council for the Accreditation of Teacher Education (NCATE); and are understandably hesitant about steps that will reduce their access. The officials who control certification and licensure in state departments of education define their professional role as the gatekeepers of the profession; they are wedded to the current system and have no incentive to change it. Elected state officials are hesitant to push an agenda that would impose costs on the organized, vocal interests discussed above, while generating only diffuse benefits for the general public. In short, there is little incentive for any of these interests to have their world turned upside down by far-reaching reforms. Moreover, the current statutory environment has allowed these privileged actors to resist any meaningful changes that threaten their self-interest.

Although the alignment of interests in the administrator preparation and licensure debate is similar to that of the teacher quality fight, the politics of administration reform have played out differently. The teacher quality conversation of the 1990s was characterized by bitter ideological attacks in which radical reform proposals were met for a long time by denunciations of the reform advocates and staunch efforts to define the adequacy of existing practice (Hess, Rotherham, & Walsh, 2004). In the case of administrative preparation, however, the battle has been more similar to punching a pillow than joining a culture war; existing training programs have been much quicker to acknowledge the failings of the status quo and to embrace the need for change.

Nonetheless, since the 2003 publication of the *Better Leaders for Better Schools: A Manifesto*, by the Thomas B. Fordham Foundation, the critics of radical reform have become more vehement. In a critique published by the University Council on Education Administration (UCEA), English, a professor of education at the University of North Carolina, Chapel Hill, asserts that the *Manifesto* plays “fast and loose with the facts” (English&Eaves, 2004, p. 84) and is “outright discriminatory against women” (p. 80), adding that its supposed author, Chester E. Finn, Jr., has reaped considerable financial rewards from his efforts to “disestablish public education” (p. 55). Professor Ted Kowalski’s (2004) UCEA essay calls the *Manifesto* a “recent escalation in a long-term battle waged by forces committed to making school administrators domesticated government employees” (p. 92).

More often than not, however, the traditional protectors of the status quo, such as Michelle Young of UCEA, have admitted that “in order to move forward—in order to build programs that support leadership for learning—we must rethink and revise our practice in several areas” (Young & Kochan, 2004, p. 121). The question is whether the proposed revisions are equal to the challenge. Do they treat seriously the potential benefits of broadening the talent pool and thinking more expansively about leadership and skills or do their changes constitute only a tweaking of long-held assumptions and entrenched practices? The political, institutional, and professional context in which friendly reformers operate makes it difficult for them to contemplate such changes, even should they desire to do so.

In this article, we survey the field of newly reformed programs and find much evidence that the proponents of traditional preparation, although adopting the language of reform, have pursued a strategy of cooptation rather than contestation. Moreover, the evidence suggests that the new nonprofit and for-profit providers, which are hindered by political and statutory barriers, have found it difficult to drive systemic change. The initially imposing wave of reform generated by the powerful storm of dissatisfaction with existing practice appears to have had only limited impact. Most reformers with an institutional interest in the issue have been mollified by slight changes that provide them with increased opportunity and flexibility, whereas only a handful of individuals lacking much in the way of institutional resources have continued to call for more radical change.

### Market Dynamics

There is widespread agreement that there is a shortage of quality leadership in public schools. The National Association of Elementary School Principals (NAESP) estimates that more than 40% of K-8 principals will retire during the first decade of the 21st century. Sixty percent of superintendents in a recent Public Agenda survey agreed that they have had to “take what you can get” in hiring a school principal (Farkas, Johnson, Duffett, & Foleno, 2001).

Nationally, 29 states report having a current shortage of school leaders or predict that they will have one in the near future. For instance, a recent study of New York state found that between 1995 and 1999, the average number of applicants for a superintendent vacancy dropped by a third (Volp, 2000). In Maryland, the looming shortage is so threatening that the state department of education is enticing retired principals to come out of retirement with the promise of full salaries and benefits. The added cost is enormous, increasing the cost of a principal by as much as 60% or 70% (Desmon, 2002). Thirty-seven retired principals were rehired in this manner for 2002 and 2003 (Maryland Teacher Staffing Report, 2003).

The problem in Maryland, New York, and elsewhere, however, is not a lack of candidates, as states often certify more candidates than they need yet still claim to have a shortage.<sup>1</sup> The Center on Reinventing Public Education (CRPE) has found that gloomy conclusions about a principal shortage “turn on the perceptions and opinions of superintendents, principals, and other educational leaders. Quantitative data on the nature and the extent of the shortage are hard to find” (Roza, 2003, p. 11). A survey of district human resources personnel revealed that between 1994 and 2001, half of the districts had unchanged numbers of applicants, 14% reported increased applicants, and only one third revealed a decrease in applications. Even in districts that depicted themselves as in budget retrenchment, the reported decline was just 10% (Roza, 2003). Clearly the shortages being reported by most districts are not because of a lack of quantity but a shortage of qualified applicants. Indeed, 80% of superintendents report that finding a qualified school principal is a moderate or major problem (Roza, 2003).

