center on **reinventing** public education

MAKING SENSE OF LEADING SCHOOLS

A National Study of the Principalship

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"In the great scheme of things, schools may be relatively small organizations, but their leadership challenges are far from small, or simple."

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Executive Summary

Much of the current attention to school leadership looks at all of the things principals "might" do and treats these possibilities as if they are the things all principals "should" do. The result is an overstated picture of the job, one suggesting that if schools are to succeed, principals should take on an increasing array of leadership responsibilities.

This study offers a different perspective. Instead of examining what it takes to lead schools in the abstract, it looks at what school leaders actually do. It then asks what this implies for policy and leadership development.

This report is based on in-depth interviews with educators (principals, vice principals, and teachers) in 21 schools in four cities across four states. While some of these schools were success stories, others were works in progress; the study purposefully avoided only looking for "hero" principals. It also purposefully avoided looking only at traditional public schools, by including additional interviews with leaders in private, independent (both sectarian and non-sectarian) and charter, contract, and magnet schools.

From these schools visits and interviews, the study team draws five major conclusions:

1. The core of the principal's job is diagnosing his or her particular school's needs and, given the resources and talents available, deciding how to meet them.

2. Regardless of school type—elementary or secondary or public or private—schools need leadership in seven critical areas: instructional, cultural, managerial, human resources, strategic, external development, and micropolitical.

3. Principals are responsible for ensuring that leadership happens in all seven critical areas, but they don't have to provide it. Principals can be "one-man" bands, leaders of jazz combos, or orchestra conductors.

4. Governance matters, and a school's governance structure affects the ways key leadership functions are performed.

5. Principals learn by doing. However trained, most principals think they learned the skills they need "on the job."

In the end, the results of these interviews suggest that rather than looking for principals with the powers and attributes of a Renaissance figure,

policymakers and district leaders should recognize that a variety of leaders and leadership models can work within schools. This report concludes with some suggestions about how district and state policymakers and colleges of education can change, the better to support, instead of discouraging, this variety.

Preface

The College of Education and the Center on Reinventing Public Education of the Daniel J. Evans School of Public Affairs (both at the University of Washington) undertook a study of the nature of the school principalship in 2000 with support from The Wallace Foundation. The study is part of a major, multi-year, multi-million dollar effort by the foundation to help improve and develop new leadership for American schools.

The goal of the Center's larger three-year investigation was to stimulate and inform a national movement toward remedying four problems related to the supply of principals and superintendents in the United States: leadership shortages, inadequate training, poor understanding of leaders' roles, and a general lack of ownership of the supply problem.

The research reported here is one of five efforts supported through a grant to the Center as part of The Wallace Foundation effort. *Making Sense of Leading Schools* restricts itself exclusively to examining what school principals do. It is exploratory in nature, an effort to understand what principals actually do, not an attempt to gauge their effectiveness. Other reports from the Center are devoted to the job of the school superintendent, principal shortages, human resource development, and indicators of community support for schools.

Study Questions and Approach

With regard to the school principal, the goal of the research reported here was to understand what it takes to actually lead a school. The research was guided by three questions:

1. Are there core roles that all principals play regardless of the type of school they lead?

2. How do these roles differ across traditional public, magnet, charter, and private schools?

3. Do current training programs address the demands of the job?

Ultimately, the study team hoped to issue findings in several key areas: First, how to understand more completely all the dimensions that fall under the rubric "school leadership." Second, whether leadership tasks differ in different kinds of schools. And finally, whether training of school principals could

be improved so as to enhance principals' leadership potential.

The study team sought to understand the principalship in great depth rather than provide a snapshot from a broad national survey. The team set out to complete in-depth interviews with educators in 21 schools in four small to mid-size cities in four different states. (These schools are described in greater detail in Appendix B.) To describe what a principal does, a national sample is not required; a broad cross-section of representative schools is sufficient. To understand more precisely how principals divide their time among various functions, on the other hand, would probably require a much larger research base.

The main interviews were done with the principal, but interviews were also completed with assistant principals, teacher leaders, department heads, and teachers at-large. The interviews followed a semi-structured format; the core questions asked at each site are listed in Appendices C and D.

During the interviews, respondents were asked about the way their schools distributed leadership and management responsibilities, maintained instructional quality, and identified and solved problems. The field work, which extended over two years, also examined how school leaders are trained, formative experiences considered most important, and areas in which leaders considered their preparation was deficient.

The schools visited included five elementary schools, seven middle or K-8 schools, seven high schools, and two K-12 schools (see Table 1). The sample of schools included traditional public schools, private independent schools (both sectarian and non-sectarian), and "entrepreneurial public schools"—i.e., charter, contract, and magnet schools. These "entrepreneurial public schools" are funded based on the numbers of students they attract, rather than a guaranteed budget. Since they generally possess more control over their finances and staffing than traditional public schools, the leadership demands on their principals are likely to be quite different.

Table 1.
Participant School Characteristics

	Elementary School	Middle or K-8	High School	K-12	TOTAL SCHOOLS
Private	1	2	1	1	**5**
Traditional Public	3	1	4		**8**
Magnet		2			**2**
Charter	1	2	2	1	**6**
TOTAL	**5**	**7**	**7**	**2**	**21**

While some of the schools in the sample were success stories, others were works in progress. To get a picture of the principalship that went beyond the profession's superstars, the study team purposefully avoided looking for "hero" principals.

This report presents the study's major findings and conclusions.

Introduction

The latest leadership trend in American education is that principals should be "instructional leaders." It's an attractive idea and, in a lot of ways, fairly self-evident. But the concept lacks definition and, like any good idea taken too far, making instructional leadership the *sine qua non* of school leadership may ultimately miss the point. Given all the demands on principals, is it reasonable also to expect them to spend hours in the classroom? Should principals be "real instructional leaders" even if other problems, like student safety, parental relations, or declining enrollment threaten the existence of their schools? Is it reasonable to expect principals to know more about instruction than teachers who have done it longer (and who might have passed up opportunities to become principals because of their dedication to the classroom)? Does it make sense to expect high school principals to lead disciplinary instruction in mathematics, history, English, physics, or biology?

Is it reasonable to expect principals to know more about instruction than teachers who have done it longer?

These are practical, not theoretical, questions. Answering them requires evidence about the real challenges and tasks principals face. It also helps to understand the resources principals can draw on to meet these challenges.

Much of the current attention to the challenges of school leadership, however, has avoided such practical questions. It has focused instead on all of the things principals *might do*—not what they actually do. The set of comprehensive standards developed by the Interstate Leaders Licensure Consortium (ISLLC) is an example of this approach. The "ISLLC standards," a set of "knowledge, dispositions, and performances" lay out a formidable catalog of things principals should be capable of mastering.

The great benefit of the ISLLC standards is that they move beyond elementary distinctions between managing and leading to expand understanding of what principals can and should do. They provide a valuable starting point for considering the different categories of skills principals need. In part, the study reported here builds on that work by setting out to explore whether it is essential for every individual principal to possess all the skills defined generically in the ISLLC standards as essential for the principalship.

This report, developed under a team led by Bradley Portin, of the University of Washington's Educational Leadership and Policy Studies Department in the College of Education, develops an innovative and useful new look at the principalship. The aim of the project was not to evaluate principal effectiveness, but rather to explore and detail the complex leadership demands on principals. Avoiding the urge to categorize everything a principal might do

(and the accompanying temptation to define a single model of best practice), this study looked at what it takes to be a principal in terms of what principals actually do. The report on these findings has significant implications both for state and district school leadership policy and for the way colleges and universities train principals.

Finding the Obvious—and More

Not every school needs the same kind of leadership.

Whether they lead urban public or elite private schools, principals do not need to be told that their jobs are complex and varied. It is not surprising, then, that after interviewing more than 150 educators in 21 diverse schools over the course of two years, Portin and his team came away with a solid appreciation of just how knotty the position is. Pushing past a single-minded focus on "instructional leadership," they came to understand as folly the expectation that a single individual can master all the skills that go into running a school.

In the end, they found that there is no simple answer to the question, "What does it take to run a school?" Though relatively small when compared to major public agencies or large corporations, schools are complicated organizations. The leadership challenges of directing a school cannot be reduced to a set of formulas, much less a single formula.

The research reported here illuminates three key findings. First, not every school needs the same kind of leadership. Second, not every school is the right place for anyone nominally qualified to be a principal. Finally, the rules under which principals act matter a great deal. When principals lack authority to choose teachers or adapt methods and schedules, they become mere middle managers. And when they do not enjoy the support they require—from policymakers, district administrators, and training institutions—they can easily be put in a double bind of being responsible for everything while lacking the authority to decide anything.

Paul T. Hill
Director, Center on Reinventing Public Education
September 2003

Section 1 The Principal as Diagnostician

The core of the principal's job is diagnosing his or her particular school's needs and, given the resources and talents available, deciding how to meet them.

Whether principals are dealing with a shortage of capable teachers, staff turnover, unpredictable funding, or social turmoil, they face many challenges. This research suggests, however, that one challenge stands out above others. It lies at the heart of what it means to lead a school, whether traditional public, charter, or private. It is the challenge of understanding what the school needs and deciding how to meet those needs.

Understanding what the school needs and then delivering what is required is the core job of the principal. The ability to understand and deliver lies at the heart of school leadership.

This deceptively simple and straightforward observation defines the need for a complicated array of actions and talents on the part of the principal. It requires the ability to "read" a school's goals, commitments, context and resources. It requires understanding a school's strengths and weaknesses. It means setting priorities, spurring others to act, and thinking long-term. Understanding what the school needs and then delivering what is required is the core job of the principal. The ability to understand and deliver lies at the heart of school leadership.

The principals interviewed talked about this core aspect of their job as "diagnosing problems" and "analyzing available resources and solutions." Diagnosis and analysis, they report, are central to the job of leading a school. Just as a doctor diagnoses illness based on a patient's symptoms, the principals described how they worked to understand what their schools need in light of what they could observe in and around the school. This diagnostic function was a key to how effective principals made sense of leading their schools. No one talked about having a detailed road map for how to lead his or her school.

