



Elevating Educational Leadership Task Force Report

Marianne Yared McGuire, Chair

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Introduction/Summary

As a grade school student, I remember being told there was only one way to differentiate homonyms – those pesky words that sound alike but have different spellings and meanings. “You’ll simply have to memorize them,” teachers abruptly concluded. To help us with the memorization, our teachers did offer up little memory joggers or simple associations. And so it was with the words principal and principle. “You can easily remember the difference here,” said at least one teacher; “the principal of a school is your pal so that’s the one that ends in ‘p-a-l’.”

Of course that was at a time when principals were rarely in their offices. They could frequently be spotted cruising the halls, stopping in the classroom to observe our work, or visiting amiably with teachers, parents and other students. It always seemed like there was time for a principal to be somebody’s pal.

That is no longer the case in the real world of today’s schools, where principals must compete for shrinking public resources while coping with increased demands to elevate student achievement and follow a track of strict accountability. This is frequently done under the veiled specter or even overt threat of being replaced should MEAP test scores not meet certain expectations. In short, today’s principal has little time to be anybody’s pal.

When we convened the Task Force on Elevating Leadership in Schools we did so simultaneously with four other task forces all established by the State Board of Education. The goal of this task force was to decipher what it takes to make a good principal. At the same time, the Board had an ongoing goal of closing the academic achievement gap between wealthy and poor schools and students. So the task force had two primary goals: to identify what makes a good school leader, and what schools and their leaders can do to close the achievement gap.

We want this report to portray what it is that principals do. What do they wish they could do? What are their needs? What is standing in the way of achieving those needs? What guidance can be given to and gained from principals already in the field? What recommendations can be made to reach desired goals?

We also wanted to learn how schools identify common goals and then arrive at staff-wide commitments to achieve those goals. We didn’t want to simply produce another study, but wanted to produce a set of recommendations that will serve to guide the State Board of Education in their work to set policy and shape the direction of school improvement in Michigan. We wanted to know what might be blocking a school’s success and what we could offer to excise the blockage.

We found principals surprisingly willing to participate in the task force and eager to talk about their work. We found that while there is no sure definition of the job there are a number of basic tasks expected of principals. Typically, today's principal is under extreme pressure to:

- raise overall student achievement while giving particular attention to closing the achievement gap;
- be instructional design and delivery experts;
- be curriculum experts;
- be an expert on state standards and benchmarks;
- be consensus builders;
- be skilled at grant writing;
- be legal experts;
- be computer literate;
- be marketing and public relations experts;
- be deft and diplomatic at handling the media, parents, and the public;
- be security and safety experts;
- be administration and building managers;
- be special education experts;
- be ready to handle any emergency.

We soon realized we were studying a position that has evolved so significantly over the last 20 years that there is not even a set definition for it. Planning is difficult because the job is frequently reactive rather than proactive with the principal required to offer immediate response to much of what transpires in a typical day. Searching out a role model becomes a game of hide and seek because the job keeps evolving. Principals find themselves reinventing the position because structure and guidelines are so elusive.

We found that when a school does achieve a high level of success, it is usually with the help of strong leadership and in spite of these tremendous barriers. Identifying goals and reaching a level of intense cooperation between principal and staff is essential. But how does a staff and its principal achieve that capacity? It is that story we hope to convey in this report, along with recommendations that legislators and school boards can put in place to assist principals, staff and community. We hope to provide principals with some of the tools necessary to make their job easier and in the end to help students achieve their highest potential.

It might be a little extreme to say we found a way to put the "pal" back in principal but hopefully, with the report's recommendations in place, we will see a day in the near future when principals at least aren't so isolated by the overwhelming nature of the job.

Marianne Yared McGuire
Elevating Educational Leadership Task Force Chair

How this Report Was Prepared

The intent of this report is to draw upon the experiences of principals to outline as much as possible their roles and duties, and at the same time to lay out some guidelines for what it takes to provide outstanding leadership. We also wanted to provide a framework for what a school needs to do to raise the level of education of all children.

