

EDUCATION WEEK

SPOTLIGHT

On School and District Leadership

EDITOR'S
NOTE

To fundamentally transform American education, schools require strong leaders who can identify and implement a range of innovative policies and practices. In the course of just a few short years, school leaders have been confronted by a once-in-a-lifetime economic recession, a wave of unprecedented federal programs like Race to the Top, and a surge of activity around common standards and assessments. In the face of such challenges, many school districts are rethinking the roles of central offices, shifting superintendent work hours and schedules, redefining school leadership and training programs, and altering how they prepare students for college and the workplace.

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Nicole Fruge/Education Week-File

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Ruin Gives Way to Renewal in Joplin

By Christina A. Samuels

M eet voucher supporters' new fellow strategists: students with disabilities.

Just days before a massive tornado devastated their community last May, a group of Joplin, Mo., educators and other community members had a meeting about "21st-century learning."

What should such learning look like in their community, they wondered. How

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DISTRICT RENEWAL**

does a school system pivot from a focus on student test scores to a focus on achievement measured in other ways?

Then May 22 arrived, bringing the catastrophic storm that ripped through the community of 50,000 in the southwest corner of the state. The tornado killed 161 people and destroyed six schools, including the city's sole high school. Three other schools and the district administration building were damaged.

One year later, Joplin is preparing to break ground next week—on the anniversary of the tornado—for new facilities that match the school district's ambitions for the education it wants to provide its 7,800 students.

Expanding on the new view of learning Joplin had begun to explore just before the storm, the district has done away with traditional notions of school design. Its new schools will feature flexible classroom areas, including spaces where students can work independently or in small groups, called "think tanks."

And Joplin High School and Franklin Technical High School, once housed in separate buildings, will be brought together in a new facility that will include five "career academies" where students can follow a college-preparatory academic path as well as take classes that lead directly to the work world.

"One of the facts that we're facing is the high school that prepares every kid for college is not the high school we need anymore," Assistant Superintendent Angie Besendorfer said. "We had begun to question that, but we were just touching the tip of the iceberg" before the devastation last year.

The district's new middle and elementary schools are slated to be completed in December 2013, and the high school in August 2014. On May 21, the day before groundbreaking ceremonies, President Barack Obama will visit the community to give the commencement address to Joplin High School seniors.

The school architecture is just one of the major changes that came to the school district after the tornado hit. Last August, as the first school year after the storm got under way, the district distributed laptops to all of its high school students. The transition was embraced by some staff members and was rocky for others.

As with the change from textbooks to laptops, the changes discussed for the school architecture were challenging for some people, Ms. Besendorfer said.

"They wanted what we had back, so we had to work and move through the personal pieces of all that," she said. "Each of our employees and our kids had their own personal trauma. It was a delicate dance."

But at the same time, the upheaval caused by the storm gave Joplin the ability to look at schooling in a different way—a process



Nicole Frugé/Education Week-File

that may have been slower to take root if the tornado had not happened, Ms. Besendorfer said.

"We're living without things we thought we could never live without as a community," she said. "And, having that happen to us, we're now able to question things we never questioned before."

Gathering Ideas

One of the first steps Joplin educators and community members took was to visit other schools around the country to get an idea of how their architecture supported their academic programs. From October to December of last year, more than 60 teachers, administrators, and community members visited schools in eight states, cherry-picking ideas that they thought might work in Joplin.

Tobin D. Schultz, the co-chairman of the Joplin High School social studies department, was among the Joplin representatives who traveled to Texas, visiting six schools in three days. One school that stood out for Mr. Schultz was Carl Wunsche Senior High School, a career academy in the Spring Independent School District, north of downtown Houston.

The school, which won a 2007 prize for school facility excellence given by the Council of Educational Facility Planners International, has a student-operated bank, coffee shop, and restaurant. Community members can visit the cosmetology program for a haircut from students in training. Other students work in an early-childhood program housed at the school.

Mr. Schultz said he texted his wife to tell her that he thought he had found the next school for their family. She asked him if they

Senior Derek Carter, above, reads *Catch-22* on his laptop in a Think Tank room at the 11th and 12th grade campus of Joplin High School.

needed to prepare for a move. He said he told her no, "I think we'll just build that in Joplin," he said.

Bringing Classes Together

One element that community members agreed on is that Joplin High School should remain a comprehensive facility. Many of the career academies that they visited were small schools of choice, where students had to forgo extracurriculars to enroll.

"We're going to combine the best of both worlds," Mr. Schultz said.

The next step for the community was translating its dreams into a coherent structure. Chad Greer, a principal architect with the Joplin-based firm Corner, Greer, and Associates, had already used some of the ideas in the section of a Joplin shopping mall that currently houses the district's 11th and 12th graders. The 9th and 10th graders are in a former warehouse.

The "mall school" has open spaces and conference rooms "where students can feel like it's theirs," Mr. Greer said. The entire look is closer to office space or a college campus than to a traditional high school.

"If you treat these students like they're in college or in the business world, they will rise up to the occasion," Mr. Greer said.

Community members hope the temporary

mall facility will provide a smooth transition to the new high school. Mr. Greer said the new space will offer opportunities for students to see all the programs available to them; they might be able to walk past a classroom and see a welding lesson taking place, for example.

Career Sampling

That element is exciting to Susan H. Adams, the director of human resources at Able Manufacturing & Assembly in Joplin, and one of the community members who visited schools. "What this new school is going to do is give every student the opportunity to try or to taste a couple of different careers," Ms. Adams said.

The career academies available for students will focus on arts and communication; business and information technology; human services, which includes offerings such as Junior ROTC, culinary arts, and early-childhood programs; health sciences; and technical sciences.

Mr. Greer, who has designed other school facilities, said interest is growing in designing the built environment to reflect academic objectives.

