

# the FORUM

PUBLIC SCHOOL FORUM  
OF NORTH CAROLINA

*A Forum Position Paper summarizing the results of a Forum Study Group's examination of how to identify and prepare school leaders who can meet the challenges of the Twenty-First Century in the public schools of North Carolina and recommendations for making the current system stronger and more productive.*

## Better Identification and Preparation of School Leaders

### The Challenge

Concerns about improving the quality and quantity of effective school principals are not new to North Carolina. For over two decades policymakers have launched numerous initiatives aimed at building the capacity of school leaders in North Carolina. The initiatives, however, have not been sufficient to meet the demand for principals who can effectively create schools capable of giving all of the state's young people a twenty-first century education.

The cumulative effect of two trends now makes the identification and preparation of school leaders more critical than ever before. The first trend is the more rigorous demands placed on schools. Not only are the stringent requirements of the federal No Child Left Behind program forcing schools to meet student performance standards higher than any in the state's history, but calls for reshaping education to meet global standards far exceeding those in the United States will require a level of educational leadership more stringent than ever before.

The second trend is one that is impacting the workplace in occupations across the board – the impending exodus of “baby boomers” who are now at, or near, retirement age. Consider the demographics of school principals:

A 2007 School Leadership Supply and Demand Report prepared by UNC's Principals' Executive Program found that 995 principals, or nearly one-half of the state total had 25 or more years of educational experience and were either eligible for retirement or within a few years of eligibility.

To compound the baby boomer exodus issue, a growing number of assistant principals have not completed an approved Master's of School Administration (MSA) program before being employed in a leadership position. They, like lateral entry teachers who

have college degrees but not training in education, are granted provisional licenses and are expected to make up their preparation deficiencies while on the job. To illustrate the degree to which the state is increasingly reliant on school leaders lacking full preparation backgrounds, between the 1999-2000 school year and the 2000-2001 school year, the number of provisional licenses granted rose 600%, from 40 to 232.

North Carolina hires on average 285 principals a year. With more and more research finding a direct correlation between strong school leadership and the overall performance level of young people in a school, the Forum Study Group that examined this issue contends that the state must become proactive in support of new and more effective approaches to the identification and preparation of school leaders. The following report will address recommendations that hold the potential to address this critical issue.

### **Background for Forum Studies...**

Every-other-year the Forum Board of Directors devotes the better part of a school year to examining issues critical to education and framing recommendations that have the potential to strengthen schools across North Carolina. During what the Forum calls “Study Group” years, the Forum Board is converted into a study group similar to a Legislative Study Commission. The study group will, over six to eight months, examine issues about an educational topic, hear from experts within and outside of North Carolina and come to a consensus on recommendations. For the first time, during 2008-09, Forum members were divided into two study groups and examined two separate issues. One group focused on creating an educational governance framework that would bring clarity to our current system, which many consider dysfunctional. The other group focused on strategies to improve the quantity and quality of leaders for the state’s public schools.

Previous Forum Study Groups have led to major legislative and policy changes including the creation of the Teaching Fellows Program, the establishment of supplemental funds for low-wealth and small schools, the beginning of the state’s educational technology fund and much more.

What follows are recommendations coming out of the examination of better ways to identify and prepare school leaders in North Carolina. The Forum offers these recommendations to policymakers in the belief that they have the potential to improve education for young people across North Carolina.

### **Strengthening the Case for Investing in School Leadership...**

The landmark Supreme Court ruling in what is called the *Leandro* Case placed a heavy burden on North Carolina policymakers. Not only did the ruling find that the State (i.e., the Governor’s Office, the General Assembly and the State Board of Education) has the final responsibility to guarantee that all young people have an equal opportunity to obtain a sound basic education, it defined that responsibility in very specific terms:

*“ . . . first, that every classroom must be staffed with a competent, certified, well-trained teacher; second, that every school must be led by a well-trained competent principal; and third, that every school be provided . . . the resources necessary to support the effective instructional program . . . ”*

As pointed out earlier, with a growing number of school principals entering administration lacking adequate preparation for school leadership, it is difficult to argue that the state is meeting its responsibility to ensure that every school is being led by a well-trained principal. The previously cited 2007 School Leadership Supply and Demand Report found:

*“ . . . more than one-half (285 of the new assistant principal hires hold provisional licenses . . . Add to this group the number of educators who hold licenses in school administration but do not serve as school administrators (in 2002, 2,500 who were under retirement age and were employed either outside of education or as teachers), and the complexity of the school-administrator supply-and-demand issue is revealed: although there seems to be a sufficient number of qualified people to fill administrator vacancies in North Carolina’s schools, these qualified individuals are not applying for available jobs and the situation seems to be worsening over time”*