Two Similar Schools, Two Diagnostic Challenges

The principals of two public magnet schools—one an elementary and the other a middle school—illustrate the point. The elementary school principal began her interview by reporting that she inherited an office that was always full. "The kids" she said, "were always in trouble." The school had rules, but no one had ever enforced them. By the time she took over, expectations for behavior at the school—among both students and adults—were shockingly low. It was common to hear angry parents yelling at teachers

and administrators. The school's culture was loose and fractious. Problems in the middle school sounded similar. The middle school principal reported that when he assumed leadership of the school, people in the district spoke of the school as a "disaster." Student achievement and morale were low, while absenteeism was high. Despite the fact that outside observers labeled both schools disasters and found it hard to distinguish what was causing problems within each of them, the two principals developed contrasting diagnoses of the nature of the problems they faced.

The elementary school principal made changing the school's culture her top priority. She set out to clarify behavioral expectations by posting the school's existing rules about behavior everywhere. She also insisted, both in public and private, that everyone—adults and children—take these rules seriously. Outlining consequences for inappropriate behavior, she created a conflict-resolution program and required teachers to manage discipline problems in their classrooms as much as possible. (In the past, teachers routinely had sent misbehaving students to the principal, which explained why her office was full when she arrived.) Finally, she worked on relationships by getting to know every student and by being visible on the playground and in the school's classrooms and hallways. She made it a priority to "let the kids know I care about what they are doing," and, at the same time, made it a point to let parents know that they could count on her. "I don't let anything go with parents," she said. "I follow through on everything." This principal's solution to the challenge rested on her efforts to shape the culture of the school — to be a visible and persistent presence in places within the school, such as playgrounds and hallways, where interactions between children, and between children and adults, had deteriorated.

The middle school principal worked out a somewhat different resolution to the problems his school faced. He quickly realized that the school's dysfunctional staff and disjointed academic program were the sources of its woes. "Getting the right staff," he said, "was the key [to turning the school around]." Like most experienced principals, he knew how to work the district's hiring system. He guarded information about pending vacancies until the district's obligatory transfer period had passed. Then he used the school's student-teacher placements as a "farm team" from which to identify and select outstanding prospective teachers. He also enjoyed an extraordinary understanding with the teachers' union that allowed him to "counsel out" some of the school's least productive teachers. By his fourth year, 40 teachers—more than half of his teaching staff—had been hired by him. Equally remarkable, 15 of these 40 had some prior history with him and understood where he wanted to lead the school.

Apart from remaking the school staff, he also brought several new routines and norms to the school. He established a schedule built around grade-level teams that included time for both individual and team planning. He put in place a school-wide, daily, oral language activity. He also began to use

achievement data to guide teaching and remediation, and, as part of this effort, established an after-school math academy for students who scored poorly on math assessments. These efforts were all part of what he called pushing the school "beyond random acts of learning."

By all accounts, these two principals went a long way toward turning around two troubled schools. In doing so, they had to understand what their schools needed. As diagnosticians, they looked beyond surface symptoms and similarities to seek out root causes for the problems they encountered. In one case, the school required a cultural transformation; in the other, it needed to renew its staff and improve coordination of its academic program. Both elements, of course, are closely related, but in each school the principal approached change differently. The elementary principal understood the need for a combination of informal actions that would set a tone and formal structures that would clarify expectations. She understood that she had to attend to multiple groups within the school, including its students, teachers, and parents. The middle school principal was convinced that changing expectations would not be sufficient. His school needed to transform both what was taught and who taught it. Changing only one or the other would not be enough to turn things around.

The Importance of Accurate Diagnosis

Anyone familiar with the challenges of urban education will recognize the challenges those two principals faced. Schools with a poisoned culture, a dysfunctional staff, or a loose academic program seem to plague many urban public school systems. Indeed, the study came across several other schools in which principals talked about the chaos they confronted the first day on the job and how they had to build a strategy to re-establish order. But even when schools are not totally dysfunctional, the principal's job involves diagnosing problems and searching for remedies. The diagnostic skills that principals in this study revealed were a combination of using and understanding multiple forms of data and the ability to see the connections between multilayered challenges.

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Special Challenges of Charter and Independent Schools

In the charter and private independent schools involved in this research, principals were also engaged with the complex problems of their schools and the challenges of meeting them. Most of these principals talked about the difficulties of attracting and keeping students at their schools. Recruiting students requires more than simply developing marketing plans or distributing attractive brochures. It means looking hard at academic programs, teachers and facilities, understanding whether they are accurate expressions of the school and its purposes, and whether or not they make sense in both practice and presentation. As one parochial school headmaster said, "Marketing is a

reflective activity. It forces you to know what you're about."

Another private school head talked about marketing his school in terms of managing parents, their expectations, and what they thought they knew about the school. He said, "We have lots of contact with parents here [current and prospective]. There is lots of explaining to do. I have to take care of a lot of rumors." For each of these leaders, their school's survival rested on the ability to compete, maintain enrollment (and related income and tuition), and secure funding. Understanding how best to meet these demands pointed them toward a variety of activities. Some saw that they needed to improve facilities and embarked on major capital campaigns. Others worked on fundraising among graduates. Most focused on keeping teacher salaries competitive and attracting the best talent to the classroom. Meanwhile, others looked to expand academic and extracurricular programs, while a few tried to build networks with other schools and organizations to secure outside support. In different private schools at different times, each of these activities (and others) could take center stage. Understanding which strategy would address his or her school's needs (and marshalling the appropriate talent and skill to pursue it) was as essential a task for these leaders as it was for traditional public school principals.

Of course, the problems a principal confronts in his or her school, be it public or private, are not static. Looking back over a 25-year tenure at her school, the principal of one urban parochial K-8 school recalled how needs had changed. At the outset, the primary problems were a weak teaching staff and eroding support from families. Accordingly, she focused her energies on staff training when she first took the job, in some cases replacing unprofessional staff with better-trained teachers more attuned to the school's mission. A decade later, she focused on modernizing instruction in the upper grades, in part to guard against enrollment losses to a nearby "reconstituted" public middle school.

In the course of her career, her school's needs and its resources changed so sharply that work she had once done wound up delegated to others, while she now confronts issues that were not even recognized 25 years before. Over her tenure, the school's annual budget grew from $340,000 to $4,000,000. Now, late in her tenure, with a strong staff to which she can delegate instructional leadership, she focuses on external tasks. Raising scholarship funds to ensure that the school maintains an economically diverse student body is a major priority. Understanding changes in the environment and responding to shifts in the challenges facing the school has been a key to her leadership success. And this understanding, combined with the capacity to respond flexibly in a dynamic environment, may be the core skill that defines a principal's effectiveness.

The leaders interviewed in new school start-ups typically found themselves facing a more complicated array of issues than principals in established schools, whether public or private. "Start-up principals" find themselves

responsible on-the-fly for an array of activities and decisions involved with everything from acquiring or renovating facilities, to acquiring equipment, books, and curriculum, to recruiting faculty and students. In established schools that are expanding programs, leaders face similar complex challenges. They find themselves preoccupied with how growth affects their school's finances, facilities, and programs. A school's needs and resources change over its lifecycle—and so do demands on leadership.

The Principal: A Master Diagnostician

The central point is that regardless of a school's type or stage of development, school leaders have to be master diagnosticians. How they diagnose, interpret, and dissect what are necessarily complex systems is, in some ways, a key measure of their success as a principal. These skills help define their ability to succeed not simply in managing the multiple demands of the job but in moving their school toward the aims and goals it holds out for itself.

While diagnosing and analyzing complex problems sometimes occurs in the moment—during a serious disciplinary crisis, an unexpected turnover of key staff, the loss of anticipated funding, or even a facilities breakdown—the choices effective school leaders make at these moments are not *ad hoc*. Even amidst crisis, the best principals consider the long-term interests of the school, continuously touching on intangibles like vision, mission, and motivation as they proceed to a decision. Ultimately they are grounded in the broader context of their schools' goals and commitments. In some cases, these goals and commitments are set by the school itself, as in the case of a private or charter school that defines its own mission and attracts families, teachers, and funders on that basis. In such schools, no action is neutral. Any decision—whom to hire, how to handle a dispute among teachers or a student disciplinary incident—can either reinforce or blur the school's basic commitments. In other cases the school's goals and commitments are set by others, as in the case of public schools where school boards and state legislatures are key actors. In public schools, as in private ones, no decision is neutral either. Every judgment made in the school either advances the school's goals and commitments or sends a signal that the goals and commitments are, if not irrelevant, perhaps at best contingent.

Many Schools: Many Challenges

In examining each school, the study team tried to discover the central challenge the school faced and how it was organized to deal with the problems before it. Identifying the central challenge was a combination of posing direct questions to principals and careful analysis of field notes by the study team. In summary, the core challenges are presented in Table 2 below (all school names in Table 2 are pseudonyms).

What Table 2 reveals is that all of these schools face obstacles in trying to meet their goals and commitments. All of them, moreover, have to deal with multiple problems. Improving test scores amidst high student turnover, while building the school's reputation may be what confronts the public "Carter High School." But planning for leadership succession while maintaining community relations in an aging "empty-nester" community is what the parochial "Redeemer School" finds on its plate. Meanwhile, although "The Ohio Field School" finds challenges establishing diversity while meeting parents' high expectations, a charter school in the same state, "Northgate Community," defines institutional survival as its most pressing need. No matter how well or poorly financed a school, leadership challenges confront the principal, and these challenges do not normally present themselves one at a time.

In general, there seem to be particular kinds of problems confronting public school principals, on one hand, and their private school counterparts, on the other. Public schools appear especially susceptible to conflict among multiple goals and stakeholders. Principals in public schools, for example, can be especially challenged when they find that a goal set by one overseer conflicts with commitments made by another. So, if the state legislature defines expectations for student performance while ignoring a teacher contract specifying that schools must hire the most senior teacher who applies for an open position, districts (and principals) are left to sort that out. Such tensions in public schools can be severe if no effort is made to rationalize stakeholders' demands.

Private and charter schools are much more likely to identify issues of basic survival or responding to parental and community expectations as critical issues. Yet, they too can face conflicting demands, such as the need to satisfy parents who want their children prepared for selective colleges, to cover costs and to keep tuition competitive, while maintaining an attractive environment for teachers.[1]

In every school visited during this study, leaders had to understand their particular school's goals and commitments, make everyday decisions in light of them, and create a strategy for balancing conflicting demands.