But, he said, "it is going to be much more difficult for a district that is interested in moving that way to do so if they already have high schools," due to the challenges in adapting existing structures.

Joplin voters approved a \$62 million bond issue last month to support the construction of the new schools and the repair of the old facilities, but the vote just barely made the supermajority needed. There were 4,860 votes, or 57.64 percent, in favor of the bond to 3,571 votes against. The bond issue needed four-sevenths of the votes to pass, or 57.14 percent. The district has also received a little over \$35 million in federal and state emergency aid.

With the money and architectural plans in place, Joplin now plans to embark on another re-examination of its practices—this time centered around how the district structures the school day. One idea, said Ms. Besendorfer, the assistant superintendent, is to bring all the classes in a subject area together for lectures, then have students break into small groups for guided and independent practice the rest of the week. Such changes may not be easy, she said. "But maybe we need to stop doing what's easy, and start doing what's best for kids," she added.

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Principal Prep for Common Core Gaining Traction

By Catherine Gewertz

A year ago, top officials in the school leadership world were worried. It seemed to them that principals were being overlooked in national conversations about how to get educators ready for the Common Core State Standards.

But that is changing. The past six months have seen a surge of activity to acquaint principals with the new standards and teach them how to lead their staff members through the profound changes that are required to turn the new expectations into classroom instruction.

"There is much greater awareness now about what we need to do to educate principals about what they should be doing for the common core," said JoAnn D. Bartoletti, the executive director of the National Association of Secondary School Principals.

A year ago, as she took the helm of the NASSP, Ms. Bartoletti told *Education Week* that far too little was being done to prepare principals to lead common-standards implementation in their buildings. And while there is still much more work to be done to fully support principals in the common core, "I am more hopeful than I was last spring," she said last week. "There is more going on now."

Ryan Imbriale, the principal of Patapsco High School and Center for the Arts in Baltimore County, Md., said the past year has brought a spike in the amount of information being offered for principals on leading common-core implementation. Still, it can be tricky to figure out what's high-quality guidance, he said.

"All of a sudden, a floodgate has opened, and there is a real focus on this," Mr. Imbriale said. "Articles in journals, opportunities for seminars, summer trainings. I want to make sure I get the right information from the right people."

The 30,000-member NASSP, based in Reston, Va., jumped into the void by partnering

with the College Board to offer a series of six webinars that walked principals through some of the issues they will face as they work with their teachers to implement the new standards.

Meeting a Need

Mel Riddile, the NASSP's associate director of high school services, wrote a series of columns on principals and the common core for the National High School Center, part of the American Institutes for Research, and sought to spread the message as well through an April webinar for the Alliance for Excellent Education, a Washington-based high school improvement group. The NASSP assembled the webinars and columns, along with articles from its blog and its monthly magazine, on a new common-core resources Web page.

The National Association of Elementary School Principals is also beginning to offer common-core information to its members, as it did in a May 3 webinar with the School Improvement Network. The Alexandria, Va.-based group hired a full-time staff member devoted to the standards, compiled a "checklist" aimed at helping principals take stock of what they must do to move ahead with the new standards, and set up a Web portal to house its new stock of common-core resources.

The two national principals' groups have conducted recent joint trainings in Georgia and Michigan, supported by the Council of Chief State School Officers and the James B. Hunt Institute, a North Carolina nonprofit that supports the common standards. Lucille Davy, a former New Jersey commissioner of education who is now serving as a senior adviser to the Hunt Institute, said that the groups hope to offer more such trainings in states that want them.

Gail Connelly, the executive director of the NAESP, said she hopes those sessions can help fill what has until recently been a void.

“There is a tsunami that’s about to hit our schools, and I’m worried that our principals are not prepared,” she said.

Leading Change

Principals must understand many moving parts of school life to lead their staffs toward the common standards, the NASSP’s Mr. Riddile said. Not only must they grasp the content and pedagogical changes in the standards, but they also must recognize a host of other potentially necessary changes: grading practices, daily schedules, student grouping, monitoring, and implications for special education, English-language learners, Advanced Placement, technology, and counseling.

“If I were designing an implementation plan, the first thing I would want to do is get the school leader on board,” said Mr. Riddile, who led two Virginia high schools and was the 2006 national secondary school principal of the year. “They have to have the big picture of where this is going, how to work with the teachers.”

The ASCD has expanded its focus on principals, giving a common-core webinar earlier this month that walked participants through the standards’ key ideas and how they should look in the classroom. The Alexandria, Va.-based professional-development group will also run two-day institutes for principals in five cities scheduled for August.

New York state created a number of resources for school leaders, including a principal’s guide to overseeing the key instructional shifts in the standards, and posted them on its common-core website, engageny.org. It describes what is expected of students, teachers, and principals in each such shift.

The 405,000-student Chicago school district is reaching its principals through its regional superintendents. In four meetings this year, those 18 regional superintendents explored the common core, said Steve Gering, the district’s chief leadership-development officer. They then worked with the district’s 625 principals and their school leadership teams. The idea, Mr. Gering said, is to create a structure that not only builds capacity among principals, but also enables them to customize the work to their school sites and offers ongoing support as they put the work into practice.

“We have to empower the instructional-leadership team, led by the principal, to adapt the information around the common core to the needs of their school,” he said. “The principal is the one leading the adaptation and design of the common core to their school site and is the one ultimately responsible for implementing it.”

Mr. Imbriale, the Baltimore County principal, said he has gotten help both from his state and his district in wading into the com-

mon-core work. Last summer, every principal took a school team to a Maryland education department summer training academy, where they learned about the new standards and designed a school transition plan, he said. The team from Patapsco High—Mr. Imbriale and his core-subject department chairs—has been at the heart of the work ever since, he said.

