

# Strategies

FOR SCHOOL SYSTEM LEADERS ON DISTRICT-LEVEL CHANGE

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## The School Leadership Challenge

A growing number of school districts, foundations, and national organizations are zeroing in, perhaps as never before, on this key question: What implications do recent developments in public education—such as the standards-and-accountability movement; site-based, shared decision making; and many others—have for school leadership? The simple answer seems to be that the job of principals in particular, and school leadership in general, has become far more complex than at any time in our history.

The operational demands that school principals always faced—school safety, keeping the buses running on schedule, contending with mounds of paperwork, disciplining students, mediating adult interrelationships, and handling central office requests and requirements, etc.—have not gone away. But consider what is new or changing:

■ **Instructional leadership.** If principals have, to varying degrees, always been instructional leaders, that role has reached a new height of demand and complexity since standards and accountability have become the watchwords in public education. The principal is expected to lead in the design of a curriculum

that meets the learning needs of all students and is aligned with state and local standards, to know what constitutes good instructional practice, and to coach and otherwise guide teachers in the continual improvement of their educational knowledge and practice.

■ **Distributed leadership and shared decision making.** Paradoxically, distributed leadership and decision sharing make the principal's job both more manageable and more complex. When principals engage parents and teachers in the decision-making process, they are employing a strategy for both arriving at better decisions and building ownership for those decisions. This approach, however, is not only time consuming; it requires high-level leadership skills.

■ **Increased public scrutiny in a high-stakes environment.** Increasingly, accountability has become the mantra of a skeptical public. Politicians and citizens are requiring that schools, as the recipients of taxpayer dollars, be accountable for results. This has often translated into state accountability policies centered on high-stakes standardized tests. In many places test scores are published in local newspapers, and low or declining test performance can have multiple negative consequences—affecting real estate values, threatening school autonomy in the case of district or state intervention, and triggering sanctions against teachers and students. To deal with the pressure of such a high-stakes environment, a principal must have skills in the areas of pub-

lic engagement, interpreting and managing data, and political savvy.

■ **Federal, state, judicial, and union requirements.** From Title I to state and federal special education regulations to court-ordered desegregation requirements to teachers union grievances, the policy context that today's school leaders must operate in can be a labyrinth of requirements, procedures, and red tape.

■ **Parent and community involvement and partnership management.** Principals are expected to take the lead in developing school-level policies and practices that will increase the involvement of parents and other citizens in support of student learning and school improvement. Further, principals are expected to develop partnerships and alliances with local businesses, community agencies, and other groups for a range of purposes, including the expansion of human and financial resources available to the school,

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access to health and human services children may need, and others. This, too, involves learning new skills.

2 ■ **Leading complex change.** All of the above combine to suggest a new level of complexity that school leadership now requires, but there's more. Principals must, above all, become expert at leading change, take the reins in developing the organizational capacity and structure needed to support good teaching and learning in all classrooms, be skilled at dealing with resistance to change, build consensus among diverse stakeholder groups, and establish, communicate, and implement shared vision and strategic direction.

Building the capacity of principals to meet these challenges has enormous implications for district-level leaders in terms of the system's role in school leadership development. Consider also the following:

■ Half the superintendents surveyed in a 1998 study by the National Association of Elementary School Principals and the National Association of Secondary School Principals reported shortages of qualified candidates for principal vacancies.

■ According to a report from the Institute for Educational Leadership ("Leadership for Student Learning: Reinventing the Principalship," October 2000), the average age of principals has been steadily rising in recent years, while their age at retirement is falling.

■ The U.S. Labor Department predicts that the need for new school administrators will increase during the next five years by 10 to 20 percent.

No matter how you slice it, school leadership development is something that most district-level leaders will soon be grappling with, if it is not already a prime concern.

This issue of *Strategies* features three school systems that are aggressively addressing these challenges:

■ Chicago Public Schools, where the Chicago Principals and Administrators Association is playing a unique leadership role in tackling the school leadership development challenge;

■ Hamilton County Public Schools in Chattanooga, Tennessee, which has worked with national experts to launch a leadership development center; and

■ Plainfield Public Schools in New Jersey, a small district that is not only supporting school leadership development programmatically but has also reorganized the central office to focus support on school leaders in their increasingly complex work.

The leadership development activities in these districts share several common features:

■ **Differentiated program offerings for school leaders at different stages of development.** For example, the Chicago Principals and Administrators Association has developed one program for teachers who seek to move up into administrative positions, another program for new principals, and a third program for veteran school leaders.

■ **Contextualized learning and on-the-job support.** Program content is tailored to the specific local context, and school leaders are mentored by more experienced peers.

■ **External connections.** The success of the leadership development efforts cannot be separated from important relationships that have been established with universities, consultants, and national organizations.

■ **System changes.** Districts can make the job of school leadership more feasible through system-level changes. For example, Plainfield's curriculum and instruction office, which had operated as a bureaucratic overseer of programmatic requirements, was reorganized into technical assistance teams, actively supporting school leaders in the implementation of key reforms. ◀

—Scott Thompson, Editor

## About the PANASONIC FOUNDATION

The Panasonic Foundation was established in 1984 by the Matsushita Electric Corporation of America. It provides direct technical assistance in long-term partnership with a select number of school districts to help bring about systemic, school-based, whole-school reform.

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The mission of the American Association of School Administrators, the organization of school system leaders, is to support and assist these and other education leaders to achieve the highest quality education for all learners through personal, professional, organizational, and leadership development and advocacy for public education.

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# Chicago, IL:

## Faced with a Crisis, a Union Steps Forward

Chief Executive Officer: Paul Vallas  
District Size: 431,750 students,  
591 schools

### Abstract

Chicago Public Schools, the third-largest district in the country, has become a lightning rod for both praise and criticism over the last decade for its aggressive initiatives designed to reverse what most agree had been a failing system. As a result of two major legislative reforms—one in 1988 and another in 1995—decision-making authority has shifted from the central office to the schools and then partially back to the central office again. Each school, and by extension the principals and teachers in those schools, is now held strictly accountable for improved student achievement, with tangible consequences for failure. A mass exodus of principals has accompanied the reforms. In the last decade, in part because of the power vested in local school councils to fire the principal, 93 percent of the district's principals have either been required or volunteered to leave their jobs. In addition, 60 percent of the current principals are within four to eight years of retirement.

Worried about where the next generation of leaders will come from and how they will be prepared for the multiplying complexities of the job, the Chicago Principals and Administrators Association (CPAA) has stepped into the breach and

established an impressive array of professional development programs. The role is unusual for a union, and it is attracting national attention for its progressive nature.