Making trade-offs among goals and commitments is a difficult challenge in all schools. In every school visited during this study, leaders had to understand their particular school's goals and commitments, make everyday decisions in light of them, and create a strategy for balancing conflicting demands. Diagnosing needs and developing solutions does not happen in a vacuum. It is demanding work that is not reducible to formula.

In the great scheme of things, in short, schools may be relatively small organizations, but their leadership challenges are far from small, or simple.

[1] Charter schools, for example, must balance the demands of parents, teachers, donors, and the public agencies that grant and can withdraw their charters. For an account of how charter leaders struggle to balance these demands see Hill, P.T. and R.J. Lake, (2002). *Charter Schools and Accountability in Public Education*, Washington DC, Brookings.

Table 2.
Core Challenges Faced by Schools **all school names are pseudonyms*

	Traditional Public *(institutionally organized, obtain public money)*	Independent *(do not rely on public dollars, sectarian and non-sectarian)*	Entrepenurial *(charter or magnet schools—employ public funds in often novel or creative ways)*
Washington	**CARTER HIGH *** Improving test scores; low attendance; high mobility of students; challenging neighborhood; maintaining an older facility; building the school's reputation.	**THE REDEEMER SCHOOL** *(Parochial School)* Planning for leadership succession; continuing to build the student base from which the school draws; capital development plans; maintaining community relationships.	**ROBERT SMITH MIDDLE SCHOOL** *(Public Magnet School)* Ensuring the school's progress when current principal leaves; developing other leaders in the school; maintaining the school's "turn around."
	ALCOTT ELEMENTARY Bringing discipline and instructional focus to the school; awaiting facility remodel.	**LIGHTHOUSE SCHOOL** *(Private School)* Managing the board; developing a capital campaign for school expansion; ensuring ongoing interest in school's distinctive program.	
		EXCELTON SCHOOL *(Private School)* Leadership transition; maintaining the school's unique program as leadership changes; marketing the school and ensuring financial viability.	
Ohio	**WESTERN THAMES MIDDLE SCHOOL** A struggling school with hopes to turn around; high poverty and mobility; student discipline; collaborating with neighboring schools.	**THE OHIO FIELD SCHOOL** *(Private School)* Ensuring the school's reputation remains untainted; building the school's endowment; working with high expectations from parents; establishing diversity in the school.	**NORTHGATE COMMUNITY SCHOOL** *(Charter School)* Institutional survival; attracting and retaining both students and staff; decaying facility; building support for educational progress in community.
	SUNNYSIDE HIGH SCHOOL Reining-in an out-of-control school; truancy; vandalism; establishing a basic program and coordinated social services.		**ADAMS ACADEMY** (*Charter School)* Implementing new program and establishing the school as a new charter; ensuring financial viability; developing participatory management.

Table 2. *continued*
Core Challenges Faced by Schools **all school names are pseudonyms*

	Traditional Public	Independent	Entrepenurial
Illinois	**O'CONNELL ELEMENTARY** Moving beyond history as a "leaderless" school; maintaining the culture of trust in the school; building external partnerships to support the school's programs.		**SUMMERCREST CHARTER SCHOOL** *(Charter School)* Growth as new grade levels are added to the school; facilities inadequate to meet growth; maintaining literacy vision; working with the board to develop leadership.
	NORTH HIGH Maintaining the school's historic distinctive mission; maintaining diversity requirements of the school; budget cuts and principal change.		**CLINTON MAGNET SCHOOL** *(Public Magnet School)* Holding onto "market share"; implementing new technology program that is core of program; space contraints.
	TIGERWEST HIGH Managerial predominance in leadership; student discipline; initiating instructional innovation.		
Wisconsin	**GRAFTON ELEMENTARY** High-poverty, high-mobility student population; ensuring teacher collaboration; keeping focus on classroom teaching; grantwriting.	**WALKER PREPARATORY** *(Private School)* Acquiring accreditation; establishing International Baccalaureate program; adding grade levels to the school; establishing competitive salaries; lowering operating deficit.	**NAMASTE HIGH** *(Contract School)* High-need, at-risk student population; maintaining school's reputation for success and the partnerships that support the programs.
			MIDDLETON HIGH *(Charter School)* Recapturing enrollment drop; financial viability; developing new teachers with a senior staff; maintaining the school's distinctive business programs.
			SAMSON MIDDLE *(Charter School)* Developing the school's charter provisions; creating a sense of structure in the school to support new vision.

Section 2 Leading a School, Inside and Out

Regardless of school type, schools need leadership in seven critical areas.

During site visits, the team asked principals (and those who work with them) to describe what they do as school leaders. What are you responsible for? What do other leaders in the school do? And what do you think has to occur for the school to function effectively? As might be expected, the responses varied widely. The answers ranged from evaluating teachers to raising money, from running meetings to putting in appearances at football games.

The research challenge was how to identify amidst this variety a set of critical leadership functions that had to be performed in any school—regardless of whether it was a traditional public, charter, magnet, or independent school. As will become clear, the functions settled on do not present a formula or map for leadership; instead, they point to key areas in which leaders—both principals and others—take a variety of actions to move their school toward meeting its goals and commitments. There are no universally "correct" techniques for addressing the issues raised in each area.

From an extensive list of tasks, functions, roles, and duties, the team identified seven common functions of leadership evident in all types of schools and performed by someone in each of them.[2] Table 3 below lists these seven areas and describes generic actions associated with each.

These functions were performed quite differently in different schools. In some, principals were the key players in all seven areas. In others, teachers or other administrators played important roles. In most schools, some functions were clearly more critical than others. These differences are a key finding of this research effort. Subsequent sections examine who performs which functions and why. This section provides a general outline of what the functions are and the purposes they serve.

The team identified seven common functions of leadership evident in all types of schools and performed by someone in each of them.

[2] In addition to the responses in the 21 schools, this analysis draws on current literature in educational leadership, including, for example, chapter 1 (pp. 3-41) in Sergiovanni, T. J. (2001). *The Principalship: A reflective Practice Perspective (4th ed.)*. Boston: Allyn & Bacon.

Table 3.
School Critical Functions and Action

Critical Function	Action
Instructional Leadership	Assuring quality of instruction, modeling teaching practice, supervising curriculum, and assuring quality of teaching resources.
Cultural Leadership	Tending to the symbolic resources of the school (e.g., its traditions, climate, and history).
Managerial Leadership	Tending to the operations of the school (e.g., its budget, schedule, facilities, safety and security, and transportation).
Human Resource Leadership	Recruiting, hiring, firing, inducting, and mentoring teachers and administrators; developing leadership capacity and professional development opportunities.
Strategic Leadership	Promoting a vision, mission, goals, and developing a means to reach them.
External Development Leadership	Representing the school in the community, developing capital, public relations, recruiting students, buffering and mediating external interests, and advocating for the school's interests.
Micropolitical Leadership	Buffering and mediating internal interests, maximizing resources (financial and human) .

Instructional Leadership

Every interviewed principal and teacher talked about the importance of having someone to guide the curriculum and set priorities for professional development. The degree to which this occurred in practice, however, varied greatly. For some principals, instructional leadership seemed to be limited to perfunctory supervision and evaluation of teachers in accordance with contract and code provisions. Other principals talked more concretely about how they made daily visits to the classroom to evaluate teachers (in terms of delivery methods, content, and student participation) and to provide feedback and assistance. The schools in the sample presented a range of activity and effectiveness around instructional leadership. Nevertheless, it was clear that all of them needed someone who ensured the quality of instruction, was able to model teaching practice for others, and could supervise the curriculum, while ensuring that teachers had the resources they needed.

It was clear that all schools needed someone who assured the quality of instruction.

Cultural Leadership

Principals and teachers also talked about the importance of maintaining their school's sense of tradition and tone—of fortifying the school's sense of how things get done around here. The principal of a parochial elementary school, for example, spoke about how the school used a yearly theme to support its culture. Introduced each year by the principal in a major presentation to the school community (students and parents), the theme's purpose was to send a message to students, parents, and teachers about the school's priorities and goals. "Though the parables differ," she said, "the message is always tied to our values of service, respect, integrity, and love. It gives us a common language"

The year the school was visited the theme was "The Greatest Show on Earth." The principal's message was aimed at middle school parents: Adolescents are performing a "high wire act," she said, and it is the job of parents and teachers to serve as a safety net while standing back and letting the students perform.

Elsewhere, a public elementary school principal talked about herself as "a daily representation of the school's culture and climate." Her energetic and friendly interactions with adults and students set the school's tone. She promised, for example, to perform a lip synch routine in front of the whole school if all grades met their performance goals. Making good on her promise, she symbolized how both academics and a good-natured enthusiasm were important at the school. In another public school, the teachers stressed expectations around behavior by handing out "Caught Being Good" tickets to students. Each day teachers would deposit the ticket stubs in a box in the principal's office and at the end of the day the principal drew names and handed out prizes.

At another public middle school, the principal used ceremony to highlight student progress. The school's yearly "Celebration of Learning," gave teachers, parents, and students an opportunity to recognize and reward student progress as measured by the district's promotion policy. With such a broad range of activities, public and private school leaders reinforced the importance of creating a school climate and sense of tradition that supported the school's goals and commitments.

Managerial Leadership

Both public and private school leaders talked about managing their school largely in terms of fiscal management. Across sectors, the need to "get creative" with funding was a continuing refrain. In some public schools, principals discussed the added stress of having limited control over their budget. One principal at a public elementary school with 500 students reported she had control over about $25,000 of her budget. In a comprehensive public high school, the principal found additional discretionary funds for the school by placing soda machines prominently in the hallways. For this principal, finding additional funds was a basic leadership problem, one so pressing that it became worthwhile to run the political risk of offending community groups and parents concerned about marketing soda pop in public schools.

In private and charter schools, principals had more control over finances. But they did not have the luxury of an essential guarantee of funding that public school leaders enjoy. Much of their time was spent marshalling resources above and beyond tuition receipts. In two cases, this also involved building extensive endowments and capital campaigns for building construction.