They brainstorm with other department chairs in the district at monthly meetings, returning to share what they learned with their colleagues, he said. He, too, uses monthly principals’ meetings at the district level to build his knowledge and bring it back to his staff.

“An administrator that doesn’t get that kind of support from the central office can feel very isolated,” Mr. Imbriale said. Also crucial, he said, is building a good team with his department chairs, since he depends on them to be key conductors of the work throughout the building.

The biggest watchword in overseeing common-core implementation for Tracey Lamb is monitoring. As the principal of Fulton County High school in Hickman, Ky., she uses twice-monthly faculty meetings to hone teachers’ instructional focus and make sure they are gauging students’ progress regularly and adjusting instruction accordingly.

“It’s all about instruction and facilitating to make sure that what is supposed to be happening is happening,” said Ms. Lamb, Kentucky’s 2008 high school principal of the year. “Monitoring, monitoring, monitoring, and teaching, teaching, teaching.”

Principals must also be sure to carve time out of the schedule to let teachers work together on ways to teach the standards and analyze data from assessments of student work, Ms. Lamb said. Additionally, principals must take care to coordinate with feeder schools to align expectations, she said.

As principals begin exploring their role as common-core leaders, some caution them against seeing themselves as solo players.

Rob Weil, the director of field programs for the American Federation of Teachers, urges them to approach common-core leadership as a joint project with their teachers, working as a team to define and observe classroom practice.

“Leadership isn’t one person,” said Mr. Weil. “It’s most effective when everyone is playing a role, working together.”

If common-core implementation is to be sustained over time, it’s not only current principals who must be prepared, but aspiring principals as well. And those engaged in that work say far too little is happening.

Preservice Preparation

Margaret Terry Orr oversees one of the leadership-training programs at the Bank Street



It’s all about instruction and facilitating to make sure that what is supposed to be happening is happening. Monitoring, monitoring, monitoring, and teaching, teaching, teaching.”

TRACEY LAMB

Principal, Fulton County High School, Hickman, Ky.

College of Education in New York. She also chairs a regional association of such programs and serves on a state task force that’s examining principal evaluation. She reports that little attention is being given to ensuring that new principals are prepared to lead their staffs in teaching the common standards.

“Principal-preparation programs just haven’t been doing very much with this,” she said. “The dialogue is just beginning.”

New York state officials have begun working with the public university systems to think about how to incorporate common-core ideas into teacher preparation, Ms. Orr said, but are not yet doing likewise with programs that prepare principals. “We fear that attention to leadership preparation will not be well addressed,” she said.

Top education officials in New York recognize and place a high value on ensuring strong common-core leadership in school buildings, but because of limited capacity, haven’t yet been able to focus a lot of investment in aspiring principals, said Ken Slentz, the deputy commissioner for the office of P-12 education, which, with the state’s office of higher education, oversees professional development for teacher and principal evaluation.

The state is focusing first on training those who evaluate principals, on the theory that the process can strengthen in-service school leaders by designing targeted professional development based on multiple observations and surveys of parents, students, and teachers, he said.

The education department recognizes that it must turn its attention to principal preparation, he said, so that both preservice and in-service programs build the instructional leadership of principals.

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Conn. Superintendents Push New Vision for Schooling

College-going rates rising, remediation rates falling

By Christina A. Samuels

The Connecticut classroom of the future may not be limited by a traditional school year, the four walls of a classroom, or even the standard progression of grades, based on a proposed package of unusually bold changes that are being advanced by the state's school superintendents.

Instead, the current system would be replaced by a "learner-centered" education program that would begin at age 3; offer parents a menu of options, including charter schools and magnet schools; and provide assessments when an individual child is ready to be tested, rather than having all children tested in a class at the same time.

The superintendents' recommendations also promote the long-resisted idea of consolidating some of the state's 165 school districts, 21 of which consist of only one school.

"The present division of local school districts into 165 separate entities with some regional arrangements is economically inefficient and fosters economic, racial and ethnic isolation," according to the proposal, released in November by the Connecticut Association of Public School Superintendents.

"We're not at all naive about the challenge before us. We're going every ox there is," said Joseph Cirsuolo, the group's executive director. He worked closely with a 16-person panel that spent two years developing the 134 recommendations.

While ambitious, the package comes at a timely moment. Gov. Dannel P. Malloy, a Democrat, who was sworn in last January, has declared that he wants the upcoming legislative session to focus on reforming education for the state's 564,000 students in prekindergarten-through-12th grades. On Dec. 20, Mr. Malloy sent a letter to state legislators, saying that he would like to see laws that improve access to high-quality, early-childhood programs, create an educator evaluation system that values "skill and effectiveness" over seniority and tenure, and deliver resources to needy

districts that embrace reform. The governor also plans in January to launch a series of stakeholder workshops around the state to talk about education reform. Many of the governor's priorities dovetail with the superintendents' proposals.

"We should not and will not accept half-measures and repackaged versions of the status quo," Mr. Malloy said in his letter to lawmakers. Both houses of the Connecticut General Assembly are controlled by Democrats.

A 'Perfect Storm'

Mr. Cirsuolo said that the superintendents' work has been presented to the governor, the new state Commissioner of Education Stefan Pryor, and other education groups around the state, including local school boards.

"There's almost a little 'perfect storm' developing" around education reform in Connecticut, Mr. Cirsuolo said.

The package of reforms presented by the superintendents grew out of an annual policy conference in 2008 that brought together 123 of the state's 165 superintendents. The leaders talked about how the mission of education had shifted to the expectation that all students should be achieving at high levels.

"We've seen a not-so-subtle transformation in the education world from providing students with an opportunity to learn, to an obligation to be sure that every kid does learn," said Frank H. Sippy, the superintendent of the 4,500-student Pomperaug Regional School District 15 and a member of the panel that developed the recommendations. "We superintendents recognized we're pretty well equipped to do the former, but not terribly well equipped to do the latter."

