HELP WANTED:
Top Administrators to Lead California’s Schools

Over the last decade, California’s public education system has undergone unprecedented change. The state’s standards-based reform movement has transformed the focus and goals of public education, challenging schools to set higher expectations for all students and holding everyone, from superintendents to students, accountable for academic performance.

“The challenge of creating schools to meet these objectives involves many facets of the education system,” says the Council of Chief State School Officers (CCSSO) in its 2001 publication, Leadership for Learning in the 21st Century. “Above all, it requires a new level of leadership to provide the inspiration, know-how, drive and endurance required to change the schools and raise student performance.”

To achieve these new objectives successfully, today’s school leaders must wear multiple hats. They are instructional leaders, personnel directors, fund-raisers, public information officers, social workers, negotiators, legal experts, statisticians, financial analysts, and politicians. According to Linda Lambert, professor of education at California State University (CSU), Hayward, today’s school leaders must command a more sophisticated skill set to effectively carry out the full scope of their responsibilities than was true for their predecessors.

School leaders face greater pressure as they juggle multiple and increasing responsibilities while working for across-the-board improvement in student achievement in a new, highly public, high-stakes accountability environment. As a result, fewer qualified individuals seem willing to enter the fray. At the same time, the need for school leaders is increasing. A significant number of current administrators will likely retire over the next decade and must be replaced. Simultaneously, additional schools, and thus school administrator positions, are being created to keep up with enrollment growth.

How will California find the education leaders it needs to advance the cause of school improvement its citizens expect? What will ensure that enough qualified administrators are willing and able not only to handle the ever-increasing demands of the job, but also to provide the visionary leadership needed to create and manage the high-achieving schools California desires?

This paper focuses on workforce issues related to two key school management positions, principal and superintendent. This is not to underestimate the importance of other administrative positions. Instead, it focuses on the two leadership positions in order to more easily describe the changing nature of administrative responsibilities, the possible causes for decreasing numbers of applicants for administrative positions, and some innovative approaches that schools, districts, and the state are taking to address these issues.

The nature of educational administration has both broadened and deepened

The scope and urgency of principals’ and superintendents’ work has increased dramatically over recent decades as a result of the confluence of a number of events. Standards-based reform in the 1980s began to expand administrators’ responsibilities from oversight and management to leading the implementation of new academic standards, aligning instructional practices to them, and raising all students’ achievement. In the 1990s, state leaders increased the pressure on education leaders for greater fiscal and management accountability. These activities have been carried out under a more and more watchful and critical public eye.

All of this has occurred against a backdrop of social, economic, and political change. Economic upswings and downturns, demographic and cultural shifts, increased legal and political involvement in education, more regulatory
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requirements, and the rapid growth in the development and use of technology have all played significant roles in reshaping the principalship and superintendency.

**Standards describe new aspects of leadership**

Certainly, the specific pressures of being a principal or superintendent depend on local circumstances such as district or school size, geographic location, student needs, school board relations, community involvement, and local politics. Despite these differences in local conditions, all principals and superintendents must accomplish a common set of tasks.

A number of national commissions and professional associations have set out to define the new job description for school leaders. For example, the Interstate School Leaders Licensure Consortium, a group of policymakers and educators convened by the Council of Chief State School Officers (CCSSO), articulated its collective vision of leadership in its 1996 publication, *Standards for School Leaders*. This document has served as a framework for states to describe within their own contexts the new job descriptions of its educational leaders. In California, the Association of California School Administrators (ACSA) and the California School Leadership Academy (CSLA) have led the way in this effort, drafting California Professional Standards for Educational Leaders, which as of this writing is undergoing review by state agencies. These standards describe the central aspects of California school leaders’ roles and the activities necessary for fulfilling them.

Principals and superintendents are, and always have been, responsible for a core set of leadership functions: stewarding the community’s shared educational mission, developing and nurturing a school culture that inspires learning, managing operations efficiently and effectively, and considering and responding to educational and other needs of their diverse school communities.

In recent years, however, these functions have deepened and broadened. Today the core educational mission is to cultivate higher academic achievement for all students. This objective drives administrators’ every activity and decision. To fulfill this mission, school leaders must create and sustain a school culture that holds high expectations for everyone. They must develop a system that holds all staff accountable for teaching more challenging content, and holds all students accountable for mastering it.

Today’s principals and superintendents must also be skilled in using data to assess teacher effectiveness and student learning and be able to translate that information into a plan for improving them. High-stakes assessment and accountability heighten school leaders’ urgency to quickly and accurately pinpoint instructional weaknesses and appropriately address them. In other management dimensions, decisions about how to allocate fiscal, human, and material resources must be made with an eye toward the success of all students.

School leaders also confront more complex public relations and advocacy roles. High-stakes accountability has raised public awareness of student performance and has increased pressure on school leaders to better inform the public of school and student performance goals and outcomes. Through site-based councils and other initiatives, parents, students, and community members are more involved than ever in the decision-making processes of their schools and districts. Some schools and communities have become more diverse. In that situation, school leaders must coordinate all parties’ efforts around the core academic mission while balancing the diverse needs and values of the school community.