Across schools, someone (even if it was in concert with the district central office) had to pay attention to the operations of the school. This included schedule, facilities, and transportation as well as its budget. All schools needed someone to make sure that the system kept functioning. In some cases, this challenge could be onerous, as older buildings deteriorated or the school was set upon by vandals. At one public high school, the principal had devoted extensive time to cleaning up the school. In fact, he pointed with pride to doors freshly painted to cover up years of vandalism from student carvings. For this principal, attending to the managerial dimension of a clean, safe school was an essential leadership task.

Human Resource Leadership

Across the board, school leaders singled out the importance of hiring and inducting teachers for their schools. As the principal of a public middle school noted, "Getting the right staff was the key." Human resource leadership included both teaching (certified) and support (classified) staff. Both were important and principals talked about how important the ancillary staff are

to the climate of the school.

Private and charter schools generally had more control over hiring and the conditions of employment than did traditional public schools. The primary driver for hiring in the public system was a combination of centralized personnel departments and specific practices defined by union contracts and state codes. Principals in traditional public schools had to rely on their ability to "work the system." This included timing posted openings to ensure access to a preferred pool of candidates. In several instances, public school principals negotiated special provisions with their districts to provide them with greater latitude in replacing staff unable to embrace the school's mission.

Finally, the human resource function included professional development of staff. For teachers, school-based in-service training and development required a nimble principal who could both gain access to resources and match development activities to the school's strategic goals. In addition, several principals followed the practice of sending teachers in teams to conferences—ensuring that collaborative learning could occur during the professional development activity.

Strategic Leadership

Most of the school leaders interviewed were well versed in the vocabulary of "vision" and "mission." Whether they were working from a district-supplied school improvement plan or with a board of trustees to map out goals, principals reported that strategic leadership was an important element of the job. A private school head noted, "It's my job to build our vision and mission and to keep it in front of the school." Each year he and his staff would review the school's mission statement and talk about how to keep it fresh. During one of the meetings, the school decided to institute what it called "Habits of the Mind." This became a monthly curricular focus on behavior tied to mission, a focus designed to "help students think about what [e.g.,, respect] looks like and sounds like." An assistant principal at a parochial school commented on something similar. A new mission statement at his school prompted conversations among the staff about the school's spirit and climate. The teachers eventually set up a new committee to address these issues directly.

This study identified two other areas of leadership that have generally received less attention: external development and the micropolitics of leading a school.

Across schools, varying levels of success were evident in strategic leadership. Some schools knew where they were going; others were marking time. Each school—like any organization—needed a vision, mission, goals, and a way to reach them. Some schools defined their own missions; others had their missions partly defined for them by outside groups such as boards and state government.

All of the leadership areas cited above—instructional, cultural, managerial, human resources, and strategic— are well described and documented

elsewhere.[3] They present little that is new. In addition to these five areas, however, this study identified two other areas of leadership that have generally received less attention: external development and the micropolitics of leading a school.

External Development Leadership

The inclusion of private and "entrepreneurial public schools" in this study (i.e.,. charters, magnets, and other publicly funded schools that hire their own teachers and are funded based on the number of children voluntarily enrolled) highlighted leadership functions that are present, but often in the background, in traditional public schools. Private school heads have always talked about the need to market their schools to parents and to raise money above and beyond the tuition paid by students. Whether this takes the form of an annual giving campaign or a particular push to raise money for a major capital project, private school leaders spend a lot of time worrying about making connections to external resources and commitments. Traditionally, public schools have not demonstrated such an emphasis.

However, although development is more common in private schools, this kind of leadership is becoming more evident in public schools. In recent years, many public school principals have found themselves raising supplementary funds from parents, foundations, and businesses.[4] Indeed, every school visited was actively pursuing grant funds to help supplement their program. Many of the schools—public and private — had extensive lists of organizations with which they partnered: e.g., Boys and Girls Clubs, YMCA, local banks, businesses, and colleges.

Beyond that, many public schools are involved in marketing or "selling" their images. A public middle school principal described this activity by saying, "I want people to come and see what we're doing here—we want to promote our work and get visible. We can make connections to the community that add to our program and resources." The principal of another public magnet middle school talked about the importance of "telling our story to parents and students" as she worked to attract new students when "white flight" eroded the school's historic enrollment base.

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[3] See, for example, Crow, G. M. (1995). "Socialization to a new conception of the principalship." *Journal of Educational Administration*, 33(1), 22-43; Starratt, R. J. (1993). The Drama of Leadership. London: Falmer.

[4] See, for example, Mary Beth Celio. *Random Acts of Kindness*. (1996). Seattle: Center on Reinventing Public Education.

Micropolitical Leadership

The last critical area of activity involves facilitating the transactions within the school that are associated with the other six areas.

This is an area that has, to date, received little formal attention. But it is obviously important. By micropolitics, we mean "the strategies by which individuals and groups in organizational contexts ... use ... authority and influence to further their interests."[5] When school members jockey for resources, propose a change in the school's program, or try to alter reporting relationships—these actions can be thought of as micropolitical.

For example, as principals promote the vision and core mission of their school (strategic leadership) and work to develop teaching quality (instructional leadership) they need to explain what they intend to do and why it is important. They also have to motivate people to join the cause (human resource leadership), and sometimes they have to redirect resources (management leadership). In one of the schools in this study, when a public school principal embraced state standards-based reform mandates, she had to explain the rationale and influence of the reform to the staff. Ultimately, she had to counsel out of the school three teachers who refused to accept the reform. All of these efforts require mediating and buffering varied internal interests within the school as the school staff chooses priorities for both programs and resources. The principals interviewed as part of this study left little doubt that these leadership functions are often difficult and stressful.

Distinct, but Not Separate

One of the potential drawbacks of identifying seven leadership areas is that the very identification of these dimensions might leave the impression that they are totally separate "silos" of activity. Of course, they are not. Though distinct in some ways and useful for analytical purposes, the seven areas are necessarily and inextricably linked. When a principal attends to a school's fiscal health, she also influences the school's climate and its relationship with external stakeholders. When a principal sets an instructional agenda, what he does has implications for human resources and professional development. While the seven areas are logically distinct, and they can be assigned to different people, they necessarily push and pull on each other in important ways.

A small, K-8 private school illustrates this point very well. Because the school lived and died by its enrollment, the headmaster was constantly engaged in marketing—as he put it, he had to "sell the school" to prospective students

[5] Hoyle, E. (1986). *The Politics of School Management*. London: Hodder & Stoughton, p. 126.

and families. In practice this meant that during a typical school day it was common to have prospective students and their parents touring the school, popping their heads into classrooms, talking to teachers and students.

This openness, so necessary in marketing the school, had an effect on the school's culture (and vice versa). Because external development required that the school regularly present itself to outsiders, it encouraged a culture of openness and accountability that was apparent even during a relatively short visit. The culture was friendly, open and confident, a reflection of the school's general sense of itself, certainly, but also something encouraged by the strategic and external development needs of the school.

Likewise, an entrepreneurial public school principal explained how his school wanted to change to a block schedule because the staff recognized that students needed more time to focus on their work. This required changes in teacher working conditions that violated the union contract. What began as an issue of instructional leadership very quickly became a matter of human resource leadership as the school became deeply embroiled in negotiations with the union about working conditions.

Site-specific characteristics often determined the urgency of specific leadership issues.

In each of the seven leadership areas many different alternatives are possible, both in terms of the actions taken and who takes them. What leaders and schools choose to do and the areas of leadership in which they invest the most energy is the result of a complicated array of situational influences. Site-specific characteristics often determined the urgency of specific leadership issues. Is the school new or established? Does it have a solid academic reputation? Or, is its reputation shaky? What about the principal's expertise and the talents and dispositions of other adults in the school? In fact, as the next section argues, the principal does not have to be a "one-man band." The essence of the principalship lies in ensuring that these seven leadership functions are performed. Whether principals perform or delegate the functions is a secondary consideration.

Section 3 More than a "One-Man Band"

Principals are responsible for ensuring that leadership happens in all seven critical areas, but they don't have to provide it on their own.

As noted above, the role principals, teachers, and others play in the seven areas differs considerably between the schools visited. This difference is due to the complicated interaction of governance, a school's stage in development, its resources, and its leader's personal preferences. In some schools, the principal retains direct links to all seven areas of activity; in others, the principal delegates large areas of leadership activity to teachers or assistant principals. In some public schools, as will be seen, district central offices play a key role in both human resource and instructional leadership. In a similar vein, some private school boards are involved in managerial leadership. Despite these distinctions, principals are generally responsible for the overall operation of their schools without having to perform directly all of the leadership functions required.

Despite these distinctions, principals are generally responsible for the overall operation of their schools without having to perform directly all of the leadership functions required.

It is important to make a distinction between positional and *de facto* leaders—and between leaders and leadership. Principals, assistant principals, department heads, and others highly placed on a school's organizational chart, are leaders by position. However, *de facto* leaders exist in every school: individuals who, regardless of their position, help schools identify issues that interfere with student learning, create a more participatory environment, and help bring resources to bear toward meaningful change and reform. (Conversely, *de facto* leaders can also sabotage change by throwing the weight of their influence against it.) Whether appointed or *de facto*, leaders are thought of as the people who exercise discretion and influence over the direction of schools. *Leadership* is more of a broad characteristic of schools, a distributed capability in an environment that helps sustain changes that enhance student learning, improve instruction, maximize participation in decision making, and align resources to the school's vision and purpose.

The distinction between leaders and leadership may become clearer after examining Figure 1 (following page). Figure 1 presents a general illustration of the variety of leaders and leadership configurations across schools. The top diagram in Figure 1 shows how, in some schools, the seven critical leadership areas (represented by the seven circles) are tightly coupled around the principal. The principal remains centrally involved, if not entirely responsible, for each of the core functions. The top diagram displays what is almost a formula for a beleaguered principal—a one-man band responsible for just about everything in the school from the lyrics and melody to the

bass line and harmonics.

The middle diagram displays a more distributed leadership model. This principal encourages "leadership" throughout the organization, very much the way the leader of a jazz combo expects her musicians to solo. Here the principal lays down the basic melody line and encourages individual band members to improvise around the theme. In this middle design, the principal focuses on a few key functions to keep the whole thing together (e.g., strategic leadership, external development, and cultural leadership) while other administrators and teachers take the lead in the other functions (e.g., instruction and human resource leadership). This is more of a shared model, sometimes contingent on available talent, sometimes on the disposition of the principal.

