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# Education Leadership:

An Agenda for  
School Improvement

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This and other resources on education leadership, arts participation and out-of-school time learning can be downloaded for free at [www.wallacefoundation.org](http://www.wallacefoundation.org).

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## INTRODUCTION

Last fall, some 500 educators, policymakers, researchers and others gathered in Washington, D.C., to discuss the importance of principals and what could be done to strengthen and assist them. This report documents that conference, *Education Leadership: An Agenda for School Improvement*, offering ideas for how to boost school leadership and glimpses of how it's being done around the country. Sponsored by The Wallace Foundation, the event gave attendees a chance to exchange information and hear first-hand from school superintendents, government officials and others on the cutting edge of education leadership reform. It also offered an opportunity to reflect on a milestone anniversary: Wallace's decade of commitment to the idea that we won't be able to improve schools until we get serious about improving leadership.

Wallace has carried out its work by employing an unusual, double-barreled approach to philanthropy. The foundation supports innovative projects; it also supports and disseminates rigorous research about those projects and other crucial issues so the field as a whole can learn and benefit. Numbers tell part of the story of how this has played out over the last 10 years: innovations tested in 26 states; publication of 70-plus reports; distribution of some \$282 million in grants. Wallace-supported projects have delved into everything from how to improve coordination of state-district leadership policy to how to ease time constraints so principals can focus on instruction, not administration. Wallace-supported research has begun to answer such vital questions as what obstacles impede progress to strong leadership and what can be done to remove these barriers.

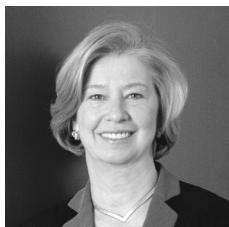
On the following pages, you'll find an exploration of the many factors that go into shaping better principals and that our work has sought to respond to. The report opens with a commentary, adapted from her keynote address, by Wallace Foundation President M. Christine DeVita, who describes four big lessons learned and suggests possible new directions for education reform. Next, Richard Colvin, a respected education journalist, chronicles the conference proceedings, reporting on conversations among speakers spanning the range of education policy and practice: superintendents like Joel Klein, of New York City, and Michelle Rhee, who appeared along with the mayor of her city, Washington, D.C.'s Adrian Fenty; state officials such as Delaware Governor Jack Markell; and national leaders including U.S. Secretary of Education Arne Duncan, whose conference comments close this report.

You'll also hear from people on the front lines, including a central figure in *The Principal Story*, a Wallace-funded documentary, aired over PBS last fall, that followed two principals facing the challenge of educating children with many needs and few opportunities. We think you'll agree that in her Q. and A. on p. 18, Kerry Purcell lends a human face to the tough – and oh, so important – job that Wallace has spent 10 years trying bolster, in hopes of a better education and brighter future for all of America's children. ■



# FOUR BIG LESSONS FROM A DECADE OF WORK<sup>1</sup>

By M. Christine DeVita, President, The Wallace Foundation



For the past decade, The Wallace Foundation has worked to improve public education by seeking ways to ensure that principals do well by the students entrusted to them.

This matter of “school leadership” was hardly a hot issue 10 years ago. Indeed, it was seen as a distraction, noticeably absent from most major school reform efforts. Even those who recognized leadership as important expressed uncertainties about it. Why and how did school leadership matter? What could be done to improve it? Could states, districts and schools work together to figure out new ways to recruit, select, prepare and retain principals? If so, how? The field was long on questions, but short on answers.

In response, Wallace gathered together a lot of smart people – from state and district offices, school buildings, universities, research organizations and elsewhere – to think, study, take risks and work hard with us. Through their efforts, we have found answers to many of the questions and challenges.

So, what have we accomplished?

And what have we learned?

To the first question: Leadership is now on the agenda. Federal officials increasingly accept that school improvement cannot succeed without effective school leadership. In fact, the word “principals” appears 24 times in the Federal Register notice of the Race to the Top education reform program.<sup>2</sup> More to the point, one of Race to the Top’s four aims is the development not only of great teachers but also great principals. Recognizing the connection between teaching and leadership, and the interdependence of the two, represents enormous progress.

State leaders, too, now see the importance of leadership. A recent survey by the Council of Chief State School Officers and the National Association of State Boards of Education found that most state superintendents and school board presidents across the country believe that school principals have important effects on student learning.<sup>3</sup> Moreover, a majority say the training and support of school principals is on their state’s education improvement agenda.

It’s one thing, however, to insert school leadership into the conversation, another to act on it. That leads to our second question, regarding what Wallace has learned in its decade of work on this issue. We believe there are four lessons that point the way to actions that can strengthen school leadership:

- State and district education leadership policies must work in harmony.
- District leaders need to support strong principal leadership.

- Top-notch principals are a must for school improvement.
- Better training results in better principals.

First, building an education leadership policy that coheres from states to districts to schools has important benefits. Such coordination has not been the norm, and indeed there is often tension between state and district leaders. But new research from the RAND Corporation tells a surprisingly positive story of what can happen with a break from past practice. For example: Where states and districts work in harmony on school leadership, the research found, principals on average report having significantly more authority than other principals on important instructional matters like establishing a curriculum and removing teachers.<sup>4</sup>

Second, district leadership makes a difference, especially in turning around low-performing schools. Only district leaders can direct additional resources to the highest-needs schools and create incentives to help attract and retain highly qualified staff. Only district leaders can reorganize the central office to better support principals in their learning improvement agenda. Only district leaders can provide principals with reliable assessments that help them focus on what matters most. And only district leaders can free up time for principals to concentrate on instruction. Take the example of a Louisville, Kentucky, program that assigns a “school administration manager,” what we affectionately call a SAM, to handle non-instructional tasks that would otherwise occupy the principal. An evaluation found that, on average, principals with SAMs are spending nearly five hours more per week on instruction than they did before.<sup>5</sup>

Third, research we’ve commissioned has concluded that there are virtually no documented cases of troubled schools being turned around without a powerful leader.<sup>6</sup> One reason is that a good principal is the single most important determinant of whether a school can attract and retain high-quality teachers. The principal is also uniquely positioned to ensure that excellent teaching spreads beyond isolated classrooms in his or her building. The bottom line is that investments in good principals are a particularly cost-effective way to improve teaching and learning.

Lastly, we’ve learned that training matters. A 2007 Stanford University study we commissioned identified the characteristics of exemplary training programs,<sup>7</sup> and earlier this year, an evaluation of the New York City Leadership Academy, which incorporates these characteristics, demonstrated how high-quality training can pay off. The evaluation found that compared to schools led by new principals who were not Academy graduates, elementary and middle schools led by recent Academy alumni made more significant gains in English-language arts and comparable gains in math after three years, even though the Academy principals’ schools were initially lower-performing than the others.<sup>8</sup> So, if we do a better job preparing our principals, they will do a better job for us in leading student improvement.