In fall 2009, the 16 superintendents, assistant superintendents and university professors started work on the project, with the assistance of outside educational experts, including Michael B. Horn, an expert in education and "disruptive innovation," and Tony Wagner, the co-director of the Change Leadership Group at the Harvard Graduate School

“ We’ve finally progressed to the point where the question is not, ‘Will we or won’t we have reform?’ It’s, ‘What kind of reform will we put forward?’ ”

PATRICK RICCARDS

Executive Director, Connecticut Coalition for Achievement Now, (ConnCAN)

of Education.

The superintendents' recommendations are encapsulated under broad categories. For example, under the topic of making learning personal, the report recommends that students progress through school based on what they actually learned, rather than the time they have spent in classes. Under the category of offering options, the superintendents' report proposes abolishing all regulatory state mandates and replacing them with mandated student-learning outcomes. State funding mechanisms should include incentives tied to meeting and exceeding those mandated outcomes, the report says.

The full membership unanimously adopted the proposal in October. While Connecticut tends to rank higher than average among states on the National Assessment of Education Progress, also known as the "nation's report card," recent results suggest some stagnation. On this year's tests, Connecticut scores were largely flat compared to 2009, in reading and mathematics. The state also showed large achievement gaps between its white students and their black and Hispanic counterparts, and among students of different income levels.

Student Outcomes

Last month, the state released statistics showing that nearly one in five of its students

do not complete high school in four years. The numbers were worse for Hispanic students, black students, students eligible for free or reduced-price lunches, students in special education and students who are learning English: About one in three students in those groups do not receive a standard diploma in four years.

But many of the school leaders who worked on the panel do not lead districts that are struggling with student achievement. For example, Mr. Sippy's district serves Middlebury and Southbury, which are among the state's better-off towns, and about 95 percent of its graduates go on to college.

In the 2,500-student Weston district, 97 percent of high school graduates enroll in college. But Colleen Palmer, the district superintendent and also a member of the panel that developed the recommendations, said that the school system's strong test scores are just one measure of success. The school system could still be more flexible and responsive to student needs, she said.

"We haven't had one clear vision of education reform we've been able to look to in our state," said Ms. Palmer. And with the wealth and resources of some communities in the state, "one could be seduced into feeling that we're doing better than we really are," she said.

Another panelist, Salvatore Menzo, the superintendent of the 7,000-student Wallingford district, has experience as a former superintendent of a one-school district, and a school leader trying to make change. In 2010, his district reconfigured its elementary schools into four K-2 schools and four 3rd-through-5th grade schools to balance demographics and enrollment numbers. The debate before that change was contentious, he said, and a similar one needs to occur to improve education in the district.

Some education groups in the state said that they welcomed the superintendents' proposals.

Mary Loftus Levine, the executive director for the Connecticut Education Association, an affiliate of the National Education Association, said her organization agrees with the superintendents on issues related to early-childhood education, stable state funding, improving teacher-preparation programs and involving parents more deeply in the lives of their children's education.

Patrick Riccards, the executive director of the New Haven-based Connecticut Coalition for Achievement Now, also called ConnCAN, said "we've finally progressed to the point where the question is not, 'Will we or won't we have reform?' It's, 'What kind of reform will we put forward?'"

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District Central Offices Take On New Roles

By Christina A. Samuels

As "chief talent officer" for the Hartford, Conn., school district, Jennifer Allen finds herself in a different role from many central-office personnel who work in human resources.

Rather than serve as a conduit for flowing district policy to school principals, who are then expected to act on those centralized decisions, Ms. Allen and her team in the 20,000-student district help principals learn how to best exercise autonomy in their schools, from making staffing decisions to figuring out instructional priorities to determining if there's enough money in the school's budget to buy a van for after-school activities.

In her position, power doesn't come from a title, Ms. Allen said. It "comes from providing a service that principals decide they need."

New Responsibilities

Like Hartford, districts around the country are shifting responsibilities that once rested at the central office to principals, who may be operating magnet schools, charter schools, or neighborhood schools with varying levels of autonomy, all under one school system umbrella. These new-breed "portfolio" districts also require new thinking at the central office, where administrators once used to command, control, and compliance are now just one of many potential sources principals can tap for professional development, curriculum assistance, or help analyzing student data.

The Center for Reinventing Public Education, based at the University of Washington Bothell, has long tracked the progress of portfolio districts. It counts 26 school systems as members of its "portfolio district network," including New York City, Los Angeles, the District of Columbia, Baltimore, and the Recovery School District in Louisiana.

Among the many central-office positions that need to change in a portfolio district is that of the chief academic officer, said Paul T. Hill, the center's founder. Central-office administrators generally offer "a standardized approach, coaching, and professional development. But as much as possible, that needs to be put into the schools" in a portfolio-model district, he said. "At the extreme end, the chief academic officer can become a broker or a tender of the supply of options for schools. The district is not the default



Jennifer Allen: Central-office power comes from providing a service that principals need.



Paul T. Hill: The chief academic officer can be "a broker or tender" of options.



Eric Nadelstern: Central-office administrators may have less control than they think.

provider of anything.”

From Mr. Hill’s point of view, school administrators need flexibility not just in their schools, but freedom from mandates from the top in order to design programs, hire teachers, buy materials and technology, choose vendors, and own or lease their own property. Central offices can keep longitudinal data on students, assess schools based on student performance, distribute money to schools, recruit teachers to the district, and manage an enrollment process for the schools that do not use neighborhood boundaries, he said.

But this change, though easy to describe, is not always easy to implement, he added—in part because of concerns from central-office administrators about loosening the reins of power.

“District people are always worried that their school people are not ready for the responsibility,” Mr. Hill said.