A major reason why fewer opt to enter school administration certainly has to be the increasing demands placed on the job. Two factors combine to place the principalship under more scrutiny and accountability than ever before. The first of those is the federal government’s No Child Left Behind accountability system. Under that system a growing number of the state’s schools now are facing, or are soon to face, the consequences of that system to and including possible school closures or a total reconstitution of the leadership and approaches used in schools not meeting the federal standards. In 2007-08, 101 of North Carolina’s schools were in the low performing category; 701 were labeled priority schools requiring dramatic improvement.

The second high-demand factor is an outgrowth of the Leandro ruling. The judge presiding over the continuing Leandro case identified a number of high schools in which he contended that “academic genocide” was taking place. Principals in those schools were required to undergo extensive training provided by the Principals Executive Program and the UNC-Chapel Hill Kenan-Flagler Business School. Additionally, the Department of Public Instruction works directly with those schools to develop greater leadership skills and capacity. More recently Judge Manning, the judge presiding over the Leandro case, has ordered the state to show what steps are being taken with an entire countywide school system that he has determined is dysfunctional.

As if these factors were not enough additional pressure on school leaders, the North Carolina State Board of Education recently adopted the “21<sup>st</sup> Century Every Student Ready” goals, goals that will ask more of schools than ever before.

## **An Antiquated System & Random Improvement Efforts**

While the demands and expectations placed on school leaders have changed dramatically, the process of preparing school leaders has not. Principals, for the most part, are self-selected. Someone wanting to enter a Master's in School Administration (MSA) program simply needs to enroll in a college or university offering MSA degree coursework. Few of these institutions require candidates to undergo screening programs aimed at assessing leadership potential.

Once enrolled, candidates for school leadership are required to complete so many college credits. It is a "book-based" approach (i.e., credit-based approach), with little meaningful field experience or coaching while learning on the job.

That is not to say that the state has not over time made attempts to bolster the preparation and capacity of school principals. However, such initiatives have a history of beginning with much promise only to come to abrupt endings. Notable examples include:

- **The establishment of the Principals' Executive Program (PEP).** Beginning in 1984 the State created the Principals' Executive Program, a program that subsequently became a model for similar programs across the country. PEP's original focus was on school principals and for years it offered a 26-day residential capacity building program for principals. As a result of the advent of statewide accountability programs, there was less support for a program that took principals away from their building for 26 days and PEP reinvented its approach and moved to an array of two or three day programs. While at one time PEP was a nationwide model, unless there is a change in legislative sentiment, its funding is scheduled to come to an end at the conclusion of this school year.
- **The creation of a principals' assessment center.** In the nineties the state invested heavily in a center designed to assess the leadership potential of aspiring school principals. While the center was well-regarded, it fell victim to budget cuts and was disbanded.
- **An attempt to create fewer, but stronger, MSA programs.** Also in the nineties the state initiated one of the most ambitious leadership initiatives undertaken in recent years. After examining the varying quality and output of MSA (Master of School Administration) programs across the state a decision was made to limit the number of programs and invest in the creation of up to seven larger, well-resourced, high-quality MSA programs. While well-intentioned, this initiative soon fell victim to politics. MSA programs that were closed when the state limited the number of such programs to seven, managed, one-by-one, to gain legislative dispensation to reopen their doors. Within the span of a few years, the number of MSA programs continued to grow until all had been restored. There are now seventeen programs in operation.

Even with this history of unsustainable initiatives, the state continues to take steps to strengthen school leadership. In 2007, for instance, the State Board of Education and the UNC General Administration convened an Ad Hoc Committee to assess a list of issues related to principal and assistant principals' preparation. The final committee report included twenty-two recommendations, including a call to create a statewide center to coordinate leadership training and establishment of regional leadership academies. Those recommendations have influenced actions taken by the State Board of Education and many of them are included in the Study Group recommendations that follow.

Also in 2007, the General Assembly enacted a bill directing the State Board to adopt new standards for school administration preparation programs. The bill further called for including practical, field-based experience as well as academic, theory-based coursework. The legislation requires all colleges and universities offering school administrator preparation programs to redesign their programs to meet the new standards and report to the State Board of Education by July, 2009.

Additionally, in 2006 the State Board of Education adopted its twenty-first century standards for school executives and piloted a new Executive Evaluation Instrument for school principals in 2007-08. That evaluation instrument is now being used statewide and is reinforcing the State Board's raised expectations for school leaders.