Superintendents and principals today must handle additional—and more complex—tasks to fulfill the core educational mission. Meeting their responsibilities often requires greater knowledge. Pre-service and ongoing training can play a critical role in developing, maintaining, and updating essential knowledge and skills relevant to today’s and tomorrow’s leadership challenges.

**Positions are difficult to fill with the right people**

The new challenges of the principalship and superintendency present school districts with a two-pronged dilemma. They must find enough individuals willing to take these more
difficult jobs. Then, among this group, they must identify enough knowledgeable candidates who possess the analytical, leadership, and communication skills to do these jobs well.

**Anecdotal evidence points to shortages**

While little empirical data on administrator quantity and quality exists, substantial anecdotal evidence in California suggests that fewer qualified individuals than in the past are applying for available administrator positions. In the case of the superintendency, two executive search agencies that recruit for administrative posts in California—California School Boards Association (CSBA) and Leadership Associates—report a decrease throughout the state in the number of individuals applying for superintendent positions. An open superintendency today may attract 40% of the applicants it would have in the early 1990s, they say.

In the end, it takes only one person to fill the open superintendency. However, for a variety of reasons, districts need a pool of several strong candidates from which to choose. Sometimes the first-choice candidate turns down an offer, and the school board must extend one to another candidate. Perhaps more importantly, choosing a superintendent is a complicated and time-consuming selection process that requires buy-in from the community and agreement from board members, who come to the table with their own interests, values, and expectations for the superintendency. Ideally the process of selecting a superintendent requires balancing all of these interests and then determining which of several qualified candidates best meets all stakeholders’ expectations.

Ron Hockwalt, the head of the Association of California School Administrators’ (ACSA) Superintendency Committee and a superintendent himself in Southern California, confirms these recruiters’ perceptions. Today, he notes, superintendent searches are routinely opened, closed, and then reopened, often several times, before the right candidate emerges to take the position. Dick Loveall, executive recruiter with CSBA, says that in his experience this may occur in 10–15% of superintendent searches statewide.

Recruiters say they have seen superintendent shortages occur across the board. Certain...
certainly, though, some administrative positions are harder to fill than others, depending on the district, local conditions, and the position itself. Bob Trigg of Leadership Associates has found that elementary school districts usually attract the greatest number of applicants, followed by unified and then high school districts. According to Hockwalt, shortages in candidates for the superintendency are most dire in urban areas. However, he reports, all districts are facing shortages. “Someone’s always looking [for applicants],” Hockwalt says.

**Administrator attrition and student enrollment may contribute to shortage**

Staff retirements, along with growing student enrollments, will increase the demand for administrators. As the large cohort of educators from the baby-boom population begins to retire over the next decade, California will need to replace thousands of retiring administrators. Therefore, it is critical to ensure the availability of candidates to take the helm when these positions become available. Vacancies due to retirements, particularly in the principalship, come on top of those that must be filled when new schools open for business. Since 1996–97, California’s enrollment growth has been more than 100,000 students annually, though it is projected to slow somewhat in the next few years. California Department of Education (CDE) statistics show that from 1996–2000, districts opened nearly 600 new schools around the state.

Many choose not to use their administrative credential

According to anecdotal evidence, the number of qualified individuals applying for and accepting positions as school principals falls short of the need, which may at first glance be surprising given the number of new administrator credentials granted each year. The problem appears not to stem from an insufficient number of people with appropriate credentials, but rather from credentialed administrators choosing not to move into administration from their current positions as teachers and other professional staff.

The California Commission on Teacher Credentialing (CTC), which oversees credentialing and licensing for all education professionals, including administrators, reports that California currently has more than 34,000 fully credentialed administrators. At the same time, California has roughly 23,000 school administrators employed in schools and central offices. Theoretically, there are plenty of credentialed individuals to fill principal and other administrative positions when they become available. Yet throughout the state, districts report shortages of candidates applying for these positions. For example, when ACSA surveyed 376 California superintendents in 1999, 98% of the respondents said they believed that the state has a shortage of qualified principals. Nearly 90% reported difficulty in finding candidates for the last high school principal position advertised, while 84% reported similar shortages for the last middle school posting, and 73% for the last elementary school opening.

A 1999 study by Professor Jeanne Adams at California State University, Northridge (CSUN) may lend insight into why districts are experiencing shortages. In a survey of alumni of the CSUN administrative credential program, only 38% of the respondents reported that they were actually serving in administrative positions. The remaining 62% cited pay, stress, job satisfaction, and politics among others as reasons why they had chosen not to pursue administrative positions at this time.

Results of this and other larger studies point to three major reasons why qualified school leaders have become harder to find. The jobs of superintendent and principal reportedly have become so complex and unwieldy that many feel that it is no longer possible to do them well. Many say the level of compensation does not sufficiently reflect the amount of responsibility, stress, and time commitment involved. And finally, preparation and professional development programs do not address the skills and knowledge required to successfully handle the new responsibilities of the superintendency and principalship.

