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LEADING *for* LEARNING

As expectations for principals increase, programs to prepare school leaders are becoming more sophisticated.

Getting Serious About Preparation

The nation's schools need principals who know instruction, and that focus is helping to shape more coherent professional programs to select and train the next generation of school leaders.

By Lynn Olson

For decades, preservice training for principals looked something like this: While working as teachers, they took occasional courses at an education school on such topics as school finance, law, and educational theory. After a few years, they completed a culminating field assignment, which might have involved shadowing their own principals. Then candidates applied for jobs in administration.

That scattershot approach increasingly is giving way to dramatically different forms of principal preparation. The focus is less on creating efficient managers than on preparing individuals who can lead a school to higher student achievement.

Would-be principals now go through their courses of study in a predetermined order, and in cohorts with others in the same program. Seminars build upon one another to produce candidates who know how to analyze instruction, create learning opportunities for teachers, and strategize about how to move a school forward based on data. Field experiences start early and involve the actual exercise of leadership in a school building. And districts are taking on a larger role in shaping school leadership, from who gets admitted to training programs to how they are mentored and evaluated.

To be sure, the norm is somewhere between the traditional routes and the new ones. But the past few years have seen a significant proliferation of more intensive, carefully mapped-out preparation and a growing consensus about

what "best practice" should look like.

"I think the big story is that people are moving to a common perspective about where we need to be and how we need to change," says Joseph Murphy, a professor at Vanderbilt University's Peabody College of Education, in Nashville, Tenn.

The reasons for the shift are clear. The push for unprecedented levels of improvement in student performance, epitomized by the federal No Child Left Behind Act, requires a different kind of leadership: focused on instruction and achievement. Underpinning that recognition is a growing body of research on what good leaders do.

"It's forcing a lot more attention on instruction and teaching," says Paul D. Houston, the executive director of the Arlington, Va., based American Association of School Administrators, which represents district superintendents and other senior-level administrators. "The whole conversation about what people are looking for from school principals is much less the managerial stuff and much more the academic stuff."

Rigorous Selection Criteria

One of the most notable aspects of the new generation of preparation programs is who gets accepted. Traditionally, universities have simply waited to see who shows up. In contrast, some of the newer programs vigorously recruit and screen candidates for their capacity and motivation to become successful leaders.

In a study released this year, "Preparing School Leaders for a Changing World: Lessons From Exemplary Leadership Development Programs," lead author Linda Darling-Hammond

found that the best programs worked with school districts to recruit candidates who were known as excellent teachers with strong leadership potential, and who reflected the local population.

As a result, she found, graduates of such programs were much more likely than those in a comparison group to be female and members of racial or ethnic minorities. They were also more likely to be working in an urban school and to have strong and relevant experience, such as serving as a coach for other teachers, a department chair, or a team leader.

Of the more than 5,000 people who have applied to New Leaders for New Schools, a New York City-based nonprofit group that prepares principals for urban districts, only 330 have been accepted since the program's inception seven years ago.

"There is a very high and rigorous standard," says Darlene A. Merry, the chief academic officer, including three "non-negotiables": knowledge of teaching and learning, a belief in the potential of all children to excel academically, and an unyielding focus on goals and results.

Coherent Curriculum

Darryl Cobb, the chief learning officer for the New York City-based Knowledge Is Power Program, a national network of charter schools that prepares its own school leaders, says KIPP also looks for grit and tenacity in an individual's prior working relationships with adults. That's because principals improve student performance primarily by working with adults, not youngsters, he explains. They have to see their role as creating an environment and an organization in which teachers and students can succeed.

Equally important, the new generation of leadership programs offers a coherent curriculum that is deeply

rooted in practice, focused on the principal's role in improving instruction and student achievement, and designed to ensure mastery of core competencies by engaging participants in solving real-world problems through case studies, school-based projects, and simulations.

Such assignments, the Southern

senior vice president of the Atlanta-based SREB. "Where it used to be one course in curriculum and instruction, that's beginning to make up 25 percent to 30 percent of the content."

For example, the National Institute for School Leadership, a Washington-based for-profit group that contracts with states and districts to prepare school leaders, has developed 14 case studies—many with video simulations—to help candidates develop the knowledge and skills they will need on the job.

"We don't hate theory," says Robert C. Hughes, the vice president of NISL. "Theory is very important. Policy is very important. But the piece that wasn't getting its due was practice."

Chances to Practice

To help candidates apply what they are learning, exemplary programs also provide early and intensive field-based experiences for would-be principals that are integrated with their coursework.

According to the SREB, candidates should have access to a continuum of experiences. That includes observing, participating in, and leading teachers to improve classroom practice, and completing at least one major academic-improvement or "action research" project in a school. Candidates

also should receive feedback and coaching on their performance during their fieldwork, including support from carefully selected and trained mentor principals.

The nature of such well-designed and well-supervised internships is particularly critical, according to Darling-Hammond, a professor of education at Stanford University. Two of the programs she studied, at Delta State University in Mississippi and in the San Diego Unified School District, offered full-year, paid administrative internships with expert principals, financed by the state of Mississippi, in one case, and by the district through a



Michael Dwyer for Education Week

Participants in the New Leaders for New Schools summer training program in Boston walk to lunch.

Regional Education Board notes in a 2006 report, "Schools Can't Wait: Accelerating the Redesign of University Preparation Programs," might engage participants in analyzing local data to determine priorities, working with principal and teacher teams to carry out instructional interventions or school reform models, or planning and implementing school-based research. Often, practitioners from the district and local schools work with university faculty members in developing and teaching such courses.

"What we're seeing in the better programs is a real shift in the courses being taught," says Gene Bottoms, the

foundation grant, in the other.

After a summer program, a New Leaders for New Schools candidate spends a year as a resident in a school under the guidance of both a mentor principal and a coach, who meets with the candidate regularly to provide job-embedded support and reflection.

“You can’t just give people the information and assume that they know how to go and apply it,” says Merry of New Leaders. “Probably the magic of the whole process is in supporting them as they practice the application.”

Districts as Partners

Unlike the highly theoretical programs offered in more traditional settings, these new principal-preparation programs also work closely with districts—and are sometimes created and run by districts themselves—so that they reflect the local context.

Geoff Southworth, the deputy executive director of England’s National College for School Leadership and the college’s strategic director of research and policy, argues that leadership “needs to be finely tuned to the circumstances in which leaders operate.”

That requires a tight linkage between theory and practice, rooted in local communities.

The New York City Leadership Academy’s Aspiring Principals program recruits, prepares, and supports principals specifically for the city’s public schools. Once accepted, aspiring principals take part in a six-week summer “intensive” that engages them in a series of simulated school projects that reflect the realities of the settings in which they’ll work. That preparation is fol-

lowed by a 10-month, school-based residency under the mentorship of an experienced principal, and by a planning summer that enables candidates to have a successful transition into their leadership positions.

The curriculum is based on the real experiences of New York principals and current systemwide reform efforts. And the faculty members who guide participants in acquiring the knowledge and skills they’ll need to run their own schools are former principals or principal supervisors.