Giving Up Control

One of the first steps for central-office administrators, according to Eric Nadelstern, a former deputy chancellor in the New York City school system, is to get past the idea that they have that much control in the first place. They don’t, he argues.

“You can have programs and say we’re going to implement them across the district in all the schools, and make sure that everyone is capable of doing the same thing, at the same time, on the same topic,” Mr. Nadelstern said in an interview. He is currently a professor of educational leadership at Teachers College, Columbia University.

“That is the prevalent *modus operandi* of most district superintendents, and you can do that and get a short-term gain on 4th grade reading scores, but there is never any lasting impact at the 8th grade level or in high school graduation rates,” he continued. “When a teacher closes the door in the morning, they do whatever the hell it is they think needs to be done.”

Mr. Nadelstern recently wrote a paper for the University of Washington center on how New York created networks of autonomous schools. He said rather than fight the heterogeneous practices taking place behind closed doors at schools, central-office administrators should embrace them. “The people closest to the kids in the classroom—the principal, the teachers in consultation with parents—are the best people to make decisions,” he said.

New York, with 1 million students and 1,700 schools, manages its diverse portfolio of schools by setting up networks of schools linked by similar educational philosophies but not necessarily geography. The networks provide some central-management activities

and are compared yearly for performance and principal satisfaction. Schools are free to switch networks yearly as they choose.

Mr. Nadelstern said New York started small. “You can’t go in there and say to everyone we’re going to change and expect them not to fight against that. What you need to do is to create something entirely new and protect it from the old while you’re nurturing it,” he added.

Growth of a Network

New York started with an “autonomy zone” of 26 district-run and three charter schools, which Mr. Nadelstern oversaw. The zone eventually grew to 48 schools, and the initiative was then rebranded as Empowerment Schools and open to any principal who chose to participate.

“The thing you’re nurturing eventually replaces the entire system,” he said.

Not every district chooses to transform itself the way New York did. Alyssa Whitehead-Bust, the chief of innovation and reform for the 82,000-student Denver school district, said she believes the changes at the central office need to happen at the same time that a district is giving more autonomy to its schools.

“At a minimum, you have to have support at the superintendent level, along with some other top leaders,” she said. Her office oversees performance management for the district’s charter schools and “innovation schools,” a state designation growing in popularity that gives some regular schools control over parts of their budget, hiring, and curriculum, as well as freedom from some union rules.

Ms. Whitehead-Bust said that her position and that of her team can be described now as “coaching,” and it’s not always an easy shift.

“It’s a value for us not to get caught up in one school type as being preferable to another,” she said. “We try to focus not on the differences between these schools but the similar goals.” School officials also try to borrow good ideas from the innovation of charter schools; for example, seven district-run schools will be piloting an extended school day and year in the coming school year, as is done in some Denver charter and innovation schools.

James Meza Jr., appointed in July 2011 to be the interim superintendent for the 45,000-student Jefferson Parish, La., district, has also worked fast, rolling out changes like principal-leadership programs and more autonomy for school leaders while eliminating 200 central-office positions and working to streamline central-office operations.

“We have 7,000 employees, and 3,500 of them are not in schools,” Mr. Meza said.



We try to focus not on the differences between these schools but the similar goals.”

ALYSSA WHITEHEAD-BUST

Chief of Innovation and Reform,
Denver school district

“Most of them could go away tomorrow and not much would change.”

Moving on Monitoring

As an example of central-office streamlining, he said that the district is eliminating central-office-based compliance officers for the spending of federal Title I funds targeted to economically disadvantaged students and shifting the monitoring task to schools. State permission was required to make that change, he said.

The district also removed 15 principals and could have removed more, Mr. Meza said, but found that it didn’t have a deep pool of better candidates waiting in the wings. That prompted the creation of a new office that will be in charge of leadership training.

“The skill set for these principals is very different. We’re not going to be at the central office telling them what to do,” said Mr. Meza, who prior to his appointment was the dean at the University of New Orleans’ college of education.

The shift to a portfolio process is not without critics.

Kenneth J. Saltman, a professor of educational policy studies and research at DePaul University in Chicago, wrote a 2010 paper saying that such efforts offer instability with no reliable empirical evidence of success.

“The portfolio district approach looks like a recipe for high risk and no clear reward,” he writes.

Mr. Hill agrees that the evidence in favor of portfolio approaches “is far from a slam dunk.” But, he added, it’s implausible to think that a central-office administration can meet the needs of a diverse district using a traditional structure. “You have to ask if this one solution fits all the problems,” he said.

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FOCUS ON: MANAGEMENT

Budget Pressures Reshape Work Lives Of Superintendents

Part-time, double duty more prevalent

By Christina A. Samuels

Superintendent Tim Foist made a pitch to his school board earlier this school year to reduce administrative costs—starting with himself.

Mr. Foist is the superintendent of the 1,200-student Mingus Union High School District in Cottonwood, Ariz., a single-school district 100 miles north of Phoenix. He argued that it makes financial sense for the district to make him a part-time superintendent, paying him for 145 days of work instead of 260.

It's an arrangement that seems to be making sense to a growing number of other school districts as well.

As budgets grow tighter, districts that have always had their own top administrators are considering new leadership structures, including creating part-time superintendent positions, sharing superintendents with neighboring jurisdictions, and consolidating roles, such as having a superintendent also serve as a principal. These primarily small and rural districts hope to keep their identities and avoid consolidation while still realizing some savings.

In the Mingus Union district, the change will reduce Mr. Foist's salary to \$68,000 a year, from \$98,000, starting in the 2012-13 school year. Mr. Foist, who had previous stints as a superintendent in Arizona's 2,000-student Holbrook and 3,000-student Yuma Union High School districts, also receives a pension because he had retired before taking the job at Mingus four years ago.