**These jobs are really tough**

Superintendents and principals face increasing pressure to improve schools, often without the necessary resources, staff support, or preparation to do so. Compared to years past, many report that stress levels are greater, work days and work years are longer, and the public’s expectations are higher. Held accountable for
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What it takes to become an administrator in California

In California, the administrative services credential authorizes an individual to serve in any of the many administrative positions at the school and district level, including superintendent, deputy superintendent, coordinator, principal, and assistant principal. The assistant principalship is a typical entry-level position for a newly credentialed administrator, though the opportunities and career paths vary by district size and configuration.

The California Commission on Teacher Credentialing (CTC) accredits administrative preparation programs, usually operated by, or in collaboration with, institutions of higher education. Courses are meant to provide the theoretical foundations for many administrative responsibilities, particularly of the school principalship, while practical experience through internships provides a realistic view of what it takes to put theory into practice.

Administrator preparation programs are usually geared toward teachers and other staff who, for professional and practical reasons, continue to work while they pursue their administrative credential. Becoming a credentialed administrator in California is a two-tier process.

Requirements for completing Tier I, the Preliminary Administrative Services Credential:

- Possess a bachelor’s degree and have passed the California Basic Educational Skills Test (CBEST);
- Hold a valid California teaching or other professional education services credential;
- Have worked for at least three years as a successful, full-time professional staff member in public or private schools; and
- Have graduated from a CTC-approved professional administrator preparation program or participated in a commission-approved internship.

The Preliminary Credential is valid for five years from the date issued.

Requirements for Tier II, the Professional Clear Credential:

- Work for at least two years as a full-time administrator while holding the Preliminary Credential; and
- Complete a CTC-approved individualized program of advanced preparation designed by the candidate’s institution of higher education and the employer.

The Professional Clear Credential is valid for five years and is renewable upon completion of professional growth and service requirements.

Out-of-state educators have different requirements for the credential.

Source: California Commission on Teacher Credentialing (CTC)

the activities and performance of their schools or districts, administrators in these top positions have little job security. In many districts, new demands have come unaccompanied by equivalent increases in compensation.

Superintendents face special challenges and high stress levels

In the American Association of School Administrators’ (AASA) 2000 national survey of superintendents, 51% of respondents reported that their stress levels were “very great” or “considerable.” They cited lack of adequate financial resources for school district operations as the top reason why they might leave the field, followed by a lack of community support. More than 70% of respondents reported that their districts were challenged by at least half of the items listed on the survey including finances, testing, accountability, administrator or board relations, changing curricular priorities, regulatory compliance, teacher and administrator recruiting, parent apathy, and changes in societal values and behavioral norms.

In California, along with these concerns, the state’s new testing and accountability
“[Administrators] must have a sense of urgency about improving their schools, balanced by the patience to sustain them for the long haul. They must focus on the future, but remain grounded in today. They must see the big picture, while maintaining a close focus on details. They must be strong leaders who give away power to others.”

increasingly held responsible for all outcomes, both positive and negative.

Numerous studies highlight principals’ concerns about recruiting new leadership talent in the future, given the challenges of the job. For example, conference participants in the July 2000 Principals’ Leadership Summit in Washington, D.C., cited a number of issues that discourage individuals from pursuing the principalship. These major challenges included responsibility for raising all students to high standards without adequate support, new accountability systems, and legal and special education issues. In 1998, the National Association of Elementary School Principals (NAESP), the National Association of Secondary School Principals (NASSP), and the Educational Research Service (ERS) conducted a survey of those who hire principals to learn what factors appear to discourage potential applicants for these jobs. The most frequently cited reasons were the stress of the job, the time demands, and insufficient compensation for the job responsibilities. Some other items reported were difficult community relations and societal problems. The Association of California School Administrators’ (ACSA) 1999 California survey mirrors these national findings, noting that money, stress, and long hours have taken their toll on districts’ abilities to attract qualified candidates for principal positions.

In addition, California principals face some challenges unique to this state. For example, the state’s high-stakes accountability system puts tremendous pressure on principals to raise students’ standardized test scores or face penalties and sanctions. Meanwhile, one in four students statewide is not fully proficient in English, the language in which the tests are given.

While California’s principals at all levels confront many similar challenges, they also face some that are distinct to the level of their schools. For example, management, evaluation, and mentoring responsibilities for elementary school principals have grown with the implementation of smaller classes in grades K–3 and the hiring of new teachers to fill them. Principals receive no additional funds or support to evaluate and mentor the larger number of staff members, many of whom are new and inexperienced.

Middle and high school principals, meanwhile, are under pressure to implement the state’s new algebra requirements and to ensure that all students are capable of passing the High School Exit Exam. Seen as the last chance the K–12 system has to prepare youth for adulthood, middle and high schools are under great pressure to turn around failing students and boost academic success for all. For these reasons, understaffing is of particular concern in middle and high schools. Implementation of new policies, combined with handling student academic and other issues, requires considerable time and expertise from professional staff, including teachers and guidance counselors.

In comparison with schools in other states, public schools in California have some of the highest student to staff ratios in the country. (See Table 1 on page 8.) Understaffing shows up in categories such as guidance counselors and other site administrators. This often places an overwhelming burden on principals, and unfortunately many find that providing instructional leadership often takes a back seat to managing the minutiae of daily operations.