States, universities and school districts that can take advantage of their purchasing power can all help make these characteristics the rule rather than the exception. In the 16 states that Wallace works with most closely, more than 200 university-based leadership preparation programs either have been forced to improve or have shut down. At the same time, 24 new principal leadership programs started by our grantees have been ranked as high-quality. Some are district-run; others are operated in partnerships between districts and universities.

Our four lessons can teach states, districts, policymakers and practitioners measures to take to ensure widespread use of effective leadership practices. But there's a fifth consideration they need to keep in mind, too. Leadership is a crucial component of improving public education in this county, but it's not the only one.

This is especially important to acknowledge today as we stand at what feels like a turning point in the long history of public education in the United States. We now have a federal administration that has demonstrated a firm commitment – backed up for the first time ever with serious funding – to improving educational opportunities for all our children. Across the country, state and city and district leaders are rethinking their roles and working with each other more strategically and cohesively. And although we do not agree on every issue or how best to proceed on every aspect of reform, we do have broad consensus that reform is urgent and absolutely necessary.

Because of this confluence of events, we have an unprecedented opportunity to think differently about education: about how our schools are structured, about how they can connect with other community institutions, and about how we can surround children with learning and enrichment opportunities both during the traditional school day and throughout the year. We know that learning doesn't begin and end at the classroom door and that children spend the majority of their time outside school. For many, particularly those in the most distressed schools and neighborhoods, there are few options after the last bell rings. There is also little opportunity for them to participate in enriching learning programs during the summer months – not remediation but the kind of programs that other children take for granted and that can stave off the “summer learning loss” that contributes so heavily to the achievement gap between poorer and more affluent students.<sup>9</sup>

We see some hopeful signs. A number of cities, including Boston, Chicago, New York, Providence, and Washington, D.C., are finding new and innovative ways to connect schools with other community organizations to create more high quality out-of-school time options for children.

Ten years ago, few people were thinking about leadership, but look at the progress we have made. If we seize the opportunity we have today, perhaps 10 years from now we'll think about the education “system” as incorporating not only schools but also the many other resources that our communities have to offer our children.

Secretary of Education Arne Duncan and other leaders have talked about education as the civil rights issue of our time. In that spirit, I'd like to close with the words of Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. “Although social change cannot come overnight,” he said, “we must always work as though it were a possibility in the morning.”

So, let's roll up our sleeves and get to work. ■

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*M. Christine DeVita has been president since 1987 of The Wallace Foundation, a private charitable foundation created by Lila and DeWitt Wallace, the founders of Reader's Digest.*

## ENDNOTES

- <sup>1</sup> This paper is adapted from a speech DeVita delivered to Wallace's national conference, Education Leadership: An Agenda and Plan for School Improvement, in Washington, D.C., October 15, 2009.
- <sup>2</sup> Since the conference, the *Federal Register* has published Race to the Top's final rules, which include the comment that, "... research supports that effective teachers and principals are essential to improving student achievement." The words "principal" or "principals" appear more than 100 times: *Federal Register*, vol. 74, no. 221, November 18, 2009, p. 59697.
- <sup>3</sup> Unpublished survey for The Wallace Foundation.
- <sup>4</sup> Catherine H. Augustine, Gabriella Gonzalez, Gina Ikemoto et al., *Improving School Leadership: The Promise of Cohesive Leadership Systems*, RAND Corporation, December 2009, p. 83.
- <sup>5</sup> Brenda J. Turnbull, M. Bruce Haslam et al., *Evaluation of the School Administration Manager Project*, Policy Studies Associates, Inc., December 2009, p. 24.
- <sup>6</sup> Kenneth Leithwood, Karen Seashore Louis, Stephen Anderson and Kyla Wahlstrom, *How Leadership Influences Student Learning*, Center for Applied Research and Educational Improvement and Ontario Institute for Studies in Education, September 2004, p. 5.
- <sup>7</sup> Linda Darling-Hammond, Michelle LaPointe, Debra Meyerson, Margaret Orr, *Preparing School Leaders for a Changing World: Lessons from Exemplary Leadership Development Programs – Final Report*, Stanford and The Finance Project, April 2007.
- <sup>8</sup> Sean P. Corcoran, Amy Ellen Schwartz, Meryle Weinstein, *The New York City Aspiring Principals Program: A School-Level Evaluation*, New York University Institute for Education and Social Policy, August 2009.
- <sup>9</sup> Karl Alexander, Doris Entwisle and Linda Steffell Olson, "Lasting Consequences of the Summer Learning Gap," *American Sociological Review*, April, 2007.



# A 10-YEAR CLIMB: EDUCATION LEADERSHIP REACHES THE NATIONAL REFORM AGENDA

By Richard Lee Colvin, Director of the Hechinger Institute on Education and the Media and Editor of *The Hechinger Report*, Teachers College, Columbia University



Kerry Purcell, who for six years led the turnaround of a perennially low-achieving Springfield, Illinois, elementary school, says she became a principal because she wanted to change the world, one teacher at a time. “I believed I had the skill set to help teachers become better teachers so students could be more successful in the classroom and in life,” she tells a film interviewer.

Tresa Dunbar, in her second year as principal at a failing Chicago elementary school, says on camera that two-thirds of her teaching staff is not performing up to standards, and that it is her job to change that ratio. “We’re not doing enough to support you,” she tells a teacher who struggles to keep her students focused on a lesson. “You can do it...but we have to help you.”

A decade ago, teachers were in the spotlight – and rightly so, given that effective teaching influences student achievement more than any other aspect of schooling. But even though it is school leaders like Purcell and Dunbar who make it possible for teachers to do their best work, leadership was rarely mentioned by education reformers. Even less thought was given to what it would take to prepare principals for their roles or support them in their efforts.

Now, leaders are beginning to share the spotlight. In school district and state education offices around the country, improving school leadership is considered a must. And if dollars are any indication, the federal government, too, is recognizing the importance of leadership by making significant amounts of new Department of Education funding available to cultivate and support strong principals.

So it was fitting that Purcell and Dunbar – chief protagonists of the Wallace-supported documentary *The Principal Story* – were showcase speakers at The Wallace Foundation’s national conference on education leadership in Washington, D.C. Oct. 14 to Oct. 16, 2009. Purcell’s and Dunbar’s poignant and powerful tales of their daily lives as principals in challenging schools, recounted before an audience of some 500 federal, state, district and school officials from across the country, dramatized the core question of the conference: What can those at all levels of public education, from the White House and Congress to the school building, do to create the conditions under which well-trained principals can have the greatest impact?