The problem, then, is less a shortage of applicants than of desirable candidates. A crucial factor is the conviction among district leaders, including human resources personnel and district officials, that only conventionally hired and trained principals are qualified to be school leaders. According to the CRPE study, hiring a nontraditional candidate “appears to be the furthest thing from the minds of human resource offices” who “do not give nontraditional candidates even a passing glance,” and “most non-traditional candidates probably do not survive the first cursory inspection of the human resource department” (Roza, 2003, p. 36). Given the existence of good rationales to imagine that other avenues to leadership recruitment and preparation might make good sense, this habit of mind can shut the door on promising candidates. This perspective contradicts the experiences of many other sectors (Hess, 2003) and significantly restricts the opportunity for meaningful experimentation with principals hired from new avenues or trained in new ways.

Recent efforts to improve the principal corps have occurred on two levels: First, states have made changes to licensure and certification provisions; second, an array of providers, from traditional preparation programs to for-profit companies,

have offered alternatives that claim to rethink the content, delivery, and scope of principal preparation.

### **Statutory Changes and Environment**

States have generally encouraged the recent explosion of administrator preparation reform proposals, with some seeking to loosen regulation and others attempting to tighten licensure strictures to further professionalize the field. Meanwhile, there has been a broad embrace of innovative approaches to providing training.

#### *Licensure*

In general, licensure regulations have seen only limited modification. The conventional formal requirements regarding experience, coursework, and attendant requirements continue to dictate the shape of both traditional and nontraditional programs. According to the National Center for Education Information (NCEI), 12 states have alternative certification routes for principals, and in 2002, Florida passed legislation that gave local school boards the right to set alternative qualifications for principal candidates. Michigan and South Dakota do not require principals to obtain licenses and allow districts to set their own hiring criteria. New Jersey has made it easier for school leaders to transfer their credentials from other states (Archer, 2004). Although New Jersey, New York, and Oregon do not have alternative routes, they have created programs that are designed to entice nontraditional candidates into the leadership pipeline. Arkansas, Kentucky, Louisiana, and Ohio have developed a tiered licensure system through which candidates can earn a preliminary certificate before earning full licensure after a 1-year to 2-year induction period (National Governors Association Center for Best Practices, 2003).

In general, however, alternative programs are little used and have requirements that barely differ from the traditional avenues. For instance, NCEI has found that in 2 of the 12 states that have an alternative principal licensure provision (Ohio and Tennessee), the route is not used and that Texas's alternative system is reserved solely for former teachers (Feistritzer, 2003). At present, there are fewer than 10 practicing administrators in the state of Maryland who were certified via the state's alternative route. Other states have actually taken the opposite tack and tightened their licensure regimes. In 2003, Oklahoma strengthened licensure restrictions that had been relaxed to encourage nontraditional candidates (Bianchi, 2003). In September 2003, the Michigan Board of Education unanimously agreed to press for the reinstatement of administrator certification, but the state department of education has yet to enact new licensure provisions (Michigan Elementary and Middle School Principals Association, 2003). Maryland is also seeking to tighten its control over licensure, particularly the little-used alternative certification system. According to certification officials, the state is considering requiring all prospective administrators to have a master's degree in education (whereas the state currently accepts a master's degree in any field as meeting the degree requirement). Also, the department is considering eliminating or reducing the leeway in its alternative route, which presently grants full licensure to alternatively certified principals that have exhibited 5 years of student achievement gains (Hess & Kelly, 2004).

#### *Preparation*

Ongoing efforts to refine administrator preparation have focused on an extensive set of attitudes and skills contained in the Interstate School Leaders Licensure Consortium (ISLLC) "Standards for School Leaders." The consortium was made up of more than 30 state education agencies and all of the major organizations involved in school administration (including the American Association of School Administrators, National Association of Secondary School Principals, and the NAESP). As of early 2003, 24 states had implemented ISLLC's six standards, and many preparation programs have begun to redesign their curricula around the ISLLC vision. Although potentially helpful, the standards also represent a very particular and relatively narrow view of the principalship and contradict efforts to broaden the talent pool or skills that principals possess.

In conjunction with the interstate standards effort, some individual states have aggressively sought to reform their principal preparation programs. In the mid-1990s, Mississippi and North Carolina were the first two states to take a hard look at their preparation programs. During the past decade, they have both used aggressive program reviews to close down below-average university-based administrator preparation programs and cultivate more innovative programs. Delaware, Georgia, and Massachusetts are either conducting or planning rigorous program reviews. Iowa recently created a new provision requiring preparation courses to provide more practical field experience. Texas permits organizations other than state-sanctioned universities to provide administrator preparation. Regional education service centers, public school districts, and other organizations can develop principal preparation courses that are aligned with state standards but tailored to the potential leaders' needs (Southern Regional Education Board [SREB], 2003). Many states have incorporated standards such as those offered by ISLLC into their preparation requirements, though, as the SREB has pointed out, "most states have 'addressed new standards' by matching old course titles and content to new expectations. On paper, this strategy 'aligns' courses and standards. In reality, it results in little or no change" (SREB, 2003, p. 9). Are these changes to regulations and preparation program reviews actually changing the way principals are being recruited or trained?