“There are some generalizable skills,” says Sandra J. Stein, the chief executive officer of the academy, “but for somebody going in new to a complex context, it helps to have as much of their training grounded in the realities they’re actually going to face.

“Part of the goal here,” she adds, “is just to accelerate the learning, so that people hit the ground running.”

Yet even the best preservice programs now acknowledge that new principals need additional support during their first few years on the job, while they are still learning their role. That’s why programs such as New Leaders for New Schools, the New York City Leadership Academy, and others now build in coaching or mentoring for novices.

“A number of our grantees have been more active in getting under way a bona fide support process for the first, second, and third year on the job,” says Frances McLaughlin, a senior director at the Los Angeles-based Broad Foundation, which recently awarded a new round of grants for innovative principal-development programs. “In fact, several of our grantees are actually shifting money away from preser-

vice training and into better and more support for principals on the job, in the form of mentoring and some continued cohort-based learning.”

The Leadership Academy, for example, offers all New York principals individualized learning opportunities during their first four years on the job, ranging from on-site coaching and workshops to chances to network with their peers.

In England, first-time head teachers (as principals there are known) are entitled to a flexible grant of about \$2,600 during their first three years on the job, which they can use for a wide range of learning activities.

New Providers

As significant as the change in the content of principal-preparation programs is the shift in who’s preparing new school leaders. Even as many university-based programs are being redesigned—some at the insistence of state policymakers—they’re also losing their monopoly.

“The process of replacing university-based educational leadership programs is well under way,” wrote Arthur E. Levine in “Educating School Leaders,” a 2005 report. “In fact, the programs have done all they possibly could to encourage it. The question is whether education schools and their leadership programs will attempt the reforms necessary to curb current trends.”

Besides such nonprofit ventures as New Leaders for New Schools, which now has contracts with nine large urban districts, a host of other players are involved: for-profit companies that offer online training modules, charter

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About This Report

This special pullout section is the fourth annual *Education Week* report examining leadership in education, an important topic in an era of high-stakes accountability for public schools. It includes a mix of explanatory articles and original research conducted by Hajime Mitani of the Editorial Projects in Education Research Center, under the direction of Carole Vinograd Bausell. Christopher B. Swanson directs the EPE Research Center.

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The project is underwritten by a grant from The Wallace Foundation, which seeks to support and share effective ideas and practices that expand learning and enrichment opportunities for all people. Its three current objectives are:

- Strengthening education leadership to improve student achievement;
- Enhancing out-of-school learning opportunities; and
- Expanding participation in arts and culture.

For more information and research on these and related topics, please visit the Knowledge Center at www.wallacefoundation.org.

For copies of last year’s special report, go to www.edweek.org.

The Next Generation of School Leaders

During the past decade, the age of school principals has risen steadily. In part, this graying of the educational administration workforce may be attributable to the same demographic shifts that are affecting American society as a whole. However, this trend also signals significant changes within the profession.

Up-and-coming school leaders—those who have been principals for less than five years—are now entering the principalship at an older age and with more extensive leadership training and experience in administrative roles. The share of all principals

Participation in programs for aspiring principals

Up-and-Comers **51%**

Veterans **36**

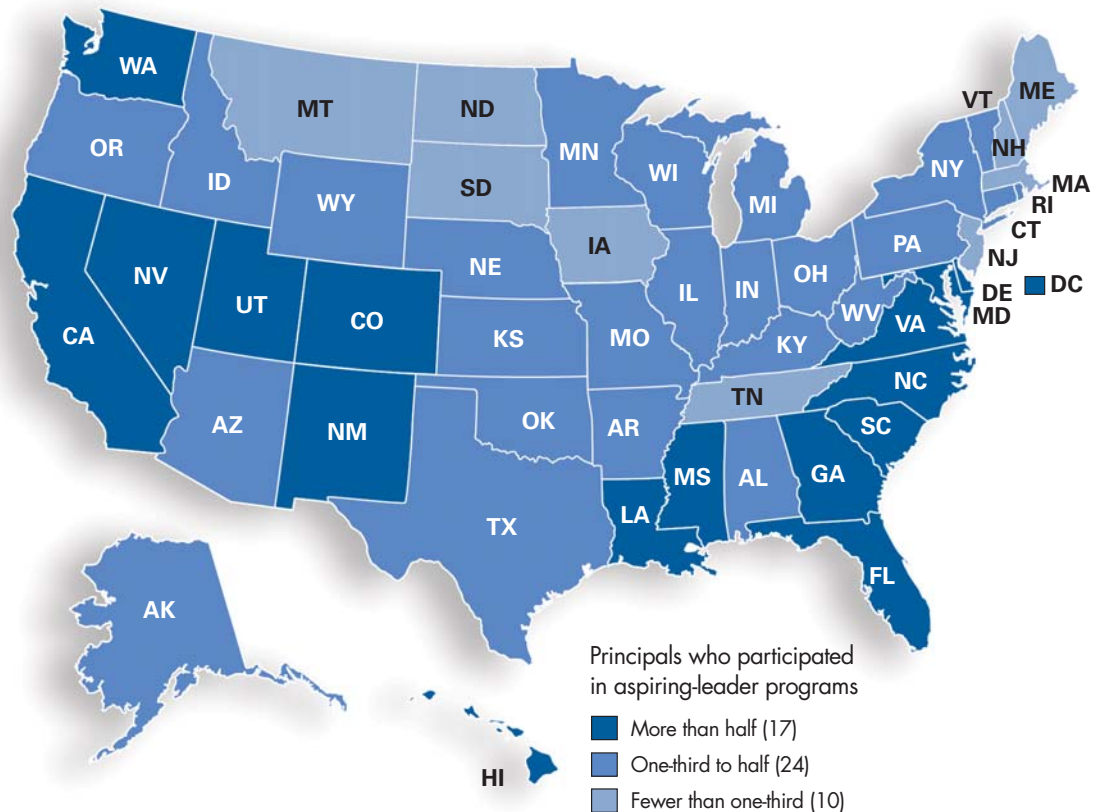
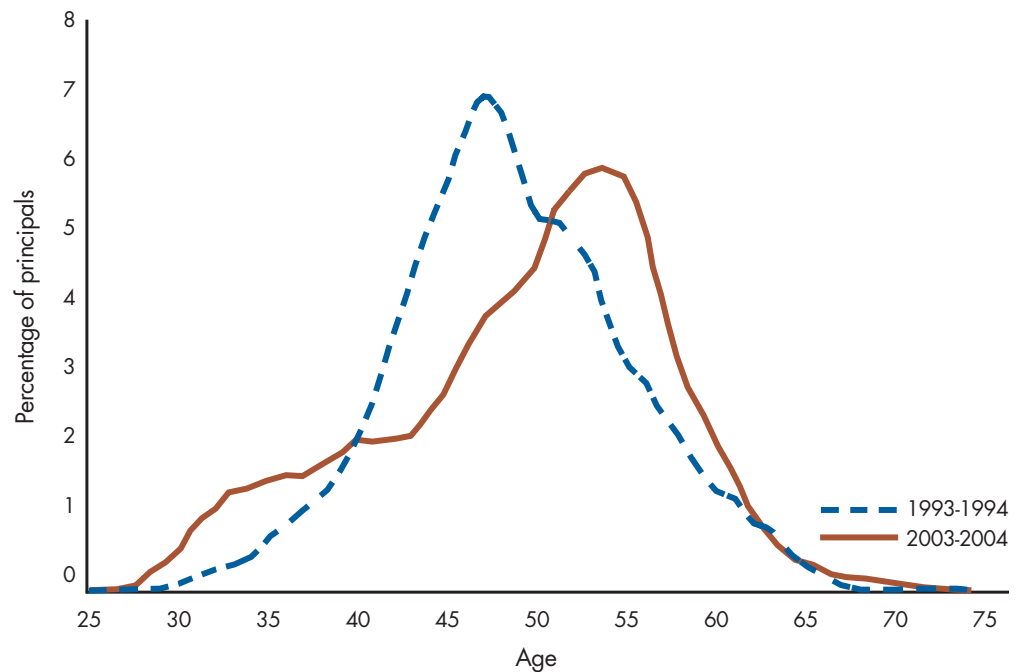
with such training varies tremendously across the states.