The task force drew on the resources of principals from across the state who represented urban, suburban, rural, charter, elementary, middle and secondary schools. Beginning with our first task force meeting in October 2001 we asked principals to tell us about their jobs. What was it they liked? What didn't they like? What might they do to change the structure and substance of the position? What did they think it took to elevate the position's stature so that principals can work to their optimum capacity? How does a principal get the whole staff working towards the same goals? And very importantly, how can a leader raise the educational performance levels of all students?

In addition to the participants, who gave so freely of their time and who are all listed in the addendum, special attention and gratitude needs to be extended to Dr. Barbara Markle, head of Michigan State University's Office for K-12 Outreach in the College of Education. The assistance she and her staff Marcia Leone and Chris Reimann gave were invaluable. Chris in particular deserves recognition for having captured the many voices that contributed to this task force and consolidated them as one voice for this report. Sonya Gunnings-Moton, special assistant to Dr. Carole Ames, Dean of MSU's College of Education, contributed greatly to our video.

A special thanks must be extended to our sub-committee who gave so freely of their time, ideas and research to compile the necessary information for this report: Marilee Bylsma, former principal of Detroit Public Schools' award-winning Gompers Elementary and current Director of DPS' Principals Academy; Yvonne Caamal-Canul, former principal and curriculum and assessment director for the Lansing School District and current Partner Educator with the Michigan Department of Education's Partnership for Success program; Dr. Philip Cusick, professor and chair of Education Administration, MSU College of Education; Dr. Phyliss Ross, also with Detroit Public Schools and principal of Davison Elementary, another award-winning school; Paul Smith, principal of Dearborn Public School's Fordson High School, and Dr. Mary Stephen, principal of Utica Community Schools' Malow Junior High School.

Everything to Everybody: The Roles and Responsibilities of Principals

Few who do not work directly in or with schools realize how complex the position of school leader has become over the last twenty years. One way to gauge this complexity is to try to

define the job. Ask ten people to define the role and the responsibilities of a school principal and you will get ten different answers. Many of these answers will share common elements, but each will emphasize particular characteristics that reveal the different priorities of the person you asked. Parents will say that the principal is responsible for their children being well-treated and safe at school; legislators, on the other hand, expect principals to raise student and school achievement scores. New teachers want principals to mentor them and help them establish their best practices; veteran teachers want principals to provide them with resources and help them grow as professionals. Community members expect principals to keep schools clean and orderly while collaborating with its institutions and businesses; central offices want principals to “keep the lid on,” preventing issues from becoming problems. The business community wants principals to focus on producing high quality workers and customer satisfaction. In other words, the multiple perspectives of distinct stakeholders give rise to conflicting priorities and demands.

Even those within the ranks of school principals – the state and national professional associations – have their own definitions of the principal's role. The Michigan Department of Education's Partnership for Success Program initiative has identified four critical attributes of effective school leadership. The Council of Chief State School Officers, through its Interstate School Leaders Licensure Consortium, has set out six standards for school leaders, describing the knowledge, dispositions and performances it expects of school administrators (1996). The National Association of Elementary School Principals (2001) publishes a manual that lists five fundamental prerequisites for successful school leadership. In other words, even those within the profession have different perspectives on the role and responsibilities of the principal.

Although different, many of these definitions share common elements. Principals are expected to provide vision and instructional leadership, on the one hand, and manage students, staff and community members on the other, all while maintaining a safe and orderly environment conducive to learning and high student achievement.

An Endangered Species

One common denominator in virtually every reform initiative is that the principal is the key to successful school improvement. Only the principal is in the position and has the opportunity to influence the many factors – instructional resources, school climate, community support – and people – students, teachers, parents, district staff, business and community leaders – that together determine the success of a school and its students.

Unfortunately, for many principals the responsibilities of instructional leadership have been eclipsed in recent years by the challenges of school management, especially the financial, safety and personnel issues that come with school-based decision making. Now, however, state and federal educational policies demand that instructional leadership be given high priority.

In particular, schools and principals are being pressed to close the achievement gap between student subgroups.