## State-Run Principal Academies

A number of state departments of education, often allied with university-based schools of education, have developed principal academies to train present and future administrators. According to the Education Commission of the States (ECS), in 2001, 26 states had created principal academies: 22 programs for both principals and superintendents and 4 for principals only (ECS, 2001). The ECS estimates that by the 2004-2005 school year, more than 30 states will have developed some sort of statewide principal academy. The academies range from residential summer institutes to information-laden Web sites. These programs serve a varied population; most are designed as in-service professional development for current administrators, whereas others seek to identify, recruit, and prepare teachers with leadership promise. The academies are supported by state funds, business contributions, and federal and foundation grants.

Prominent programs include the Ohio Principals Leadership Academy and the Georgia Leadership Institute for School Improvement. The Ohio Academy was created by the Ohio Department of Education, housed at Ohio State University, and led, until recently, by well known education leadership professor Joe Murphy. The academy is a 2-year program designed to help practicing principals deal with the new challenge of driving student achievement rather than simply managing books, buses, and facilities. It has been designed to fit the schedules of its students, and the program reportedly comes to its participants by offering classes and workshops at convenient locations and having regional academies set up throughout Ohio (Richard, 2001b, p. 15). Its chief operating officer is a business trainer with experience developing management academies for companies such as Bath and Body Works (Richard, 2001b). In addition to traditional education administration topics, the academy has based its curriculum on best-in-class leadership models from the business, nonprofit, and government sectors (Bell, 2000). There are approximately 350 educators involved in the leadership academies, counting all participants and mentors.

Georgia's Leadership Institute for School Improvement trains leaders to use data, adopt the best practices, and reculture schools to focus on student achievement. High-poverty and heavily minority pilot school districts have been invited to participate, with participation restricted to invited districts. Superintendents in invited districts select an attending group of seven educators (principals, teacher leaders, and central office staff) who make up a change team. The institute is funded by the Gates Foundation, the Wallace-Readers Digest Fund, and various Georgia businesses, and the program seeks to isolate the best practices from successful organizations and "attract and place a broader pool of able candidates for school leadership" (*Georgia's Leadership Institute for School Improvement*, 2004). Although expanding the pool of able candidates is a worthwhile goal, Georgia's leadership academy targets only individuals already within the state's public school system. Programs such as these are certainly welcome innovations. In the end, however, these programs are innovative in a very limited sense. They do not expand the pool of talent entering the leadership pipeline. Instead, they try to expand the skills of conventional candidates.

## New Education School Programs

Existing institutions have shown a remarkable willingness to change at least the rhetoric and day to-day organization of administrative preparation. As a recent publication of the National Commission for the Advancement of Education Leadership Preparation (NCAELP), a conglomerate of leading education school professors, professional organizations, and state officials, put it, "Many preparation programs continue to lack the curricular coherence, rigor, pedagogy and structure to provide the kinds of knowledge, skills and dispositions needed to produce a large supply of exceptional school and district leaders" (Jackson & Kelley, 2003, p. 1). Many education schools across the country have started comprehensive redesign initiatives aimed at aligning curriculum, delivery, and mission. How successful have these efforts at redesign been?

Administrative preparation programs have sought to refine course offerings to meet new challenges and disarm their critics, though consideration of these innovative programs shows limited change in broadening the talent pipeline, rethinking qualifications, or re-imagining preparation. As the SREB (2003) warns, "Redesigning leadership preparation programs does not mean simply rearranging old courses—as staff at some universities and leadership academies are inclined to do. True redesign requires a new curriculum framework and new courses aimed at producing principals who can lead schools to excellence" (p. 7).

The NCAELP highlights a number of programs that have been "identified by experts in the field as exceptional or innovative" (Jackson & Kelley, 2003, p. 6). The Institute for Educational Leadership (IEL) and the Illinois Education Research Council also identify two of NCAELP's six innovative programs as "excellent principal preparation programs" (Hale & Moorman, 2003, p. 10). The major reforms that these programs have undertaken include a shift to a cohort model in which 20 to 25 students stay together during the course of their studies; there is enhanced focus on clinical activities, such as field-based mentored internships; and there is an attempt to align all coursework to a set of national standards, such as ISLLC or NCATE (Hale & Moorman, 2003). They are also reportedly "more demanding of participants" and "have more careful selection and screening processes" than most traditional programs (Jackson & Kelley, 2003, p. 7).