Novice principals, however, are likely to find themselves at the helms of schools facing such challenges as high levels of student poverty and lagging academic performance. More recent cohorts of principals are also becoming increasingly diverse. Women, for example, now make up the majority of up-and-coming school leaders. And while only about one in five new principals is a member of a racial or ethnic minority group, this marks improvement compared with past generations.

SOURCE: EPE Research Center, 2007; Original analysis of data of the U.S. Department of Education's Schools and Staffing Survey (1993-94 and 2003-04)

An Older Principal Workforce

In 2004, school leaders were typically older than those working a decade earlier. Over the course of a decade, the median age of principals rose from 48 to 51.



Up-and-Coming Principals (less than 5 years of experience)

Age at first principalship **43**

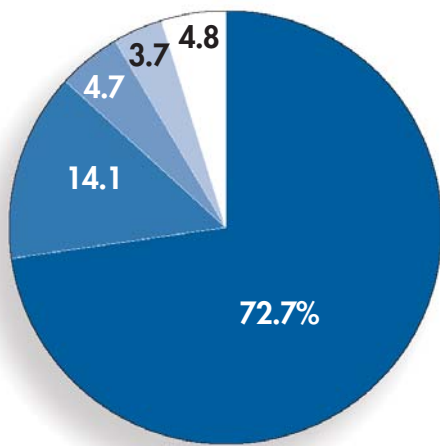
Prior teaching experience (years) **14**

Veteran Principals (more than 10 years of experience)

Age at first principalship **37**

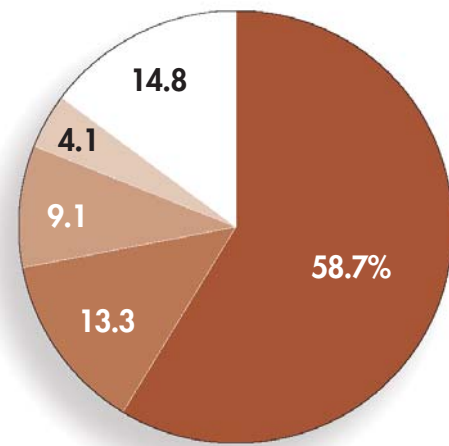
Prior teaching experience (years) **11**

Previous Leadership Experience



- Assistant principal
- Department head/Curriculum specialist
- Athletic coach
- Club sponsor
- Teacher

Note: Principals reporting multiple prior leadership roles were assigned according to their most senior position, as ranked above. A very small number of principals (less than 1 percent) reported no prior educational experience and are omitted from this analysis.



Characteristics of Schools

School did not fully meet performance standards **50%**

Majority of students poor **40**

Most students members of racial or ethnic minorities **37**

School did not meet all performance standards **40%**

Majority of students poor **34**

Most students racial/ethnic minorities **30**

Backgrounds of Principals

Female **54%**

Racial and ethnic minority **20**

Female **36%**

Racial and ethnic minority **15**

school networks such as KIPP that are creating their own preparation programs, and districts that have decided to “grow their own” principals.

“I’m constantly surprised when I run into superintendents from much more moderately sized districts who say, ‘We’re running our own program now,’” says Houston of the AASA, who also believes that the wave of online education for future administrators “is just starting to build.”

And while many district programs still must maintain ties to universities for their candidates to be certified, some states, like Massachusetts, have empowered districts to license administrators themselves—with or without a higher education institution.

The expansion of new models has brought with it new challenges, however. For one, researchers have only begun to generate new knowledge about how best to produce school leaders who can raise student achievement. In a recent review of the research on preparation programs,

to \$87,000 per participant for Delta State, with the largest expense associated with the paid-internship year.

Although high-quality programs require a significant financial commitment, Darling-Hammond, the Stanford researcher, argues that it’s still a good investment “to get somebody who is so much better prepared and so much more competent when they hit the job.”

At the Margins

Despite the growing consensus about what needs to happen to better prepare school principals, most observers of the field agree that change is still at the margins and has yet to reach the bulk of institutions that prepare future leaders.

“There’s a lot happening,” says Levine, a former president of Teachers College, Columbia University, who is now the president of the Woodrow Wilson National Fellowship Foundation in Princeton, N.J. “I can’t tell you the quality of it all.”

“In general, I’m more skeptical about the promise of current develop-

preparation programs to retool themselves and reapply for program approval, or be shut down. They’ve also brought in teams of experts from outside the state to review program designs and recommend improvements. But that’s still the exception.

The Southern Regional Education Board, which represents 16 states, urges states to adopt rigorous, well-defined standards for school leaders; provide a curriculum framework to guide program redesign; create an external process for auditing the quality of program curricula; and strengthen accountability for results, including measures of graduates’ on-the-job performance and the achievement of students in their schools.

Some experts say the best thing states could do is to stop providing salary increases for teachers who take courses in administration, but have no intention of leading a school.

“At the moment, half the people in these programs are there for salary bumps, not because they want to be administrators,” says Levine, “so what they want are fast, easy, nonrigorous

Despite the growing consensus on how to better prepare principals, change is still at the margins.

Murphy of Vanderbilt University and his colleague Michael Vriesenga found that, “in general, the field of school administration is weakly informed by empirical research findings, drawn from either quantitative or naturalistic perspectives.”

Of the roughly 2,000 articles they reviewed for the study, only 8 percent dealt with preservice training programs, and fewer than 3 percent were empirical studies, focused on quantitative data.

While many in the field favor preparation that includes extensive fieldwork, such a system can be expensive, as it takes principals-in-training out of their current jobs for lengthy periods of time and requires that they receive ongoing supervision. The Stanford study, for instance, found the annual costs for exemplary preservice programs ranged from about \$25,500 per participant in San Diego

programs and models than are the people who are in the institutions providing the stuff,” says Frederick M. Hess, who in 2005 co-wrote a scathing critique of the content of 31 principal-preparation programs, “The Accidental Principal.” The study concluded that the programs were not teaching the kinds of skills—such as the use of data, research, and performance evaluation—needed to lead schools in the 21st century.