### The Chicago Context

In 1988, after 8 to 10 years of teacher job actions and a growing outcry from parents, community and business leaders, and the media about poor student performance, the state legislature passed a Chicago school reform act that completely transformed how schools and the district would be governed. The major components of the 1988 measure were the following:

■ **Local school councils.** The law created local school councils (LSCs) at each district school, consisting of six parent representatives, two community representatives, two teachers, the principal, and, at high schools, a student representative. The LSCs were given authority to hire and fire principals, a task formerly controlled by the board of education; authority to approve the local school improvement plan; and authority to approve the local school budget.

■ **Principal renewals and tenure.** The reform measure took away principals' tenure and required them all to reapply for their jobs. Within the first two years of their creation, each of the LSCs reviewed its principal's contract for performance according to criteria established by the board, including a scoring rubric. As a result of that review, nearly 30 percent of the district's principals lost their jobs or chose not to reapply.

■ **New roles for principals.** The measure gave principals four significant new roles: (1) authority to hire all staff, a responsibility previously controlled by the district board; (2)

control over programs and curriculum; (3) direct supervision of their custodial staff; and (4) budgeting authority over discretionary funds.

Although principals now served under the scrutiny of their LSCs, Albert Bertani, senior executive director of leadership development programs offered by the CPAA, says the changes essentially gave the principals the authority to run their own schools. They could choose their own teaching staff without seeking permission from the central office. They could hold a late-night meeting without asking permission from their district supervisory engineers. And they could make budgetary decisions, with the approval of the LSC, over a large pot of state and federal funds that follow the students. In elementary schools, the sum typically amounted to \$500,000; at the high school level it averaged \$800,000 but could go as high as \$1.5 million in high-poverty areas.

The 1988 law was a revolutionary experiment in decentralization and was most radical in empowering LSCs to hire and terminate principals. To date, few, if any, other school districts give such authority to schools. But results in Chicago were mixed. The law emphasized governance issues rather than teaching and learning. As student performance remained low in Chicago, the legislature went back to the drawing board in 1995 and altered the 1988 reform with the specific aim of improving instruction and learning. The main components of the 1995 reform were the following:

■ **Mayoral-appointed board.** The 15-member board of education, which previously had been jointly appointed by a commission and the mayor,

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was replaced by the mayoral-appointed, 5-member Chicago Reform Board of Trustees.

#### ■ **Corporate management structure.**

The mayor's budget chief, Paul Vallas, was appointed chief executive officer of the district, replacing the superintendent. Vallas generally brought to his central office administrators with financial and operations backgrounds rather than education backgrounds, with titles that matched the corporate model. The number of district departments was reduced from 10 to 4, and those directing the departments became chiefs and deputies, rather than assistant superintendents and directors.

#### ■ **New level of accountability.**

The board and the CEO were given authority to intervene in nonperforming schools, and they exercised that authority almost immediately, intervening in 109 schools before the end of the year. Nonperforming schools are those in which less than 15 percent (recently increased to less than 20 percent) of students score at or above national norms on certain standardized tests. These schools are required to draw up a new school improvement plan, and they receive outside support from a probation manager in the areas of school leadership, professional development and training, developing quality instructional programs, and improving parent and community involvement in the school. The probation managers come from the district's Office of Accountability and external partners, including university professors and personnel from local corporations. In the worst case, schools can be shut down and reconstituted, meaning the principal is replaced and all other school staff must leave unless they successfully reapply. Seven high schools were reconstituted after the 1996–97 school year. The board and the CEO were also authorized to remove princi-

pals in persistently low-performing schools, which represents a partial reversal of the '88 reform that invested such power in the LSCs alone.

The '88 and '95 reforms significantly changed principals' responsibilities, increasing the complexity of the job. Now principals had to answer not only to the LSCs, but also to the central administration.

### **The Chicago Principals and Administrators Association**

When Beverly Tunney assumed the reins of the CPAA in 1993, it was in deep trouble. It had a \$225,000 legal bill from its losing battle to restore principal tenure following the '88 reform and had only 268 members in a system with almost 600 schools.



**By 1995, more than 83 percent of the district's principals had three years or less of experience.**

At about the same time, the state of Illinois initiated an early retirement program, which provided incentives for many Chicago principals to retire early. About 50 percent of the principals took early retirement. This, along with the nonrenewals by LSCs, greatly depleted the district's administrative ranks. By 1995, more than 83 percent of the district's principals had three years or less of experience.

Tunney faced two immediate tasks: to rebuild the association's membership and to provide principals with the training they would need to cope effectively with the new demands of their jobs. "There was a need, an incredible need, and the association grew out of that need," she says.

The CPAA surveyed its membership to determine how it could best serve them. Principals overwhelmingly called for support in their development as school leaders. At the same time, Tunney recruited

new members by showing that the association could deliver—both in terms of high-quality leadership development programs and negotiated salary increases for school and district administrators. Within a few years, the membership had mushroomed to 1,800.

To begin the leadership development agenda, Tunney hired Kent Peterson from the University of Wisconsin–Madison to study principal development programs around the country and to recommend a promising model to Chicago. In 1994, the California School Leadership Academy program became a model for one of the CPAA's core efforts.

### **Meeting the Leadership Development Challenge**

The CPAA, with the support of the Chicago Public Schools and grants from foundations, has developed three school leadership programs for aspiring, new, and experienced principals, assistant principals, and administrators. And it has modified the design of a state-mandated academy.

■ **LIFT.** The first program created to react to the changing environment was the Leadership Initiative for Transformation (LIFT), aimed at principals with three years or less of experience, which began operating in 1995.

Five organizations, under the collective name of the Chicago Leadership Collaborative, joined to build the program: the CPAA, Leadership for Quality Education under the aegis of the Chicago Civic Committee, the Illinois Administrators Academy, the Kellogg School of Management at Northwestern University, and the Center for School Improvement at the University of Chicago. The effort was supported in part by a grant from the Chicago-based John D. and Catherine T. MacArthur Foundation.

"We started out by doing focus groups with experienced and new

## Supporting New Principals

Naomi Esquivel was a first-year K–8 principal when she was encouraged to become a LIFT participant. “I was afraid because I didn’t want to spend time away from my building,” she says. “But I’m happy I took the challenge.”

Esquivel says LIFT’s emphasis on the practical prepared her for daily administrative duties. She learned

how to work with her LSC, how to manage the budget, and how to prepare the school for opening day. And from experienced principals who came in to make presentations, she learned how to incorporate instructional improvements into each day’s schedule.

“I think the scores now are the highest they’ve been in the school in 10 years,” she says. “That doesn’t all have to do with leading by principals, but it helps.”

Martha Silva-Vera, a K–8 principal and LIFT mentor, agrees that practical advice is necessary and comforting. Her protégé, like Silva-Vera, comes from a school where gangs are prevalent.