These new challenges remind us that the core purpose of the building principal is to be an instructional leader. Rooted in Public Act 25, the school improvement process, the federal “No Child Left Behind” legislation and “Michigan YES” initiatives is the expectation that the principal be the catalyst, the keystone, to make positive changes to a building’s educational environment. The principal must have and convey a compelling vision for how his or her school will accomplish its goals. The principal is also the “responsible party” when success is not reached. State law demands the removal of the principal before a state take-over of a school occurs.

In short, principals are being asked to do everything, now.

One result is that, around the state and across the nation, districts are reporting that the number of qualified candidates applying for school administrator openings has declined, even as the number of principals reaching retirement age is at an all-time high (NASSP, 2000). Not surprisingly, this decline in interested applicants can pose more problems for some districts than for others, particularly in urban and rural districts. However, it is important to recognize this decline not as a problem for some districts but as a symptom of a greater problem for all districts. In short, the application rate should be treated as the educational equivalent of the canary in the coal mine.

Research by Cusick (2002) and others has found that the prime source of principal candidates – teachers with five to seven years experience and a demonstrated interest in school leadership – increasingly view the role and responsibilities of the principal as too demanding and not sufficiently rewarding.

Management consumes principals’ time, attention

Principals today are too busy and are forced to cram too many things into too little time and space. Mary Stephen, a member of the task force and herself a principal, reported in her interviews with 25 of her peers that the problem is that “principals see themselves as carrying the burden of responsibility for everything that occurs within the school – and there are too many things going on in the school.” As one principal put it, “You’re a problem solver from the minute you walk in until the minute you leave. Everything is a problem.” As another said of his 13 years running a large school, “Two thousand kids, 200 staff, 120 of them teachers, I never knew what was going to happen when I walked in the door.”

When asked, principals will tell you that they took the job to help kids and to improve instruction, but that they find themselves burdened with increasing and often conflicting responsibilities. Among the conflict-generating elements cited most often are special education, school improvement, annual reports, accountability, core curriculum, student safety, gender and equity issues, mission statements, goals and outcomes, staff development, building level decision making, curriculum alignment, student achievement, MEAPs and other tests, and accreditation.

In his most recent research, Cusick points out that several of the duties of the principal – monitoring state and federal programs, attending to affirmative action, coordinating the curriculum with district and state goals, monitoring tests, and implementing technology – have come only recently. He notes that several of these duties have come as part of recent federal and state mandates.

Cusick sites a study by two Michigan then-superintendents, Wayne Peters and Diane Scheerhorn (1996), who added up 25 years of state efforts to improve Michigan schools and found 289 separate laws, mandates, executive orders and requirements put out by governors, legislators, attorney generals and the Michigan Department of Education. A few examples include the Common Goals of Michigan Education (1971), Michigan Life Role Competencies (1978), Individual goals and objectives (1979), The Blueprint for Action (1984), Standards of Quality (1985), Employability Skills and Student Portfolios (1987), Goals 2000 (1988), Public Act 25 (1990) which included core curriculum, annual reports and building accreditation, Curriculum Frameworks (1993), PA 335 and 339 (1993) which connected student outcomes to school accreditation, Proposal A (1994), Summary Accreditation Status and Inter-district choice (1995), Charter and Public School Academies (1995) and the Michigan Curriculum Frameworks (1996). In each case, the principal has been responsible for interpreting and implementing new policies for his or her building, even when they conflict with each other.

During the past five years, state policy makers have added to this list the Michigan Merit Award Program (1999), The Center for Educational Performance and Information and the Office of School Excellence, the Michigan Accountability Task Force (2000) and the recently passed “School Safety Act,” all of which have added to the responsibilities of school principals. Cusick found that principals cited special education as a particular problem. One principal told him, “There used to be three pages of rules about [special education]. Now there are 15.” In 2002 the new state accreditation program, Education Yes!, and the 670 page “No Child Left Behind” federal legislation add yet the newest layer of responsibilities for principals.

Cusick and others have identified three other factors that make the principal's role less appealing. The first is money: principals once made significantly more than teachers, but that gap has shrunk. Second, principals work longer hours and more days each year than teachers – princi-

pals point out that they make less per hour and less per day than the teachers in their building. Third, these longer hours come at the expense of family time. One principal told how his young daughter hid his shoes so that he could not go back to school for an evening function.