Mr. Foist said that shifting to part-time status will save the district enough to stave off cuts to arts and music programs in its budget, which totaled about \$6.8 million in fiscal 2012. "What I'm trying to do is allow people to see that in some small districts, if they're managed properly, this can work," he said.

John Tavasci Jr., a member of the Mingus district's governing board, said voters have flatly refused to merge the high school district with its

three feeder K-8 districts, each of which has its own full-time superintendent. "It's territorial," he said.

But in a one-campus district such as Mingus, it's feasible to have a part-time superintendent with other administrators handling day-to-day duties, Mr. Tavasci said. Mr. Foist's "leadership is ever present, whether he's here or not," he said.

Spurred by Economy

Arrangements in which a district chief performs double duty are not a new phenomenon, particularly in districts with small enrollments in the Midwest and in New England, said Daniel A. Domenech, the executive director of the American Association of School Administrators, in Alexandria, Va.

What is new, he said, is the trend of districts considering shared leadership because of the budget fallout from the recent recession. Those partnerships may face a bumpier road, because sharing services has not been done before, nor may it be the preferred option, Mr. Domenech said.

"We've seen some places where they've done it and they didn't like it," said Dan E. Ernst, the associate executive director of the Nebraska Council of School Administrators. But, "when times are tight fiscally, you look at all opportunities to maximize your money."

William H. Mayes, the executive director of the Michigan Association of School Administrators, says money concerns are the driving force behind recent district partnerships in his state as well.

"Traditionally, Michigan has not shared superintendents," Mr. Mayes said. Michigan districts have been facing tightening budgets for years, he said, but districts are fighting to keep their independence rather than consolidate.

The boards of the 700-student Mendon district and the 945-student Centreville district, both K-12 districts located about 35 miles south of Kalamazoo, Mich., decided to share a superinten-

“It’s not for all districts, it’s not for all boards, and it’s not for all superintendents. You do save money, but you have to give up some things.”

BILL FISHER

Superintendent,
Elcho and White Lake School
Districts, White Lake, Wis.

dent after the former leaders of both districts retired. Since the 2010-11 school year, the two neighboring districts have shared administrator Rob Kuhlman. The districts pay about \$82,000 each to cover his salary and benefits.

"We got exactly what we thought we'd be getting, and it's as good as we'd hoped," Michael Eley, at the time the president of the Centreville school board, told the Kalamazoo Gazette.

Administrative Costs

The April 2011 edition of *The School Administrator*, a publication of the AASA, explored the issue of shared superintendents in depth. It noted that the number of districts with shared superintendents in Iowa, for example, had risen from 28 to 63 over the past three years. Iowa lawmakers have periodically provided bonuses to districts to merge or share services. The latest incentive package, which started in the 2007-08 school year and expires next year, provides up to \$240,000 to districts that share administrative services.

Some research suggests that smaller districts devote a higher percentage of their budgets to administrative costs. *Wisconsin Taxpayer Magazine*, a publication of the non-partisan watchdog group Wisconsin Taxpayers Alliance, studied school administrative costs in a January 2011 report. Statewide, the average amount districts spent on administration equaled 8.1 percent of operating funds.

Districts with fewer than 500 students spent an average of 10.3 percent of their operating budget on administration. Districts with 500 to 749 students spent 9.8 percent on administration, and districts with 750 to 999 students spent 9.6 percent.

However, on average about 61 percent of administrative costs were spent on building-level administrators, as opposed to central administration.

Merging Roles

Some small districts were able to buck the trend, the Wisconsin group's report noted. For example, the 336-student Belmont district, 65 miles southwest of Madison, spent \$706 per student on administration, compared to the statewide average of \$913. That district has a part-time superintendent and one principal. The other small districts with lower-than-average administration costs had also consolidated leadership roles, or had administrators working part time.

At least one Wisconsin superintendent said that splitting his duties between two districts is working well—though he adds that administrators and school boards should both enter such partnerships carefully.

For the past four years, Bill Fisher has served as the superintendent of the 375-stu-

dent Elcho district and the 213-student White Lake district. Both rural districts are about 190 miles north of Madison, but are 40 miles away from each other.

Facing declining enrollments, they decided to share a top administrator after their individual superintendents retired in 2008. The search for a joint superintendent took six months before Mr. Fisher was hired, for \$102,000.

Compromise Needed

"I was drawn by the challenge," said Mr. Fisher, a former principal. Right now, he spends Mondays and Wednesdays in Elcho, and Tuesdays and Thursdays in White Lake. He tries to alternate his Fridays between the districts.

Mr. Fisher said the workload is heavy. "Every month, I have two separate board meetings. Both districts have to be very flexible; there has to be a lot of give and take," he said. "If I still had small children at home, it'd be almost impossible."

On the positive side, Mr. Fisher said he has two "excellent" boards that communicate well, and have been understanding when he has to devote extra time to a pressing issue in the other district.

The two districts share a football team, but otherwise compete against each other in sports. Mr. Fisher said he tries to spend an equal amount of time on each team's side, putting up with good-natured ribbing from his two constituencies. "If I do go to a baseball game, I stand in the middle somewhere," he said.

"It's not for all districts, it's not for all boards, and it's not for all superintendents," Mr. Fisher said of the dual role. "You do save money, but you have to give up some things."

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FOCUS ON: LEADERSHIP

Charter Sector Creates Grow Your Own Programs for Leaders

But the demand may still outpace supply

By Christina A. Samuels



Christine Campbell found big charter groups train their own leaders.

In the 2010-11 school year, more than 500 charter schools opened across the country, each one in need of a leader who had a grasp of the education- and personnel-management skills needed to run a school, as well as a solid underpinning in other areas such as non-profit management, budgeting, and strategic planning.

That rate of growth is not expected to abate any time soon, the National Alliance for Public Charter Schools says. From 2005-06 to 2010-11, the number of charter schools grew by nearly 41 percent, from 3,999 to 5,627. And nearly a half million students are on charter school waiting lists, according to statistics from the Washington-based alliance.