The three-day gathering – called Education Leadership: An Agenda for School Improvement – was a culmination of sorts, an event marking the foundation’s decade-long effort to get policymakers and others to recognize the centrality of principals to school reform. It featured an address by U.S. Secretary of Education Arne Duncan in which he emphasized that leadership is high on the Obama administration’s list of school reforms. Delaware Gov. Jack A. Markell laid out an ambitious school leadership agenda for states. Well-known

school system superintendents, including New York City's Joel Klein and Washington, D.C.'s Michelle Rhee along with the District's mayor, Adrian Fenty, shared their views on performance, management and accountability. And a host of researchers, educators, principals, nonprofit leaders and others offered ideas, insights, impressions and innovations.

#### THE PRINCIPAL STORY PROJECT

*The Principal Story*, funded by Wallace and aired nationally last fall as part of PBS' acclaimed P.O.V. series, is a documentary about two principals who focus on improving teaching and learning in low-performing schools amid the competing demands of managing their staffs and engaging their students and communities. The *Chicago Tribune* gave the film four stars, calling it "excellent and emotionally compelling." The Principal Story Project, at [www.wallacefoundation.org/principal](http://www.wallacefoundation.org/principal), offers free videos and conversation guides based on the film to help principals, state and district officials, policymakers and others promote excellence in education.

Topics included effective instructional leadership, leadership transitions, the turnaround of failing schools, leadership preparation, and the promises and perils of principal empowerment.

The conference capitalized on the increasing recognition in recent years – backed up by research<sup>1</sup> – that leadership is second in importance only to teaching among school-related influences on student achievement. Leadership is particularly consequential at low-performing schools where,

often, discouragement drains away initiative and undermines teamwork. Such schools will not improve and student achievement will not rise without effective leaders who set ambitious performance targets and help their staffs meet them.

"The bottom line is that investments in good principals are a particularly cost-effective way to improve teaching and learning," Wallace Foundation President M. Christine DeVita said in her conference keynote address.

But the foundation's initiative also has demonstrated that, important as they are, principals alone cannot bring about broad, lasting changes in schooling. Even gifted and committed principals work within systems of policies, incentives, training and support that can either help or hinder their efforts. Improving schools and sustaining gains depend as much on providing principals with appropriate training, resources, goals, authority, academic standards, relevant data and incentives as it does on recruiting exemplary individuals. The purpose of the conference, DeVita said, was to present "a clear road map for the actions that states, districts and policy makers can take to spread these more effective practices."

#### FEDERAL RECOGNITION OF THE IMPORTANCE OF LEADERSHIP

The Obama administration's aggressive reform agenda, linked by the president to the nation's long-term economic health and backed by significant investments, makes this "an extraordinary time to be working in education in this country," DeVita said. The Department of Education has placed improved leadership among its top priorities, by, for example, weaving the development, reward, retention and equitable distribution of effective principals into requirements for states seeking funding from the \$4.35 billion Race to the Top program.

The administration's push to improve school leadership is an acknowledgement that better leadership is closely tied to better instruction, and that the federal government has neglected this area of school reform in the past. "We have dramatically under-invested in principal leadership," Duncan told the audience in his keynote address. "From a budget of tens of billions of dollars, we've put relative peanuts into principal leadership." The administration's school reform agenda depends in part on reversing that because, Duncan said, significant improvement will come about "only if we have great principals in our schools."

States competing for funding from Race to the Top are judged partly on what they've accomplished and partly on what they plan for the future, according to the program's director, Joanne Weiss. Only two states were selected for funding in the first round of awards, announced in March 2010; the second and final round will be awarded by September. Would-be winners, Weiss said, have to supply good answers to questions such as: What makes a principal effective? Are good principals being assigned to schools that need them most? What do principals tasked with turning around failing schools need to be able to do? Which principal preparation programs work best? During a panel discussion on Leadership, Innovation and Change, Weiss described Race to the Top as an "all fronts assault on the inertia that stalled so many of the education reforms that we've been engaged in over the last several years."

For New York City Schools Chancellor Klein, who also participated in the discussion, the emphasis on leadership was on the mark. "If you don't solve the school leadership problem, you cannot solve the teaching problem. The two are inextricably intertwined," he said. Weiss punctuated his comment: "In fact, the leadership problem comes first."

#### **HARMONIZING STATE AND SCHOOL DISTRICT WORK**

However welcome the new federal dollars may be, they are only part of what's needed to improve school leadership. State policies and practices are critical, too. After all, states set standards, create accountability systems, generate data about student performance and enforce education codes. And lest anyone think that a state's content and performance standards and accountability mechanisms do not influence classrooms, a researcher at a session on Making Leadership Work: A New Agenda for States and Districts had some news. State learning standards are "always on people's minds," said Michael Knapp, professor of educational leadership at the University of Washington.

But in overseeing regulations and policies that are often as thick as a dictionary and detailed as an insurance policy, states also can find themselves at odds with district leaders who abhor red tape and want as much freedom as possible. That makes it incumbent upon state officials to collaborate with districts and gain their trust, said RAND researcher Catherine Augustine, a behavioral scientist.

Augustine, who appeared at a panel on Help From the State: Policies and Strategies to Improve Schools, is lead author of RAND's *Improving School Leadership: The Promise of Cohesive Leadership Systems*<sup>2</sup>, a Wallace-supported report. She identified a number of ways in which states are bolstering school leadership including:

- spelling out what school leaders need to know and be able to do,
- making sure training programs prepare principals with the required knowledge and skills,
- rewriting licensure requirements, and
- mandating coaching or mentoring for new principals and ongoing professional development.

Where states and districts work in tandem on school leadership, the research found, principals on average report exercising greater authority than their counterparts elsewhere on important instructional matters including establishing a curriculum, selecting textbooks, and removing teachers. The research also suggests that principals working in the better coordinated jurisdictions

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*“States and districts can boost school leadership by providing principals with current, useful data and effective training in how to use it to identify weaknesses in teaching or learning.”*

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were more satisfied than other principals that they were spending sufficient time on staff development, engagement of teachers outside the classroom, motivation of staff and students and a range of other instructional matters.<sup>3</sup> Still, fully harmonizing state policies and practices on school leadership with those of the district and other players – creating a “cohesive leadership system,” to use Wallace’s term – can be difficult. Where it does

occur, a number of factors are often present including strong political support; stability of school boards and superintendents; and participation of groups beyond the state and district, such as professional associations and universities.

States and districts can boost school leadership as well by providing principals with current, useful data and effective training in how to use it to identify weaknesses in teaching or learning. Most principals have access to student achievement data, said Ann Duffy, policy director of the Georgia Leadership Institute for School Improvement, at a session on building better data systems. However, she said, to work most effectively, they need three less commonly offered types of information, too, namely data about: engagement of students and teachers, growth in learning and implementation of policies. “Data alone will not lead to better instruction or higher student achievement,” Duffy said, “but good information can help principals to make decisions about how to use their resources, plan professional development and improve their own practices.”