“My protégé, as we talked about the gang situation, had a physical sense of relief,” she says. “The fact that she had another person who had those experiences gave her relief. She is looking forward to coming to my building to look at our intervention plan and our security guards.” ◀

principals, so we had a pretty good idea of what was needed,” says LIFT Director Dolores Gonzalez. “Clearly they needed budget skills, as well as skills in team building to involve everyone in developing the school improvement plan; using student assessment data to improve teaching and learning; hiring and firing; and taking care of yourself as a leader.”

LIFT links two beginning principals with an experienced principal. Over the course of the school year, the protégés—as they are called in Chicago—and mentors meet for about an hour a week and at monthly workshops.

The LIFT sessions alternate between two- or three-day residential retreats and one-day meetings. Gonzalez says the workshops are mostly activity-based. Sessions are led by veteran principals, central office administrators, university-based and independent consultants, and community leaders. The program content is aligned with the standards required by the Chicago schools for developing school leaders and addresses such issues as instructional leadership, parent involvement and community partnerships, creating student-centered learning climates, professional development and human resources management, board policy, school improvement planning, managing

school operations, and interpersonal effectiveness.

Since the program’s inception, it has served 203 principals, with cohorts ranging from 28 to 60 principals a year. Gonzalez says each year LIFT is able to recruit from 80 to 85 percent of beginning principals. More recently the board has made the program mandatory for all new principals.

■ **CASL.** The Chicago Academy for School Leadership (CASL) was established in 1996 as the result of a needs analysis that the CPAA conducted of principals systemwide. The analysis showed that principals wanted professional development programs directly linked to their everyday experiences and needs.

After the California School Leadership Academy was identified as a model for the program, the CPAA hired one of the California program’s staff members, Karen Dyer, as the executive director of CASL. Dyer and other CPAA leadership team members adapted the program to respond to the needs identified in the Chicago survey.

“We asked what is it that principals need to know and be able to do,” says Jacqueline Carothers, one of four CASL directors (Dyer has since left to take a position in another organization). “We revised the curriculum and incorporated research.

Then we had a group of principals look at the product and respond to it. That’s an ongoing process.”

CASL’s target audience is experienced principals, assistant principals, and other administrators. It is designed to equip them with the knowledge necessary to stay current with curriculum changes and to continue to build their skills as instructional leaders. The program has three main components: the Long-Term Learning Seminars, the School Leadership Learning Teams, and the CASL Coaching Experience.

The anchor program is the Long-Term Learning Seminars, including 15 six-hour days. Normally participants finish the requirements in one to one-and-a-half years. The program begins with an initial evening retreat followed by three days of workshops, and it ends with a presentation of portfolios. Each cohort has about 25 participants. The program’s goals are to give participants the skills to understand and analyze organizational culture to improve student learning; to develop a vision tied to improved student learning; to develop, implement, and assess a curriculum focused on constructivist learning; to understand alternative instructional approaches; to structure a comprehensive assessment process; to create an effective

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environment for student learning; and to design results-oriented, ongoing professional development for teachers.

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Another program component, the School Leadership Learning Teams, is a series of 10 seminars conducted over a period of two years. The seminars give principals and their leadership teams—including teachers, staff, parents, students, and community members—opportunities to review research and best practices related to their schools' change efforts.

The CASL Coaching Experience pairs up principals, assistant principals, and other administrators in collegial coaching relationships. The yearlong program gives the participants opportunities to build supportive professional relationships and to engage in reflective learning.

In its four years, more than 1,500 people have participated in CASL programs, including more than 300 principals. Many go to CASL initially to fulfill the 32 hours of professional development that the city requires of principals over a two-year period. But although they can nearly fulfill these hours just by attending the initial workshop of the Long-Term Learning Seminars, most take advantage of the full CASL program. Carothers says their continuing participation suggests that the program is meeting their needs.

A recent evaluation of the program showed positive outcomes. "They feel more confident as leaders," Carothers says. "Conversations they avoided in the past as instructional leaders they are now leading. Also, there is the residual benefit of having colleagues across the city they can access. And they have a common knowledge of research and language."

■ **LAUNCH.** Chicago's newest principal leadership program, the three-year-old Leadership Academy

and Urban Network for Chicago (LAUNCH), supports teachers, assistant principals, and district administrators who aspire to be principals. The program is a collaboration among the CPAA, Chicago Public Schools, and Northwestern University's Kellogg School of Management and its School of Education and Social Policy.

LAUNCH is selective. Over the last three years, more than 500 people have applied for about 100 spots. To be eligible, the candidate must have a minimum of six years' experience in the system with excellent evaluation results, a master's degree, and a Type 75 principal's certificate.



**"They feel more confident as leaders. Conversations they once avoided as instructional leaders they are now leading."**

The program has three main components. The first is a five-week summer academy at the Kellogg School. Participants report that the curriculum is intense, demanding, and rich. Workshops are led by presenters from the Kellogg School and the School of Education and Social Policy, authors, higher education professionals, superintendents, exemplary Chicago principals, central office personnel, Bertani, and LAUNCH Director Ingrid Carney. For the first week, participants live on campus. During the seminar they learn about the urban context in which they work and about the impact of the reform legislation on Chicago schools. In weeks two through five they learn about management issues, instructional leadership team building, and parent and community involvement.

During one of the weeks taught by professors from the School of Education and Social Policy, the participants develop case studies of three schools that have been on pro-

bation for at least a year. Teams of 10 to 12 participants per school conduct site visits and write a school improvement plan to improve reading and math. "We look for principals who we think would be open to opening up their schools to this kind of scrutiny by a team that has no authority associated with probation," Bertani says. "We look for complicated environments, but not so complex that we can't do justice to the complexities of the system." The teams offer recommendations to the principal, and Bertani says there is evidence that the principals pay attention to the recommendations.

Another week at the Kellogg School focuses on schools as organizations, bringing an organizational behavior perspective to leading, managing, and facilitating in schools. Through role playing and simulations, participants learn experientially about managing conflict, motivating employees, conducting negotiations, and building high-performance teams.

The second component of the program is a full-time, semester-long paid internship with a principal mentor. Principals must meet certain qualifications to be mentors. "We look at their schools and make sure that they are making movement, even if they are low-performing," Carney says. Mentor principals must have at least four years of experience in their positions. Many have gone through the LIFT program. The LAUNCH fellows report that many of the mentors give up their privacy and allow their protégés to shadow them throughout the workday. "My table was pushed up against hers in her office," says Bernadette Butler, a 1999 LAUNCH fellow. "Even when she was out of the office, I was glued to her." Fellows interview the mentors, and both mentor and fellow have an opportunity to make choices about the people they will work with.

## Mentoring Aspiring Principals

Fred Arana, principal of Little Village Academy, says he had a lot of sleepless nights when he opened up the K–8 school five years ago in a vibrant Hispanic neighborhood. To get him through the initial months of stress and uncertainty, he relied on a LIFT mentor and relationships with other principals that had developed during the program.

