OCPEA Educational Leadership Quality: A Policy Brief

Introduction

The educational challenge of the 21st century is to achieve higher levels of learning for all children. This theme has become the overarching issue on the nation's domestic policy agenda as evidenced by the bi-partisan passage of NCLB. The policy levers engaged to address this challenge include increased accountability through state developed testing systems, increased competition through parental choice, and increased investment in improving teacher quality. There remains, however, another important policy lever that has been overlooked: investment in school leadership quality and stability.

The purpose of this policy brief is to inform policymakers at all levels about how leadership quality can help us rise to meet the educational challenges of the 21st century. As policy makers work to support the improvement of student learning, they should be cognizant of how quality leadership impacts learning in our schools and the possibilities for further strengthening school leadership and the preparation of school leaders.

This policy brief provides information about three important questions:
* What do we know about the relationship between effective leadership, teacher quality, and student learning?
* What do we know about how to prepare quality leaders?
* What do we need to do to ensure further improvements in leadership preparation?

The answers to these questions will help us leverage the impact of quality leadership to improve schools for all children. We conclude this brief with some policy recommendations in the aforementioned three areas.

What do we know about the link between effective leadership, teacher quality, and student learning?

Much of the recent attention on increasing student achievement and decreasing the achievement gaps has focused on the critical relationship between effective teachers and student achievement. Indeed, Sanders and Horn (1998) asserted that the "single largest factor affecting academic growth of populations of students is differences in effectiveness of individual classroom teachers" (p.27). With the adoption of NCLB in 2001, all states were required to provide each student a highly qualified teacher, as well as to equalize teacher quality across schools (ECS, 2007). However, most states have failed to meet the teacher quality standards set forth by NCLB (Peske & Haycock, 2006), and there is little evidence that policies and programs focused on increasing the number and quality of teachers, such as teacher pay schemes, financial incentives, alternative certification, and mentoring and induction programs, have come to fruition (ECS, 2007; Peske & Haycock, 2006; Fuller & Brewer, 2005).

One overlooked aspect of increasing teacher quality is the role of the principal. Historically, principals have been viewed as managers rather than leaders. Contemporary views of school leadership, however, place the principal much closer to the heart of schooling process—teaching and learning (Zigarelli, 1996). Indeed, a number of researchers have found that school leadership has an important impact on schools and student achievement (see, for example, Heck & Hallinger, 1999; Leithwood, Louis, Anderson & Wahlstrom, 2004; Waters, Marzano & McNulty, 2003). Further, a recent report from the National Staff Development Council (Killion, 2004) claimed that "strengthening school leadership" is essential for meeting the challenges facing schools (p. 1).

While teachers have a direct impact on student achievement, principals typically have an indirect, albeit powerful, impact on student achievement. Based on the results of an analysis of research conducted between 1980 and 1995 on principals' effects on student achievement, Hallinger and Heck (1998) identified four "avenues of influence" (p. 171) through which principals influence both individuals in schools and the systems within which individuals work, thereby influencing student outcomes. Specifically, principals impact teacher and student performance through influencing the purposes and goals of the school, the school structure and social networks, the people, and the school culture. The two avenues through which principals most directly affect student achievement are (a) the creation of a school culture focused on learning and characterized by high expectations for all students and (b) recruiting and retaining high quality teachers. Indeed, as noted by Papa and his colleagues (Papa et al., 2003, p. 11), principals "have the potential to importantly shape the environment in which the students learn [as well as influence] the quality of the teaching work force." More specifically, principals can play a leading role in designing and supporting school social contexts that support teacher and student learning in ways that lead to improved student outcomes (Copland, 2003; Ervay, 2006; Hanushek, 1971; Miller & Rowan, 2006; Goldring & Rallis, 1993; Leithwood & Montgomery, 1982; Rosenblum, Louis & Rossmiller, 1994; Smylie & Hart, 1999).

There is wide consensus among researchers and policymakers that teachers are the single most powerful school factor affecting student achievement. A growing body of research has found that principals strongly influence teacher quality—and, therefore, student achievement- through recruiting and retaining high quality teachers (Fuller, Baker, &Young, 2007; Grissmer & Kirby,1987, 1997; Ingersoll, 2001; Levy, et al., 2006; Miller & Rowan, 2006; Papa, Lankford, & Wyckoff, 2002; Williby, 2004). In fact, Fuller, Baker, and Young (2007) found that Texas elementary schools in which principals decreased teacher turnover and increased teacher quality had positive impacts on gains in student achievement over time. A number of recent studies have found that principals strongly influence teacher turnover which has a significant impact on student achievement. For example, a series of studies by the Center for Teaching Quality using statewide surveys of teachers (see http://www.teachingquality.org/twc/whereweare.htm) have found that leadership and leadership behavior profoundly influence the retention of teachers at a school across all different types of local and state settings. Indeed, Berry and Fuller (2007) found that specific principal behaviors can double the likelihood of a teacher staying at a school after controlling for student characteristics and achievement.