With the need for charter administrators in mind, the sector is developing its own leadership-training programs, many of which are as diverse as the independently operated public schools themselves. But questions remain about whether those entrepreneurial programs are growing quickly enough to meet the demand for charter school leaders and whether the programs are turning out leaders of high quality.

The University of Washington Bothell's Center for Reinventing Public Education surveyed the charter school leadership market in a 2008 report. It found that several large networks, such as the San Francisco-based Knowledge Is Power Program, or KIPP, and EdisonLearning, based in New York City, have their own programs to train leaders in their organizations' cultures.

Programs such as New Leaders, also in New York City, and the Boston-based Building Excellent Schools prepare their students to assume charter leadership in stand-alone charter schools or those within a network, rather than feeding into a leadership pipeline to a particular charter-management organization.

Some programs focus on training charter school leaders to work in particular states. A few have a specialized focus, such as the Chief Business Officer's Training Program, which is run by the Charter Schools Development Center in Sacramento, Calif. That program trains lead-

ers to run the business side of California charter schools.

But those programs are turning out only a total of about 400 or 500 leaders a year, which is barely enough to keep up with new school growth and leadership turnover, said Christine Campbell, a senior research analyst for the University of Washington center and the lead author of the 2008 report.

"We know that the demand is outstripping the supply," she said.

The charter-leadership programs generally get high marks from their participants, which is an "important start" in measuring their quality, the report notes. However, only a few of those that the center examined link their effectiveness to leaders' success in the field, or mention other measures of program accountability.

One program, Get Smart Schools in Denver, has trained 23 people since its creation in 2008; 20 are now in leadership positions in Colorado charter schools. Six recruits are training in the current cohort.

Amy Slothower, the program's executive director, said that Get Smart "has not reached the scale we'd like to reach," but that part of its slow expansion is caused by intensive candidate screening.

The program does not charge its fellows to participate in the yearlong program, Ms. Slothower said, in contrast to most traditional training programs.

"We feel that if we can continue to not charge tuition, we can be honest and selective with our admissions program," she said. Private grants pay for the leadership training.

Wide Skill Set

Another reason training programs remain relatively small is simply the sheer variety of topics that must be covered to create a well-trained charter school leader.

Andrew Collins, the director of school development for the Arizona Charter Schools Association, in Phoenix, is helping to create a six-month fellowship that will train principals to start their own schools in low-income communities



Andrew Collins says charter leaders must be steeped in budget and finance issues.



Linda Brown founded a training program that pays fellows stipends.

in that state. Mr. Collins said that fellows in that program will learn what it's like "to form a nonprofit business at the same time you're the instructional leader of a school."

Fellows will also be steeped in budget and finance issues. Mr. Collins said traditional principal-training curriculums may not need to focus as heavily in that area because most such matters are handled by a district central office, but at a charter school, principals and founders "are the [chief executive officer] and [chief financial officer] all together, at least in the first few years."

The new Arizona program will also put a heavy emphasis on learning from other leaders, a common theme among charter school leadership programs, according to the CRPE report.

When the fellows are done with the six-month course of study, they're expected to transfer into the association's 18-month Charter Starter program, which aims to have leaders opening new schools by August 2014.

Some groups are proud of the differences they perceive between their models and traditional leadership training.

Linda Brown, the founder and chief executive officer of Building Excellent Schools, which has trained leaders now working in 20 cities, said her program provides a \$90,000 stipend to its fellows, rather than asking them to pay tuition. In return, she said, it asks for its fellows' full commitment to the program—and that means long days and few holidays.

"It's very gritty," Ms. Brown said. "We're not about the theoretical underpinnings of things. The focus is on reality."

At the same time, other groups are expanding their original training programs in new directions. The KIPP Foundation has allowed leaders from other charter-management organizations to take part in its training; about 20 out of 140 people in its upcoming five-week summer institute will be from schools other than those founded by KIPP, said Kelly Wright, the foundation's chief learning officer.

Partnership With Districts

This year, KIPP went even broader, thanks to a federal Investing in Innovation, or i3, grant. With the \$50 million grant, the foundation created the KIPP Leadership Design Fellowship, which has brought together representatives from a dozen districts and several CMOs and educator training programs. Between now and October, the fellowship participants will gain insight into how KIPP trains its leaders.

Ms. White said the training program was created in part to answer the increasing

number of questions that the charter network was receiving from people interested in how it trained its school principals and school founders.

"We were reflecting on what is the best way to share the lessons we're learning," Ms. White said. "So we decided to do a cohort model, based on how we train our leaders." The hope is that the participants will take what they've learned back to their own communities and expand their local leader-training capacity, she said.

Ms. Campbell, with the Center for Re-inventing Public Education, believes that charter school leadership programs will always remain relatively small, compared with the thousands of university-based principal programs across the country. However, principals in district-run schools are increasingly finding themselves in need of the skills in which charter leaders are trained.

"I hope that what we'll see is that traditional preparation programs adjust to become like charter school leadership programs," she said.

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Indianapolis Plan Suggests Blueprint for Other Districts

By Christina A. Samuels

An Indianapolis-based nonprofit organization has crafted a sweeping plan for reworking the 33,000-student Indianapolis school system that would place the district under the control of the city's mayor, pare down the money spent in central administration, and give principals broad authority to hire and fire teachers.

The reform plan created by the Mind Trust organization would transform the district's schools into what the report calls "Opportunity Schools," which would be given "unprecedented freedom over staffing, budgets, curriculum, and culture," as long as they continued to meet high standards. Those schools would compete for students who live within the district's boundaries.

Whether these ambitious plans would come to fruition is still in question. But the state's superintendent of public instruction, whose office funded the bulk of the report, said he would want to see the reform measures outlined in the report adopted not just in Indianapolis, but in districts statewide.