While district personnel offices see the decline in the application rate for school administrator openings as a problem, state policy makers need to see it not just as a problem but also as a symptom of a greater problem. If states are to achieve the ambitious goals they have set for schools and students, they need to help schools and districts redefine the role of the principal into something that is as rewarding as it is demanding.

Elevated School Leadership in the Context of Standards-Based Reform

The previous section bears out what a national task force (Institute for Educational Leadership, 2000) on principals concluded: that the principalship as it exists in most schools today – “a middle management position overloaded with responsibilities for basic building operations” – cannot meet the new expectations being laid out by state and federal reform initiatives. Principals must now be able to manage not only the ancillary functions of schools but also the much harder and more important core function of schools – that of teaching and learning.

Harvard's Richard Elmore points out that standards-based reforms mean that schools are being asked by policy makers to do things they are largely unequipped to do, and that school leaders are being asked to assume responsibilities that they are largely unequipped to assume (Elmore, 2000). Elmore argues that “standards-based reform represents a fundamental shift in the relationship between policy and institutional practice,” and warns that schools may respond to this reform the way they have to previous reform efforts, by trying “to bend the logic of the policy to the logic of how existing institutions function, making the policy unrecognizable upon its arrival in the classroom.”

Elmore concludes that if policy makers hope to have their reform efforts bear fruit, they must equip schools and their leaders with the right tools. The question is not about change – schools and principals have learned how to change in response to wave after wave of reform initiatives. Rather, the question is about improvement, and improving is something most schools and their principals do not know how to do. To be fair, notes Elmore, nobody else knows either. Standards-based reform sets goals to reach, but provides little guidance on how to reach them.

If it is to succeed, standards-based reform will require schools and districts to shift what they look for in principals from traits – can the person in the role organize things and get along with people – to proficiencies based on a core of technical knowledge about teaching, learning, curriculum, assessment, team building and other essential skills. While traits are important characteristics to consider in selecting school leaders, they are not sufficient to meet the new definition of a successful principal. In short, traits are no substitute for proficiency.

Proficiency represents a much more complex set of knowledge and skills because it requires an understanding of the new student performance standards, the curriculum and pedagogy necessary to achieve them, the assessment used to measure their attainment – and more. Principals need this knowledge and skill in order to guide teachers as they strive for goals across subject areas and grade levels.

What does elevated school leadership look like?

Standards-based reform asks something fundamentally different of schools and school leaders – to help all students learn at high levels. The hard truth is that, across the board, schools and school leaders largely lack the capacity to do this. They simply don't know how. This means that policy makers need to understand that, unless they help equip schools and their leaders with new knowledge and skills, the new policies and goals are no more likely to succeed than previous ones did.

What competencies do school leaders need? First and foremost, principals need competence in instructional leadership – a phrase worth examining closely. Principals need a strong background in instruction, including knowledge of the instructional goals for teachers and students, as well as an understanding of the range of teaching strategies available and appropriate by subject and grade level. They need to be familiar with assessments and how to use them to improve instruction. They also need skills in guiding instruction – that is, helping teachers and other staff members adjust their practices to reach and improve learning for all students. Ideally, principals will have deep knowledge in at least one subject area so that they know what it means to have it and can recognize subject mastery (or the lack of it) in others, even in different subject areas. The principals on this task force who have been recognized for dramatic student improvement in their schools have deep core knowledge of the standards, the curriculum, and of instruction. Instructional leadership is essential to closing the achievement gap between student subgroups. Principals need to be able to help teachers adapt curriculum and instructional practices to meet the needs of all students without lowering standards.

Second, effective principals need competence in organizational leadership. The management function that largely defines the principal's workload today is a necessary part of a principal's role, but it needs to be restructured. Principals simply cannot become instructional leaders unless school management becomes manageable. Moreover, principals need to know how to organize their school communities in ways that support the core function, including being able to recognize when and where the current organization distracts from or impedes improved teaching and learning, and find alternative organizational strategies that work. Principals need to be able to shift the traditional, autonomous culture schools (in which individual teachers decide their own instructional goals) toward a normative culture that puts the learning of all students first, with clear expectations for teachers and students about how that plays out every day in every classroom.