One such program is at the California State University–Fresno, which has been deemed exceptional by NCAELP and has a two-tiered system to reflect California’s licensure regime. Phase 1 of the program is focused on instructional leadership. Candidates intern as master teachers, rather than administrators, to better appreciate the demands of teaching. On completion, students receive a provisional principal license. Tier 2 involves working as an assistant administrator while taking transformational leadership courses that “cover more traditional practical content for new administrators” (Jackson & Kelley, 2003, p. 8). The major innovative features are the tier system and the internship as a master teacher. Although sensible and perhaps laudable measures, these changes are significant only in the narrowest sense.

Other programs deemed exceptional by the establishment exhibit a similar lack of innovation. Candidates for the University of Louisville’s Identifying Educational Administrators for Schools program are nominated by their district and participate in a cohort-based, 18-credit program. The program uses National Association of Secondary School Principals’ Individual Development Programs assessments to identify learning needs, and students are required to create a portfolio of their work that demonstrates competencies in the ISLLC standards. East Tennessee State’s program, cited by both NCAELP and IEL, focuses on promoting ethical and moral leadership, while giving students access to a range of leadership approaches via a clinical internship (Jackson & Kelley, 2003). For their culminating experience, candidates develop a professional portfolio that gives students opportunities for reflection and self-evaluation (Hale & Moorman, 2003, p. 10). Wichita State University’s program, which is touted by NCAELP and IEL for its competency-based approach, includes an internship in which candidates must identify researchable problems and institute appropriate data-driven solutions (Hale & Moorman, 2003). The program has developed a comprehensive performance assessment that evaluates student’s intellectual inquiry and decision-making skills that is taken after candidates complete 33 credits of traditional preparation. Ultimately, although they are exhorting by NCAELP and IEL, these programs are innovative only in their particulars—mentoring, use of portfolios, and an emphasis on ethics—and not in their structure, skill set, or ability to attract new candidates.

IEL and *Education Week* have also flagged Delta State University’s redesigned program as particularly promising. When Mississippi moved in the mid-1990s to rigorously evaluate education administration programs, Delta State was one of the few programs to fare exceptionally well. The program focuses intently on preparing principals to lead teaching and learning. Students enter a 14-month cohort-based program that involves coursework and four intense 12-week internships in which the graduate students act as apprentice administrators (Richard, 2001a). The program is unusual among traditional administrative preparation programs in that it boasts an acceptance rate of less than 50%. The program includes some innovative elements, and the cohort system, demanding clinical experience, and teacher-friendly schedule are all sensible. Again, however, the program’s curriculum and clientele reflect convention. The coursework is designed to prepare students for the ISLLC-designed School Leader Licensure Assessment. The program caters to current teachers, and teachers enrolled in the program can earn a full year’s salary while completing the degree, so long as they return to the sponsoring district after completion (Richard, 2001a).

In short, it is not clear how, on the whole, these innovative programs are much more than conventional preparation, albeit with a grab bag of slight improvements. Not one of these highly touted programs seeks to broaden the talent pipeline by recruiting promising nontraditional candidates or exposes educators to management practice other than that practiced in conventional public schools. Indeed, the majority of them mirror the academic year in both schedule and subject matter. With the exception of Wichita State’s program, the education schools seem reluctant to tie advancement or graduation to performance assessments, choosing instead to rely on individual growth plans and portfolios. Finally, many of the programs profiled are based on the ISLLC or NCATE standards, principles rooted entirely in highly prescriptive and rather narrow notions of good school leadership. As one NCAELP researcher points out, “despite agreement and adoption of the broad ISLLC standards, the programs identified a narrower vision that drove programmatic decisions” (Jackson & Kelley, 2003, p. 14).

The muted effects that redesign efforts have had on administrator preparation are not just characteristic of the programs identified by NCAELP or IEL. The SREB’s effort to encourage universities and leadership academies to rethink and redesign administrator preparation programs has also affected little substantial change. Indeed, the SREB has concluded that although the states in its network had all adopted curriculum standards for leaders, “these have not resulted in universities changing what leaders learn, how they learn it, or how they work with K-12 schools. States do not have a system for ensuring that universities redesign their programs to meet standards” (SREB, 2002, p. 2). In 2003, SREB commented that “there are few good examples of principal preparation programs that have been redesigned well” and that “there is little reason to believe that principal preparation programs that have moved to new state standards are producing graduates who are more capable of leading school improvement and raising student achievement” (SREB, 2003, p. 9). Michelle Young of the UCEA noted in 2003 that despite pressure “from within and outside the profession,” substantive change in preparation programs “has been relatively slow compared to demand” (Norton, 2003, p. 17).

### **District-Based Programs**

An array of district-based leadership preparation programs exist. In most cases, districts partner with a local school of education and other education groups to create a streamlined program to produce their own leadership prospects. Typically of the grow-your-own strain, these programs usually draw candidates from within the district’s teaching ranks.

These programs are characterized by a practical curriculum focused on real-time experience and are tailored to the particular needs of the district. The Department of Education's Office of Innovation and Improvement has supported these efforts with its School Leadership Grants. In general, those district-based programs that are closely linked to education school partnerships do not appear to be radically different from traditional preparation courses.