As if the job as principal or superintendent alone is not challenging enough, many California administrators serve in both. In fact, ACSA estimates that 15% of all California superintendents are principals as well. This percentage is not surprising given that 32% of the state’s districts have fewer than 500 students.

Compensation does not match responsibilities
Many feel that the compensation school leaders receive does not adequately reflect their responsibilities in today’s high-stakes, high-pressure environment. Survey results and other anecdotal evidence suggest that the mismatch between compensation and responsibilities does influence individuals’ decisions to enter the principalship and the superintendentcy.

“When compared with compensation of university presidents and CEOs, many of whom manage comparable or smaller budgets and staffs, the superintendent’s salary is disap-
pointingly low,” says the National Advisory Committee on School Board/Superintendent Leadership. This gap in compensation may deter some less traditional candidates, such as business professionals and public officials, from tossing their hats into the ring.

Salary comparisons within the ranks of education reveal that, depending on the district, the difference in pay between a deputy and a superintendent can be negligible. (See Figure 2.) According to executive recruiters in California, the small increase in pay compared to the large increase in responsibility discourages some potential administrators from pursuing these positions. Compensation issues are compounded by the higher costs of living and housing in some regions of California, which further discourage some candidates from outside the region or state from applying for available positions, say recruiters.

Individuals face similar considerations when contemplating a move from teaching to administration. While teachers work approximately 180 days per year, the principal’s work year is generally 220 days long. Surveys of principals reveal that those 220 days are long ones, often 50 to 60 hour weeks, including evening and weekend hours. When calculated on a per-day basis, a move to administration might result in a much smaller raise than the candidate had anticipated. The income gap between beginning principals and veteran teachers, from whose ranks principals are often recruited, can be narrow. Add to the equation teachers’ ability to supplement their annual incomes through coaching, mentoring, and working over summers—plus the protections offered through collective bargaining and due process rights—and teachers have few incentives to become administrators.

In the meantime, teachers who are interested in leadership roles no longer need to become principals to do so. They have many new opportunities to lead at the site, district, and regional levels. “Often, [teachers] view such roles as a way to influence school policy without putting in the long hours that many principals devote to the job,” says Lynn Olson of Teacher Magazine. Expanded opportunities are an important means for developing local leadership capacity, maximizing the talent, skills, and knowledge of teachers, and

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Table 1</th>
<th>Ratio of Students to Staff by Position</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>The National Center for Education Statistics (NCES) 1997–98 data, the most recent available, shows that California ranks close to the bottom in nearly all NCES national comparisons of staff to student ratios.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>California Rank in U.S.</td>
<td>California Average</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total students to staff</strong></td>
<td>50</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Students to professional staff</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>District officials/administrators</td>
<td>48</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>School principals/assistant principals</td>
<td>50</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Guidance counselors</td>
<td>51</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Librarians</td>
<td>51</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teachers*</td>
<td>50</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*1997–98 teacher data from National Education Association’s Rankings of the States, 1999
These statistics include the 50 states plus the District of Columbia.

Data: National Center for Education Statistics, 2000

EdSource 3/01
Table corrected on 4/2/01.
Statewide average annual and per diem salaries by position
Data from the California Department of Education’s (CDE) report of Statewide 1998–99 Average Salaries and Expenditure Percentages for the School Accountability Report Card (SARC) reveals that, on average, the difference between mid-career or veteran teachers’ daily or “per diem” wages and those of principals can be small.

Average salaries for California’s teachers, principals, and superintendents

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Position</th>
<th>Annual Salary</th>
<th>Per Diem Rate</th>
<th>Annual Salary</th>
<th>Per Diem Rate</th>
<th>Annual Salary</th>
<th>Per Diem Rate</th>
<th>Annual Salary</th>
<th>Per Diem Rate</th>
<th>Annual Salary</th>
<th>Per Diem Rate</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Teacher BA+60 units (Step 10)</td>
<td>$43,521</td>
<td>$238</td>
<td>$44,919</td>
<td>$245</td>
<td>$47,483</td>
<td>$259</td>
<td>$48,289</td>
<td>$263</td>
<td>$49,481</td>
<td>$270</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teacher (highest salary)</td>
<td>$51,379</td>
<td>$281</td>
<td>$55,440</td>
<td>$303</td>
<td>$58,106</td>
<td>$317</td>
<td>$59,570</td>
<td>$325</td>
<td>$59,895</td>
<td>$327</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Principal</td>
<td>$62,803</td>
<td>$295</td>
<td>$69,810</td>
<td>$329</td>
<td>$73,974</td>
<td>$350</td>
<td>$78,775</td>
<td>$367</td>
<td>$78,145</td>
<td>$363</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Superintendent</td>
<td>$80,338</td>
<td>$355</td>
<td>$92,116</td>
<td>$407</td>
<td>$107,417</td>
<td>$473</td>
<td>$117,551</td>
<td>$519</td>
<td>$137,350</td>
<td>$602</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: “Statewide 1998–99 Average Salaries and Expenditure Percentages for the School Accountability Report Card (SARC)”

On average, a teacher’s work year is approximately 183 days, a principal’s is 213 days, and a superintendent’s is 227 days.