“Having colleagues you could call on to deal with issues in informal and formal ways was very helpful,” he says. So when he was asked to be a mentor for the LAUNCH program,

he agreed. “I realized there was a lot of privacy I would have to give up, but there is also a great need for principals here.”

Elsa Carmona, an assistant principal who is Arana’s LAUNCH fellow, says the internship has been invaluable to her professional development. “I have a desk in his office,” she says. “I am in on every call, every meeting, every discussion he has.”

Carmona shadows Arana throughout the day to learn firsthand what is entailed in the job. She helps with building supervision tasks, informally observes classrooms, explains and enforces the student behavior code, works with volunteers, helps write and translate the school newsletter, and participates in the training provided to local school councils.

As a requirement of the LAUNCH program, she wrote a plan describing how she would lead the school if she were entering as the principal. To accomplish this, she had to review the school improvement plan, interview school personnel, and observe classroom practice. Writing the plan helped her synthesize learnings from throughout her LAUNCH participation.

“One of the elements was the outstanding quality training we received at Northwestern. Another was the mentor principal who is sharing lots of tidbits. Then there were the experiences from relationships with students, parents, and teachers. Suddenly it all lit up for me when I finished the plan. I realized that I was ... ready to be a principal.”

The third component, called the Urban Network, brings the graduates of LAUNCH together for periodic meetings. These sessions allow opportunities for networking and for refresher courses. This year, two of the graduating classes met for a full day of activity at Northwestern and attended a class on “Managing Change in a Pressure-Cooker Environment.”

■ **Illinois Administrators Academy.** The Illinois Administrators Academy (IAA), a statewide program that resulted from Illinois legislation in 1985, was until recently the only mandatory program in Chicago’s menu of leadership development programs. Its initial focus was on the principal’s role in staff evaluation, but that focus has since expanded to address school improvement more broadly. In 1996, the legislature allowed Chicago to develop requirements above and beyond the standard principal certification as a condition of employment. In practice, this meant that principal candidates needed to acquire 70 hours of professional development time before

becoming a principal, and 32 hours every two years to maintain their certification as principals.

That helped make IAA a busy place. “There are 1,500 practicing administrators in Chicago [including principals, assistant principals, and aspiring principals],” says IAA-Chicago Director Sallie Penman. “Over a two-year period we have to see all 1,500.”

Unlike other regions in Illinois, Chicago’s IAA region is a single district. This means the program has been able to tailor its offerings specifically to the needs of the Chicago system. The curriculum now is linked directly to the standards of leadership that Chicago requires of its principals. Like the other CPAA leadership programs, its curriculum has been tested by design teams and focus groups. Penman says the program also has been useful for recruiting participants for the other leadership programs.

### An Integrated Program

In sum, Chicago’s array of program offerings was designed to meet the

district’s desperate need to cultivate a new breed of instructional leaders. Each program targets a specific audience—from aspiring principals to veterans—and helps them grow into leadership positions through coaching, mentoring, and providing long-term support.

IAA illustrates the degree of programmatic integration that CPAA has achieved in its leadership development offerings. Even though IAA is part of a state-mandated network, Penman says that being housed under CPAA’s roof “has allowed us to take this to a different level. Having each program focus on the same kinds of things has deepened the information from one program to another.”

Meanwhile, the directors of the programs are themselves learning in monthly meetings, two-day retreats, and professional development opportunities through such national networks as the National Staff Development Council. Most of the program directors say they are benefiting as well from the progressive

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# LAUNCHing into the Next Career Stage

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The common threads for those who participate in the LAUNCH program are aspiration and promise. All are eager to move ahead with their careers, and all have been selected for a small number of slots in the program from a wide pool because they showed the most promise. But each has a different story, and each story may end differently.

Consider Bernadette Butler. She participated in LAUNCH last year and is now the principal of a K–8 school she had worked at as an assistant principal.

Midway through her internship, someone from her school urged her to apply for the position the principal

was about to vacate. Although the LSC was very interested in her as a candidate, the staff was divided, and the departing principal favored somebody else.

"I called Al [Bertani] and told him I was in the middle of a controversy and didn't know what to do," she says. "I really wanted the job but didn't want to be in a [divisive] situation." Bertani explained the options to her, and Butler went ahead and took the job as an interim principal.

Today she says it would have been difficult to make it through the initial months without support from Bertani, her LAUNCH mentor, and two members of her cohort. "I have a lot of resources. That's the greatest thing about LAUNCH—it connects you to people."

Then there is Stanley Griggs. He was an assistant principal at an elementary school and was looking for an opportunity to move up, so he

applied for LAUNCH. After completing the program two years ago, he went through three rounds of interviews for a principal position and was not selected. Then a job in the Department of Special Projects came up and he applied. "This was the best thing that could have happened to me," he says.

Griggs works for the district's chief education officer. His responsibilities are broad: he helped revamp the magnet program; works on budget issues and program design and implementation; visits schools to evaluate budget and staffing concerns; and works with parents and students in the expulsion process.

Griggs says the broad range of skills he learned in LAUNCH—from communication and budgeting to staff development and networking—helped prepare him for his position. ◀

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leadership of Bertani and the CPAA. "I've learned more from Al in two years than I've learned from anyone else in 20 years," Penman says.

## Results

Although the programs are still new, some already are showing positive results.

■ Participation rates are generally high. Competition for the slots in LAUNCH is stiff. Last year, 30 were chosen from a field of 125 applicants. LIFT was attracting 80 to 85 percent of new principals even before it became mandatory. And CASL has attracted more than 1,500 participants in four years, including about half the district's principals.

■ LIFT has helped stabilize leadership in Chicago schools. Only 3 principals of the 203 who have gone through the program have failed to

get renewals. In addition, over 60 percent of schools headed by LIFT graduates have shown increases in student performance.

■ The LAUNCH program has succeeded in moving graduates into leadership positions. About 85 percent of LAUNCH participants have made upward career moves, including 25 who are principals and 32 who are assistant principals. All but three of the schools led by LAUNCH graduates have seen improvements in student performance.

■ Evaluations by program participants have been very positive.

■ Teachers are giving their principals higher marks. In a 1999 Consortium on Chicago Schools Research survey, teachers gave their principals higher marks on instructional leadership than they had given them on surveys in 1997 or 1994. In fact, the average school in 1999 scored about the same as the top school in 1994.

## Looking Ahead

The CPAA receives \$1.8 million a year from the district to support its leadership development programs, but the support is by no means something the association takes for granted. This year, the CPAA had to compete with three other possible vendors for a contract to provide such services to the district. Although the association won the contract, it took several additional months to get the money appropriated.

Bertani says the CPAA is committed to offering these services to its members. If the district's funds ever become jeopardized, he says, the association has contingency plans to approach foundations for support.