Under its School Leadership Grants program, the Office of Innovation and Improvement currently funds nine district-based preparation partnerships. Its first cohort of grant winners, selected in 2002, includes partnerships at Arizona State University, Tempe; the National Center for Community in Flint, Michigan, in Broward County, Florida, and in rural Oregon; and the University of Massachusetts. These partnerships aim to recruit and train a cadre of administrators to serve in particular districts. These programs are limited, however, by their reliance on traditional education school coursework, adherence to conventional licensure restrictions, and recruitment from the traditional school leadership sources.

The Arizona State University program is a partnership between the university, the Southwest Center for Education Equity and Language Diversity, and four high-need urban K-12 schools. The aim is to develop a learner-centered leadership development program that advocates learner centered leadership, systems thinking, and community leadership (*School Leadership Program; Awards: School Leadership 2002 Grant Abstracts*, 2002). The project enrolls 32 prospective administrators who are taking courses for certification at Arizona State University, 32 rising administrators who will receive one-on-one mentoring and set professional development plans, and 32 practicing administrators who will teach and mentor candidates. The program's thrust is to prepare leaders for the challenges of language diversity. The coursework component of the program is similar to the course schedule that a prospective principal would take in the traditional Arizona State University certification program.

The same is true for the Urban Principals Academy in Flint, Michigan. The academy is run by a partnership between the Coalition for Urban School Achievement; the University of Michigan, Flint; the National Center for Community Education; and seven local urban K-12 districts. The academy provides partial tuition to 21 candidates in the university's urban educational leadership training in exchange for committing to work for 4 years in a participating district on graduation. The academy runs workshops for practitioners that focus on poverty, literacy, and parental involvement. Although the focus on the challenges of urban leadership is sensible, the academy caters only to prospective administrators already enrolled in a traditional preparation program or practicing leaders, and there is scant evidence that the curriculum is any different from conventional preparation.

Although programs dealing with the particular problems of urban leadership, language diversity, and rural education are most welcome, they will provide little meaningful innovation if they do not experiment with new curricula, reach out to nontraditional candidates, or provide alternatives to restrictive licensure systems.

A district-based program touted as innovative by the National Association of Secondary School Principals is the Urban Leadership Development Program in Toledo, Ohio (Keil & Czerniak, 2003). Created in 1998, the program is a partnership between the University of Toledo, the Toledo public schools, and the Toledo Association of Administrative Personnel. Applicants must commit to serving a 3-year term in the Toledo public schools after graduation. As with other graduate-school-of-education students, all potential students must have a conventional teaching license and 3 years of teaching experience. Candidates take the same courses as conventional certification students, with participants having to fulfill the Ohio licensure requirements. The major innovations are that syllabi were "redesigned to integrate practical urban district information," classes are offered twice a week immediately after the close of the school day, and the program is evaluated based on graduates' performance on the relatively simple Praxis II Exam (Keil & Czerniak, 2003).

### **Nontraditional Providers**

Perhaps the most promising sources of innovation are the emerging nontraditional providers. These include stand-alone nonprofit organizations and, increasingly, the for-profit higher education sector. The new nonprofit providers, including New Leaders for New Schools (NLNS) and the Knowledge is Power Program (KIPP) Leadership Academy, have garnered the most national attention because of their innovative approach to training school leaders and their extremely selective admissions processes. NLNS, for instance, has been named by *Fast Company* magazine as one of the "20 groups that are changing the world" (Dahle, 2004, p. 45). Demand for these programs has grown steadily from their inception and outpaces the spots available. In 2003, NLNS received 1,012 applicants for 70 fellowship slots in its principal cohort, and the KIPP School Leadership Program had more than 250 applicants for 11 slots.<sup>2</sup>

#### *Nonprofit Organizations*

NLNS has currently placed more than 200 administrators in New York, Chicago, and San Francisco and will open programs in Washington, DC, and Baltimore in the fall of 2004 and in Memphis in 2005. The organization plans on placing 2,000 school leaders by the year 2012. NLNS's mission is to scour the country for talented and committed people from many different backgrounds and prepare them for the challenge of driving school improvement and student achievement

as school leaders. The organization boasts a nationwide nominator network that identifies and recruits promising school leaders from all walks of life. Applicants must have at least 2 years of teaching experience and a proven track record of effective leadership of adults, but the network nominates individuals from a variety of backgrounds. Currently, NLNS draws its students from the ranks of current teachers that have been discouraged in the past, former teachers who are now in the business or nonprofit world, or individuals who have moved on to teaching after another career. The program boasts very strict admissions standards and procedures, and it only accepts about 5% to 7% of applicants annually. Accepted candidates gather as a national cohort for an intense 6-week, 7-day-a-week summer institute taught by both education and business school faculty. The curriculum is broken down into three strands: transformational leadership, instructional leadership, and organizational leadership. The course materials are drawn from both educational research and business school literature on organizational change, management, negotiation, and conflict resolution.