Hess asserts that the high-stakes-accountability climate under the No Child Left Behind law has made states even more reluctant to deregulate the process for preparing and certifying school leaders, and to open it up to non-traditional candidates and programs.

Others also say that states have been reluctant to take the steps necessary to produce real change. Some states—such as Iowa, Louisiana, Mississippi, and North Carolina—have required all of their university-based

programs. And as long as there’s a large market for that, people are going to provide it.”

“There’s no question,” agrees Murphy of Vanderbilt. “There’s this amazing policy lever that states just refuse to take. If they had the courage to say there’s no salary credit if you’re a teacher, then you would begin to really shrink these programs. And you would be able to commit resources to the education of people who are going to do the job.”

States also could deny accreditation to programs that don’t place 80 percent of their graduates in leadership positions in five years, Murphy says.

But while improvements remain at the margins, says Bottoms of the SREB, “I do see a momentum building on the part of state leaders far different than what we saw seven or eight years ago. I believe we’re poised for the curve to turn up rather rapidly.” ■



The National College for School Leadership, in Nottingham, England, determines the content and helps ensure the quality of the country's standards for school heads.

photos by
Chris Montana

by Lynn Olson

A National View

In England, a central college for leadership drives preparation.

Nottingham, England

When Arthur Levine, then the president of Teachers College at Columbia University, wrote a scathing report in 2005 on the preparation of American school leaders, the one institution he singled out as a “promising model” wasn’t even in the United States. It was England’s National College for School Leadership.

Created by the government of then-Prime Minister Tony Blair in 1998, with the mission of “every child in a well-led school, every leader a learner,” the college was designed to modernize the way school leaders are developed and supported at every stage of their careers, and to elevate their status.

According to Tony Bush, a professor of educational leadership and management at the University of Lincoln, in Lincoln, England, it is “probably the most comprehensive and sophisticated national school-leadership-development model in the world.”

Located here in Nottingham in a state-of-the-art conference facility, with soaring glass windows overlooking a lake, the college is a free-standing

institution, independent of any university and almost wholly funded by the government. The focus is on developing individuals who can lead instructional improvement in their schools by drawing on both research and practice, aligned with the country’s national standards.

One of the college’s key responsibilities is the National Professional Qualification for Headship, or NPQH. Introduced in 1997 to prepare candidates for the headship, or principalship, and underpinned by a set of national standards, the credential will become mandatory for all newly appointed head teachers by April 2009. Since April 2004, individuals new to the headship must either hold the qualification or be in the process of getting it.

The college is essentially the national credentialing authority for the NPQH—determining the content of the program, setting the standards for its delivery, and maintaining quality across nine regional providers. The latter range from Manchester and New Castle universities, to two free-standing leadership centers, to a consortium of local government authorities.

Most candidates earn the credential within 14 months, although a small fraction with more extensive leadership experience can complete the program in as little as six months. Like all the college’s programs, the NPQH relies on a combination of face-to-face seminars, mentoring, online instruction and networking, and site visits to actual schools. **(See box, Page S12.)**

In addition to the NPQH, the college offers programs for teachers who are just beginning to take on leadership roles, school business

managers, school teams wishing to improve their effectiveness, and experienced heads who want to exercise leadership beyond their own schools. A robust research and evaluation program; an extensive e-learning community, with more than 120,000 members; and a series of strategic initiatives in response to government priorities round out the college's activities.

"What's most important, and what our research emphasizes here, is what I'd call applicable knowledge: know-how, as well as know-what," says Geoff Southworth, the deputy executive director of the college and its strategic director of research and policy. "Our courses do rely on theory, but they're deeply practical. And that's what our clients, our customers, our colleagues in schools value."

development activities they had participated in.

Judgments by the government's school inspection unit—the Office for Standards in Education, Children's Services, and Skills—also have found that the quality of school leaders is going up. The office now judges leadership and management to be good or better in 84 percent of secondary schools and 76 percent of primary schools, while only 4 percent of primary schools and 5 percent of secondary schools have "unsatisfactory" leadership.

"Before, there was virtually no formal preparation for school leadership. It was a matter of luck if you managed to be in the right place to pick up decent training," says Carole A. Whitty, the deputy general secretary for the National Association of Head Teachers,

competition to house the college and who subsequently served in the Blair government. "The symbolic nature of the college raises the status of school leadership in the country."

Even so, both the National College for School Leadership and the National Professional Qualification for Headship have been subject to criticism since their inception. Particularly in its early years, the college was criticized for being too diffuse and for trying to deliver too many of its programs directly.

"It was all over the map," says Michael Fullan, a professor emeritus at the Ontario Institute for Studies in Education at the University of Toronto, who recently completed a



Since 1997, more than 23,000 people have completed the NPQH, or about 85 percent of those who began the program.

"When the NPQH was first set up, it was itself a big innovation," says Southworth. "There hadn't been such a qualification. So one of the early things it had to do was to get into the bloodstream of the profession, and it's done that."

An "Independent Study into School Leadership," conducted this year by PricewaterhouseCoopers, an international consulting firm, found that 44 percent of school heads who had completed the NPQH thought it was the most useful of the professional-

whose 40,000 members represent the largest association of school leaders in England. "So by introducing NPQH, you're raising the aspirations of the whole country, in terms of what you get when you appoint somebody to run your education system."

A survey this year of 640 heads, deputy heads, and other school leaders found that 87 percent believe the college is helping to raise standards in schools.

"I think its strength is it does provide a focus for school leadership training, and that's really important," says David Hopkins, who was the dean of education at the University of Nottingham when it won the

small-scale evaluation of the college for its chief executive, Steve Munby. "It was sponsoring networks upon networks, and nobody could find its center of gravity."

One of Munby's first acts in assuming leadership of the college in March 2005 was to reach out to some 500 heads across the country to find out what they wanted from the college.

"So we've seen, over the last few years, a much closer partnership between school leaders and the national college," says Whitty. "School leaders feel they've got a college which is more theirs than it was."

Munby has focused the college more clearly on the preparation and support of

school leaders at all levels of the system. And he has worked more closely than his predecessor with the national government to provide advice on key government priorities. One of those is leadership succession. Nearly a quarter of England's head teachers are expected to retire in the next five years, creating a pressing need to identify and groom the next generation of school leaders.

The NPQH also has been criticized as being too mechanistic and for credentialing people who never intended to become heads. Although the national data are weak, estimates are that fewer than half those who have earned the qualification so far have gone on to assume a headship.

"I don't think it would be a secret to say that I think it needs a bit more refocusing," says Barry Day, the head of the Greenwood Dale secondary school

understanding of learning and of leadership."

"Now I'm on the course," she added, "I'm more open-minded about it, because I can see it's an exciting prospect."