These recent steps are encouraging. If nothing else, it is clear that the realization that school leadership is a critical ingredient for school success remains strong.

However, as the Study Group delved into leadership development, examined initiatives underway elsewhere and heard from practitioners in the field, it became clear that North Carolina lacks a systematic, coherent, comprehensive system to identify and support effective school leadership.

### **What Can Be Learned From Others?**

In searching for comprehensive approaches that could provide leadership preparation models for North Carolina, the Study Group looked at leadership initiatives underway elsewhere, one in another country, one a new national program based in New York City and two in operation in North Carolina. Following is a summary of what the Study Group learned from the approaches of others.

#### **Singapore's Talent Identification & Development Program**

In 2007, the Forum and the Center for International Understanding co-sponsored the eighth international study trip in the Forum's International Studies Program. A delegation of twenty-nine North Carolinians spent ten days in Singapore learning about teacher and principal preparation. Following is a brief description of Singapore's educator succession model.

The following are the four guiding principles of Singapore's philosophy for educational leadership:

*Principle 1: Educational Leadership is anchored in values and purpose.*

*Principle 2: Educational Leadership inspires all towards a shared vision.*

*Principle 3: Educational Leadership is committed to growing people.*

*Principle 4: Educational Leadership leads and manages change.*

- Candidates wanting to be teachers are recruited from the academic upper one-third of high school graduation classes and go through a rigorous screening process that admits far fewer students than candidates.
- Those chosen as teacher candidates attend the National Institute of Education which is Singapore's only teacher preparation institute with an enrollment of over 5,000 students.
- Prospective teachers have their full tuition paid and are paid 60% of a beginning teacher's salary while they are studying to become a teacher. Once on the job, teachers are paid for twelve months and the beginning pay is higher than that of medical doctors starting out in their field.
- During the year, teachers are given time to spend the equivalent of 100 hours on staff development activities designed to sharpen their skills.
- High performing teachers who meet a variety of criteria can earn annual bonuses equal to as much as two months pay. Bonus funds come to the school in a block grant and teams of school managers award bonuses to teachers based on a variety of criteria.
- Throughout one's career as an educator in Singapore, an employee will annually be rated based on "leadership potential" and "intellectual capacity".

The Singapore professional journey to becoming a principal begins with the process of talent identification, and training begins with what they call "middle management"—curriculum specialists, grade or team leaders and departmental chairs in secondary schools. Candidates for middle management positions are identified based on their leadership potential ratings and then interviewed and screened by a committee of school leaders.

- If selected for a middle management position, the successful candidate undergoes leadership training tailored to the position he/she is assuming.
- Once on the job, middle managers become part of the leadership team within a school. Team members collectively make decisions on issues ranging from teacher evaluations, to bonus recipients, to promotions, to management of the education program in the school.
- Middle managers are ranked annually based on leadership potential and eventually comprise the pool from which assistant principals are chosen.
- If one is chosen to be a school principal, he/she will go through two years of state-provided training. One year will be residential at a leadership training institute; the second year will be spent interning at a school.
- Principals are transferred from one school to another every five or six years. As one moves up the educational management ladder, one's salary moves up accordingly. School principals generally earn six-figure salaries comparable to that of a medium or large school system superintendent in North Carolina.

## **Leadership Academy Approaches**

Few school systems in North Carolina have a required program of additional leadership training or a sequential systematic approach to building leadership skills of principals over time. The Study Committee reviewed several such programs from within and beyond North Carolina. They each have components that could be replicated in North Carolina as regional academies.

### The New York City Leadership Academy:

- Originally funded by grants; now totally public funding;
- Accountable principal preparation and support programs that are rigorous, relevant, and responsive;
- A focus on social justice that redistributes talented school leaders to hard-to-staff schools;
- Approach is problem-based and action learning;
- Admissions process includes application, references, group interview, individual interview and background check;
- Pre-requisites include five years of work experience, three years of experience teaching in grades K-12;
- Candidates are initially selected but are counseled out if it is determined they cannot run a school;
- Learning opportunities draw on comprehensive problem-solving scenarios and/or authentic, school-based challenges;
- Live workshops and on-line training are both utilized.
- Core Programs that include both Leadership Preparation for aspiring principals and on-the-job program (beginning June 2009) and Leadership support that includes coaching, support for new/experienced principals, and on-going professional development delivered on-site and on-line.