NLNS candidates then begin their residency in an area public school. Rather than simply shadowing their mentor, it is more like a medical residency, with residents actually helping to handle the day-to-day business of the school and charged with taking on three separate challenges. These challenges are concrete deliverables; all residents must work with three teachers and show evidence of increased student achievement, must oversee a team to ensure a focus on the core business of student achievement, and must start an initiative to tackle a building-wide problem and then document its success. This type of documented competency assessment is alien to traditional school administration internships and ensures that residents are ready to take on their own schools after completion. NLNS has set up a postresidency network in each district through which principals can get different measures of the success of their schools. Veteran principals who are known to be excellent school leaders coach new administrators in the postresidency period, while NLNS garners data on student achievement, teacher quality, parental involvement, and school climate to give new graduates a sense of their progress and, more importantly, to allow the organization to hold itself accountable for producing quality leaders (NLNS representative, personal communication, March 17, 2004).

The KIPP School Leadership Program is similar to NLNS. The program seeks a diverse pool of national talent through a nominator network, engages in quality control at all levels of the process, has developed an innovative curriculum that blends educational content with conventional management expertise, and focuses explicitly on results. However, whereas NLNS residents are to be placed in traditional public schools and are therefore subject to conventional licensure requirements, KIPP school leaders are trained to open new KIPP charter schools, thus allowing the academy to select with a freer hand. KIPP does require that applicants have at least 2 years of teaching experience, a college degree, demonstrated leadership, and a dedication to education. After initial screenings based on paper credentials, the final stage of the selection process entails two interview weekends and a visit by KIPP staff to the candidate's current place of employment to observe job responsibilities, leadership capability, and interpersonal relations.

The KIPP program begins with the Fisher Fellowship year, a mixture of coursework, rotating residencies in KIPP schools, and a start-up boot camp for candidates. The national cohort of KIPP leaders is in residence during July and August for the Leadership Institute at University of California Berkeley's Haas School of Business. The curriculum includes three threads: instructional leadership, organizational leadership, and operational leadership. Students are taught by business school professors, education researchers and theorists, and KIPP practitioners. The curriculum fuses the KIPP ethos that results matter with more conventional business practices. Nancy Euske, a scholar of nonprofit and public management at Haas, teaches a course titled "Building and Maintaining an Effective School: The Importance of Organizational Alignment." Through the examination of case studies about successful companies, such as Southwest Airlines and FedEx, students consider what lessons the private sector may hold for K-12 management. Students take a separate course, for instance, on accountability and managing for results with the former vice president for accountability of the State University of New York's Charter School Institute (*School Leadership Program: Program Overview*, 2001).

After the summer, students serve two 4-week residencies at existing KIPP academies or other schools that employ KIPP's five pillars, including 2 weeks at a KIPP school in its 1st year of operation. The residency period is followed by a 1-month start-up boot camp in which more formal preparation is delivered and fellows meet with the regional teams to get updated on the plans for new school sites. Finally, from January to June, the fellows work on site with KIPP regional teams to implement their school plan and attend three more formal training sessions.

Despite the increasing demand for these programs, among both aspiring school leaders and districts interested in their services, groups such as NLNS and KIPP have run into statutory and political barriers that hinder expansion. The fundamental obstacle for most nontraditional programs is that, in the vast majority of states, the only institutions that are empowered to endorse public school leaders are university schools of education. Even most alternative licensure systems are controlled, at least in part, by state schools of education. As a result, most nontraditional providers are forced to contract with traditional schools of education or risk producing candidates that will not be recognized as qualified school leaders. For instance, NLNS must collaborate with a different university partner in each city that it serves to retool its curriculum in accord with state licensure requirements, an expensive and time consuming process. The result is that according to NLNS officials, the organization "can not keep up with the number of cities that want our services" (NLNS representative, personal communication, March 17, 2004).

Although KIPP has a slightly easier time because its leaders are being trained to lead KIPP charter academies and



contract schools, it too has struggled to obtain state recognition for its graduates. KIPP graduates in Baltimore, for instance, are not recognized as qualified by the state. As one KIPP spokesman points out,

Most KIPP leaders could choose any career but are being told by the state that they have to take classes to become certified. They have to go to class at night after the already extended school day, which is ridiculous.

As a result, KIPP recently partnered with National-Louis University, one of the larger providers of traditional administrator preparation, in an attempt to develop an accreditation program. Although a happy outcome from the point of view of traditional administration trainers, this is likely to mute the clarity of the KIPP program, limit its ability to pioneer new approaches, and slow its pace of expansion.