A comparison of average per diem rates of veteran teachers and beginning administrators in Santa Clara County
Very often, the most senior teacher makes more per diem than the brand new assistant principal or principal. The following chart illustrates this point, listing the average per diem pay in Santa Clara County’s 27 largest school districts. This chart provides per diem salary data only. Many teachers also take on coaching, mentoring, and other jobs after hours and during the summer to supplement their incomes.

Salaries for the same job differ by district type
An unexpected finding of this analysis of salaries among Santa Clara County school districts is the differential in pay between high school principals and assistant principals in high school districts versus those in unified school districts. On average, base minimum annual salaries for high school principals and assistant principals in high school districts were about $7,000 more than in unified districts.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Type of School District</th>
<th>Elem</th>
<th>High School</th>
<th>Unified</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Position</td>
<td>PER DIEM RATE</td>
<td>PER DIEM RATE</td>
<td>PER DIEM RATE</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teacher (highest salary)</td>
<td>$364</td>
<td>$394</td>
<td>$364</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Elementary School Principal (base minimum)</td>
<td>$339</td>
<td>n/a</td>
<td>$345</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Middle School Assistant Principal (base minimum)</td>
<td>$323</td>
<td>n/a</td>
<td>$324</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Middle School Principal (base minimum)</td>
<td>$350</td>
<td>n/a</td>
<td>$355</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>High School Assistant Principal (base minimum)</td>
<td>n/a</td>
<td>$368</td>
<td>$337</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>High School Principal (base minimum)</td>
<td>n/a</td>
<td>$429</td>
<td>$381</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Monthly Compensation Reporter for Santa Clara County, December 2000

On average, a teacher’s work year is 184–185 days and a principal or assistant principal works 210–221 days each year.
encouraging them to stay in teaching. However, an unintended consequence is that the incentive for teachers to pursue administration is no longer quite as strong because they can obtain fulfilling leadership experiences within their teaching roles.

As a side note, changes in family structure may also contribute to the administrator shortage, says Richard McAdams, an education professor at Lehigh University. “Moving to another region or state might represent a career opportunity for administrators but requires their spouses to resign from positions that contribute substantially to family income. These spouses might be happy in their current jobs. They might have their own career aspirations and be justifiably concerned about finding suitable positions elsewhere,” McAdams says.

The cost of living and housing in California, the low compensation relative to administrative responsibilities, and the career and salary considerations of the spouse result in greater reluctance on the part of prospective superintendents and principals to uproot their families. Recruiters concur that, while this reluctance may not be the cause of the administrator shortage, it does exacerbate it.

Preparation is insufficient

Many individuals responsible for hiring superintendents and principals say that those candidates applying for openings often are not adequately prepared to manage the complex responsibilities before them. In the meantime, administrators themselves report feeling under-prepared or improperly trained to deal with some aspects of their changing roles and with challenging local circumstances. Among superintendents who responded to the Association of California School Administrators’ (ACSA) 1999 survey, 28% reported that the preparation of recent candidates for principal positions was, indeed, inadequate. Only 7% said that preparation was excellent.

Formal preparation is not up-to-date

A large number of today’s school leaders went through university-based training programs at a time when the knowledge, skills, and competencies required for success today were not part of the administrator’s job description.

“The preparation, curriculum, and management approaches of the past simply are inadequate for the future,” says the Education Commission of the States (ECS). And while some training programs and licensing requirements have been updated to reflect the expanded roles of administrators, many have remained unchanged for decades.

As with preparation for many professions, administrator academic training of 20 or even 10 years ago could not have anticipated all of the changes the field has experienced. Ongoing training, evaluation, and mentoring are all the more critical for filling the gaps in knowledge that a continuous stream of new policies, initiatives, and expectations have left for administrators.

On-the-job experience alone cannot fill knowledge gaps

Researchers conducting the American Association of School Administrators (AASA) 2000 study observed that while the on-the-job experience gained by climbing up the administrative career ladder helps individuals obtain important skills, it also tends to perpetuate outdated practices. Nor does work experience alone expose superintendents to the latest research on best practice. Without up-to-date, research-based preparation, many administrators will inevitably practice “what is,” while not preparing for “what will be.”

Additionally, too rapid an advancement up the administrative career ladder can be detrimental to the superintendency. CSBA’s Loveall notes that because leadership opportunities abound in California, many of the state’s most talented and capable educators are promoted very quickly from one position to the next. Having not spent much time in any one position, they arrive at the superintendency unseasoned and without the breadth of leadership experience that their predecessors had.

Administrators must be better prepared to manage their new responsibilities

Improving administrator preparation and ongoing professional development is a critical step to ensure that both aspiring and current school leaders are qualified to handle their
demanding and ever-changing duties. In California, state leaders and agencies, professional organizations, institutions of higher education, and many districts are recognizing the importance of administrator preparation and taking steps to improve it.