Last May, England's secretary of state for education approved the college's plans for redesigning the NPQH, based on a yearlong consultation with the field. This fall, the college will begin recruiting 150 candidates for a pilot to begin in March 2008. The redesign will include a more rigorous assessment of candidates on entry; a more rapid and personalized route through the program, focused on peer learning and coaching and on placements outside a candidate's own school; and efforts to improve the proportion of graduates who actually become head teachers.

In part, the college is responding to

"What we want to do is make the NPQH more personalized, more contextualized," says Southworth. "It's probably, in its current form, not as flexible as it needs to be."

What the college hopes to retain are the benefits of the practically rooted, peer-to-peer interactions, evident at a recent face-to-face meeting at Beaumanor Hall, just outside Nottingham. On a beautiful spring day, 32 aspiring school leaders are crowded into a second-floor conference room in the 19th-century mansion, which now serves as a conference center for teachers in Leicestershire County.

Despite the temptations outside, the buzz in the room is palpable. The

Far left, in the National College's state-of-the-art conference center, school leaders work in the central cafe before the beginning of class.

Center, the facility's meeting rooms are decorated with large images of students and educators.

Left, the training program emphasizes peers' learning from one another.



in Nottingham. "From my perspective, I'd like to see a bit more streamlining, and a bit more rigidity in terms of how people get into the program."

While some of those at a recent training session expressed a strong desire to become head teachers, others were less certain—citing concerns about balancing work and family life, among other considerations.

"I don't necessarily want to be a head teacher," said Louise J. Goffer, an assistant principal at Longslade Community College, a secondary school in Birstall, a suburban village north of Leicester. She enrolled in the program because she felt that colleagues who had completed it "had a wider

the changing and increasingly complex leadership environment. The government's Every Child Matters agenda now requires head teachers to coordinate education with other social services and to give children access to a variety of activities beyond the school day. And its agenda for upper-secondary education requires school leaders to work more in partnership with higher education institutions. In addition, new models of school leadership have been springing up around the country, ranging from head teachers who are leading more than one school to those given responsibility for coordinating strategy and relationships between networks of schools.

educators have just been asked to each turn to a colleague and discuss a time when they served as a leader and had a successful outcome. What did they say and do that led to that outcome?

Ten minutes later, they're asked to share with a different partner the behaviors and attributes of a colleague in a leadership role who had a positive impact on them.

Ten minutes after that, the educators change partners yet again to talk about how a past or present head teacher shaped the culture of their school in a positive way.

The rapid-fire exchanges, designed to encourage reflection and to root the day's discussions of "leading for learning" in the very practical context of real schools, are typical of the college's approach. The session is led by Neil Plimmer, a practicing head teacher with 16 years'

Elements of the National Professional Qualification For Headship

Induction day: Candidates meet their personal tutors and other members of their tutoring groups and form “learning circles” with four to six colleagues who support one another through the six- to 14-month program.

Contract visit: Each candidate receives a half-day visit at school

from his or her tutor, during which they agree on a personal-development plan, including visits to other schools and a school improvement project.

Supported self-study: Candidates work through 16 study units based on their areas of need, participate in online and telephone discussions and meetings with their learning circles and tutoring groups, and attend four face-to-face events focused on developing

the skills needed for headship. Each candidate must also keep a “learning journal” and carry out his or her personal-development plan.

School-based assessment: Candidates each receive a whole-day visit at school from an assessor, who gauges their contribution to school improvement, their expertise in the key areas of the national standards for headship, and their capacity to reflect on what they’ve learned.

Final skills assessment:

During this one-day assessment, the candidate demonstrates his or her overall readiness for the headship. Both the school-based and final skills assessments are subject to regional and national moderation to ensure all candidates have met the same criteria.

SOURCES: *Education Week*; National College for School Leadership

experience, and Graham Osborne, a tutor and previous head teacher, who is responsible for supporting about a dozen of the individuals in the room as they work their way through the qualification program.

Prior to the meeting, the aspiring head teachers have participated in an induction session; completed a self-diagnosis of their leadership skills and learning styles, derived from key areas of the standards; and received a half-day visit from their tutors to develop an individual learning plan targeted on their needs and to identify a school improvement project that the candidates will each lead, and that will form a significant part of their school-based assessments.

At today’s face-to-face event, most of the candidates are deputy head teachers, or assistant principals, although a few are heads of subject-matter departments, and one is serving as a consultant to a local authority. In between the assigned day’s activities, they swap stories, network, and share problems and other issues.

“I think face-to-face is really useful because everyone brings with them their own experiences, and there are similarities in those that we can discuss quite openly, which gives you confidence in your own decisionmaking and leadership skills,” says Simon T. Bent, a deputy head at the Melton-Mowbray Sherard Primary School in Leicestershire County.

Fiona Oliver, a vice principal at Fullhurst Community College, a secondary school in the city of Leicester, describes the biggest

strength of the program as “the ability to really reflect, because there normally isn’t too much time to do that, and that’s quite powerful.”

For her improvement project, she’s leading an effort to revise the school’s behavior plan in consultation with teachers, parents, students, and all the primary schools that feed into the school. Other candidates are updating a school policy for gifted and talented students, forming an “ecoteam” of students to

In England, standards for ‘heads’ are clear and public.

make their school a greener place, and improving a school’s use of data to provide better mentoring for students and raise achievement.

The school improvement project must show that the candidate can manage a leadership effort across the whole school, and must be embraced by the head teacher as useful for the school itself. “It shouldn’t be spurious, made-up work, but a pretty substantial piece of work to move the whole school forward,” says Richard Jones, a senior program manager for the National College.

At the end of the self-study period, an assessor will visit the candidate’s school to determine whether he or she is ready to proceed to the final stage of the NPQH program, after examining evidence that includes the results of the school improvement project and interviews with people at the school.

The final stage includes a 48-hour

residential session at the conference center in Nottingham, as well as a one-day skills assessment.

The total cost of the program is about 3,000 pounds—or \$6,000—per participant in the standard, 14-month route. Candidates from large schools pay about 20 percent of that, while those from schools of 100 or fewer pupils are entirely subsidized by the government.

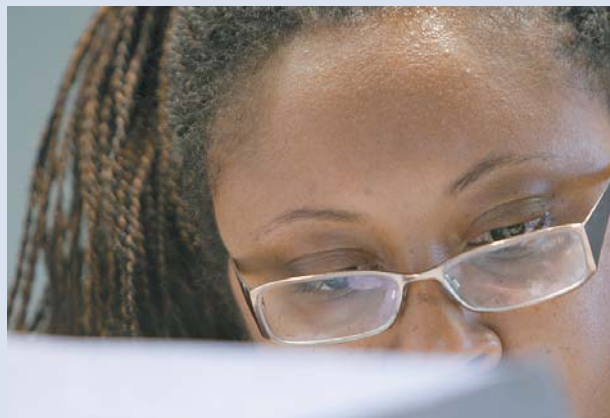
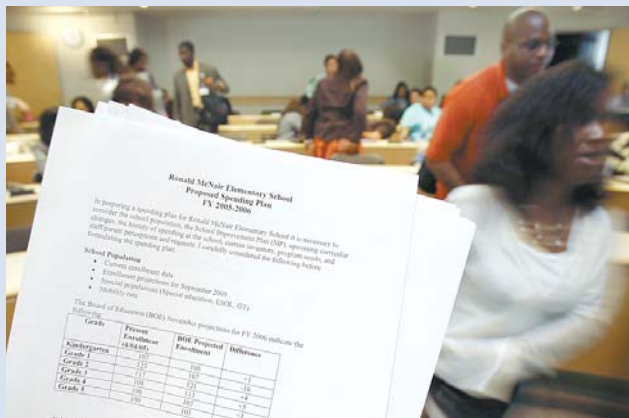
Despite criticisms, and the pending redesign, most observers say that the college has changed the discourse about school leadership in England by making such notions as distributed leadership—spreading initiative across individuals within a school—part of the common nomenclature.