Nontraditional providers are also hindered by hiring practices. Hesitant to bring in candidates who have not completed traditional licensure programs, many schools have been reluctant to hire even promising KIPP or NLNS graduates. For instance, NLNS's graduates from the Chicago program have had a very difficult time finding a principal placement in the city's public schools. Only 5 members of the first 15-person graduating class and about half of the 32 graduates in 2003 found jobs as school leaders, with just 7 of 47 graduates hired to run traditional neighborhood schools. As Russo (2004) has observed, "those without preexisting connections to the community or to the school bureaucracy were struggling even to get interviews" (p. 48). In Chicago, hiring is done by local school councils that are reportedly skeptical of nontraditional candidates and prefer to hire individuals from within the school system (Russo, 2004). In the end, Russo points out, NLNS "will need to find more success in placing its graduates if it is to remain a viable model for improving the management of regular public schools" (p. 51).

KIPP's challenges are less stark because its principal candidates are usually placed into KIPP schools and are not seeking placements in traditional public schools. Nonetheless, KIPP occasionally has to deal with hostile political forces at the district level. For instance, one recent KIPP graduate--a former Fulbright Scholar and Mississippi Teacher of the Year--was turned away by the San Lorenzo California School Board because he was not fully credentialed, until the state board intervened and overruled the decision (Bono, 2002). Such is the ability of political and statutory forces to restrict the growth of nontraditional providers.

#### *For-Profit Providers*

According to the National Center for Education Statistics Integrated Postsecondary Education Database System, as of spring 2004, there were just three for-profit colleges offering education administration programs. However, further research turned up two additional programs. The University of Phoenix, Capella University, Walden University, Jones International University, and Touro University International all offer a master's-level degree in education administration. Although the hallmark of these providers is convenience and affordability, due to their heavy use of distance learning and online learning delivery, it is unclear that their training is substantively different from traditional providers. Indeed, because these programs are focused on profitability, they have strong incentives to emulate traditional programs, abide by traditional licensure rules, and ensure that graduates have an easy time obtaining licensure from the state.

Capella University, an online for-profit institution, unveiled its educational administration master's and Ph.D. program in 1998. Capella claims to be the first online postsecondary institution to obtain regional accreditation and state approval for an education administration specialization. In 2002, Arizona approved the program, followed by the state of Minnesota in 2003. Graduates can be hired as licensed school leaders in both states. Capella also claims that state approval and regional accreditation enable Capella candidates to obtain licensure in other states more easily, although as of 2003, just seven Capella graduates had been licensed outside of Arizona and Minnesota ("Frequently Asked Questions," 2004).

Capella's program appears innovative in delivery only; classes are asynchronous, meaning that students can sign on for online lectures at any time during the week. Students are instructed to devote about 10 hours per week to coursework, including 2 or more hours of online course room discussions (*How E-learning Works*, 2004). The leadership certificate includes 10 required courses and a 320-hour practicum, or a total of 48 credits. The required courses reflect conventional administration program offerings. Despite its convenient and innovative online format, Capella's program does not attract or serve nontraditional candidates because it requires all candidates to have at least 3 years of fully licensed teaching experience. This requirement is most likely in place to reconcile the program with Minnesota and Arizona requirements for licensure.

The for-profit University of Phoenix offers both online and direct instruction degree training. The University of Phoenix currently teaches upward of 100,000 students online alone, and its network of ground campuses has been consistently expanding. Similar to Capella, it offers an online master's degrees in education administration, but no state has approved Phoenix's program as a route to certification. As a result, prospective students are told to consult with their state departments of education to find out what additional steps will be necessary beyond the university's coursework. The vast majority of students in Phoenix's program are teachers who are looking for a way out of the classroom, and very few come

from fields outside of education. According to anecdotal evidence, most go on to work as school administrators, though it is not clear how many candidates are successfully placed in the public schools.

Similar to most new providers, the University of Phoenix has run into licensure barriers in its efforts to expand. In an effort to streamline the certification process for its graduates, the University of Phoenix has worked with states to ensure that its program fits the mold of each state's certification program. This process, though lengthy and labor intensive, is almost impossible to avoid; according to one University of Phoenix professor, "if you want your graduates to have a job, you've got to design the courses around state standards" (University of Phoenix faculty member, personal communication, May 3, 2004). The result is that with the exception of state-by-state variations in education finance or school law requirements, the content of University of Phoenix's program is "pretty much the same as everywhere else" (University of Phoenix admissions counselor, personal communication, June 6, 2004). Students in Tennessee, for example, who enroll in the University of Phoenix will have an individually tailored course schedule that mirrors almost exactly the curriculum at Tennessee State or University of Tennessee. On top of these statutory barriers, the University of Phoenix must also contend with institutional preconceptions that for-profit providers are "mercenary . . . and that they operate on the cheap" (University of Phoenix faculty member, personal communication, May 3, 2004). Similar to the nonprofit providers of principal preparation, for-profits can also fall victim to the mistrust of nontraditional providers that pervades many states and districts.