The California Commission on Teacher Credentialing (CTC) has been active in developing guidelines for good administrator preparation. In 1995, the agency adopted Standards of Program Quality and Effectiveness for Administrative Services Credential Programs, in collaboration with an advisory panel of district and site administrators, professors, and representatives from professional organizations and state agencies. As a result of this effort, Tier I and Tier II curriculum requirements were revised, and candidates are now required to complete an induction program in order to earn their Professional Clear Credential (Tier II). It is unclear how fully the latter has been implemented. A survey of Tier II credential programs in California reveals that induction (the term for formal orientation and support of new administrators) is required to obtain the credential. However, many in the field say that high quality induction, in the way that the CTC and its advisory panel originally envisioned it, is not yet a reality.

In June 2000, the CTC decided to formally review its 1995 standards for their appropriateness, given recent state educational reforms. The CTC assembled the Administrative Services Credential Task Force. Over the next year the task force will examine the content, structure, and requirements for professional preparation programs and state licensing. According to the task force, a top priority will be to improve the structure of the Professional Clear Administrative Credential program, particularly the induction aspect of it. As it begins its work, the Task Force has identified some core components for Tier II credential programs: an individualized professional development plan designed by the candidate, employer, and institution of higher education; mentors to provide support and assistance to new administrators during their first few years of service; and more time to complete credential requirements. Details of how these should be implemented are still under discussion by the group.

Along with the CTC, several entities in California play major roles in the direction and substance of administrator preparation. ACSA has long supported administrators, providing professional development and networking opportunities to its constituents. Traditionally institutions of higher education have also been major providers of training and professional development. However, the perception among many California administrators and policymakers is that there is a disconnect between the preparation that higher education offers and the real needs of practicing administrators. Concern over this disconnect is reflected in the CTC task force’s priority for greater collaboration between university-based credential programs and school districts.

State lawmakers, too, have recently become players in the effort to ensure that
Help Wanted: Top Administrators to Lead California’s Schools • March 2001

Some of California’s exemplary programs and new initiatives to support school leaders

Professional organizations

✓ ACSA offers a number of programs including the Principals’ Center Summer Institute, an intensive 10-day program for administrators; a week-long summer Colloquium for New and Aspiring Principals; and the Principals and Superintendents Academies for new and aspiring school leaders. All are meant to develop, refine, and update administrators’ knowledge and leadership skills to deal with changing requirements for diverse communities. In addition, ACSA sponsors a number of committees that support and advance professional development. These “job-alike” committees identify and study issues specifically related to elementary, middle, and secondary principals, co-administrators, and superintendents. They promote networking among administrators and provide access to opportunities for professional development and mentoring.

✓ The California School Leadership Academy (CSLA)—a collaboration of the California Department of Education, WestEd, and several state and national education initiatives—gives new and experienced administrators the opportunity to strengthen their knowledge and skills and to learn strategies for raising the academic achievement of all students.

Higher education initiatives

✓ Center X at University of California, Los Angeles (UCLA) provides opportunities for collaboration among UCLA faculty and K–12 and community college educators. Activities are targeted toward improving urban schools, particularly in the Los Angeles area.

✓ Principal Leadership Institute is a new, 15-month program for aspiring school leaders operated by the University of California at both Berkeley and Los Angeles. Governor Gray Davis provided $500,000 in seed money in the 1999–2000 budget to help UC establish this program. In 2000, businessman and philanthropist Kenneth Behring donated $7.5 million to expand it. The first class began its course of study in summer 2000.

✓ UC–Santa Cruz New Teacher Center has a beginning principal support program. In 1998, the center began piloting this program, modeled after the Beginning Teacher Support and Assessment (BTSA) Program.

California’s administrators are getting the professional development they need to lead schools to higher standards. In 2001 Governor Gray Davis proposed spending $15 million for the Governor’s Principal Training Act (Assembly Bill 75–Steinberg). If enacted, AB 75 would train 5,000 principals per year in leadership, management, and data analysis skills necessary for implementing California’s academic standards and curriculum frameworks. The CTC, along with three appointees of the governor, would comprise the advisory board responsible for establishing program guidelines for professional development providers interested in offering training under this act. At this early date, it is uncertain what the final legislation will look like, but professional organizations, the CTC Administrative Services Task Force, and others will undoubtedly keep careful watch as the proposal makes its way through the Legislature.

Other steps can improve administrator preparation

Given possible changes in licensing requirements in the near future, institutions of higher education may need to rethink their administrative credentialing programs and professional development curricula to ensure content relevance, timeliness, and alignment with the new professional standards.

Institutions of higher education could play two important roles in strengthening administrator preparation and professional development. Having the latest research at their fingertips, they could provide aspiring and current administrators with new information on best instructional, teacher mentoring, and staff evaluation practices; cognition; student measurement; and value-added assessment, all with an eye toward the educational mission of academic success for all children. Second, building stronger relationships between higher education, professional associations, and districts could help to bridge the gap between theory and practice. While academia could encourage practitioners to “think outside of the box,” practitioners could ensure that new approaches and ideas are grounded in the real challenges that school leaders face.

Improving new administrator induction is clearly on the minds of many in California. Just as stronger induction programs likely will be very important for supporting and improving the practice of new principals, new superintendents could also benefit from formal induction, many researchers and superintendents say.