Principals also need standards against which to be held. But even that is not enough, said Delaware Gov. Markell, whose state was one of the two winners in the first round of Race to the Top awards. (The other was Tennessee.) “If you have good standards but you don’t have a good plan for identifying talent, for nurturing talent, for developing the talent or assessing the talent, then the standards themselves won’t do any good,” he argued, adding: “You’ve got all these different components and all these components have to be aligned.” One result of that view is that university-based principal preparation programs in Delaware are in sync

with the standards. Another crucial element of the state's leadership improvement effort has been the creation of the Delaware Performance Appraisal System. All education leaders in the state, including principals, are evaluated based on their goals, vision, and ability to create and reinforce a culture of learning. Student achievement data are factored into the performance assessment as well. Finally, Markell said during the panel on Making Leadership Work, the state recognizes the importance of giving teachers, too, ways to be leaders. That means making time for them to "work with their colleagues, with their principals, to talk about students, to talk about different approaches but also to take on leadership opportunities to prove what they can do," he said.

For the state, Markell concluded, "it's about having all of this fit together in some kind of coherent fashion."

### **STRENGTHENING PRINCIPAL PREPARATION**

Part of the puzzle is figuring out how to improve the quality of leadership preparation programs, which have been criticized in many quarters for accepting all comers, demanding little work, offering an out-of-date curriculum and relying largely on adjunct teachers to keep costs down.

Too often, leadership preparation is nothing like what Stanford University professor Linda Darling-Hammond described in a 2007 report that detailed characteristics of exemplary programs.<sup>4</sup> They included, as might be expected in university-level training, experienced professors and a coherent curriculum based on a set of professional standards. But the programs also offered:

- an emphasis on instructional leadership,
- opportunities to solve real-world leadership problems and receive feedback from peers and professors,
- support from peers as well as formal mentoring and advising by accomplished principals,
- internships that allow the principal candidates to do real work, and
- the recruitment of candidates from the ranks of the most accomplished teachers.

Successful preparation programs studied for the report also had built strong partnerships with local school districts. Such collaborations ensure that principals are being prepared to succeed in specific districts and regions. They serve, too, to increase in number and quality the opportunities for internships and to offer up real school problems as part of the candidates' course work. Equally important is that the collaborations make it more likely that newly-minted leaders will receive consistent support from a mentor and on-the-job professional development.

Finding programs with all these features is more difficult than it should be, and in the 16 states where Wallace has been most active, more than 200 preparation programs have been forced to overhaul their programs or shut down. Moreover, improving the programs can be knotty, as Louisiana has found in its work. There, the Board of Regents, Board of Elementary and Secondary Education, state education department and governor's office jointly created a blue-ribbon commission to examine teacher and principal preparation. As a result, the state embraced a set of standards for leadership and asked its universities to redesign their programs to meet them, according to Jeanne Burns, who co-directed Louisiana's commission on leadership.



Then, although some universities made an honest effort to reform their programs, others “just mapped the new standards onto their existing courses,” Burns said during a panel discussion on Raising the Bar: Setting a Culture of High Expectations. In some cases, new faculty hired to bring about changes “had to do battle with tenured faculty.” Key state leaders like the commissioner of higher education and state superintendent then met with university leaders to clearly detail their higher expectations for the redesigned programs.

Enforcing the standards brought to light just how weak some programs were: Of 15 public and private leadership programs required to submit redesigned programs for a state review led by national experts, only one was approved outright. Nine were told that approval was contingent upon their addressing a number of the experts’ concerns, while the remaining five were turned down for approval altogether, in large part because they had failed to form required strong partnerships with school districts that could make available solid leadership preparation activities, such as mentoring. Four of the five eventually submitted new proposals for

approval after working closely with school districts to come up with stronger program designs.

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*“Another change in the field is that principal preparation is no longer the province of universities alone.”*

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But more complications ensued as school districts began to balk at supplying the agreed-upon leadership activities, and collaborations between the districts and univer-

sities began to evaporate, Burns said. Louisiana officials have responded by stepping in to re-establish and assist the joint efforts. “The state has to create expectation for universities and districts responsible for preparing new leaders,” Burns said. “Now we expect leadership programs and partnering districts to continue to grow and improve.”

Kentucky took a different but equally difficult route. In that state, long-term teachers are required to earn a master’s degree in order to maintain their certification, and many fulfill that requirement by getting their master’s in leadership – even though they never plan to become a principal. That dynamic created a reliable source of income for the universities but gave them little incentive to make the programs more rigorous, for fear of driving away students.

Rather than try to force universities to improve their master’s degree programs in leadership, Kentucky decided to shut them down by the end of 2011. “We reached an agreement with the university heads and deans that resulted in the sun-setting of all master’s degree programs for teachers including principal preparation programs,” explained Phillip Rogers, executive director of the Kentucky Educational Standards Board. “We made it very clear that failure to redesign these programs would result in us no longer requiring a master’s degree for teachers.” Rogers, who attended a workshop on human capital management, said that universities feared losing the revenues from the master’s degree programs for teachers more than they wanted to protect their leadership programs. So, the master’s-level leadership programs are being eliminated and those who want to become principals in coming years will have to complete a more rigorous post-master’s program. Kentucky has used a grant from Wallace to create the new programs and to develop an assessment for credentialing and hiring principals. The master’s pro-

## CREATING THE NEXT GENERATION OF TOP-LEVEL LEADERS

Last fall, the Harvard Graduate School of Education announced its first new degree program in 74 years: a doctorate in education leadership, slated to begin this August with 25 students.

Offered tuition-free, the three-year, interdisciplinary program, which is supported by Wallace, seeks to prepare graduates for senior leadership roles in school districts, government agencies, nonprofit organizations and private enterprises. Students will spend their first year taking courses from Harvard's Kennedy School for public policy and the Harvard Business School as well as the school of education. In their second year, degree-seekers can sample classes from any of the three schools, while in their third year they will work in a school district, state agency or an education non-profit such as Teach for America.

"Our premise – and it's one that the leadership of the university shares – is that the preparation of the next generation of top level leaders in education is too important to be left to education schools alone," said Robert Schwartz, the Harvard School of Education's academic dean, during a panel discussion titled Looking Forward: Creating New 21st Century Leaders. One of the purposes of the program, therefore, is "to tap into" the expertise of professional schools across the university, he said.

grams for teachers, meanwhile, are being redesigned to provide teachers with skills and knowledge for closing student achievement gaps.