Environmental and political forces might constrain the emerging for-profit sector in two ways. On one hand, licensure barriers may restrict expansion by nudging risk-averse candidates into traditional providers or by dissuading nontraditional candidates from submitting themselves to the potential headaches and obstacles. Additionally, adhering to state requirements may limit the ability of for-profit providers to try new things or develop truly innovative curricula, as is the case with the University of Phoenix. In some ways, from a business perspective, this model may make the most sense. By mapping their programs onto existing traditional ones, they make it easier to obtain state approval and will eventually be able to offer traditional certification courses at a lower price and in a more convenient format.

## Conclusion

Broadly speaking, the world of principal preparation shows little evidence that the whirlwind of initiatives and new programs has yielded much in the way of substantive change. Most of the new programs, although depicted as radical innovations, do not address the major impediments that stifle new approaches and deter potentially promising candidates. Simply redesigning curricula, adding internship time, or tweaking delivery is unlikely to help programs improve significantly, much less prepare their candidates for the demands of 21st-century school leadership. In truth, in considering the narrow world of educational leadership from a more distant vantage point, it seems apparent that the new programs largely continue conventional practices but repackage them under the mantle of reform.

There is little evidence that state principal academies, district-based preparation programs, or innovative education school programs are doing much more than shifting to a cohort model, reshuffling courses, or slightly enriching their traditional program experiences with more field based internships. Even among those programs flagged as national leaders, not one has shown any significant interest in recruiting new talent from outside the schools, aggressively targeting promising teachers who might not otherwise pursue leadership, or recasting school leadership preparation in light of lessons from outside education. Meanwhile, the few programs, such as KIPP or NLNS, that seemingly embody the possibility for radical change find themselves hampered by statutory constraints and district hiring practices.

Among the for-profit providers, there may be even less substantive innovation than among traditional programs. For-profit firms have one overriding motive: to make a profit. So long as statute, regulation, and hiring practice embody a clear preference for former teachers trained in accord with state guidelines and standards promulgated by established education leadership groups, for-profit providers have every incentive to play along and little or no incentive to attract new talent. In fact, the major innovation of the for-profits has been their use of distance learning and technology to make it easier, more convenient, and, sometimes, cheaper for leadership candidates to fulfill their traditional obligations.

The only source of significant innovation is really emerging from the small nonprofit programs such as the KIPP principals program and NLNS. Making a point to recruit promising leaders who might not otherwise pursue positions in education administration, to be highly selective, and to seek out ways to marry educational preparation and broader training in management practice, these programs are helping to reinvent assumptions about who should lead schools, how these individuals should be selected, and what skills these aspiring candidates need to master. These programs are constrained, however, by their small size, the need to work around licensure guidelines, and a hiring mind-set that can hamper their ability to place their graduates in traditional district public schools. Moreover, these programs are characterized by an impassioned sense of mission and a relatively conventional view of the importance of teaching experience, limiting their ability to attract radically new candidates or pilot dramatically different approaches to recruiting and training principals.

Why has the wave of people advocating change resulted in so little? The constituency for fundamental change is unlikely to muster enough force to foment substantial change in the status quo. The emerging for-profit providers have financial incentive to adapt themselves to the dominant institutional regime rather than strike out in new directions. The new providers, including reformed education school programs, district-based institutes, or the new nonprofit groups simply want more leeway to promote their particular vision of preparation, not to drive systemic change. The handful of academics, policy advocates, and business leaders who have led the charge for radical reform have miniscule constituency resources and little professional or institutional stake in the reinvention of administrator preparation. Given this reality, it is understandable why cautious refinement has satisfied much of the demand for an overhaul of administrator preparation and why the menacing wave of pressure for change may readily dissipate into a wavelet of iconoclastic voices that breaks harmlessly on the shores of the status quo.

Educational leadership has been a scene of great tumult in the past 5 years. This activity and attendant efforts to highlight model or innovative programs has given the impression that much of note is happening. In fact, such a conclusion depends on where one is standing. From the perspective of the traditional world of educational leadership preparation, there is indeed a burst of change afoot in that once-moribund field. However, from any broader perspective, little of note appears to have transpired. Outside of a few boutique programs, which are themselves frustrated by existing practices, little has been done thus far to draw new people into school leadership, cultivate new skills in school leaders, or infuse school leadership preparation with lessons from outside the narrow bounds of K-12 education. Of course, there is always tomorrow.

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## Notes

1 Feistritzer (2003), president of the National Center for Education Information and an authority on administrator and teacher certification nationwide, found that "states report they are issuing far more administrator certificates than they have people actually looking to lead schools and school districts" (p. 70). Nationally, RAND has estimated that the rate of entry into the school administration field averages about 22% to 26% percent, whereas the rate of exit out of school administration averages about 22% to 25%, including retirees (Gates, Ringel, & Santibañez, 2003).

2 Figures provided courtesy of Knowledge is Power Program and New Leaders for New Schools representatives through interviews (personal communication, April 2, 2001, and March 17, 2004, respectively).

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