Third, principals need competence in community leadership. The position of principal has become the nexus between the school and the community it serves. Principals are the “public face” of their schools and need to keep the community informed and engaged in school progress. Principals must at once understand and respond to the unique strengths and needs of the families and community members in and around their schools in order to mobilize any and all community resources possible for the benefit of the students. Principals also set the tone and expectations of the school as a community with a special purpose: the preparation of all its students to participate as full and productive members of the larger community and society around them.

Many principals already have competency in one or more of these areas of leadership; the challenge facing local and state policy makers is how to help them develop their competence in the other areas, in helping all principals attain competence in all three areas of leadership. It is also important to note that these core competencies do not describe the whole spectrum of knowledge and skills that individual principals may have or need. They are, however, the set of competencies that all principals need if they are to be effective school leaders.

Task Force Policy Recommendations

The Task Force on Elevating Educational Leadership recommends three areas in which State Board action can improve the leadership our students and schools receive. These areas are complementary: progress in one area will benefit action in the others.

Recommendation #1: The State Board should recommend to the Legislature a new system of endorsement for school administrators. In order to do this, the Board should establish standards for effective school leadership that acknowledge the existence of core competencies that school leaders must have if their schools and students are to achieve excellence and that reflect the multiple roles of instructional leadership, operations management and community leadership. Included in this effort should be a new process for accrediting the university programs that prepare administrator candidates to ensure that such programs include sufficient opportunities for candidates to learn about the real issues that will confront them as principals and superintendents.

Currently Michigan is the only state that has no standards and does not license or certify its school administrators. Every student deserves the opportunity to attend a school in which the principal has the qualifications necessary to fulfill this essential role. By establishing these standards, the State Board will also provide superintendents with a valuable tool for assessing principal performance.

The issue of standards for the principal's position and for the preparation programs offered by universities was overwhelmingly favored by task force members. A minority position voiced by some of the charter school principals interviewed for this report appears in the appendix.

Recommendation #2: The State Board must acknowledge the complexity that has developed in the roles and responsibilities of the principal and help others to realize the tremendous change in the demands on school leadership that has transpired over the past 20 years. Legislators, local school boards and other policy makers in particular need to understand the "additive" effect of layer upon layer of education reform efforts over the years and resist the temptation and habit of continuing to add to the list of responsibilities principals have.

In the interest of establishing and implementing more effective educational policy, the State Board should create an advisory panel of seven to nine members, including active building principals and representatives from higher education, to monitor and review proposed changes in education policy and their potential implications for school administrators, as well as assist the State Board in establishing standards for school leadership. Such a panel could also recommend a new job description for school principals that acknowledges the need to balance the responsibilities of instructional leadership and operations management, as well as the human

toll that excessive responsibilities take on the people who fill these positions. Most important, such a description could set boundaries for a position that currently has none.

This recommendation echoes one made by the National Association of State Boards of Education in their task force report on school leadership (1999): “To ensure excellence among all principals, states need to provide a clear picture of an effective principal, contained in a set of standards, and require principals to be evaluated regularly according to the knowledge, skills, and dispositions defined in the standards.”

Recommendation #3: The State Board must make a commitment to securing an appropriate level of support for the professional development of principals in allocating funds from Title II of the federal “No Child Left Behind” legislation. Central to this professional development is the establishment of an effective mentoring program for new principals, particularly for those principals beginning work in low-performing schools. To this end, state-wide professional development opportunities such as Principal’s Academies that draw upon the resources of the state and national administrators associations and university expertise could create an on-going system of support for school leaders who otherwise have very limited access to knowledgeable others familiar with the type of issues they face on a daily basis.

The teacher quality movement has recognized the importance of induction and mentoring during the first years of teaching. The effectiveness of professional development for teachers will be severely compromised if their building principals lack similar opportunities to grow professionally.

Conclusion

Federal requirements to raise standards for all students and to close the achievement gap between student subgroups pose a challenge to every state. In its constitutional role as the general planning and coordinating body for all of Michigan’s public education, the Michigan State Board of Education can take the lead in helping schools and districts across the state make the most of their most valuable assets – the teachers and principals who work with students every day. The purpose of this report is to recommend actions that the State Board can take to maximize the effectiveness of the state’s school leaders – its principals.