## NEWCOMERS IN THE LEADERSHIP PREPARATION ARENA

Another change in the field is that principal preparation is no longer the province of universities alone. Indeed, new non-university programs are "ending the monopoly of education schools on the production of teachers and leaders," Robert Schwartz, the academic dean of the Harvard Graduate School of Education, said during a panel discussion called Looking Forward: Creating New 21st Century Leaders. He added: "This is a positive thing." *[See box for a new approach at Harvard to preparing top-level education leaders.]*

One example is New Leaders for New Schools, a non-profit orga-

nization created by a group of socially minded and entrepreneurial graduate students intent upon training outstanding candidates to lead city schools. Founded in 2000, the private- and publically-funded program is highly selective. Those admitted attend an intensive four-week training institute in the summer and continue their studies as they complete a year-long residency with a mentor principal. They also receive weekly coaching and complete several research projects. New Leaders has trained some 640 candidates for leadership positions including about 20 percent of the principals in Washington, D.C. It provides services in 12 urban centers throughout the United States.

In addition, the organization collects student "outcomes" data from schools where its principals work. The idea is to "develop a much better sense, in a granular way, what it is that good principals do, and then use those insights to drive continuous improvement of our program and principals," said New Leaders chief executive officer and co-founder Jon Schnur, speaking at Growing Your Own, a panel on non-university-based programs. One lesson from the data so far is that successful principals establish a culture of high expectations that also is compassionate and supports teachers and students in their learning.

Joining the non-profits are about 20 school districts across the nation, from New York City to Fort Wayne, Indiana, that have established principal preparation programs. Typically,

## A NATIONAL MODEL FOR LEADERSHIP PREPARATION BY DISTRICT

Perhaps the best known of the school-district principal preparation programs is the NYC Leadership Academy, a non-profit created with Wallace and other private support as one of the central elements of Mayor Michael Bloomberg's and Chancellor Joel Klein's efforts to reform New York City schools. "We opened a leadership academy because we felt that we could no longer trust to the universities alone to prepare the quality of leadership we require in the 21st Century," said Eric Nadelstern, the city's chief schools officer, at a conference session on the pros and cons of principal empowerment.

The Academy has produced leaders for close to 15 percent of the city's 1,600-plus schools, and a recent evaluation offered hopeful findings about the program's work. The study compared test results from elementary and middle schools led by recent Academy alumni with those led by new principals who were not Academy graduates. The two sets of schools were demographically similar, although those overseen by Academy principals were initially lower performing than the non-Academy group and trending downward. In spite of this, Academy principals' schools after three years made significantly larger gains in English-language arts and comparable gains in math. (There were no significant differences at the high school level.)<sup>1</sup>

Since its launch in 2003, the Academy has also become a national model for leadership development, as evidenced by the high demand for the Academy's consulting work and the visits that some 1,000 education leaders from around the world have made to New York to learn more about the organization.

<sup>1</sup> Sean P. Corcoran, Amy Ellen Schwartz, Meryle Weinstein, *The New York City Aspiring Principals' Program: A School-Level Evaluation*, Institute for Education and Social Policy, New York University, 2009, pp. 3-4.

these programs combine intensive training with on-the-job residencies, mentoring and coaching, and their graduates are then planted in city schools. Alumni of the Superintendent's Academy for Building Leaders in Education, a two-year program set up in Atlanta in 1999, now occupy about a quarter of that city's principal posts. [See box on the NYC Leadership Academy.]

Still Joel Klein, who was instrumental in launching a principal training program in New York City that has become a national model, said he, for one, would benefit from more research on how to determine which candidates are most likely to succeed. "People always ask me, 'If I could have one skill as superintendent, what would it be?'" Klein said. "If I could be the best principal picker in the United States, that's the skill I would really like to master."

### THE DISTRICT ROLE IN ON-THE-JOB SUPPORT FOR PRINCIPALS

In addition to hiring the right candidates, superintendents need to provide principals already on the job with ongoing professional development and surround them with teams of experts, said Fort

Wayne Community Schools Superintendent Wendy Robinson, speaking at the Making Leadership Work panel. Because what's being demanded of principals is changing so rapidly – the use of data and the emphasis on instructional leadership, for example – long-term principals need a "support system" as much as neophytes do, albeit one tailored to their experience, skills and knowledge. "You almost have to look at a 30-year veteran principal the same way you do a first-year principal," Robinson said.

Beverly Hall came to the Atlanta Public Schools in 1999 with the goal of making that school system a model for cities nationally. Back then, the graduation rate was below 40 percent, only 60 percent of eighth graders met performance standards for reading and about a third were

proficient in math. At the same time, many principals were on the verge of retirement and saw their jobs as “making sure the buildings were clean and everything was quiet,” according to Sharon Davis Williams, one of the district’s executive directors of K-to-8 school reform, who participated in a discussion on Setting a Culture of High Expectations.

Under the leadership of Hall – who was named 2009 National Superintendent of the Year by the American Association of School Administrators – the district began to provide principals with training customized to their experience and the type of school they were leading. The idea was to shape principals who could be “human capital managers” adept at recognizing, developing, evaluating and rewarding teachers, Williams said. Principals today are expected to “support the high flyers” among their teachers, providing them with feedback, pushing them to continue improving and giving them opportunities for professional development.

But principals also have to be able to help their weakest teachers improve and, if all else fails, remove them. To assist principals in doing so, the district provides assistance from an evaluation specialist, support from human resources, and legal advice. “We coach principals to exit low performers when necessary and we support them,” Williams said. “We also help the

principals develop the skills and talents they need to work with the middle and high performers.”

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*“But principals also have to be able to help their weakest teachers improve and, if all else fails, remove them.”*

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Sometimes, districts show their support for principals by easing bureaucratic restraints on them. In 2006, New York City launched “empowerment schools” where

principals agree to be held to higher performance standards in return for more control of everything from budgets to staffing and scheduling. The chancellor provides the principals with expertise and networks in which they learn from one another, but also sees to it that they face fewer central office demands.

For his part, Jerry Weast, superintendent of Montgomery County schools, in Maryland, set about the task of reform by organizing his district around a common goal: that by 2014 at least 80 percent of the district’s graduates would be ready to enter college without needing to take remedial classes. To reach that goal, county school officials had to face the facts uncovered by an analysis of the district, including that the effectiveness of principals and teachers varied from school to school. “We found out that our evaluation structure was wrong, we found out that our employment structure was wrong, we found out that our curriculum was a mile wide and an inch deep and couldn’t be accomplished,” Weast said during the Making Leadership Work discussion. “We found a whole lot of things about our processes that weren’t aligned to this outcome of getting kids college-ready.”