The third diagram of Figure 1 shows how, in other schools, the seven critical leadership areas are even more broadly distributed among various people. Here the principal is more akin to an orchestra conductor—playing nothing himself, but making sure the many individual parts are expertly performed, while harmonizing and working together smoothly. This particular model accurately describes what is apparent in many private schools. In these schools the principal serves in a "superintendent-like" role, focusing on strategic leadership and external development and politics, leaving the "principal" responsibilities to department chairs and heads of school sub-units.

Figure 1.
Leaders, Responsibilities, and the Seven Core Functions

Consolidating Seven Functions within the Principal:
The Principal as One-Man Band

The Principal

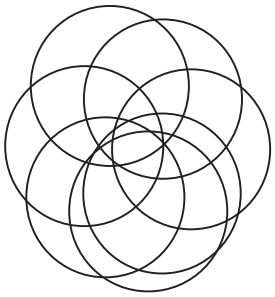
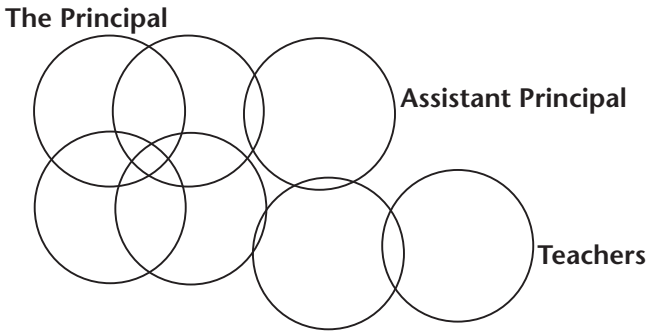


Figure 1. *continued*
Leaders, Responsibilities, and the Seven Core Functions

Shared Leadership Between Principal and Other Designated Leaders in the School: ***The Principal as Jazz Band Leader***



Distinct Leadership Roles between Independent School Principals and Level Heads: ***The Principal as Orchestra Conductor***

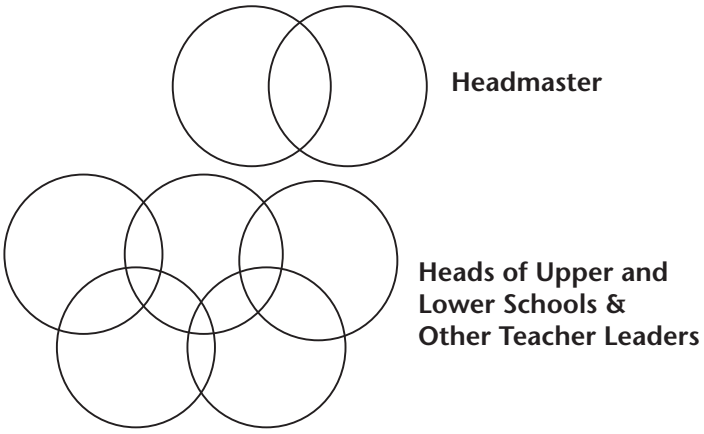


Table 4 (following page) illustrates this variety further by looking at how three specific schools in the study distributed leadership responsibilities across the seven areas. The column on the left of the table lists the different people, or groups of people, involved in leadership activities in each school. The remaining columns lay out each of the seven areas of leadership. One of the schools is a charter school; the second is a parochial school; and the third is a traditional public school.

It is quickly apparent that in the charter school, the principal participates in each of the seven areas, but he shares leadership with others around instruc-

tion, strategy, and human resources. Teachers are a particularly important part of the school's leadership team with key roles regarding instruction, the school's mission, and hiring decisions. In the parochial school, on the other hand, the principal completely delegates instructional and human resource leadership to an assistant principal, but remains vested in the rest of the leadership functions. So here is a school in which the principal delegates many of the instructional leadership roles, while retaining major responsibility in broader external and strategic issues such as keeping the flame of the school's culture and strategic direction alive.

Table 4.
Three Schools Distribute Leadership Differently

	Core Leadership Functions						
	Instructional	Cultural	Managerial	Strategic	Human Resource	External Development	Micropolitical
CHARTER SCHOOL							
Principal	X	X	X	X	X	X	X
Assistant Principal							
Teacher "A"	X			X	X		
Teacher "B"	X			X	X		
Board					X		
CATHOLIC SCHOOL							
Principal		X	X	X		X	X
Assistant Principal	X		X		X		
Teacher "A"							
Teacher "B"							
Board				X			
TRADITIONAL PUBLIC SCHOOL							
Principal		X	X	X	X	X	X
Assistant Principal			X	X	X	X	
Teacher "A"							X
Teacher "B"							
District	X			X	X		

By contrast, in the traditional public school, no one appears to be leading the school's instructional program. What little instructional coherence there was seemed to be driven by the school district. The principal, moreover, is largely constrained to activities around management, culture, and internal politics. Activities associated with human resources and strategy are mostly vested in the district, leaving the principal with little sense of ownership in these areas.

The Many Forms of Leadership

What is apparent conceptually in Figure 1 (and demonstrated as a practical matter in Table 4) came through powerfully during the interviews conducted at the 21 schools. There are many different ways to lead. The principal does not have to do it all. A recently founded pre-K-to-4 church school provided one illustration of this. The interviews with the principal and other school personnel suggested that the principal's main sphere of activity was managerial, doing things like assembling and delivering the necessary fiscal and academic reports so that the school could accept voucher students from the local school district. The school's church-based board of directors provided most of the strategic and cultural leadership. Though not a career educator, the principal was also involved in hiring and firing staff members and she visited classrooms and participated in teacher evaluations. But she said she did not oversee the school's curriculum. That job fell to an experienced teacher on the school's staff, a person everyone acknowledged to be the school's real instructional leader.

At an elite private school, the headmaster took a completely different approach. In a role akin to a superintendent, she focused her attention on strategic leadership. She had recruited and developed individuals in the school who were capable of assuming major leadership responsibilities around the academic program, leaving her free to promote its vision, mission, and goals. The school's board of directors advised the headmaster on noneducation -related matters, including finances, city ordinances, capital development, and growing the endowment.

At a parochial elementary school, the principal delegated much of the day-to-day management of the building as well as instructional leadership to others. She taught one class a week to keep abreast of the attitudes of students and teachers, but she spent the bulk of her time raising funds to enlarge the school's endowment and ensure the school's long-term survival.

Delegation by the principal did not amount to abdication.

Another elite private school provided a similar story. The school's headmaster was entrusted by the board with the overall educational and operational leadership of the institution, but he had delegated instructional leadership to division heads who in turn worked closely with their respective department chairs.

In all of these cases, delegation by the principal did not amount to abdication. Even when there was a fairly wide distribution of leadership, the principal was able (and needed to) keep a finger on the pulse of each of the seven core areas. For example, in any of the schools that were moving forward toward their goals, the principal, even if not "the instructional leader," was able to articulate a set of criteria about the quality of instruction at the school. The criteria ranged from evidence of state standards in instruction to data on student achievement. In some cases the principal's connection to instruction was evident through the ability to identify teachers and administrators who had strong instructional skills and to organize the school in such a way as to empower those people's leadership.

Given today's emphasis on instructional accountability, these distinctions are important. In no case was a principal walled-off from the instructional work of the school. But neither did all principals present themselves as the "instructional exemplar" of the school—capable of teaching any class at any time. Principals often recognized that their distance from the classroom meant that they needed to rely on others who were closer to the work of teachers to provide leadership. These principals could still identify good instruction when they saw it, and would incorporate visits to the classroom into their regular practice. (One principal reports that class visits are her "morning ritual.") They could often use occasional observations as a way of assuring themselves that good instruction was present throughout the school. But their comments suggested that identifying good teaching is not the same thing as helping others teach well. They knew that distributing instructional leadership around the school was necessary if they were to tend to other challenges facing their schools. Clearly, instructional leadership merits the attention it receives in the press and research. But several of the principals interviewed followed a dictum around instructional leadership that is familiar in international affairs, but rarely heard in education: trust but verify.

In no case was a principal walled-off from the instructional work of the school.

Section 4 Governance Matters

A school's governance structure affects the ways key leadership functions are performed.

While this research provides a healthy appreciation for diversity within school types (there is, for example, no "typical" charter school), a few patterns emerged around the way certain kinds of schools carry out leadership activities in the seven areas. In short, governance matters.

Traditional public school leaders are profoundly affected by the actions of superintendents, district-wide school boards, and central offices. The actions of these groups are, in turn, influenced by federal, state, county, or city government policies and by collective bargaining agreements. While charter and independent school leaders are not immune from external influence, their schools' lean governance structure (generally built around boards of trustees) sets them apart from the weight of a larger system. And though charter and independent schools must be licensed by the state, and abide by basic state, city, and county regulations, they are less directly affected by those parties. Some had teacher unions, but their labor relations were generally local and not defined by contracts negotiated far from the school.

Traditional public school leaders are profoundly affected by the actions of superintendents, district-wide school boards, and central offices

This study suggests that these differences in governance structure influence the degree to which adults in the school share leadership responsibilities. And it also suggests that governance affects how much authority the school had to act in each of the seven leadership areas.

Sharing Leadership Responsibility

Leaders in all of the schools said they shared with others some responsibility for actions in all seven areas. But leaders of the private/entrepreneurial schools were more likely than public school leaders to share leadership responsibility in several of the areas. In particular, private/entrepreneurial school leaders reported they were more likely to share leadership around culture, strategic vision, and human resources. In many ways, it is not surprising that the private/entrepreneurial schools reported sharing leadership responsibilities around culture more than the traditional public schools did. By virtue of their autonomy and lack of guaranteed enrollment, many of these schools prize having a clear and uncomplicated mission that explains what they will provide students and what they expect of all the adults and children associated with the school. Traditional public schools, by contrast, may have more diffuse missions largely defined by external pressures and demands.