Good training lays the groundwork for school leaders to handle their future responsibilities, professional development keeps them up-to-date on new challenges and opportunities, and induction and mentoring support them through the learning process. All of these efforts can increase an individual’s chances for meeting with job success and satisfaction, powerful incentives for the dedicated and conscientious educator. The availability of
high quality preparation and continuing education opportunities, as well as the assurance of guidance and support, not only serve to improve administrators’ practice, but also could be instrumental in recruiting and retaining talented school leaders.

**New recruitment and retention policies could help**

A recurring theme in studies of school administration is that the pipeline for candidates needs to be expanded and strengthened. As California has learned, it is one thing to have enough qualified individuals; it is quite another to have enough candidates actually apply for open positions.

Experts say that recruiting should start early in individuals’ careers and that recruitment programs should provide plenty of opportunities for candidates to learn about the day-to-day activities, challenges, and rewards of working in administration. Additionally, districts and schools should create more opportunities for individuals to assume leadership roles to expose them to what leadership is all about and to help them acquire valuable skills. “Grow your own” programs are becoming popular in some California districts. California State University’s Jeanne Adams cites several examples, including programs in the Glendale, Santa Monica/Malibu, Oxnard Union High, and Capistrano Unified school districts. These programs identify in-district leadership talent among teachers and other professional staff and recruit and mentor them for future administrative roles within the district.

“Grow your own” programs help not only to recruit new leadership, but also to facilitate induction and familiarize individuals with the policies, practices, and culture of the school district, says Adams. Additionally, tapping into an already-established local talent pool takes away some of the obstacles of relocation and life upheaval. Investing in these programs could enable districts to increase the number of job applicants willing to remain in the running for the duration of the search process.

**Can California make the job more attractive?**

Perhaps the most critical step to take in order to address decreasing numbers of qualified candidates for administrative positions is to reevaluate what school leaders are asked to accomplish, what they are held accountable for, and how they are compensated for taking on these challenging responsibilities.

**Identify top priorities for administrators and determine the level of support needed**

All executives, whether university presidents or CEOs of Fortune 500 companies, are responsible for the health and well-being of the entire organization, from personnel to plant operations to customer satisfaction with the product or service delivered. While they ultimately report to their advisory boards and stockholders, chief executives have numerous mid-level executives and assistants, depending on the size of the organization, who carry out the tasks that fulfill these responsibilities.

Superintendents and principals, too, are held accountable by school boards, the public, and departments of education for the well-being of their entire organizations, from staff evaluation to student testing to campus safety to developing and monitoring budgets. Like other CEOs, they need the support of competent and skilled staff to function effectively.

Local school boards and district leadership may need to revisit policies to ensure that district and school staffing levels are adequate.

Determining appropriate staffing levels involves a realistic assessment of the myriad jobs that need to get done and the kinds of skills and experience staff need in order to meet these expectations. That realistic analysis will help determine how many staff are necessary and how much it will cost to employ them. In the meantime, administrators themselves could influence the direction of the process by letting go of tradition where it no longer works and thinking creatively about how their schools and districts could be better organized.

State and local policymakers can also play an important role in revamping administrative jobs so that they are more doable and appealing to potential applicants. Administrators' responsibilities should be rethought and prioritized with today's educational objectives front and center in the thinking. In the past, regulatory compliance has been a necessary adminis-
trative priority. In today’s educational world, improving student outcomes is a shared goal. However, administrators have not been released from the workload associated with compliance. Policymakers could restructure these requirements.

A third component of rethinking the superintendency and the principalship is reconsidering the levels of authority and autonomy afforded to administrators. Administrators are held fully accountable for school improvement, yet many conditions critical to school improvement are not within their control. For example, depending on the district, principals have little or no say in staff hiring and assignments, as these decisions are often based on seniority. Frequently, superintendents must implement new state policies and initiatives without adequate financial and human resources.

If state and local policymakers could establish realistic expectations for administrators and provide them with sufficient support to meet them, revisit policies that place unnecessary demands on administrators’ time, and be open to alternative organizational models and management practices, then districts might be able to generate more interest among talented educators to pursue school leadership positions.

**Align compensation with responsibilities**

Making school administration more attractive to qualified candidates may also require recalibrating compensation to more accurately reflect administrators’ weighty responsibilities. However, increasing administrator compensation is highly political at the local level, particularly for superintendents, as their salaries are public information. Balancing the needs and expectations of all parties may require districts to think more creatively, say executive recruiters. For example, some districts have addressed their region’s high costs of living by offering candidates housing allowances and other perks.

With scarce resources, increased spending for administrator salaries might necessitate decreased spending in other areas. Conversely, increases in beginning teacher salaries, such as those funded by lawmakers in 2000–01, often prompt increases across salary schedules. That may include administrators, but to varying degrees. What such universal raises do not address is the differential between teachers and administrators—the financial incentive that, for many, makes taking on the increased responsibility justifiable.

**California has taken positive steps, but needs to do more**

“The entire system of recruiting, preparing, and sustaining quality leadership in the education system must be overhauled if we are to develop our capacity to help all children learn,” says the Education Commission of the States.