To combat inequities, Weast redirected resources and gave schools serving large numbers of poor children more money and staff. He also tripled spending on professional development for principals to help them become better instructional leaders and spent heavily on teacher training. But rather than dictating what schools did, he tried to foster innovation and build

the commitment of teachers and principals to reaching the goal. The strategies seem to be paying off. Performance on the district's early literacy assessments are nearly the same for white and African-American students. The district also tracks its progress using performance in algebra in middle school and Advanced Placement exams in high schools. The rate at which black students take and pass AP tests has doubled and is higher than the success rate for white students nationally. Although disparities remain, achievement gaps have narrowed considerably by most measures.<sup>5</sup>

In the most successful school districts everyone from teachers to the superintendent are committed to a goal such as the one set in Montgomery County and take collective responsibility for achieving it, according to research by University of Minnesota professor Karen Seashore, who discussed her findings during the Raising the Bar panel. Educators in such districts tend to set higher standards for themselves, more professional development is made available, teachers trust principals and are given leadership roles, and parents are more involved. Unfortunately, Seashore said, these conditions are less likely to exist in large city or large suburban districts.

#### **WILL, COURAGE AND THE MAYOR'S BACKING**

When they undertake serious change, superintendents should brace themselves for turbulence, a number of conference speakers said. Robinson, of Fort Wayne, told the audience that she had long ago accepted that her work might make her unpopular in some quarters and that asking questions tough enough to make people uncomfortable was an essential part of her job. "I want people to know that I really don't want to see your room decorations," she said. "I want to see, 'Do your kids even know what standards you're teaching them today?'"

Weast urged conference-goers to accept the unpleasantness, beseeching them to summon "the will and the courage" to make change. "You are going to make people angry when you do this differentiated funding and you put resources where you need to put them, because as people, we really feel we get cheated if 'we don't get more than them,'" Weast said.

Superintendents need political cover as well. In some urban school districts, that comes from mayors, who increasingly in recent years have won the power to oversee public education in their cities. Their ranks include Richard Daley, who persuaded the Illinois state legislature to give him control of the Chicago Public Schools, and Bloomberg, who is responsible for New York City's schools.

Another is Washington, D.C.'s Adrian Fenty, who appeared with his schools chancellor, Michelle Rhee, at one of the conference highlights: a conversation between the two, moderated by John Merrow, education correspondent for the PBS NewsHour. The discussion showed why mayoral backing can be so critical to school reform, and the panel title was on point: Can D.C.'s Mayor and Schools Chancellor Turn Around the City's Schools?

Fenty became mayor in 2006, appointing Rhee schools chancellor the following year. It was a surprise choice, not least because before accepting the job Rhee told the mayor to expect firestorms if she held the post: the measures she considered essential to transform public education in Washington would upset many, she explained. Fenty was undeterred, in large part,



because of repeated, urgent calls he had heard from constituents during his mayoral campaign to repair a system so broken that the vast majority of its schools were under federal notice to improve. “She asked me, ‘How much was I willing to risk to fix the schools,’ and I said ‘risk everything,’” Fenty recalled.

True to her word, Rhee has generated a lot of controversy. She has closed low-performing and under-enrolled schools and gained the power to ax certain non-union employees at will. She also engaged in a tough, two-year contract battle with the Washington Teachers’ Union to shake up the teaching force. The result, announced in April 2010, was a tentative pact that *The Washington Post* hailed as an “extraordinary agreement” providing “important tools to reward teachers who do well and hold accountable those who don’t.”

Rhee has taken a similarly hard line about principals, with whom, she said, she has a straightforward agreement. “They know what the expectation is, they know what the goal is, and they know that if they don’t meet that goal there’s a high likelihood that they won’t return,” she said.

#### **THE PRINCIPAL AS INSTRUCTIONAL LEADER**

Her bottom-line conversations with principals demonstrate that, as strong a leader as she is, Rhee knows she cannot achieve what she wants to without first-rate principals. And research suggests that principals, in turn, cannot succeed without accepting that they must depend on their staffs. In schools that he studied, the most successful principals developed team-oriented cultures “where everyone was expected to do their part as members of one or more teams working together toward the same goals,” said University of Washington professor Bradley Portin, who helped lead a study on effective leadership.<sup>6</sup>

It’s up to the principal to establish a strong, achievement-oriented school culture and clear expectations, and he or she must endorse a specific “learning improvement agenda” for the school, the report says. But teacher-leaders should be involved in crafting that agenda, communicating it to other teachers and making it a reality in their classrooms. In addition, strong principals form and work with instructional teams comprising teachers and others, such as assistant principals who focus on instruction, assessment coordinators and subject matter specialists. The principal, through the instructional team, should also encourage teachers to talk and think about targets for student achievement, attendance, behavior and other important dimensions of schooling – as well as appropriate measurements to assess progress in these areas.

Deborah Lantaigne is a Springfield, Massachusetts, principal who told the conference that she formed both a literacy team and a numeracy team with teacher representatives from each grade. “The role of the principal is complex,” she said during a panel on The Principal as Leader of Leaders, noting that she had had to work hard to make sure her teams understood “the big picture” of state and district accountability policies and achievement data. Ted Husted, principal of a Bronx elementary school, said it can take as long as two years to plant seeds for meaningful change within a school, and that in his case, he used much of that time for teacher training. Asked during a session on principal empowerment how principals could handle teachers who refuse to improve, he conceded there were few easy answers. As

the leader of an “empowerment school” in New York, Husted has more autonomy than many principals in personnel matters, but he said, “I still have a union contract to deal with.”

In their appearance at the conference, both Dunbar and Purcell, the central figures of *The Principal Story*, talked about what could be done to assist principals in their difficult job. Dunbar emphasized the importance of strong mentors and called for schools of education to become as rigorous as schools of medicine or law. Purcell asked that district officials view the central office as a service- not a compliance center. She also made a plea that state officials keep the demand for high performance in perspective and consider the humanity of the children sitting in those classrooms. “Kids are much more than a test score,” she told the conference audience.

Her comment served as a reminder that the whole point of improving leadership is to help children by creating schools in which they can thrive. Husted captured this in recalling an exchange with one of his second graders. “You’re the boss of everybody in the whole building?” the boy asked. Yes, Husted answered. “But who’s your boss?” the student pressed.

“I said, ‘you are,’” the leader of P.S. 85 replied. ■

#### ENDNOTES

- <sup>1</sup> Kenneth Leithwood, Karen Seashore Louis, Stephen Anderson and Kyla Wahlstrom, *Review of Research: How Leadership Influences Student Learning*, Center for Applied Research and Educational Improvement, Ontario Institute for Studies in Education, The Wallace Foundation, 2004.
- <sup>2</sup> Catherine H. Augustine, Gabriella Gonzalez, Gina Ikemoto et al., *Improving School Leadership: The Promise of Cohesive Leadership Systems*, RAND Corporation, 2009.
- <sup>3</sup> Ibid., 83-86.
- <sup>4</sup> Linda Darling-Hammond, Michelle LaPointe, Debra Meyerson, Margaret Terry Orr, *Preparing School Leaders for a Changing World: Lessons from Exemplary Leadership Programs*, Stanford University, The Finance Project, 2007.
- <sup>5</sup> Daniel de Vise, “Over 10 Years Montgomery’s Weast Aced Tough Tests,” *The Washington Post*, July 28, 2009.
- <sup>6</sup> Bradley S. Portin, Michael S. Knapp, et. al., *Leadership for Learning Improvement in Urban Schools*, Center for the Study of Teaching and Policy, University of Washington, 2009.