Table 5 shows the percentage of principals interviewed, grouped by governance type, who said they shared leadership responsibility across the seven areas. While the small sample is far from representative and many other factors are undoubtedly at play, the results suggest a relationship between leadership arrangements and the governance structure across the 21 schools. Schools with governance structures that ensure more freedom of action appear to spread leadership functions around within the school more than traditional public schools do.[6] By contrast, traditional public schools look more constrained in terms of distributed leadership roles. And this is noticeably so in terms of leadership related to school culture and strategic goals.

Table 5.
Percentages of Principals Saying They Shared Leadership, by School Type and Leadership Function

Critical Function	Private and Entrepreneurial Schools* (13 Total)	Traditional Public Schools (8 Total)
Instructional	92%	75%
Cultural	67%	14%
Managerial	46%	50%
Strategic	85%	38%
External Development	46%	50%
Micropolitical	77%	75%
Human Resource	100%	63%

**Includes private, religious, charter, and magnet schools*

In the traditional public setting, it may be that a combination of union contracts, constraints on resources, and the historical vesting of power in the principal rein in opportunities to distribute leadership across all seven leadership functions. In some collective bargaining agreements, for example, only the principal (or assistant principal with administrative credentials) can evaluate teachers. Given these and other constraints (on hiring and on curriculum direction) it is no wonder that principals are less able to share leadership with other adults in the school.

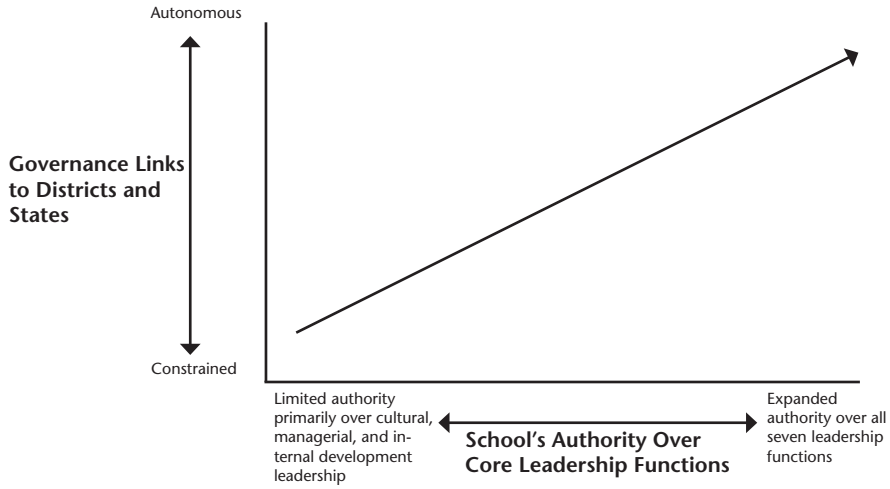
6. On a different note, it is somewhat surprising that all of the principals, regardless of school type, said that they shared at least some responsibility for instructional leadership with other adults in their school given the current emphasis on the principal as instructional leader.

Another possible explanation for the difference is that all of the traditional schools had fixed tables of organization established by their districts. Smaller traditional public schools—e.g., those with less than 500 students—had very limited means for assisting the principal no matter how difficult the school's circumstances. They had to cross an enrollment threshold (usually 500 students) before being allotted another administrator. The nontraditional schools, by contrast, had more latitude in how they allocated resources and could, as a result, adopt a plan of organization and staffing that met the needs of their students and school—whether this meant having a dean of students, or deputizing a veteran teacher to take on administrative roles. To be sure, the principals of the larger traditional public high schools had one or more assistant principals ready to participate in leadership roles. They could also delegate some leadership roles to their department heads. But as the point below suggests, these same high school principals, as well as other traditional public school leaders, were limited in the amount of authority they could muster in each of the seven critical areas.

Differences in Authority and Freedom of Action

In traditional public schools, principals were sometimes unable to exert much authority over leadership in areas like instruction (because the district drove the curriculum) and human resources (because of centralized recruitment and hiring). Figure 2 illustrates the general relationship between governance structures of the district and state and authority to act in the seven leadership areas: the more autonomy a school has in its decision making, the more likely it is to have freedom to act in all seven leadership areas.

Figure 2.
The Relationship Between Governance Links and Leadership Action



Principals in the most constrained environments had trouble ascending beyond being a middle manager.

Principals in the most constrained environments had trouble ascending beyond being a middle manager. Much of their time was spent in compliance and implementation of directives established from either the district superintendent or the board. These principals' actions were often focused on keeping the school clean, the students under control, and the teachers from rebelling. In some traditional public schools, the collective bargaining agreement and other district-wide policies determined what would be covered in teachers' professional development and how many days could be devoted to it. Teachers engaged in professional development activities that sometimes had little to do with their school's priorities. In other traditional public schools, bureaucratic imperatives constrained the principal's work—as more than one principal noted, some of their least productive time was spent dealing with a barrage of e-mail and other correspondence from "downtown."

One public school principal reported how changes in his district's policy had wreaked havoc on his school. The district's new attendance policy was quite punitive, resulting in costly record keeping on site, more discipline procedures, and more suspensions. Further, he explained how another district policy — all students must wear visible student identification cards at all times — had created enforcement problems at the school. "There is a disconnect," he said "between the rules the board establishes and the reality of what goes on in a school and what it costs to implement these things." Such policies set the direction of the school on various fronts and took some key aspects of leading the school (i.e., the school's expectations and consequences for student behavior) outside of the principal's authority. In these constrained schools, principals end up spending much of their time completing administrative tasks for the district. In some instances, also, they spend a lot of time figuring out how to "work within the system."[7]

A public middle school illustrates two different stages of linkage to the school district. The school was, for much of its history, a traditional school connected to its district with all of the constraints just identified. The principal and staff applied to become a district charter school in order to gain more operational freedom over staffing, curriculum, hiring, and resource use. The principal explained this decision by saying the school "wanted to bypass the superintendent and central office to have direct access to the school board—we needed more control over our budget and operations." In the end, still a public school, it secured additional decision making power to run the school.

7. In two of the traditional public high schools we visited, the principals had extensive histories with the districts, including a history of holding a position in the district central office. With this background, they were able to manage hiring decisions and negotiate for school programs in a manner that would not always be accessible to an "outsider" or novice principal.

Despite these general patterns — traditional public schools being more constrained in terms of distributing leadership and freedom of action than private/entrepreneurial schools — there is no absolute link between governance and the principal's freedom of action. Just as a public school was able to transform itself into a charter school with considerable freedom of action, one charter school visited by the team was overseen by a Board of Trustees consumed with micromanaging finances, human resources, and curriculum. The board interfered so much it ended up constraining and clouding the principal's sphere of authority. Poorly defined roles and responsibilities, coupled with financial problems (the school's enrollment was too small to sustain its program), put the school on the brink of going out of business.

To sum up: While many factors influence how a school approaches the seven key leadership areas, a school's governance structure seems particularly important in influencing how adults in the building share leadership. In fact, governance can often determine whether or not the school leadership (or leadership team) has authority to act in any of the seven areas.

A school's governance structure seems particularly important in influencing how adults in the building share leadership.

Section 5 Learning by Doing

Regardless of their training, most principals think they learned the skills they need "on the job."

When principals were asked during this study to describe what best prepared them for handling complex challenges, experience turned out to be a great teacher. The academic training they had received was often dismissed, but rarely was on-the-job experience or time with a mentor discarded. Typical responses included the following:

There was nothing in my training that prepared me for this job.
– Public high school principal

Nothing I studied helped prepare me for this.
– Public elementary school principal

All of this only made sense when I started working.
– Public elementary school principal

My internship with a practicing principal was the best specific preparation I had.
– Public magnet middle school principal

I learned what I needed to know about budgets and discipline when I was an assistant principal.
– Public middle school principal

I can't even remember what I studied.
- Public elementary school principal

Having been "around the track" a time or two and having dealt with complex challenges in the past helped principals exercise the art of diagnosis and interpretation. Few cited any formal preparation as a source of this skill. This was especially the case the more time had elapsed since their initial principal preparation.[8] As the quotes above indicate, many said that their formal preparation was of little use to how they currently conceive of their job.

Short-Changed by Preparation

Principals saw their preparation programs as unhelpful because the course work emphasized only instructional and managerial leadership. Most said their training programs did not touch on the more complex combinations of leadership skills used in cultural, strategic, or external development leadership. Moreover, managing the complex push and pull within districts and district directives wasn't part of the curriculum either.

Principals generally characterized traditional principal preparation as middle management training which did not include substantive mentorship.

Principals generally characterized traditional principal preparation as middle management training which did not include substantive mentorship. During interviews, they spoke of doing either strictly skill-based activities in their preparation programs (e.g., how to prepare a master schedule), or theoretical exercises that were disconnected from what it means to really lead a school. A few described training programs that made an attempt to link theory and practice, or to emulate the "messy" and complex problems that arise in schools. These experiences, however, seemed to be the exception to the general rule.

Looking back on their formal preparation, several principals mentioned topics that they wish had been covered: conflict resolution, cultural sensitivity, problem diagnosis and solving, organizational theory, and, most of all, business and financial administration. Several of the principals of self-governing schools mused out loud that perhaps they should have pursued an MBA.

While the majority of interviewees felt short-changed by their formal preparation, it is important to note that some did not. In particular, novice principals seemed to find a closer connection between the tasks they faced on the job and their training than did people who had been principals for some time. One private school principal who had recently graduated from a principal training program said she regularly consulted her course work on organizational culture and leadership styles. It's not clear whether preparation programs like hers have recently changed to become more useful or whether there is something about the tasks that experienced principals attend to later in their careers that are left out of training programs.

8. All of the principals in this study had come through some university-based principal preparation or certification program and most said they graduated from what might be termed "traditional" programs.

Preparation: Not a Program but a Collection of Experiences

The interviews suggest that preparation for being a successful principal is a collection of experiences and opportunities, rather than simply a credentialing program. It seems that some of the disappointment these leaders expressed about their preparation could be attributed to a lack of connection with others during their early placement, as either an intern or novice principal. According to the principals in this study, key among those experiences and opportunities is the chance to work with a mentor. Several leaders said mentors were valuable sources of training during their formative years. As one of the quotes at the beginning of this section suggests, working with a mentor is a useful way to understand what various leadership and management skills look like in action. One private school head said, "I learned [how to handle the board of trustees] at the feet of the master." This was central to his understanding of the complexity and politics of leading an independent school.