Although there is a growing body of evidence on the positive relationship between school leadership, teacher quality, and student achievement, we need further investments in high quality research that examines these relationships in a multitude of contexts across a number of years. In particular, we need to focus more attention on these relationships at the elementary school level (Miller & Rowan, 2006). Further, because of the ever-changing social, economic, and political contexts that vary dramatically across local and state contexts, we need to invest in large scale and longitudinal studies that seek to identify the specific, observable, and measurable leadership characteristics that are associated with improvements in teacher quality and retention, and ultimately student achievement (Ballou & Podgursky, 1998; Hanushek, 1971; Miller & Rowan, 2006; Wayne & Young, 2003).

What do we know about how to prepare quality leaders?
There have been numerous efforts made at the national level to examine the preparation of educational administrators such as principals and superintendents of our schools. In 2005 the major organizations in the field [Division A of the American Educational Research Association (AERA), University Council of Educational Administration (UCEA), the National Council of Professors of Educational Administration (NCPEA), and the Teaching of Educational Administration Special Interest Group (TEA-SIG) of AERA] created the Joint Task Force on Educational Leadership Preparation. This task force continues to examine the calls to improve the preparation of school leaders. In the state of Ohio programs that prepare principals and superintendents go through a process of accreditation with the National Council for Accreditation of Teacher Education (NCATE).

"For the past two years, the National Policy Board for Educational Administration (NPBEA) Interstate School Leaders Licensure Consortium (ISLLC) Steering Committee has been working to revise the ISLLC Standards.   The new standards renamed the Educational Leadership Policy Standards: ISLLC 2008 As Adopted by the NPBEA were approved by the NPBEA Executive Board on December 12, 2007. As a part of the revised standards, a representative sample of research that supports each standard is included." Retrieved 1/19/09 from http://www.npbea.org/projects.php

Research has demonstrated that selected program characteristics are not only more effective for the preparation and development of educational leaders, but that they also yield better graduate outcomes (Jackson & Kelly, 2002; Davis, et al, 2005: USDoE, 2005). These program characteristics are delineated in Table 1. These program characteristics can be collapsed into several core programmatic pillars that directly facilitate effective leadership preparation: (a) clear focus on specific knowledge and skills linked to a set of values and beliefs, (b) effective selection strategies, and (c) adequate resources and staffing. Programs with such features yield better graduate outcomes- in what they learn and their career advancement, and, in turn, how they practice leadership and foster school improvement (Orr & Orphanos, 2007).

Table I. Features of High Quality Leadership Programs

Research Based Content	
that clearly focuses on instruction, change management, and organizational practice	
Coherent curriculum	
that links all aspects of the preparation experience around a set of shared values, beliefs, and knowledge about effective organizational practice.	
Rigorous selection process	
that gives priority to under-served groups, particularly racial/ethnic minorities	
Cohort Structures	
that foster collaboratively learning and support	
School-University collaborations	
that create a seamless and coherent program for students	
Field-based internships	
that allow individuals to apply their knowledge and skills while under the guidance of expert leaders	
Supportive organizational structures	
that support student retention, engagement and placement	
Systematic process for evaluating	
and improving programs and coursework	
Low student-faculty ratio	
and active, student-centered instruction	
Full-time tenure-track faculty members	
who make significant efforts to identify, develop, and promote relevant knowledge focused on the essential problems of schooling, leadership, and administrative practice	
Professional growth	
opportunities for faculty	

(Darling-Hammond, et al. 2007: Jackson & Kelly, 2002; Orr, 2007)

What do we know about engaging quality preparation programs in ongoing improvement efforts?

While a growing amount of attention has been directed to identifying research based innovations and best practice in university-based leadership preparation programs (Davis, et al, 2005; Jackson & Kelly, 2002; Orr, 2006; Southern Regional Educational Board [SREB], 2005; US Department of Education [USDoE], 2005), there is still much to be learned about improving the preparation of school leaders. To improve our knowledge in this area, leadership preparation programs need to improve their abilities to engage in high-quality, systematic, and longitudinal evaluations of their efforts and researchers need to focus more closely on the linkages between selection, preparation practices, leadership behaviors, and student achievement.

Leadership preparation programs across the country need to increase their capacity to gauge their impact, identify successes and areas for improvement, or determine how well they prepare aspiring educational leaders particularly underserved racial/ethnic groups and communities for productive careers and educational improvement. Specifically, programs need: (1) access to better evaluation models—measures, methodology and instruments—to evaluate the impact of their preparation on graduates' subsequent leadership work; (2) technical assistance in building their capacity to incorporate evaluation research and support continuous program improvement efforts; and (3) a database of evidence for benchmarking performance over time and within regional and institutional contexts. With more accessible evaluation resources and support, programs can make research-based program improvement, integrate evaluation practice into their work, and investigate benefits for all graduates and the school communities they will lead.

Researchers primarily need more funding and access to better data. Examining the relationships between and among program selection strategies, specific preparation program activities, placement as school leaders, leadership behaviors, and improved teacher and student outcomes across varying contexts and over multiple years requires significant amounts of funding. In addition, researchers have little access to quality data sets on principals. States and many school districts not only lack data on teachers and school leaders, but the ability to link these data to specific schools and the children they serve (Corcoran, 2007). Because of the insufficient funding and data, researchers are limited in their ability to delineate problems and appraise effectiveness of policy options.

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