These three recommendations – creating a system of administrator endorsement and preparatory program review based on established standards for effective school leadership, creating an advisory panel to the Board of Education to review potential changes to policies and legislation affecting schools and to help redefine the roles and responsibilities of the principals in their schools, and supporting high-quality professional development for administrators – will help equip Michigan’s schools and districts to meet the ambitious goals set for them by recent state and federal education policies. By adopting these recommendations, the State Board would

acknowledge the complex nature of the job as it has evolved over the past two decades and create new state-wide educational structures to help schools and districts respond to this complexity.

The task force considers these to be beginning steps in formulating a state-level response to decades' worth of evolution in the roles and responsibilities of the principal. Adopting these recommendations would send a positive message to current practitioners that Michigan's educational leadership cares about what they do and encourage new recruits to enter the challenging yet rewarding field of school leadership.

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Appendix A: Voices from the Field: the Genesis of the Report Recommendations

Part of the early work of the Task Force involved listening to and discussing the challenges and possibilities of elevating educational leadership with large and representative groups of principals, assistant principals, teachers, superintendents and assistant superintendents at three different meetings. These groups generated a host of observations and recommendations which have been organized and synthesized below.

These recommendations fall into four categories: raising general awareness of school leadership issues; facilitating the work of local districts in redefining the role of principals; supporting improvements in the professional development of school leaders; and establishing a system of administrator endorsement and preparatory program review.

Category 1: Raise Awareness of School Leadership Issues

- Raise awareness of the importance of the principal as instructional leader.
- Raise awareness among policymakers of the roles and responsibilities of the principal
- Address the critical shortage of building administrators.

As the Institute for Educational Leadership (2000) has stated, "There is no alternative. Communities around the country must 'reinvent the principalship' to enable principals to meet the challenges of the 21st century, and to guarantee the leaders for student learning that communities need to guide their schools and children to success." There are several steps the State Board can take to facilitate this essential work.

Category 2: Facilitate Redefinitions of Principalship Roles and Responsibilities

- Define the role of the principal. Create a generic job description that is understandable to various audiences and reflective of current demands.
- Help schools and districts redefine leadership responsibilities and create a balance among the instructional, organizational and community leadership aspects of the principal's work.

- Help schools and districts define the community leadership responsibilities of the principal.
- Define other stakeholder roles and responsibilities in school improvement: school boards, superintendents, teachers, parents, business and neighborhood community members.
- Increase the autonomy and authority principals have in staff selection.

As the Institute for Educational Leadership suggests, much change has to occur at the district level, but our state can play a pivotal role in their collective success by sponsoring the development of improvements in principal evaluation, establishing professional development networks, and – most of all – setting or adopting standards such as those of the Interstate School Leaders Licensure Consortium in reestablishing license and certification requirements for administrators in Michigan and strengthening preparation standards for accreditation of higher education programs.

Category 3: Support Professional Development in Education Leadership

- Hold state-wide, state sponsored Principal Leadership Academies.
- Hold a series of interactive policy symposia on elevating leadership.
- Develop a state-wide infrastructure to
 - Provide training for school administrators specifically geared to developing leadership skills and competencies that support instruction;
 - Provide in-service training for administrators in teacher evaluation particularly for high needs schools.
- Establish a state principal (leader) in residence, similar to the teacher in residence program.
- Establish a state school leadership recognition program.

Category 4: Policy Changes

- Establish state endorsement for school administrators and establish rigorous standards for pre-service training, including training in teacher evaluation.

- Invest in change: pursue appropriate state and federal funding to support professional development strategies in what principals are accountable for (job description); these strategies include principal mentors and leadership training.
- Review the language in the School Code pertaining to sanctions for dismissal of the building leader (Accreditation Section 1280) and language pertaining to the cap on the length of contracts for principals.
- Appoint a seven to nine member advisory panel composed of practitioners and representatives from higher education to research and evaluate policy proposals and issues, make recommendations and provide guidance to the Board around education policy issues.