Being a principal requires one to act as a leader, but no one can do it alone. It involves a core set of concerns, but cannot be reduced to a formula.

Given the complicated picture that emerges of what it takes to lead a school, it is no wonder that university-based training alone falls short. Being a principal is about instruction, but it's also many other things. Being a principal requires one to act as a leader, but no one can do it alone. It involves a core set of concerns, but cannot be reduced to a formula. But if it is little wonder that traditional university-based training falls short there is also no doubt that traditional programs can also be improved.

The Preparation Challenge

These complaints and observations from school principals really need to be understood in the context of the larger challenges facing American education today. Public schools face an onslaught of change. States are holding students, teachers, and principals accountable for achievement; teachers and administrators are adapting to possibilities generated by information technology; the relationship between schools and the constituencies they serve is under stress and changing. In the midst of it all, schools will need to hire increasing numbers of teachers and administrators in the decades ahead.

Uniformly, the principals interviewed in this study demonstrated an eagerness to serve children and a plea to be allowed to do so. Principals need to be given the ability to draw upon the collective experience and talent of their faculty. They need to be given the authority to devise and implement the means of improving achievement levels for the students that they serve.

The principals interviewed in this study demonstrated an eagerness to serve children and a plea to be allowed to do so.

But many of them need help learning how to do these things. Preparation programs face a challenge too. The world of schools has become more complex and change is in the air. Time is short and although learning on the job

is valuable, experience is often a hard teacher. Preparation programs need to respond to these realities. They need to be revised so that new principals are not simply capable of "accepting the key" to a new building; they should be capable of envisioning the new building and bringing it to life.

If that is to happen, according to the interviews reported here, preparation programs must start anew to help principal candidates deal with such questions as:

- How to change the culture of a school, and how to change people's attitudes?
- How to integrate technology successfully into the classroom?
- How to manage change?
- How to resolve conflicts and deal with unhappy, dispirited, or angry parents?
- How to ensure that the needs of all children are being met?
- How to build a focus around learning for all concerned — student, teacher, and community?
- How to manage the conflicts arising over resource competition?
- How to attract, support, and retain the highest quality teachers?

Section 6 Implications and Conclusions

Considering the variety of schools visited, it is unsurprising that what emerges from the research is a healthy skepticism about any single concept of what it means to be a school leader. Individual styles, school-specific challenges, politics, and governance issues all produce different leadership stories in different schools. There is no single recipe for leading a school.

This central conclusion means that generalizations about what principals "need to know and be able to do"—no matter how carefully crafted—ultimately misrepresent the situation in many schools. Making sense of what is going on in schools and helping principals do their jobs better requires more than an inventory of things for the ideal principal to oversee. A list that enumerates such things as research-based instruction and assessment, systems theory, operational procedures of schools and districts, technology, the philosophy and history of education and so on, misses the point. Helping principals do their job better requires an understanding of the challenges they face, how they approach their task, and the things that get in their way or help them lead.

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The findings outlined above in this report lead to four recommendations for policymakers and colleges of education. These four recommendations arise from the portrait of school leadership these principals portrayed rather than an evaluation of effective practice.

First, district leaders should ensure that the authority and freedom of action they give principals matches the responsibilities they demand of them.

The message from the interviews is clear: for principals to succeed, their authority and responsibility have to be inextricably linked. This is not a new idea. This study of 21 principals indicates that each had at least some degree of readiness and capability to effect change. But district rules and policies, legal decisions, and collective bargaining agreements restrict the ability of traditional school principals to follow through on this promise. In one school, as noted earlier, these constraints were so severe that the principal and faculty elected to extend their freedom of action by leaving the school district and becoming a charter school.

The significance of human resource leadership provides the most obvious example of how important it is for policymakers to match authority with

responsibility. The interviews suggest that the multiple challenges of school leadership require, among other things, finding ways to share leadership tasks. With the freedom to act in the area of human resources, principals can construct new opportunities for differentiated leadership that marshal joint effort among all the adults in the building. But when principals have little say in who works in their school or what training they receive (the common situation in most public schools), this potential goes unrealized. The same holds true for decisions about instruction and budgets. Moving schools forward is difficult if leaders do not have the authority to set priorities on how resources are used and distribute them accordingly. This is not to argue for abandoning state or district oversight of public schools. What the principals in the study argue for instead is that if they are given a charge (to improve achievement or school safety), and are held accountable for meeting it, they need the authority to act.

Second, states and school districts should prioritize effective leadership, rather than simply classroom experience, as the best indicator of potential effectiveness as a principal.

Leading a school takes a variety of skills. It can be accomplished in a variety of ways. A school whose arrangements for instructional leadership are well-established and effective might benefit from a principal who is especially skilled at fund-raising or working with constituency groups. A school with a toxic staff environment might need a principal who is an expert at organizational change. A school whose instructional performance is extremely low might need a person who can train others and tell the difference between teachers who can improve and those unlikely to do so. The first two skills do not come from a career in the classroom. The third might, but it can also be a challenge to a person who knows how to teach well but does not know how to help others.

The formula "only teachers can be principals" obscures important questions about how teachers learn to diagnose and delegate. The principalship is not necessarily an extension of teaching. It is an entirely different role in which teaching experience can be of some value. At the same time, the belief held by some that anyone who has led a business or nonprofit organization will automatically make a good principal is probably misguided. This view ignores the principal's need to judge instruction and, when instructional leadership has been delegated to others, to judge whether that function is being done well.

Some of the principals interviewed acted as instructional leaders; others delegated that function and focused exclusively on external development and strategic leadership. It is true that all principals should have a nose for good instruction, or at least know how to build and nurture instructional

leadership ability in others. But, with no single recipe for effective leadership, it is an open question whether the classroom should be the only pathway to the principalship. While there is no guarantee that a potential principal with an MBA or experience leading a non-profit would be able to lead a school, there is equally no guarantee that a truly accomplished teacher would either. All principals, whether former teachers or individuals from outside education, require training that fits their needs, fills their gaps in knowledge, and matches the specific challenges of the school.

Former teachers and experienced leaders of other organizations may be able to equally lead schools. They all need training and placement-based experience to teach them the many aspects of the principal's role they would not have learned in their previous jobs. There seems to be a need for new training and developmental placement programs to prepare individuals from nontraditional backgrounds to be effective principals. At the same time, policymakers should remove barriers that do not recognize the possibility of unconventional or nontraditional candidates.

Third, colleges of education should include complex tasks like diagnosis and planning in their principal preparation; preparation should continue even after principals begin working in schools.

All of the 21 principals interviewed said that their preparation for the principalship was poorly aligned with the demands of the job. Their responses suggest that, as in business, medicine, and the military, leadership preparation for schools should combine classroom opportunities to engage with the content of the seven core leadership activities and a meaningful practicum/internship to link ideas and practice. In addition, it is easy to imagine successive on-the-job learning opportunities through planned rotations and continuing education that focus on the complex tasks of diagnosis, planning and working with multiple constituencies.

What is known from the better principal-preparation programs in the country is that leadership preparation must be thought of as a continuum of experience, not a single event. This requires conceptualizing the learning needs of leaders—from developing, through novice, to experienced and expert leaders. Perhaps one of the reasons these 21 principals found little connection to their preparation was that none were able to point to opportunities to connect with preparation institutions as their expertise and responsibilities grew. Initial preparation, early mentoring, and opportunities to re-tool are missing elements for many of the principals in this study.

Many of the principals also called for more and better mentoring, and for the opportunity to participate in a variety of developmental experiences throughout their careers. The preparation experience cannot succeed as a

single event. If it remains a single treatment, it will likely deserve the description of irrelevance offered by many of this study's participants.

Fourth, districts should place principals in jobs where they match the current needs of the school.

This study indicates that it is unrealistic to expect principals to lead schools by formula or recipe. The job is too complex for such a simplistic approach. This work also suggests that no principal is right for every school all the time. Indeed, as schools grow and change, they might need principals with different skills and strengths.

Most school districts ignore these realities. Instead they treat principals as easily interchangeable commodities. Yet districts might get more from their leaders if they better managed the match between principals and schools. A school with a stable staff, but a weak instructional program, may do well with a principal who was an experienced teacher. On the other hand, a school with high teacher turnover and a lack of confidence needs an institution builder who can set direction and motivate people. A school that is misusing its funds or wants to expand its physical plant may need someone who specializes in management. Based on the schools visited during this study, Table 6 lays out several examples of different school needs and their leadership implications.

Table 6.
School Circumstances and Leadership Needs

School Circumstance	Implications for Leadership Needs
A new principal took over a school with a veteran teaching staff and strong academic program; teachers were skeptical of their new leaders	Principal focused her initial work around cultural leadership and the building of trust among the adults in the school
A new principal took over a school with a weak staff and instructional program; teachers were fraught with conflict and dissent.	Principal focused his initial work around instructional leadership and human resource leadership
A small, private independent school faced a transition in leadership as its long-time headmaster/founder retired and a new principal took over	During a transition period both leaders focused on strategic leadership, external development and political leadership, as well as micropolitical leadership.
A church group started a new private religious school	All seven areas of leadership were important, with particular emphasis on strategic leadership and managerial leadership.

What is apparent from Table 6 is the larger message of this investigation: schools have different leadership needs and no single template can be designed to turn out school leaders equally skilled in each of the seven leadership areas. Table 6 also points to a different implication. As school circumstances evolve, the definition of the best person for the job is likely to evolve as well. From that simple observation flows what is perhaps the most important conclusion of this study. Although strategically matching leaders and schools flies in the face of district practice, districts that neglect making such matches are likely to continue to pay the price in ineffective schooling.

Appendices

A. Acknowledgments

B. Methodology

C. Questions for Principals

D. Questions for Teachers

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Above all, we want to acknowledge the generous time and access provided by the educators across the country who let us into their professional lives during interviews for this study. Their willingness to participate says a great deal about their generosity as well as their commitment to understanding and improving the principalship. We could not have completed our work without them.