## BEHIND THE SCENES WITH A *PRINCIPAL STORY* PROTAGONIST



*Kerry Purcell is former principal of a Springfield, Illinois, elementary school. She is also one of two school leaders whose experiences over the course of a year in high-poverty schools were chronicled in The Principal Story, a Wallace-funded documentary aired nationally on PBS stations in fall 2009. Now a senior consultant at Focus on Results, an education-improvement consultancy, Purcell recently answered questions about the film and school leadership. Below are some edited highlights.*

### **WHAT DID THE FILM LEAVE OUT?**

Ideally, “instructional leadership” occupies half a principal’s day, but time constraints prevented the film from fully capturing all this entails: developing, executing and participating in professional development; reallocating resources to enhance teaching; hiring and evaluating staff; making data-based decisions, for example.

### **WHO HELPED YOU AS PRINCIPAL?**

Two people especially helped me see beyond clouded emotions so I could make sound decisions. One was a principal-trainee who relieved me of lunchroom and other tasks that would have kept me from instructional duties. She also happened to be a great sounding-board. The other was another elementary school principal. Together we formed a two-person professional learning community. Once, for example, I had to figure out what to do about a tenured teacher whose lesson-planning and behavior-management skills were so poor that her students – kindergartners – were suffering badly. My colleague gave me the encouragement, guidance and courage I needed to handle this difficult problem and, ultimately, remove the teacher from the classroom.

### **WHAT KEY MESSAGE SHOULD VIEWERS TAKE FROM THE FILM?**

The goal of education is not simply to teach a child but to reach a child.

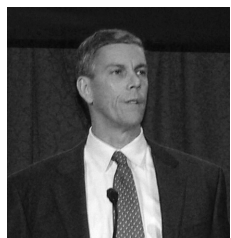
### **WHAT ADVICE WOULD YOU GIVE ASPIRING PRINCIPALS?**

Here’s my top 10 list:

- Lead with your head and your heart.
- Shape a culture of learning through establishing routines that foster a sense of safety.
- Build relationships. People don’t care what you know until they know you care.
- Get in classrooms.
- Find a mentor or coach, and meet with that person regularly.
- Use data to advocate for your school.
- Set high expectations for yourself, your staff, students and families, and the community.
- Develop goals and make a plan, but don’t overfill your plate.
- Open the door and communicate. Remember you set the tone for the building.
- You can’t be good to others unless you’re good to yourself. Airlines tell you to put on your own oxygen mask before helping your neighbor. That’s a great life lesson. ■

## “IF OUR 95,000 SCHOOLS EACH HAD A GREAT PRINCIPAL, THIS THING WOULD TAKE CARE OF ITSELF”

Comments of U.S. Secretary of Education Arne Duncan  
to The Wallace Foundation's National Conference on Education Leadership  
October 14, 2009<sup>1</sup>



This is an extraordinary time to work in education in this country. Everyone here knows the challenges. Everyone here knows we have to get dramatically better. Everyone here knows we have an overwhelming dropout rate of 30 percent, 1.5 million kids every year going out into the streets. Those students leaving school: they're not all going early to the NBA; Bill Gates isn't recruiting them early for Microsoft. Those kids from Chicago, Detroit and LA and New York who are leaving 9th and 10th grade: they are basically condemned to poverty and social failure.

So, there's a huge sense of urgency. You can say we have an economic crisis in the country. I would argue that we have an education crisis as well. Rahm Emanuel, the president's chief of staff, has this great line, "Never waste good crises." So, we have a pretty good crisis in front of us. Crises are often times of huge opportunity, and it's often frankly when times are tough that you get the kind of fundamental breakthroughs you need. And sometimes those fundamental breakthroughs are actually harder when things are a little bit better.

So, the question for us as a country is: Can we use this moment of crisis and make it an opportunity? We know the challenges. We know the hardships. We know the difficulties. But we also know what's possible.

I've been lucky enough to travel the country to see what's working and what's not. And I can tell you, I am so optimistic. I've never seen so many high performing schools. So many great teachers. So many great principals. We know what works. We know what's possible. And for every school that has a 65 percent dropout rate, there's another school in a similar neighborhood with a 95 percent graduation rate, and 95 percent of those students who graduate are going on to college.

I've always said the good ideas are never going to come from Washington. The good ideas are always going to come from great principals and great teachers at the local level doing the good work. What we have a chance to do is to invest in what works and to take it to scale.

We have \$100 billion in new money for education. Money alone is never going to solve our problems, but money does help a little bit. And, what we have that the [U.S.] Department [of Education] has never had before is discretionary resources. I talked to [Former U.S. Secretary of Education Rod] Paige; he had about \$17 million in discretionary resources. We have north of \$10 billion.

Think about that: \$17 million to \$10 billion. Four *billion* in the Race to the Top fund. Three-point-five *billion* in school improvement grants to really turn around schools. (I'll talk more

about that.) Money for technology grants. Money for the teacher incentive fund. Opportunity after opportunity. Investment innovation funds: \$650 million.

What we want to do is find those states, find those school districts, find those schools, find those non-profits that every single day are beating the odds ... and invest and take those things to scale. If it's working in 2 classrooms, let's take it to 10. If it's working in 2 schools let's take it to 10. If it's working in 2 school districts, let's take it to 10. If it's working in 5 states, then let's go to 15. And that's the opportunity we have.