Meanwhile, Bertani says the CPAA hopes to build stronger networks with national organizations so that its members can benefit from other expertise. ◀

# Hamilton County, TN:

## Creating a Leadership Center

Superintendent: Jesse Register  
District Size: 43,000 students

### Abstract

The Chattanooga Public Schools and Hamilton County Schools merged in July 1997 after a bitter public debate over the politics, culture, and bureaucracy of education. The result of the merger is a district twice the size of its predecessors and a clear need for leadership development. Because of an aging population of principals and assistant principals, the district anticipates retirements within the next five years at twice the national rate. At the same time, because of the growing complexity of the task facing school leaders, including the move toward standards-based accountability, Superintendent Jesse Register says it is important to improve principals' knowledge base. To accommodate these needs, the district has joined with its local Public Education Foundation to create a leadership development program that taps the knowledge of some of the nation's top experts in educational leadership and organizational change. The program has the following components: an independent professional development center; courses offered for principals and aspiring principals via satellite hookup with Cincinnati's Mayerson Academy; winter and summer retreats for teachers, principals, and staff; and an annual fellowship program for a

small group of teachers who aspire to be instructional leaders.

### Background

Superintendent Jesse Register came to Chattanooga in October 1996 to usher in a controversial merger between two very different school districts. The Chattanooga district was an urban, predominantly minority school system with student assignment based on gerrymandered geographical zones. Hamilton County, a rural/suburban district, was 95 percent white with student assignments based on an open enrollment policy that encouraged white flight from Chattanooga. Relations between the two districts were not very good, as evidenced by a complaint that the Chattanooga City Board of Education filed with the U.S. Department of Education's Office of Civil Rights against the county board to put an end to its policy of encouraging white flight.

But the city of Chattanooga wanted, as Register puts it, "to get out of the school business," and this sentiment was approved in a general referendum. The Public Education Foundation (PEF) in Chattanooga was asked to draw up a merger plan, and it did so. Neither district received the plan happily, and soon the foundation found itself at the center of a firestorm.

Register, who had previously presided over mergers in Cabarrus County and Iredell County in North Carolina, went to work revising the plan, addressing a series of problems including student zoning. Over a 12-month period, his administration reconfigured the geographical zones so that they were more natural, created six new magnet schools, and

helped achieve the goal of integration without resorting to forced busing.

In addition to the zoning issues, Register recognized that the district was not responding well to the challenges of standards-based learning and public demands for increased accountability. With the exception of a handful of principals who had benefited from an earlier relationship with the Edna McConnell Clark Foundation, it was apparent to Register that the current school leaders generally had not been given opportunities to develop adequate instructional leadership skills.

At the same time, it became clear that the district was facing the prospect of principal retirements at twice the projected national rate of 40 percent over the next five years. Register could not look to assistant principals as the next generation of leaders because most were the same age as or older than the principals.

The situation presented Register with a problem as well as an opportunity. He recognized that it was imperative to meet the needs of existing principals and to cultivate a new cadre of principals through a well-planned leadership development program.

### Meeting the Challenge

To meet the challenge of cultivating new instructional leaders, Register asked his team to develop a proposal that would tap supporting funds inside and outside the community. Faye Hitchcock, then a curriculum director, was assigned the task of writing the proposal. Working with PEF, she contacted the Institute for Education and Social Policy at New York University, which put the district in touch with David Green, an

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educator with an international reputation who had worked extensively on school improvement issues in Great Britain and the United States.

Green came to Chattanooga and worked with Hitchcock to take stock. "We realized that the principalship was the key for making changes to produce better learning," Hitchcock says. "The Public Education Foundation and the superintendent agreed on that." The newly merged district also needed a leadership training initiative to serve the larger system.

Green and Hitchcock embarked on four months of research before putting together a proposal. They convened focus groups with students, teachers, principals, central office administrators, parents, and community leaders to ask about their perceptions of the district's needs, leadership, and present circumstances. Hitchcock says the focus groups helped identify a need for (1) instructional leadership from principals; (2) recruitment and development of new principals; (3) networking among principals through principal study groups to reduce the sense of isolation; and (4) technology to help develop state-mandated school improvement plans.

Green says the focus groups convinced him that there had been no ongoing substantive conversations in the district about standards-based reform, except with the 12 to 16 middle school principals who had worked with the Clark Foundation or had been nurtured by PEF. Register agrees with this assessment.

Green adds that the problem was not limited to teachers and principals. "The central office was in some respects in worse shape than the principals and teachers," he says. "So I produced my findings and noted that the provisions for leadership development were almost nil. The city [Chattanooga district] had

done a bit, but it was a minor piece that had been finished for three or four years."

In January 1998, Green presented his proposal to PEF. Its key features called for (1) the creation of an independent leadership development center built on the model of the Mayerson Academy in Cincinnati; (2) the creation of standards for school leaders; (3) a leadership development curriculum; and (4) the introduction of technology to help principals network, write school improvement plans, and participate in distance learning.



### **The newly merged district needed a leadership training initiative to serve the larger system.**

The foundation accepted the findings without reservations. In the 1999–2000 school year, the program began taking shape with the following major components:

■ **Leadership Fellows Program.** Teachers interested in becoming instructional leaders—either as principals or in some other administrative capacity—participated in 20 full-day workshops during the academic year. Last year, Green selected 24 teachers from a field of 80 nominated by principals. Each of the nominees wrote a letter of application. This year, the applicants were interviewed by a committee of representatives from the following constituencies: principals, foundation, central office, the community, and leadership fellows.

The program had several components: study groups conducted by Green; school visitations; sessions on how to develop a community of leaders directed by Charlotte Roberts, a leading consultant on organizational learning who coauthored *The Fifth Discipline Fieldbook* (Currency, 1994) and *The Dance of Change* (Currency, 1999) with Peter Senge; sessions on how to lead com-

plex change led by Ann Kilcher, an education consultant who has worked extensively in the United States and Canada; individual mentoring by principals assigned to fellows; and a distance learning curriculum received via satellite from the Mayerson Academy in Cincinnati.

■ **Requisites of a Leader.** The Mayerson Academy offered 10 90-minute workshops via satellite video hook-up to participants in districts across the country, including Hamilton County. These real-time sessions included opportunities for questions and answers from the viewing participants. In Hamilton County, the workshops were available to current principals and assistant principals, as well as leadership fellows. A core group of principals worked as facilitators for the leadership fellows during these sessions. Principals and assistant principals could view the sessions from their own schools or tape them and view them later.

■ **Summer and winter retreats.** The district intensified its focus on standards-based reform and other issues in summer and winter retreats. Outside facilitators and presenters were invited to these sessions, some of which lasted up to four days. The summer retreats were held for principals and assistant principals, central office administrators, and teachers; winter retreats were for principals and selected representatives of central office staff.

"To me, the most successful of the changes we initiated were the retreats," Hitchcock says. "It was good development and good networking that made us feel appreciated." The content changed from one session to the next. In the summer of 1998, for example, Green brought together principals, assistant principals, and central office administrators to discuss leadership themes. "It was mind-blowing," he recalls. "I hadn't realized that the full group had never come together before since the merger."