Appendix B: Input from Charter School Principals

Charter school principals were interviewed to get their perspectives in connection with the task force. While there was widespread agreement among them on most of the issues facing principals today, most were opposed to reinstating an endorsement or certification of principals.

It should be remembered the state legislature eliminated certification for principals in 1995, shortly after it passed a bill creating charter schools in Michigan. It should also be noted that Michigan is the only state with no requirements to become a principal.

Certification normally carries the recognition that a candidate has completed a background of studies in school administration, building management, curriculum development and instructional leadership.

Charter school principals generally felt that no prior school leadership education need be required for taking on the role. As one charter school principal put it, "A person could bring a variety of talents to the job and limiting their background to education subject matter could prevent someone who is good for the job from taking it. A person's degree (in an area other than education) shouldn't disqualify them from taking the job."

One charter school principal with a background in business management found he is placing great reliance on his teachers. "I believe teachers have the knowledge to be successful in what they are doing at the school and should not only be consulted about things but should have their ideas considered when carrying out objectives," he said.

Another principal with a Master's degree in Administrative Supervision feels "that 90% of the job is common sense" but nevertheless believes that the courses she's taken in curriculum development, instructional leadership and teacher evaluation are invaluable.

At least one charter school principal thought it was very important to have a background in education and curriculum development because as she sees it, "being an instructional leader is paramount to being a principal."

Most of Michigan's charter schools are led by management companies who in turn hire the principals for the schools in their network. Some principals acknowledged that while they enjoy the autonomy of being able to hire and fire their own staffs, they nevertheless rely on their management companies for advice and other decision-making. One principal in fact, said she was in daily contact with her management company for advice. For the most part charter school principals did not express a need for advice on how to manage a school building, but they did stress the need for assistance in doing so.

In summary, while most charter school principals said a background in educational leadership should not be a requirement to be hired as a principal, they did recognize a need for having some understanding and increased knowledge of curriculum and instructional development. Those with no educational background acknowledged placing a reliance on their management companies and teaching staffs for expertise in those areas.

Charter school principals want more job-related information and appreciated whatever professional development their ISDs offered. Not all ISDs, however, offer leadership programs. As one principal said, "I recognize the need to be accountable and that the buck stops with the principal. We need to be better this week than we were last and we need to be in touch with the current needs of our students."

Appendix C: Principals in State and Federal Legislation

Principals in Michigan Law

Recognition of the central role of the principal in school improvement dates back at least to 1990, when the Michigan legislature enacted Public Act 25, Michigan's first school improvement legislation. PA 25 established the basis for a state-wide core curriculum, required schools and districts to devise school improvement plans and provide annual reports of student and school performance to parents and the community. It also established a new accreditation system for schools that held the principal accountable should a school fail to meet accreditation standards.

In 1995, the Michigan Legislature enacted Public Act 28, a series of revisions and amendments, one of which repealed those sections of the Michigan Revised School Code that pertained to school administrator certification. As a result, Michigan is the only state in the nation that does not license or certify its school principals, district superintendents and other school administrators, nor does it accredit the university programs that prepare them. Therefore, Michigan currently has no state standards for the preparation and qualifications of school principals. As a practice, however, almost all school districts have their own standards for administrator hiring.

Principals in Federal Law

Although it contains no specific language about the role of school administrators in school improvement, the 2001 No Child Left Behind Act requires districts receiving Title I funds to take "corrective action" by the end of the second full year after identification if schools are not making adequate yearly progress (AYP). The act specifies that at least one of a list of corrective actions must be taken; that list includes "replacing school staff considered relevant to the failure to make AYP, significantly decreasing management authority at the school level, and restructuring the school's internal organization." If schools continue to fail to reach AYP after one year of corrective action, school districts are required to institute alternative governance arrangements. This "restructuring" can include turning school operations over to the state department of education. It should be noted that AYP, as it pertains to No Child Left Behind, is yet to be defined.

At the same time, Title II of the Act provides significant funding for teacher and principal training and recruiting activities (more than \$110 million for Michigan in FY 02). States are required to use these funds to carry out one or more of several specified activities, including reforming teacher and principal licensure and certification, recruiting highly qualified teacher and principal candidates, and providing professional development to teachers and principals.