“For the first time, we have an organization that is working with us, for us,” says Richard Gerver, the head of Grange Primary School in Long Eaton, a suburb of Nottingham.

Whether something like the National College for School Leadership could ever work in the United States is an open question. Many of those interviewed in both England and the United States suggest that the college—or something like it—would be feasible at the state level. But they doubted it would be possible at the national level, given both the size of the United States and concerns about federal intrusion in state affairs.

The advantage of the NPQH, notes Jones, is that both the qualification and the standards on which it is based are “very public. They’re transparent.”

“And it does give that national assurance,” he says, “that a head in Cornwall and a head in London are working toward the same standards, although obviously how it will play out is different in different schools.” ■



New Leaders for New Schools trains principal-candidates to be instructional leaders, often using case studies and student-achievement data.

photos by
Michael Dwyer

by Lesli A. Maxwell

Real-World Lessons

A nonprofit group runs an 'alternate route' for urban principals.

Boston

Since 2000, New Leaders for New Schools has recruited and trained more than 300 principals and placed them at the helms of troubled schools in cities across the nation.

But the nonprofit organization, co-founded by Jonathan Schnur, an education policy adviser in President Bill Clinton's administration, and sustained by his political savvy and prowess at fundraising, aspires to much more.

Even in schools where achievement has been mired at the bottom for years, New Leaders principals are expected to ensure that their students dramatically improve in reading and mathematics. By 2014, the organization has pledged to raise 90 percent of students to proficiency at any school where one of its principals has been in charge for five straight years—a goal that Schnur expects will add up to somewhere between 300 and 400 schools. For its principals in high schools, New Leaders is expecting graduation rates of at least 90 percent.

"We didn't get into this to just make bad schools OK schools," says Schnur, the chief executive officer of New Leaders for

New Schools, which is based in New York City. "We got into this because of our fundamental belief that regardless of a child's race or background, they can achieve at high levels."

Such ambitious, well-defined goals are a hallmark of the 7-year-old organization. Only 22 percent of the schools that have New Leaders-trained principals running them are on track to get such dramatic results, Schnur says, in acknowledgment of the challenges in reaching those achievement goals.

Operating in nine urban districts—including Chicago, the District of Columbia, Oakland, Calif., and New York City—New Leaders for New Schools has steadily emerged as a premier alternative route for becoming a city principal.

Schnur, 41, is a swift talker who gives the history of New Leaders in less than 60 seconds before directing the conversation to what he prefers to discuss these days: his new school reform ideas and the future of New Leaders, or what he calls "chapter two." That energy, and the political skills and contacts he picked up while working in the Clinton administration, have been vital to the group's success.

Schnur has raised tens of millions of dollars for the program that he and co-founder Benjamin G. Fenton, now the chief cities officer for New Leaders, cooked up while they were at the Harvard Business School. The Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation, the Broad Foundation, and the NewSchools Venture

Fund are among the biggest backers.

New Leaders, in fact, is reliant on aggressive fundraising to pay the six-figure bill to train one principal, which some say could limit its expansion and sustainability.

In partnership with three school districts and a group of charter school organizations, New Leaders won grants from the federal Teacher Incentive Fund, roughly \$75 million over five years that the organization is using to create a largely Web-based program for sharing what it deems to be the best practices in urban schools. As part of the project, schoolwide awards will be paid for dramatic improvement in student achievement and successful teachers who open up their classrooms and share their expertise will be paid bonuses.

In the program's first year, Schnur approached school leaders in New York City and Chicago to strike an agreement on training new principals. Now, cities and school districts must approach New Leaders first, then go through a vetting process to win a contract, in part by agreeing to raise private dollars from local businesses and foundations to cover half the cost of training the principals.

Within five years, Schnur established a solid enough track record to persuade district officials to give the New Leaders organization what he insists is critical for the program to succeed: access to



student-level data so that the training program can hold itself accountable. New Leaders also insists that its trainees—once placed as principals—get a degree of autonomy that other school leaders in those districts don't necessarily have.

Selecting each class of New Leaders trainees is a rigorous process that requires applicants to write essays and survive a first-round interview. For the roughly 25 percent who become finalists, the screening becomes especially tough. Finalists are brought in for a daylong round of one-on-one interviews, case-study analyses, and role-playing as principals. They must demonstrate some expertise in classroom instruction by watching videos of teachers and offering detailed critiques.

The role-playing scenarios—Schnur declined to discuss them to avoid tipping off future applicants—are one of the main ways that New Leaders officials winnow the pool of finalists.

“What we are really screening for is a fundamental belief system,” says Schnur. “We look for all kinds of signals and clues, subtle or not, that someone is truly going to be focused on the achievement of kids in every decision they would make as a principal, and not on what makes adults happy or comfortable.”

Those who make it are then trained in a manner that resembles the residencies of new physicians who work in hospitals under the guidance of more-experienced doctors.

After five weeks of training over the summer in instructional leadership, in establishing a school culture that is centered around high student achievement, and in managing a school building day to day, the “new leaders” are assigned to work in schools with

strong principals who serve as role models and mentors.

Immediately, they are each given a project to manage, one that usually requires them to work with a team of teachers to raise achievement for a group of students over the course of the school year. They are paired with coaches, usually retired principals, who offer advice and professional development constantly, and who ultimately make recommendations on whether the new leaders are ready to run schools on their own.

“They put us in schools right away and get us solving real-world problems as soon as possible,” says Shaylin Todd, a New Leaders-trained principal who started her second year as principal of Fort Worthington Elementary School in Baltimore last month.

In late June, the latest crop of would-be principals—105 in total; roughly 10 to 15 from each of the nine cities where the program has contracts—gathered at Boston University to begin their five weeks of training. Two-thirds were racial or ethnic minorities. More than half were women. All had at least two years of teaching experience; most had more than five. Several became teachers through Teach For America, the nonprofit group that recruits novice teachers for high-need schools.

On the second day of their boot camp, the aspiring principals were immersed in case studies about using student-achievement data to help teachers become better instructors. In fact, much of the New Leaders curriculum is devoted to teaching and reinforcing the skills of being a good instructional leader.