### I-SS Leadership Academy (Iredell-Statesville Schools)

I-SS is similar to the NYC Leadership Academy model and includes the following:

- Has succession plan from teachers as leaders to superintendents;
- Has identified key elements that impact working conditions and student learning;
- Has application- based model with seven hours of coaching and support for one hour of theory;
- Has developed coaching/training/support materials and evidences aligned to the NC School Executive Standards;
- Has an existing Leadership Academy structure;
- Has a developed succession planning process aligned to the NC School Executive Standards;
- Has four trainers of the NC School Executive Standards.

Triangle Leadership Academy: (Chapel Hill/Carrboro, Orange County, Durham County, Johnston County and Wake County; 2005- present)

- Originally supported by Wake Education Foundation staff and business-community affiliates in a private/public venture;
- Began in 1999 as Wake County Leadership Academy with collaboration between Wake Education Partnership and Wake County Public Schools;
- Uses The Seven Functions of Leadership: Instructional, Cultural, Human Resources, Managerial, Strategic, External Development, Micro political, (Adopted by NC State Board of Education as framework for principal and superintendent evaluation process);
- Uses NASSP Assessment Center for Assistant Principals;
- Belongs to National School Leaders Network;
- Succession Planning for...
  - Modules for teacher leaders, assistant principals, principal/central services, and senior leaders
  - 8,000 clients served with high retention rates
  - 1,100 hours of training

### **Common Denominators in Comprehensive Programs**

While the programs examined vary greatly in their scope, their longevity and their approaches, there were common denominators that increasingly emerged as central to comprehensive programs. Key among them were:

- **Talent Identification/Succession Planning.** All of the programs focus on identifying candidates for leadership and long-range planning to insure a steady pool of candidates for leadership positions.
- **Rigorous Screening of Candidates.** Unlike today's MSA programs where candidates essentially self-select to become leaders, comprehensive programs have a rigorous screening process and invest in promising candidates.
- **A Blend of Academic and Field Experience.** The programs examined do not rely only on a credit-acquisition approach; nor are they totally experienced based. Instead, they blend the two approaches.
- **Coaching Components.** Finally, these programs provide heavy coaching and mentoring support to leadership candidates.

In the recommendations that follow these common denominators will be evident. It should be noted that while the models examined were all in the educational sector, they closely resemble leadership talent identification and development models used by highly-regarded private sector corporations.

## Forum Study Group XIII Recommendations

After much deliberation the Study Group determined that it would make short-term and long-term recommendations. Following are brief summaries of each of the recommendations for strategies for improving the selection process for quality school leaders in North Carolina and for increasing the quantity of candidates.

### **Short Term Recommendations...**

#### **Recommendation One: The Principals' Executive Program...**

- should continue to receive funding from the General Assembly to permit it to provide professional development for principals and assistant principals while other models are being created;
- should execute a revitalization of its programs and develop sequential training that addresses the needs of twenty-first century school leaders;
- should enter into partnerships with regional leadership academies as they come on line.

#### **Recommendation Two: The NC Principal Fellows Program...**

- should be revised to include a rigorous selection process based on a proven talent identification model;
- should require, at a minimum, a pre-candidacy interview and, optimally, an assessment of candidates' leadership skills and intellectual capacity;
- should include the components of coaching, opportunities driven by comprehensive problem scenarios and/or authentic, school-based challenges;
- should be integrated into a regional leadership academy approach;
- should urge the Legislature to dramatically increase the number of scholarships awarded;
- should place candidates in high-risk schools for their internship.

#### **Recommendation Three: Regional Leadership Academies...**

- should be developed to provide a network of centers with field-based opportunities for alternative licensure and continuing support of school leader professional development;
- should provide opportunities for collaboration among school systems, higher education, and private funders as has been envisioned by the Z. Smith Reynolds Foundation, which is attempting to launch a public/private collaborative focused on training;
- should have shared/collaborative oversight/ownership between a statewide center and school systems.
- should have oversight by the North Carolina Education Cabinet under the leadership of the Governor with a School Leadership Governing Board that reports to the Cabinet;

**Recommendation Four: The Center for School Leadership Development ...**

- should be transferred to the North Carolina Education Cabinet, assuming the UNC General Administration holds to the position that the Center is not part of its core mission;
- should focus all of the entities in the center on the development of leadership succession planning.

**Recommendation Five: The State Board of Education...**

- should continue to support the adoption of the National Board for Professional Teaching Standards' Advanced Principal Certification as an incentive for principals to achieve higher professional development and additional remuneration;
- should urge the General Assembly to support the program financially when it becomes available for principal participation.