■ **Leadership Development Center.** A Leadership Development Center, modeled after the Mayerson Academy, opened its doors in space owned by PEF and funded by a \$5 million budget that includes contributions from PEF and the Annenberg Foundation. The district essentially hires the center to offer leadership development activities for district personnel. Register says he wants to use the center to “develop a culture of ongoing systemic leadership development.”

### Reactions from Participants

Although still young, the leadership initiative is being endorsed enthusiastically by participants. Rebecca Everett, an elementary school principal who also is a facilitator in the leadership training program, says, “the Requisites of a Leader menu of course offerings is rich.”

The live satellite feed occurs every 10 days. During the session, an essential question is presented, and discussion follows. Participants can call or fax in questions. Twice a year, the facilitators for the program in each district—Hamilton County has four—meet with their counterparts in districts around the country.

This year, the menu has been expanded to 20 listings, including 10 core listings repeated from last year and 10 electives. This year’s participants also can apply credits to a doctorate in education.

The courses are designed to give practical advice. One course, for example, shows principals how to manage their time more effectively and focus on instructional tasks. “One of the things I learned was to give everybody a ‘promotion,’” says Diana Green, a participant who is a principal at a middle school magnet program. “In other words, go back to your school and take some of the things you do and give it to somebody else.”

Edna Varner, a high school principal, says her favorite lesson came

from a course called “Organized Abandonment ... Finding the Fuel for School Improvement.” She says, “There are always things coming down from central office you have to do. But you cannot add something on unless you take something off your plate. So the course suggests you look at what you’re doing and decide ‘What can I not do?’”

Participants also have enthusiastically embraced a program called “Leading Complex Change” taught by Kilcher. The course is tailored for principals and leadership fellows. It uses a practical, nuts-and-bolts approach to teach such skills as teamwork and collaboration, how to share decision making, and how to manage conflict and solve problems.

“She doesn’t just throw an article back at you,” Diana Green says. “Instead, she will take the information, re-create it, and break it down into pieces. Then she will say, ‘First do this, then do this.’ She gives you the tools so you don’t have to figure it out.”

### Systemic Implications

Principals cannot be expected to become instructional leaders on top of the many other expectations placed on them as school administrators unless they are given the time and support required to do so. In Hamilton County, Register has taken steps to provide principals with building-level instructional teams that can help with the implementation of new standards and curriculum development.

The team includes standards facilitators—teachers who receive a stipend for taking the lead on standards implementation. In addition, 25 consulting teachers, who are former central office curriculum specialists, have been reassigned to the schools, each responsible for up to four buildings. Register’s ultimate goal is to have one consulting teacher assigned to each school. “We want our curriculum people, our

master teachers, to be working with teachers nine days out of every two weeks,” he says. “If we need to make a centralized curriculum decision, we’ll have a meeting and do it, and then they’ll go back to the schools.”

Conversations with principals suggest that the support is necessary. Hitchcock, who is now a second-year principal, says even though she helped develop the leadership plan, she has not had time to fully take advantage of it. “I feel like too much of my time is spent on managerial issues. A lot of times people say that if you were a more effective leader this would not happen. We do need more knowledge of how to be better instructional leaders, but we also need the personnel.”

Principal Everett agrees. “[Central office administrators] need to be more sensitive to the needs of each school. I’m talking about people, not money. Those of us working with kids in urban areas have different needs that may require different personnel than those in suburban areas.”

The burdens that principals are carrying also have had an impact on their willingness to release teachers for 20 days a year so that they can participate in the Leadership Fellows Program. Everett says resistance to losing teachers for 20 days a year forced changes in the program. This year, fellows will give up some nights and weekends so that they do not have to spend as much time away from their classrooms.

### Unresolved Issues and Challenges Ahead

Despite the progress, a number of challenges and unresolved issues remain for the district.

■ **Maintaining independence of the Leadership Development Center.** David Green worries about the alignment of the center to PEF, an organization that is still not trusted by many in the community because of its work on the merger. “The inde-

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pendence of the center has to be in operational terms so that the leadership can negotiate with key players from a position of strength," Green says. Register and others have a different view on this.

■ **Transitioning from outside consultants to internal capacity.** For the past couple of years, the district has relied heavily on the expertise of Green and other outside consultants to build and maintain the leadership program. The district is now challenged to institutionalize the program and all its components. Key to that will be finding somebody to run the Leadership Development Center. Most of Green's work was predicated on the expectation that the center would have an executive director in place last year. The center is now operating with Kilcher, who still resides in Canada, as part-time executive director.

■ **Whether to stay focused on principals.** PEF is interested in expanding leadership development to parents, teachers, and community members. Others, including Green, believe the top priority for the near future should be developing a cadre of effective principals and aspiring principals.

■ **Supporting school visits.** One of the key components of the Leadership Fellows Program was to be a weeklong school visit, modeled after the English school inspection system, during which the visitors assess school performance by focusing on teaching and learning. Although many of the fellows were eagerly anticipating the experience, the visits were cut from the leadership initiative last year when a new leader of the Public Education Foundation was appointed.

■ **Selecting leadership fellows.** In the first year, leadership fellows were nominated by their principals and were then hand-selected by Green as an impartial outside con-

sultant. Green has phased out his work with the district. With selection responsibility now shifting to the central office, some have expressed concern that favoritism could become a factor in the process.

## Early Results

One of the leading indicators of success comes from the Leadership Fellows Program. David Green notes that of the original group of 24 fellows, all but 4 completed the program, and of those, 3 dropped out because they were promoted. In addition, 17 of the fellows indicated they would like to be principals at the end of the 1999–2000 school year, which is double the number of those who indicated such a desire at the start of the program. Several others are applying for staff development positions. "I'm seeing principals progressing who I didn't think would ever move," he says. "They're speaking the language now; they're talking about student learning."

The leadership training is focused on standards-based instruction, which the district has been working on for the last three years. Although the most recent results of state assessments are mixed, Register notes some reasons for optimism. Out of 137 school districts in the state, Hamilton County ranked 101st in the 1999–2000 school year on the Tennessee Comprehensive Assessment Program, the statewide assessments in math, reading, language arts, science, and social studies. But it ranked 34th in improvement. In one of its lowest-performing elementary schools, not one student tested at the proficient level in fourth grade reading three years ago; on the most recent tests, 24 percent rated proficient. Four of the county's schools performed in the state's top 100 schools, but 12 scored in the lowest 100.

Other signs of progress are more anecdotal. Everett, for example, works in a high-poverty elementary

school where students have significant reading and writing problems. After listening to the lessons from the "Organized Abandonment" course, she resolved to pour all her resources into improving reading and writing performance, throwing out routines and procedures that didn't contribute.