Broken into small groups, the new leaders pored over the results of a math assessment that showed that nearly half the students who were tested didn't understand such concepts as complex fractions. One new leader was put on the spot to act as the principal and discuss the results with two teachers: a frustrated one who blames the students, and an eager one who wants to use the data to adjust how he teaches. The other new leaders critiqued their handling of the two scenarios.

New Leaders is tracking the results posted by its principals.

“These are the kinds of real situations that perplex principals every day in schools,” says Darlene Merry, the chief academic officer for New Leaders. “What we are doing with these case studies and role-playing is preparing these new principals for something they will have to deal with in a matter of weeks when they start their residency.”

The program's curriculum evolves constantly, Merry says, especially in response to surveys of first-year residents, who offer detailed feedback on which of the summer courses and exercises proved most relevant. One of the essential features of the program—the use of retired principals as coaches and confidants to the aspiring principals over the first two years—also starts during the summer training session. The coaches meet with their assigned new leaders



Far left, instructor C. Michael Kline addresses a class during a program this past summer in Boston.

Center, participants from the District of Columbia listen during class.

Left, aspiring principals from Atlanta and Baltimore go over a budget-planning worksheet.

several times a week to discuss the lessons they learned and to answer questions and offer advice.

Since selecting its first class in 2001, New Leaders has placed roughly 85 percent of its trainees in principalships after they completed the residency year. Another 10 percent landed jobs as assistant principals, while 5 percent washed out or were “counseled out” of the program, Schnur says. Placements have been relatively easy, except for the organization’s first few years in Chicago, where locally elected school-site councils have a say in principal hiring and were initially wary of the training program.

To hold its principals accountable and to measure how well the program works, New Leaders has been amassing student-level data from each of the schools where its people are hired. The organization is working with the RAND Corp., an independent research organization, to do a detailed analysis of how much achievement improves at schools led by a New Leaders principal.

“I don’t know of a university program that is tracking the results of its principals like that,” Schnur says.

But it’s too soon to declare that New Leaders has found the right formula for training principals, says Michelle D. Young, the executive director of the University Council for Educational Administration, a University of Texas at Austin-based consortium of major research universities with programs that train school leaders.

“We have seen statements in the media and places on the Internet that indicate that the New Leaders-trained principals are getting gains in student proficiency after a couple of years, but those can be

misleading,” she says. “What we haven’t seen is a published evaluation of how they are doing. While there may be some data showing improvements, what we can’t determine is whether those can be attributed to the quality of people that they recruit or the curriculum and pedagogy that their people get in training.”

Young calls New Leaders’ selective screening of candidates both a strength and a weakness of the program.

“With better people coming in at the start, of course you end up producing better leaders in the end,” she says. “But along with increasing selectivity, you also decrease the size of your candidate pool and therefore end up having a smaller impact, number-wise, on schools.”

The cost of the program—\$102,000 to train each candidate—has caused some critics to raise questions about how long it can last and whether it could ever be expanded to every urban school system. The trainees themselves pay nothing.

But educators in some of the districts where New Leaders trains principals report that its methods are bearing fruit. When New Leaders officials began negotiating to train leaders for the 82,000-student Baltimore city schools, they insisted that their principals be certified as administrators by the Maryland Department of Education without going through a university-based certification process.

State Superintendent of Schools Nancy S. Grasmick agreed.

“The rigor with which they chose their people, the rigor of their training, and the ongoing, quality professional development

that their aspiring principals get from mentor principals and coaches was so impressive to us,” Grasmick says.

Since Maryland signed off on certifying New Leaders trainees as principals, the group sought and won similar licensure agreements from Louisiana, Tennessee, and Wisconsin, once it started training principals in New Orleans, Memphis, and Milwaukee. It also works in the Prince George’s County, Md., school district.

Todd was one of eight people in the first class of new school leaders to be trained for Baltimore. During her residency year at Baybrook Elementary School, the principal put her in charge of managing one of the school’s two buildings. Todd also worked with the school’s 2nd grade teachers to develop interim assessments in mathematics to track achievement throughout the school year. Now, Todd is the principal at Fort Worthington Elementary in East Baltimore.

Diane Goldian, a retired high school principal who has been Todd’s coach since she started the New Leaders program in 2005, drops by the school, unannounced, once every two weeks. Goldian sits in classrooms to watch teachers and examines achievement data. She tells Todd what needs work and attention and what is going well.

“I consider her to be a critical part of my instructional team,” says Todd.

For Todd, reaching 90 percent proficiency at Fort Worthington, where a majority of children are poor and African-American, is a mantra. That goal is written on posters in the hallways, and it comes up in every conversation with teachers about instruction, Todd says.

To get there, the school has a big gap to close. It has been in “restructuring,” for failing to make adequate yearly progress under the federal No Child Left Behind Act, since the 2002-03 school year.

“We’ve got our plan in place,” Todd says. “Now we’ve got to work and teach our hearts out to get there. The kids are capable. It’s up to the adults to help them.” ■



A mix of classwork, left, and practical field experience in schools working with mentor principals distinguishes the collaborative approach in eastern Tennessee.

photos by
Brian Wagner

by Alyson Klein

Joining Forces

In rural Tennessee, a state university and two school districts work together on leadership.

Johnson City, Tenn.

For decades, educators in this rapidly developing corner of Appalachia who have wanted to become school administrators have enrolled at East Tennessee State University, which offers one of just a handful of educational leadership programs available nearby. Both of the local school districts in the area, in turn, have hired many of their principals from the university's program.

But despite what seemed to be a mutually beneficial relationship with the university, neither the Greeneville City nor the Kingsport school system traditionally had significant say over which employees got into the program, or how they were prepared. That began to change two years ago, when district officials entered into a collaborative partnership to help East Tennessee State revamp its educational leadership program.

The overhaul at the university is part of a broader effort aimed at reshaping the process for credentialing principals statewide. Tennessee plans to require all its universities to begin revamping their programs or to stop credentialing new principals. The state board of education was

expected to review as early as next year an outline of the standards programs will have to adopt. The Southern Regional Education Board is advising the state, and helping to pay for the overhaul, through a three-year, \$750,000 grant from the U.S.

Department of Education. The Atlanta-based organization tapped two universities on opposite ends of the state, East Tennessee and the University of Memphis, to pilot new programs that give districts considerable input into how prospective leaders are chosen and trained.

"Credentials mean a lot in education, but credentials don't always translate into genuine skills," says Robinette Mitchell, the director of the professional-development center for the 2,700-student Greeneville school district. "We're very clearly looking for folks who are prepared to be instructional leaders. ... They [should understand] theory and current research, but know how to put it into practice."

The two universities were asked to create an "experimental cohort": a group of prospective principals handpicked with the help of district officials. Students in the cohort take all of their classes together, in a sequence designed with help from their districts. Districts coordinate internship opportunities for the students with a mentor principal.

Mentors meet regularly with district officials and representatives of East Tennessee State, located here in Johnson City, to discuss students' progress and the redesign generally. Eric S. Glover, the coordinator of the administrator-training program at the university, readily acknowledges that the districts and the university are still finding their way through a process of trial and error.