**Recommendation Six: LEARN NC, an on-line service for course work for teachers...**

- should be adapted to develop professional development programs for principals and assistant principals;
- should, along with the Principals' Executive Program and NC DPI, provide on-going cost effective training and preparation for the new teacher and executive evaluation processes.

**Long Term Recommendations...****Recommendation One: MSA (Master's of School Administration) programs ...**

- should require all candidates to undergo an assessment process which provides information on his/her areas of strengths and weaknesses as an aspiring principal or assistant principal;
- should advise candidates as to actions to take to help them make "professional journey corrections" as they prepare to be assistant principals and principals;
- should place candidates under proven school leaders for their internship;
- should counsel out candidates who, after appropriate assessment, do not appear to possess the skill sets and/or the intellectual capacity to become a twenty-first school leader.
- should include a coaching component during the year-long internship;
- should insure that the coach be someone other than the candidate's intern supervisor who has responsibility for the performance evaluation.

**Recommendation Two: Local Education Agencies...**

- should develop succession plans for all leadership positions;
- should seek ways to partner with other school systems, regional leadership academies, private, non-profits, and with Institutions of Higher Education in an effort to maximize limited personnel and financial resources.
- should be investigating ways to partner with LEARN NC to provide opportunities for aspiring school leaders to participate in online courses and other professional

development opportunities as well as continued training opportunities in the teacher and administrator evaluation process with an emphasis on evidences of developed skills.

**Recommendation Three: The North Carolina General Assembly...**

- should commission an independent entity to study the issues of pay for additional degrees for public school educators;
- should stipulate that the study be focused on the relationship of educator's degrees to effective performance and determine whether there is a direct correlation between advanced degrees and performance.

**Conclusion...**

The harsh reality is that North Carolina does not have an “institutionalized, coordinated statewide effort that addresses the recruitment of future school leaders, mentoring and coaching once in positions, sequential ongoing professional development leading to improved student performance as well as an alternative route to the principalship.” *Dr. Nancy Farmer, Interim Director of the Principals' Executive Program.* The state cannot continue to drift along making a few changes here and a few changes there. It must act boldly to meet the challenge of school leadership. While we must have a competent, caring teacher in every classroom, those teachers are unlikely to fulfill their mission if the school does not have a twenty-first century leader at its helm.

If the positions being vacated now by retirements and other factors are not filled with principals who have the capacity to be effective twenty-first century leaders, what then. Unless someone or some entity steps forward and accepts the prime responsibility for ensuring high quality school leadership, the state will see little change. The Forum's Study Group Committee on “Better Identification and Preparation of School Leaders” believes it has realistic recommendations, if only they are embraced.

The Forum believes that the challenges of preparing twenty-first century leaders for North Carolina's public schools are of such priority that they should be addressed in a bold and visionary way by our Governor and the North Carolina Education Cabinet. Under their leadership, issues related to concepts suggested in this report such as regional leadership academies, the continuation of a redesigned Principals' Executive Program, MSA programs that focus on twenty-first century leaders and a much needed, well developed succession plan for all school systems can be fully explored and designed for optimum results.

Making school leadership a high priority by Governor Perdue and the Education Cabinet would send the strongest of signals to all educators and the public that North Carolina's top education leaders will seize the opportunity to resolve the long-standing Achilles heel in our K-12 schools.

**Forum Study Group XIII**

**Committee Two**

**Better Identification and Preparation  
of School Leaders**

**Co-Chairs**

**Senator Bob Atwater, Brad Phillips, Shirley Prince**

**Staff Members**

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**Members**

**Mary Linda Andrews, Jim Barber, Representative Larry Bell, Robert Bridges,  
Larry Cartner, Herb Crenshaw, Ed Dunlap, Bill Harrison, Craig Hill, Terry Holliday,  
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Caroline McCullen, Bill McNeal, Willie McKoy, Michael Schmedlen, Larry Seigler,  
Carol Vandenberg, Jean Wright Veilleux, Representative Laura Wiley**

**Presenters**

**Alan Mabe, Vice President Academic Planning, UNC GA  
Ken Jenkins, Professor, Appalachian State University  
Cheryl Fuller, Office of Professional Development, NC DPI  
Jesse Dingle, Talent Management, NC DPI  
Raymond A. Giemza, Interactive Consulting Services, Inc.  
Pamela Ferner, Vice President, New York City Leadership Academy  
Melissa Thibault, Executive Director, LEARN NC  
Ross White, Associate Director, LEARN NC  
Joe Peel, Former Director, Triangle Leadership Academy**

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