A couple of things that are really, really important to us:

- We have to raise the bar dramatically. Our standards as a country are far too low and I've argued that in many states we are actually lying to children. When the state standards have been dummed down so much that meeting that standard doesn't mean much, I think we do those children and those communities a great disservice. Now, I frankly come from one of those states – Illinois – where students who were “meeting that state's standard” are absolutely inadequately prepared to go to a competitive university and graduate. They are barely prepared to graduate from high school. So we have to raise the bar.
- We have to do a much better job and be much more transparent about tracking our students' success and tracking their data over time. How much are students gaining each year? I'm a big believer in looking at growth and gain rather than absolute test scores. I think that levels the playing field. I want to know which teachers are helping the students grow the most. And I want to know which schools of education are producing the teachers that are producing the students that are learning the most and really to be very, very transparent around that.
- In education ... great talent matters tremendously. And how do we get great principals and great teachers into our toughest communities? There have been many disincentives to get the best and brightest where we need them most. We need to start trying to figure out a way to make that the capstone of folks' career, to go into those communities – the inner city urban world, wherever it might be – where the students and communities that have to have the best and brightest to be successful will have that chance. As a country we've talked so much about the achievement gap. I'm much more focused on what I call the opportunity gap. If we can close the opportunity gap, I think the achievement gap will take care of itself.
- And then finally, we want to really challenge the status quo where schools aren't working. I put schools in a couple of categories. The top 10 percent of our schools are probably among the best 10 percent in the world. Phenomenal schools. We should be learning from them, replicating those and sharing best practices. There are a set of schools in the middle that are improving each year, aren't at that level yet. But we need to keep supporting those teachers and supporting those principals to get better. [Then] ... if we just took the bottom 1 percent ... the bottom 1,000 schools each year ... and fundamentally challenged the status quo – stopped tinkering around the edges, stopped just playing with it, stopped looking for incremental change, but did some-



thing dramatically different – then we could transform the opportunity structure for children and for communities that have been underserved for a long, long time.

We have about 2,000 high schools in the country (it's not that big a number) ... that produce half of our nation's dropouts. Those 2,000 high schools produce 75 percent of our dropouts from the minority community – our African-American and Latino young boys and girls. That's just unacceptable. As a country we haven't been open and honest about that. We have to be willing to challenge the status quo and do some things very differently where things aren't working for children.

And I'm convinced if we can do all of those things well – raise the bar dramatically; have good assessments behind that; think very, very differently about clarity and transparency around data – if we can get great teachers and great principals working where we need them,

and think about turning around struggling schools, we have a chance to dramatically improve the country.

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*“The dividing line in our country today between the haves and the have-nots is less around race and class than it is around educational opportunity.”*

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The president has drawn a line in the sand. The president has said that by the year 2020, we need to have the highest percent of college graduates in the world. We used to have that. Go back a couple of decades. We have flat-lined, we have

stagnated, and other countries have passed us by. I think we have paid a huge economic cost in that, and I do think that this is the civil rights issue of our generation – that we have to give our children a chance to chase the American dream, and the only way we do that is by giving them a good quality education.

I'm convinced that the dividing line in our country today between the haves and the have-nots is less around race and class than it is around educational opportunity. Children can be very poor and from very tough communities, but if they have a chance to go to great schools, guess what? They're going to do just fine. And if they don't have that opportunity, there's nothing out there for them. So the stakes have never been higher.

All those things work only if we have great principals in our schools ... What Wallace has done for the past nine years is shine a spotlight – an increasingly, actually a larger and larger spotlight – on leadership. And, as everyone here knows, there are no good schools in our country without a great principal. It isn't just a cliché. It just doesn't exist. And, I've found, throughout my time in Chicago, quite the opposite: that you can have a great principal that can build a school slowly for 8, 10, 12 years, and without the right succession plan that school can be a disaster in 6 months. It is much easier to tear this work down than it is to build it up.

And if at the end of the day, our 95,000 schools each had a great principal, this thing would take care of itself. Great principals attract great talent. They nurture that great talent and

they develop that great talent. Bad principals are the reverse: bad principals don't attract good talent, they run off good talent. They don't find ways to improve those that are trying to get better. They don't engage the community.

Our principals today, I think, are absolutely CEOs. They have to manage people. They have to be first and foremost instructional leaders. They have to manage multi-million dollar budgets. They have to manage facilities. They have to work with the community. The demands and the stresses on principals have never been greater. ...

I'm really challenging ourselves just as much as challenging everyone else around the country. I think in many of these areas the Department of Education, frankly, has been a piece of the problem. We have dramatically under-invested in principal leadership. From a budget of tens of billions of dollars, we've put relative peanuts into principal leadership.

So as we go forward with our next budget submission, we want to find a way to really bring more resources to what we think is so hugely important. We want to think about the entire pipeline: how we identify the next generation of great leaders to come into education to become principals; how we also think about not just that early pipeline, but how we make the capstone of a principal's career going to a tough community.

In many places your best principals end up in your wealthiest communities with the most privileged students. Not that those jobs are easy; those jobs are very, very challenging. But we need the best talent on the front lines.

So how do we think about, as a country, how do we get 1,000 warrior-principals every single year to go into communities that for 10 and 20 and 30 years the dropout rate has been 60 percent, in elementary schools where students are falling further and further behind. How do you get that next generation of great principals to say: "The last 5, the last 8, the last 10 years of my career, I'm going to devote my life to turning around this school and turn around this opportunity structure for this community."

So, if we can do those things well, if we can really challenge the status quo, I think we can fundamentally break through.

We want to be part of the solution. We want to change our behavior ... If we can get this piece right, we'll change our student's lives forever. If we don't get this piece right, we can do all of the other big picture things that we want, but if it's not happening in real schools, in real classrooms, we're kidding ourselves. Great principals make it happen, make it a reality day to day.

... And if we can put [principals] in a position to be successful, then we're part of the solution. If not, we're part of the problem. ■

## ENDNOTES

<sup>1</sup> These comments are a lightly-edited transcription of Duncan's talk. A few of his remarks have been omitted for space or clarity; these cuts are indicated with an ellipsis. A video of the Duncan's presentation speech is available at Wallace's web site.

## OTHER RESOURCES

Download the following publications about education leadership and learn other reports and upcoming research free of charge at The Wallace Foundation's website: [www.wallacefoundation.org](http://www.wallacefoundation.org):

*Assessing the Effectiveness of School Leaders: New Directions and New Processes*, The Wallace Foundation, 2009

*Becoming a Leader: Preparing Principals for Today's Schools*, The Wallace Foundation, 2009

*Education Leadership: A Bridge to School Reform*, The Wallace Foundation, 2009

*How Leadership Influences Student Learning*, Center for Applied Research and Educational Improvement and Ontario Institute for Studied in Education, 2004

*How Leaders Invest Staffing Resources for Learning Improvement*, Center for the Study of Teaching and Policy, University of Washington, 2009

*Improving School Leadership: The Promise of Cohesive Leadership Systems*, RAND Corporation, 2009

*Leadership for Learning Improvement in Urban Schools*, Center for the Study of Teaching and Policy, University of Washington, 2009

*Preparing School Leaders for a Changing World: Lessons From Exemplary Leadership Development Programs – Final Report*, Stanford and The Finance Project, April 2007

*Research Findings to Support Effective Educational Policymaking: Evidence and Action Steps for State, District and Local Policymakers*, The Wallace Foundation, 2009

You might also want to visit THE PRINCIPAL STORY Project, which pairs a critically-acclaimed PBS documentary about school principals with specially-prepared materials to promote excellence in education leadership.

**View video highlights of the education leadership conference at The Wallace Foundation website.**



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