“It’s an emergent design,” he says. “We’re redefining it as we go.”

The university’s leadership program already had many features widely considered best practices, including a requirement that all students go through the program in cohorts. But part of what sets the “Greene-King” cohort apart from others is an effort to deliberately select field experiences to reflect the two districts’ needs.

Each district allows the students two days a month of release time from their regular jobs. They typically spend that time at their mentors’ schools, first watching them in action, then eventually taking on leadership roles themselves.

The release time helps students fulfill a statewide requirement that every educator seeking an administrative endorsement, as the principal’s credential is called in Tennessee, complete an internship. At East Tennessee State, that means logging 540 internship hours, to be roughly evenly divided among elementary, middle, and high schools. The time must also include work in the district’s central office and doing outreach in the community.

For many prospective principals, internship hours are usually squeezed in during the summer, evenings, or weekends, to accommodate their full-time teaching positions. Students can wind up with a hodgepodge of different activities that may or may not help them.

“I was really on my own in finding internship opportunities. You do what you can when you can,” recalls Vicki Kirk, Greeneville’s assistant director for

instruction, of her experience earning a doctorate from East Tennessee in 2003. “These folks are getting a much better range of experiences.”

It’s partly up to the mentor principals to make sure those hours are meaningful preparation, not just entries on a log. Mentors aim to coordinate internship opportunities that will help prospective administrators fill in the gaps in their backgrounds, as shown on a self-assessment they complete at the beginning of the program.

For instance, Kelly Ford, who teaches 4th and 5th graders at Highland Elementary School in Greeneville, felt she needed more experience in designing programs to serve the district’s increasingly diverse population. Her mentor, Larry G. Neas, who is also her principal, helped her participate on a community and district panel aimed at improving efforts to reach out to students from different backgrounds.

Neas and other mentor principals borrowed a motto from the Southern Regional Education Board—“observe, participate, lead”—to guide their work. For the past year, Ford and Andrea Tolley, whom Neas also mentors, have watched his daily routine of checking in with each classroom in his school. He often stops to ask individual students what they’re learning to see if they understand the purpose behind their assignments.

This school year, when the results of state tests are released, Ford and Tolley will help Neas analyze the school’s data. Then they’ll work with him on putting together a

presentation for Highland’s staff, explaining which areas need improvement.

But the time that students in the program spend away from their regular jobs is no small sacrifice, especially since most of them work as classroom teachers.

“It’s less work to be there [in the classroom] than it is not to be there,” says Tolley, who teaches 7th grade language arts at Greeneville Middle School, referring to the time she spends crafting

Sustaining the program will require more money from the state, educators say.

substitute lesson plans. Sometimes other teachers from the school cover her classes, but often the school must pay for a substitute, at a cost of about \$65 a day.

The release time also allows the aspiring administrators to get more mileage out of their mandatory stints in the district office. For instance, Jennifer Arblaster, who teaches a class of 3rd, 4th, and 5th graders at Washington Elementary School in Kingsport, began a series of brochures for parents explaining in accessible language the district’s curriculum for each grade.

But while such projects are meaningful, they’re also time-consuming, says Nancy Wagner, who until recently served as the assistant superintendent for instruction in the 6,500-student Kingsport district. It’s unlikely that she would have suggested a similar project to a student who didn’t get



release time, she said, simply because he or she might not have had the opportunity to work on it consistently.

Even with the help of the mentors, 540 hours is a lot to complete, however, and the use of a few filler activities can be tempting, says Kathy O'Neill, who directs leadership initiatives at the SREB and is advising East Tennessee State on its redesign. She's encouraged the university to consider gearing the internship hours toward mastering specific skills, instead of simply reaching a set number of hours.

The federal grant provided the university with about \$190,000 over three years, some of which was used to pay the faculty and district leaders for their role in the redesign process. Mentors will receive about \$4,500 over the three years. The grant also paid for training district officials, East Tennessee staff members, and mentors on the SREB's approach to leadership development.

The grant money covers the bulk of students' tuition costs for the spring and fall semesters, about \$4,800 per student annually. Students pay \$1,000 for summer courses and also cover the cost of books and transportation.

Perhaps lured by the promise of discounted tuition, more than 60 prospective students across both districts attended the initial information sessions. But many chose not to apply, partly because they were told the program would be geared to educators who actually intend to work as principals, says Wagner, the former Kingsport assistant superintendent.

The applicants were put through a

rigorous interview process that included a writing sample, four recommendations, and an extensive interview, conducted by a panel of representatives from their respective district and the university. In selecting candidates, district officials looked for educators who had already taken on leadership roles in their schools or the profession, such as assistant principals and teachers certified by the National Board for Professional Teaching Standards.

"It had to be somebody [who] as a school system, we wanted to invest our time and money on," says the Greeneville district's Mitchell. "We asked ourselves, 'Is this a person we would want to hire?'"

About 25 educators across both districts applied to the program, which accepted 12 students. Two have since dropped out.

Students applying for the traditional program at East Tennessee must face an interview panel, typically made up of at least two representatives from the university. When possible, an official from a local district also participates, although not necessarily someone from the district the candidate works in, says Glover, the university's coordinator for administrator training.

Directly involving leaders from an applicant's home district in the selection process has resulted in a strong cohort, Glover says, but he might not necessarily continue that system once the formal collaboration ends.

Greeneville and Kingsport are high-performing districts, he says, but "many students [in administrator training] come to us from weaker districts, and we can give them experiences outside [of that context]. ... It's especially important for students from the smaller, more isolated districts."

The program's coursework is designed to complement the work in the internship.

Mentor principals helped rework the order of courses and topics into what Glover calls a "just in time" format, meaning that topics are addressed in classes at around the same time, or right before, students encounter them in their internships.

For instance, at the districts' recommendation, the university moved a course in instructional leadership from the fourth to the second slot in the sequence. "It made sense for us to really get into the curriculum, instruction, and assessment, since we believe that is the foundation for being an instructional leader," Wagner says.

Students have also suggested changes. For example, at the Greene-King cohort's urging, Pamela H. Scott, a former principal and assistant superintendent, will lead or co-teach each of their courses. The students thought it would be helpful to have one person guiding them who knows their experience, strengths, and weaknesses, says Arblaster, the Washington Elementary teacher.

It's too soon to tell which of the changes will last after the grant funding dries up. State action is needed to keep some of the new features in place at East Tennessee State—and to spur similar change statewide, says O'Neill of the SREB.

"The sustainability of any of these programs is hit or miss," she says. "That's one of the reasons that we're trying to work at the state level, so that when all this goes forward, there will be legislative funding to support some of those activities." ■



Far left, Kelly Ford, an aspiring principal and teacher at Highland Elementary School in Greeneville, Tenn., looks over students' vocabulary work in a 2nd grade class at the school.

Center, Terri Tilson, at left, an administrator with the Greeneville city district, and Larry Neas, center, go over budget information with interns including Andrea Tolley, right.

Left, Neas, Ford, and Tolley make the rounds of the school, where the women shadow Neas two days a month.