"We began two-hour blocks where we did nothing but reading and writing," she says. "We took all instructional assistants and put them into classrooms with teachers for two hours (including the physical education teacher). Organized abandonment is to know your goal and find ways that might not be traditional to achieve it. In nine weeks we saw gains. We haven't tested yet, but kindergarten children are writing complete sentences and reading. When you consider my children, this is phenomenal."

Diana Green, using the same guiding principle of organized abandonment, took a program she inherited for middle school students who had been retained in grade and achieved positive results. She instituted strict commitment criteria from the parents and students and then put them to work for 12 weeks every day before school. The focused effort yielded the following results: of 48 participants, almost all were promoted, compared with only 12 of 50 in the program she had inherited one year earlier.

In the merged district, where many of the principals did not know each other, the summer and winter retreats have helped break down barriers and create networks of principals, some of whom are working together in critical friend groups. Similarly, the leadership fellows, most of whom did not know each other, are now working closely as a team of committed learners. ◀

# Plainfield, NJ:

## Moving on Many Fronts

Superintendent: Larry Leverett  
District Size: 7,400 students

### Abstract

A small district in New Jersey, Plainfield Public Schools is making a substantial commitment to supporting the leadership development of its current principals and the next generation of school leaders. This support has five components: (1) district-tailored graduate courses taught by the superintendent, (2) links to external professional organizations, (3) whole-school reform models, (4) principal standards, and (5) a central office that now acts as a service organization to individual schools.

### Background

Plainfield, New Jersey, is a working-class community near Newark. The school district serves 7,400 students; 98 percent are children of color, and 70 percent qualify for free and reduced-priced lunch. The district is one of 30 high-poverty urban districts in New Jersey that were affected by the New Jersey Supreme Court's funding-equity decision in *Abbott v. Burke*. Among other things, the decision called for \$2.8 billion in renovations of schools, top-to-bottom overhaul of elementary schools with "whole-school reform" models, and preschool programs.

The *Abbott* decision has given Plainfield an infusion of funds to rebuild its schools and make instructional improvements. The money also has helped fund the creation and extensive training of site-based management teams, which in Plain-

field are called Leadership Innovation and Change Councils (LINCCs). The teams—which include teachers, parents, the principal, and community members—have authority in school budgeting and instructional reform issues. The *Abbott* suit also requires districts to adopt a whole-school reform model for each elementary school (see the box "Models for Whole-School Reform").

But not all the changes in Plainfield have been the result of *Abbott*. Five years ago, when Superintendent Larry Leverett came to the district, he committed himself to improving student learning by combining pressure and support.

Leverett says a combination of forces, including *Abbott*, the state-wide push for accountability, and internal forces including a reform-oriented board of education, created a climate for change. "There was a time when performance at the 20th percentile in language arts and the 22nd percentile in mathematics on standardized tests was good enough," he says. "But we have really called that whole idea of minimum-level proficiency into question."

A critical piece of Leverett's strategy included building a leadership cadre and a culture that encouraged continuous learning for adults. In 1996, after enlisting the community in a strategic planning process, the board agreed to set aside 2.5 percent of the salary budget for professional development.

Interviews with teachers and principals made it clear that the mood and expectations of the district have changed over the last five years. "The single most important support for leadership is the superintendent," says Mark Jackson, a middle school principal. "What he

models sends the single strongest message. He lives the tensions of being soft on people and hard on issues." Frank Dincuff, an elementary school principal, agrees. "You need a climate in the district where principals, teaching staff, or others take on a leadership role. I see that happening in Plainfield."

### Meeting the Challenge

To meet the leadership challenge, Plainfield has looked both inside and outside the district for resources.

■ **Graduate courses.** A few years ago, Leverett took an unusually activist role in developing the district's leadership capacity when he asked Kean University, one of New Jersey's largest teachers colleges, for permission to teach graduate-level courses off-site for teachers in his district. Leverett says that initially Kean had reservations. He had to convince the university that instruction would be in an environment conducive to learning, staff who chose not to participate would face no repercussions, content would be rigorous, and courses would lead to a master's degree in administration and supervision.

With Linnea Weiland, director of curriculum and instruction (C&I), Leverett personally designed and taught courses that not only met the university's curriculum standards, but also were infused with content relevant to the Plainfield experience. The most recent courses offered were "School Supervision and Organizational Theory" and "Curriculum Development and Evaluation: Theory and Practice."

Participation has been good. About 80 teachers, guidance counselors, and teachers designated as

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literacy coordinators and design coaches in their whole-school reform models have enrolled in the last two years. Although the courses are open to outsiders, 95 percent of the students are from the district.

Leverett says the courses are fulfilling his hopes of building a leadership corps. "We have observed a number of persons in these courses take on leadership roles," he says, including individuals who have taken on leadership positions in curriculum or whole-school reform.

■ **Whole-school reform models.** In compliance with *Abbott*, Plainfield's schools have adopted whole-school reform models. Most are using the America's Choice model developed by the National Center on Education and the Economy. Two other schools have selected the Venture Schools model and one the Accelerated Schools model.

Beyond the expected improvements in instruction and learning, the district is benefiting from the development of a new level of teacher leadership emanating from the models. America's Choice, which focuses on standards-based instruction and emphasizes literacy, achieves its goals mainly through full-time design coaches and literacy coordinators trained at workshops conducted by America's Choice. Funding for their positions is supported by *Abbott* money.

As a design coach, Patty Van Langen takes charge of how America's Choice is implemented in her school. She provides leadership on what she calls the "big picture" issues, including how literacy coaches work together, how professional development is designed in her school, and how monthly leadership meetings are facilitated and scheduled with the 76 teachers in the building. The leadership team, a requirement of the America's Choice model, includes the principal, the

## Models for Whole-School Reform

Unlike some reform efforts in the past—which focused on piecemeal efforts such as changes in instructional practice in isolated classrooms or changes in decision making that didn't address classroom practice—whole-school reform models aim to bring about comprehensive changes in schools. A number of these models were developed under

the aegis of the New American Schools Development Corporation, which provided the winners of a national competition with funding to launch their model. America's Choice was one of these. Other models, such as Accelerated Schools, were developed independently.

The number of whole-school reform efforts has multiplied since 1997, when Congress funded the Obey-Porter Comprehensive School Reform Demonstration Program with \$150 million to support start-up costs related to the implementation of research-based, whole-school reform efforts. ◀

assistant principal, the literacy coordinator, and a community outreach coordinator.

Sandy Bidwell, one of the literacy coordinators, says she sees evidence not only of results in the classroom, but also in her efficacy as a leader. "At first there was a lot of resistance to my coaching," she says. "Today teachers are coming up to me and asking when will I come into their classrooms [to do demonstration lessons]."

Leverett says the whole-school reform models provide staff with leadership opportunities that have been invaluable to his district. "The positions have provided a testing ground for people who are potentially interested in becoming principals or supervisors at other levels."