Will California pay attention to that advice? State and local policymakers, as well as educators themselves, must be clear about the rising expectations placed on superintendents and principals and the challenges they face in meeting them.

To address the issue of school management seriously, decision makers will need access to better data and a common understanding of the current situation. That means getting beyond the symptom—a shortage of qualified applicants—to look at the cause. This examination should reveal what the job of education management entails and how standards-based education reform is expanding it.

By acknowledging and articulating the current scope of the responsibilities, perhaps realistic guidelines can emerge regarding the requisite financial and human resources needed to manage public education effectively and efficiently. However, because education resources are more limited in California than in many other large states, the state and local school boards must be clear about which parts of administrative work are most important and which are not. Principals and superintendents themselves can also be creative in redefining and reconfiguring their jobs. Relevant preparation and ongoing professional development are essential to help school leaders do their jobs well. To be effective, such training should be aligned with the most important educational priorities and should acknowledge the complexities these professionals face in meeting them. School districts need to develop an
ample pool of qualified candidates for their administrative openings. Compensation levels, “grow your own” programs, and other active recruiting strategies remain crucial.

Finally, California must try to be fair in its expectations for school leaders. The extent to which principals and superintendents should be held accountable for their students’ performance would rationally be related to the amount of control they have over local conditions or the level of resources they have to respond to and improve those conditions.

California is beginning to recognize and address the critical role that school administrators play in educational improvement. The skills and competence of a district superintendent will determine how effectively that district supports and directs resources to its local schools. The skills and competence of a school site principal impacts that school’s ability to attract and retain qualified, enthusiastic teachers, analyze data to improve instruction and learning, manage and implement multiple, complex school reform efforts, and maintain a safe and healthy school climate for students and staff. California’s multiple new K–12 policy reforms aimed at raising student achievement will have a better chance of succeeding if policymakers make the recruitment, development, support, and compensation of its top school administrators—district superintendents and site principals—a high priority.

**Some innovations in administrative staffing arrangements**

In some California school districts, officials are exploring new ways to configure the principalship to make the job more doable and to provide beleaguered principals with additional support within current budgets.

Ojai Unified does not have the budget to hire assistant principals for its schools, but it recognizes that principals need help in managing their responsibilities. Principals can use special district-awarded grants to support their practice in a variety of ways, including compensating teachers for developing curriculum or taking leadership roles on projects. This program provides much-needed relief for principals. Better yet, it serves to help identify, nurture, and encourage leadership talent among the teaching staff, says Jeanne Adams in her article, “Good Principal.”

In Long Beach Unified, all comprehensive high schools in the district have two co-principals, who decide among themselves how to share responsibilities. For example, some co-principals choose to divide responsibilities by grade level and others by area of operation, such as instruction or facilities. Still others decide to share responsibility for all tasks equally.

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**Upcoming findings, recommendations, and legislation**

**State policymakers** will consider legislation related to administrator professional development during the 2001 session. To keep track of the debate: [www.leginfo.ca.gov/bilinfo.html](http://www.leginfo.ca.gov/bilinfo.html)

**The CTC** convened the Administrative Services Credential Task Force in June 2000. For more on the task force’s activities: [www.ctc.ca.gov](http://www.ctc.ca.gov)

**ACSA** assembled a task force in 2000 to study administrator supply and preparation issues. To learn more about its efforts: [www.acsa.org](http://www.acsa.org)

**The Joint Committee to Develop a Master Plan for Education, Kindergarten Through University** is examining, among others, issues of administrator supply and demand. For more information: [www.sen.ca.gov/masterplan](http://www.sen.ca.gov/masterplan)

**The Broad Foundation** ([www.broadfoundation.org/management.htm](http://www.broadfoundation.org/management.htm)) and the **Wallace-Reader’s Digest Funds** ([www.wallacefunds.org](http://www.wallacefunds.org)) have recently launched initiatives to strengthen professional development and support for school leaders. Go to their websites to learn more about each program and grantees.

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“Many [policy-makers] think that ‘leadership is something that just happens’ … and do not realize how their policy decisions affect the quality of leadership or how leadership relates to other educational reforms.”

TO LEARN MORE

Related EdSource publications
California’s School Principals: At the Center of School Improvement Efforts (3/98)
Strengthening Teacher Quality in California (4/99)

Research sources
Education Week special series on leadership. www.edweek.org
Leadership, a publication of the Association of California School Administrators. 916/444-3216; www.acsa.org/publications/Leadership
Phi Delta Kappan’s special features on educational leadership. See Vol. 82, No. 6 (February 2001) and No. 1 (September 2000). www.pdkintl.org/kappan/kappan.htm

Resources for administrators
Association of California School Administrators 916/444-3216; www.acsa.org
California School Leadership Academy 510/302-4261; www.csla.org
California Commission on Teacher Credentialing (CTC) 916/445-0184; www.ctc.ca.gov
National Association of Elementary School Principals 800/386-2377; www.naesp.org
National School Boards Association 703/838-6722; www.nsba.org
National Staff Development Council 513/523-6029; www.nsdc.org
Principals’ Center at Harvard University 617/495-1825; www.gse.harvard.edu/~principals/

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