"There's nothing stopping an innovative superintendent and school board from saying, 'We want to do this in our school district,'" said Tony Bennett, a founding member of Chiefs for Change, a coalition of state superintendents who are supportive of reforms such as school choice and paying teachers based on their students' achievement. "What this offers is a menu of resources that districts can consider."

The Indiana department of education contributed \$500,000 of the nearly \$700,000 used to produce the report from the Mind Trust, which has promoted entrepreneurial education ventures in the city since the foundation was created in 2006. The report was released last month.

Policy Shifts

The state has already passed an expansive reform agenda. During last year's legislative session, the Republican-led legislature

passed a broad, needs-based voucher bill, eliminated teacher tenure and allowed districts to use merit pay, and expanded the number of entities that could create charter schools. (See *Education Week*, Dec. 19, 2011.)

Mr. Bennett said he doubts, however, that legislators this session will take up any changes to state law that might be required to enact the Indianapolis plan.

Still, the time might be ripe for major changes in the state's largest school district, said David Harris, the founder and chief executive officer of the education nonprofit that produced the Indianapolis report.

"People seem pretty open to this in ways that have surprised us," Mr. Harris said. "We expected more of a negative reaction from some quarters, but a lot of the ideas are those that people who have been involved in the public education system have long thought needed to happen."

But one major critic of the plan is Eugene G. White, the superintendent who has led the school district since 2005. Under the proposed reforms, the mayor would be in charge of appointing the superintendent, who could then be directed to implement the other changes, like creating the Opportunity Schools network.

Instead of offering anything new, Mr. White says that the agenda proposed by the Mind Trust offers rehashed ideas that have not been successful elsewhere.

"There is no doubt that we have to improve," said Mr. White, who was on the Mind Trust board from its founding until May, when he resigned over the organization's endorsement of mayoral control. "What we're saying is we are demonstrating improvement."

The report, he said, is more political than educational," driven by Indiana's desire to be a national leader in school reform, he said.

"They have to make us look as dysfunctional as possible," Mr. White added.

Discussion 'Jump-Start'

The Indianapolis district has struggled with some schools because of poverty, Mr.

“ We expected more of a negative reaction from some quarters, but a lot of the ideas are those that people who have been involved in the public education system have long thought needed to happen.”

DAVID HARRIS

Founder and CEO,
Mind Trust

White said. The school system is about 54 percent black, 23 percent white, and 17 percent Hispanic. Seventy-four percent of its students are eligible for free or reduced-price lunches.

However, the district recently achieved a graduation rate of 69 percent, up 20 percentage points from two years ago, according to Mr. White.

But the state recently took over five schools for persistent low performance, and four of them were in Indianapolis, said the state superintendent.

Indianapolis superintendents have made promises and launched plans, but "by and large, the results are not getting appreciably better," Mr. Bennett said.

The reform plan, which hinges on mayoral control, did not prompt an automatic endorsement from Mayor Greg Ballard, who

also did not say he wants to take over the school system.

In a statement responding to the plan, he said the report had “interesting ideas.”

“It is my sincere hope this report jump-starts a much-needed discussion about the future of education in our community,” he said.

Moving Resources

The Mind Trust is the brainchild of former Indianapolis Mayor Barton R. Peterson, a Democrat who served from 2000 to 2007. In 2001, the mayor’s office was granted the direct authority to create charter schools, a first in the nation, and Mr. Harris served as the charter schools director in Mr. Peterson’s administration. The organization’s financing comes from local groups and national philanthropies, such as the Carnegie Corporation of New York, the Joyce Foundation, and the Lumina Foundation. Those foundations also provide support for some news coverage in *Education Week*.

The prescriptions from the report show some of the same basic assumptions as school reform efforts elsewhere. One is that the Indianapolis district’s central office is seen as an entity that stifles good education ideas. The thinking is that the reforms needed for the system can’t be accomplished under the diffuse power structure created by the superintendent and the district’s seven-member school board.

One of the Mind Trust’s proposals for Indianapolis calls for shifting money away from the central office by cutting staff and directing the \$188 million saved back to the schools.

The district should also pay for all 4-year-olds to attend high-quality preschools and invest up to \$10million a year to attract talented principals and teachers who can start more strong schools, the report says.

“This is pro-teacher and pro-school-leader,” Mr. Harris said. “One of the things we just heard very loudly from teachers in ips is not that the central office was neutral—it was a destructive force in the work that they’re doing.”

The superintendent, however, believes that many of the ideas in the report have been tried in the city before, to little success.

For example, he said that site-based management of schools led to different textbook adoptions and different curriculum pacing, which is a problem for a district such as Indianapolis with a high mobility rate. Students could move from school to school and lose their place in the curricula, he said.

Mr. White said he plans to introduce his own reform plan in February, after the attention from Indianapolis’ hosting of the

Super Bowl dies down. He said his proposal would create traditional schools, high-needs schools that would receive more central office support, and semiautonomous schools that would be given training in human-capital management and budgeting.

“We want to be in the competition, but it’s discouraging when the politics of for-profits and charters and all these things come down against you,” he said.

The reform agenda proposed by the Mind Trust puts Indianapolis “on the leading edge of local think-tank and philanthropy-driven efforts to redefine the school system,” said Paul T. Hill, the director of the Center on Reinventing Public Education, based at the University of Washington. The report says it drew its conclusions in part on Mr. Hill’s research on portfolio school districts, which he says offer the possibility of new and successful approaches to providing education. Portfolio districts, which stress school autonomy and choice, include New York, the Recovery School District in Louisiana, and District of Columbia public schools.

“My belief has been for a long time that you need to this kind of civic engagement—not just ‘rah rah’ people—so that [reform] can be sustained a long time,” Mr. Hill said.

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