■ **Curriculum and instruction reorganization.** A frequently heard lament from principals is that their jobs have become too fragmented and too demanding—a perception borne out by recent research. To meet the public's expectations, they must manage the daily operations of an intricate organization, lead diverse stakeholders through complex change, and perform as instructional leaders.

Frank Dincuff, who has been an elementary school principal for

more than 30 years, says the shared decision making that comes with site-based management, increased accountability for student performance, and staff development have completely changed the profile and demands of the principalship. "I grew up in this business when being a principal was almost like having the divine rights of kings," he says. "You made all the decisions; it was your building." Today, he says, he shares responsibility for a \$2.3 million school budget with his school leadership council and needs to come to a consensus with the team when making important instructional decisions.

To help principals with their expanded responsibilities, the curriculum and instruction office began restructuring three years ago to move from a model of compliance to one of service. For example, instead of thinking simply about how the district would spend Title I and bilingual education money, the department began setting up technical assistance teams for assignment to each school. The goal, says Weiland, was to ensure the end of such practices as doling out staff development resources based on personal relationships rather than district priorities

and changing curriculum based on supposition rather than data.

With assistance from the Efficacy Institute in Lexington, Massachusetts, C&I established three technical assistance teams assigned to work with schools throughout the district and the schools' reform models. The teams, which included a supervisor and several curriculum resource teachers, worked with site-based teams and school staff to identify specific school needs and then draft plans to improve teaching and learning. In each case, decisions were based on student assessment data.

The focus of the teams was to support implementation of five teacher practices:

- Communicate standards to students.
- Use data to select the instructional practices required for student improvement.
- Instruct all students at or above the grade-level curriculum.
- Identify and deploy a variety of instructional strategies to accelerate learning of students who are lagging.
- Show students how to use assessments as feedback to improve their own learning.

More recently, C&I changed its structure somewhat to make better use of its resources. Instead of assigning teams to schools, each supervisor is now assigned to a school, and the teams work across schools. C&I staff also participate in leadership team meetings at the elementary and middle school level. In general, these meetings focus on problem solving and sharing of information related to the whole-school reform designs. (The high school has not adopted a whole-school reform model.)

Changing the department to a service model is having positive results. "You used to have the SWAT teams coming out of the central office," says Sheila Thorpe, the director of staff development and a former principal. "They would come to

your building unannounced and evaluate your building according to some standard you had never seen. If there was an opportunity for an 'I-gotcha,' then you were got. There wasn't support that went along with the evaluation. But when the new administration came in, the central office changed. The supervisors were given new roles, and they were relieved to have a different role."

Maxson Middle School design coach Van Langen agrees, noting that the district's literacy supervisor, who sits on Maxson's school leadership team, has offered help with facilitating meetings and supporting the school's literacy coordinator. "Our one literacy coordinator has



**The room soon was filled with lively discussion about the fine points of instructional leadership, data-based decision making, and whole-school reform.**

difficulty getting around to the 20 literacy teachers she's supposed to be helping. So someone at the district level offered to come in and support the work she's doing—to talk about readers and writers workshop models and other things."

Weiland says principals who used to view the C&I office as simply an enforcement body are more likely now to seek advice on how to develop effective school plans, build more effective budgets, and work with their whole-school reform models. The C&I staff members also are helping schools do state-required planning, she says.

■ **Principal standards.** Leverett recently drafted a set of core requirements for his principals that details expectations and indicators for effective leadership. To ensure that the draft was both on target and acceptable to principals, he then invited them to review it and make recommendations for a re-draft.

The re-drafting has occurred at voluntary sessions. At a recent session, Leverett asked the principals to read in a jigsaw format articles relevant to the core requirements. Then he asked them to evaluate the draft for any omissions or overstatements. The room soon was filled with lively discussion about the fine points of instructional leadership, data-based decision making, whole-school reform, and school safety.

Instead of nipping away at requirements that they might consider too demanding, some suggested that the language in the draft was not rigorous enough. One group zeroed in on the requirements related to management of school operations. Members of the group agreed that the core requirements seemed to lay out lower-level skills rather than strategic management tasks.

Leverett has used such forums not only to get principals' buy-in, but also to expand their thinking about job expectations and how their performance should be measured. In the end, principals will be evaluated based on the jointly formulated core requirements. All understand that down the road Leverett is likely to lead an effort to peg a system of rewards and consequences to the job standards. But, he adds, "Even before we get to the final product, there will be a lot of benefits in the learning."

Of the process, principal Jackson says, "Ultimately Larry [Leverett] will get what he wants, but some valuable shaping will take place."

The process of self-reflection already has been primed in Plainfield. Leverett conducts school walk-throughs to model effective practice in instructional leadership based, with some modifications, on the approach used in New York City's District 2. The model sets out a structure for school and classroom observation so that the principal and the observer both know what is

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expected. Typically the observer will talk to children, look around the classes, and then debrief with building leadership. The principals say they appreciate the direct feedback they get, as well as the opportunity to make changes.

16 ■ **National Staff Development Council (NSDC).** The decision of three principals to enroll in the NSDC's leadership academy is emblematic of the importance principals place on self-evaluation and professional development. The decision to attend the academies came from the principals themselves; nobody urged that they go. However, the district has supported and built upon the principals' initiative.

The academies meet in the summer and winter over the course of two years. Each year about 50 superintendents, principals, curriculum specialists, and other administrative-level employees are accepted to participate. Participants describe the

academy's sessions as intense, theory-driven, progressive workshops.

One of the NSDC's requirements of participants is that they form study groups. That requirement pushed the Plainfield participants to continuously and regularly engage in reflection over a two-year period. They met once a month as a group with Weiland to review and discuss important professional readings.

"When we read the articles, we always asked ourselves what are the implications for us and our schools," says Gloria Williams, one of the three Plainfield participants. "Then we realized we needed to bring this information back to Plainfield." To do that, the three principals began facilitating discussions once a month at meetings for administrators.

As a result, several other staff members have enrolled in NSDC. "That has been a deep and sustained effort," Leverett says. "Several of them have become involved in action research looking at classroom improvements, developing deeper

understanding of the change process and how to accelerate it."

## What's Ahead

Leverett says that much of what has occurred with leadership development has been by design, while some has occurred as either a consequence of state mandates or a desire by staff to improve practice. Whatever the impetus, the district is nurturing efforts that fit well with its intention to continue to groom leaders.

In the future, he says, the district will increase the use of external evaluators to provide additional data to assess the impact of district and school reform strategies. Meanwhile, he says, the district will continue to incorporate opportunities that support the focus on teaching, learning, and leadership. "It doesn't all happen at once, but we have a conceptual map of what is important in terms of leadership development in our district, and we look for opportunities to include those strategies that reinforce our direction." ◀

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