Study Questions

This study sought to answer three interrelated questions:

- Are there core roles that all principals play regardless of the type of schools they lead?
- How do principals' roles in traditional public schools differ from those in private schools and the growing number of public magnet and charter schools?
- How do the content of current training programs and the nature of principal certification match up against the requirements of the job? What do the current training and certification programs fail to cover? What do they prescribe unnecessarily?

We hoped to understand the challenges of leadership in a variety of schools, including private and charter schools as well as those operated by school districts. Studying different types of schools allowed us to distinguish "constants" of school leadership from challenges that are peculiar to district-run public schools. It also allowed us to anticipate changes in the public school principalship that might occur if, as many expect, schools gain greater control of funds and programs, and come under increased pressure to demonstrate increases in student achievement.

This project also paid attention to how principals spoke about their preparation and initiation into school leadership. We wanted to find out how their early career experiences and preparation programs (if they did, indeed, participate in a preparation program) equipped them to undertake the work of leading a school.

We recognize that our visits to these schools represented just a slice in time. We were viewing their perceptions of the requirements of the role with the backdrop of their work history and preparation for the role. Both what we saw and what we were told shaped the conclusions that we draw in this report.

Over the course of two years, we identified and visited 21 schools in four small to mid-size urban cities in four different US states (see Table 7 below). In all, the schools who agreed to participate represented ten elementary schools, three middle schools, six high schools, and two K-12 schools. The categories are traditional public schools (part of larger school districts); independent schools (both sectarian and non-sectarian); and what we called "entrepreneurial schools." This final category included charter schools (where state law allows); magnet schools within school districts that permit open enrollment, and contract and independent schools that are designed to

serve a specific set of students or program.

We employed structured interviews and case study research strategies[9] that generated vast amounts of summaries, recordings, field notes, and artifacts. Although principals were the focal point of our interviews, we did interview other school leaders, a sample of teachers, and, when possible, local board members.

As a team, we met regularly to make sense of the data collected, generate hypotheses, and revise our data collection strategies. There is an important dialogue that occurs in the analytic process that is an advantage of a broad-based research team. We have used research team meetings to address three levels of questions: "sensitizing," "theoretical," and "practical and structural."[10] Through a combination of cross-case comparison and interaction between emerging concepts, a wide set of emerging questions have developed. These concepts are portrayed in the discussion section of this paper.

This is a study heavily based on qualitative analysis. We have used a case study methodology approach in order to understand both the role and the context in which various principals and heads work. While not claiming to be illustrative of school leaders everywhere, this report, in which 21 schools were investigated, does paint a broad picture of leadership as it strives to raise pertinent questions for school leaders, policy makers, university researchers, and district personnel everywhere.

Identifying and Selecting the Schools

In selecting the schools themselves, a purposeful sampling strategy was utilized; the sites were identified through various contacts that the researchers had through professional and personal associations. The schools themselves were located in four urban areas in four small to mid-size cities in Ohio, Wisconsin, Washington, and Illinois (see Table 7, following page). Urban schools were selected because it is these arenas that school leaders most directly confront the complex issues of achievement, poverty, race, etc. We wanted to center our work in areas that most challenge school leaders and educational reformers alike.

All of the individuals and schools in question have been given pseudonyms in order to preserve their anonymity.

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[9] Yin, R. K. (1989). *Case study Research: Design and Methods (revised ed.)*. Newbury Park, CA: Sage.

[10] Strauss, A. & Corbin, J. (1998). *Basics of Qualitative Research (2nd ed.)*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage. p 77-8.

Table 7.
Principal Study Schools

Location	Traditional Public	Independent	Entrepreneurial
Washington	Carter High* Alcott Elementary	The Redeemer School Lighthouse School Excelton School	Robert Smith Middle School
Ohio	Western Thames Middle School Sunnyside High	The Ohio Field School	Northgate Community School Adams Academy
Illinois	O'Connell Elementary North High Tigerwest High		Summercrest Charter School Clinton Magnet School
Wisconsin	Grafton Elementary	Walker Preparatory	Namaste High Middleton High Samson Middle

**all school names are pseudonyms*

The schools in this study represent a vast array of the educational institutions extant today in 21st century America. Our school sample included traditional public, independent, and entrepreneurial schools.

By *entrepreneurial schools*, we refer to charter and magnet schools, both of which employ public funds often in novel, creative ways that help them to distinguish themselves from their public counterparts. By *independent schools*, we refer to those educational institutions that do not rely on public dollars; schools of this type examined were both sectarian and non-sectarian in nature. *Traditional public* implies exactly thus—schools that obtain public money and are organized institutionally along time-honored patterns, both at the elementary and secondary levels.

The schools in this study were identified to be facing often multiple complexities, including those involving issues of student learning, student retention, scarce resources, policy tumultuousness, and facilities expansion. These leaders at the schools were perceived, along some lines, to be making progress against the core challenges they faced.

Data Collection

Each of the case studies resulted following from one-to two-day site visit conducted under the auspices of two-to four researchers (in a few circumstances, only one researcher was able to visit the school). While on site, researchers spent substantial time interviewing principals, assistant principals, division heads, teacher leaders, and other perceived leaders in the school. Classroom visits, attending meetings and informal gatherings, and participating in various activities of the school also transpired. Researchers collected all documents made available to them by the school. Follow-up phone calls and e-mails often occurred following the visit . Furthermore, the researchers also spent time addressing the data provided by the four states. This included information on student test scores, school standing, and mobility rate.

At the school, researchers used the same core set of questions for the principal or head in order to ensure consistency. The researchers employed another set of questions for all other perceived leaders in the school. Afterwards, they each prepared an individual case summary for that school. (Appendices C and D provide the questions used for principals and teachers, respectively.)

Data Analysis

After the researchers completed their individual case summaries for the schools, they divided up the 21 schools between themselves and prepared a case report for each school comprised of two parts: 1) a set of descriptive data that focused on the demographics of the school, the seven core leadership functions and who performed each of the roles, and the principal's preparation and 2) a narrative that depicted the leadership story present at the institution in question. Each of the researchers wrote up schools that they had and had not visited and reviewed those of the schools each visited; this process allowed the researchers to become more conversant on a broader range of schools.

Following the completion of the 21 case reports, the researchers then prepared 4 large spreadsheets which consolidated the 21 individual case reports. The four spreadsheets were divided and labeled as such: Descriptive School Data; Leadership Roles and Who Plays Them; Principal Preparation; and The Leadership Story. The researchers used these spreadsheets to formulate this report.

All of the aforementioned reports have been carried out extensively using an inductive, grounded theory approach. The work and research of Miles & Huberman (1994)[11] has contributed largely to the organization and systematic thinking found in all of the data summary charts as well as the collection and use of analytic material.

[11] Miles, M. B., & Huberman, A. M. (1994). *Qualitative Data Analysis (2nd ed.)*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.

Questions for Principals

1. Tell us about your school. What are some of its unique characteristics (history, programs, students, teachers, community…)?

2. Tell us about this school's educational program. (Does it have specific educational goals, vision of learning, or response to accountability measures (e.g., improving test scores)?

3. Are you committed to a specific instructional approach here? If so, what is it and how did it come about?

4. What are the marks of good teaching here? What do you expect of your teachers and how do you communicate it? What's your role in improving teaching? (how are there others involved?)

5. What are the special challenges/demands of leading this school? Have these things changed since you've been here? If so, how?

6. How do you judge the school's performance? What do you do if you decide you need to improve in some area?

7. What's the school's organizational/decision-making structure—both formal and informal? Describe the roles and responsibilities of each of the positional leaders (APs, deptartment heads, curriculum leaders, etc.).

8. Who do you rely on to get things done at this school?

9.

   a. How do you (as a principal and/or in collaboration with other building leaders) make decisions about:

      - Hiring
      - Budgets (priorities/expenditures/allocation)
      - Staffing patterns (scheduling/teacher responsibilities/number of administrators etc.)
      - Curriculum, instruction, and professional development

   b. How do people/groups in the school communicate with each other about these issues?

   c. Do you do anything to cultivate/support other leaders in this school (as part of your management/decision-making structure)?

10. What groups outside or inside the school (e.g., a school district) affect your ability to make decisions about hiring, budgets, staffing patterns, and instruction, etc.? What's the nature of this influence? (Describe your relationship with this group or groups.)

11. What are the top five categories of tasks (i.e., top frequency) that you spend your time on(also, get percentages for each)? Of these, what's most important and why? What has the most impact on students? (Or, what's most productive? least productive?)

12. How does your daily work—i.e., what you really do each day—compare with what you think you were hired to do (or with your own expectations about becoming this school's leader)?

13. How did your formal training prepare you for this job (being a principal)? What were you unprepared for? What did you have to learn on the job? What training would've helped? How did you learn to do this job?

14. Finally: Why you think there is a principal shortage? What do you think about the job's future—where's it going?

Questions for Teachers

1. Please tell us about this school. What is special about it? What special challenges does it face?

2. Does the school have a vision of the kind of graduate it hopes to produce? Is that vision generally shared or are there some disagreements? Does the school try to introduce these ideas to new teachers and parents? How?

3. Is this school committed to using a specific approach to instruction? What is it? How did the school come to have that commitment? Were you here when that commitment was established, or was it made before you came to the school?

4. In this school what are the marks of good teaching? What is your principal's role in improving teaching? Who else plays an important role? (How does your principal affect what goes on in the classroom here?)

5. How has the school changed since _____ has been your principal? Can you give us an example of an important change and how it came about?

   a. Who was involved?

   b. What was the principal's role?

6. Are there formal or informal groups of people (individuals) that help get things done? What do they do?

7. How do you judge whether the school is performing well or badly? Who else participates in making this judgment? What happens when the school concludes that improvement is needed?

   a. Use of tests

   b. Use of outside experts or critical friends

8. Are there groups or institutions outside the school whose opinions matter? On what basis do they judge the school? How does the school respond to them?

   a. District, diocese

   b. School's own board (especially for charter and private schools)

   c. School design organization or network (e.g., Success for All)

   d. PTA, individual parents, or donors

9. What is the most important thing your principal does here?

The Center on Reinventing Public Education at the Daniel J. Evans School of Public Affairs at the University of Washington engages in research and analysis aimed at developing focused, effective, and accountable schools and the systems that support them. The Center, established in 1993, seeks to inform community leaders, policymakers, school and schools system leaders, and the research communities.



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