

SUMMARY

Preparing a New Breed of School Principals: It's Time for Action

Document can be downloaded at:

http://www.sreb.org/main/Leadership/pubs/01V17_Time_for_Action.pdf

The Southern Regional Education Board (SREB) conducted a study to answer two questions.

- What do successful education leaders need to know and be able to do?
- How do you prepare and develop effective school leaders?

Methodology

SREB collected information used the following strategies to collect information.

- Reviewed research literature.
- Asked a subset of principals from the High Schools That Work network the two research questions.
- Held a meeting of a national “leadership planning council” to discuss the two research questions and other relevant issues.
- Conducted a focus group discussion with 15 exemplary school leaders to determine how they improved student achievement and what tools or training had prepared them to do so.
- Met with groups from higher education institutions, school districts, national professional associations, instructors from preparation programs, directors of leadership academies, legislators, and businesses.

Findings

Thirteen characteristics and accomplishments of successful principals were identified. Successful principals are capable of:

1. Creating a focused mission and strategy for improving student achievement.
2. Setting high learning expectations for all students.
3. Identifying and supporting appropriate pedagogy.
4. Developing a culture where each student is valued and supported by the staff.
5. Using appropriate data to make improvements.
6. Communicating openly and effectively about student achievement with all constituents.
7. Creating partnerships with parents.
8. Understanding and facilitating change.
9. Developing effective professional development activities based on an understanding of adult learning processes.
10. Efficiently managing time.
11. Utilizing resources effectively.
12. Soliciting support from the central office, community, and parent leaders.
13. Continually learn and seek out information.

The study also recommended a variety of strategies to better prepare school leaders with the above characteristics. The recommendations, outlined below, are directed towards states, universities, and leadership academies.

States should:

- Identify potential leaders who understand curriculum and instruction and provide leadership development programs for them.
- Develop alternative criteria for admitting educators into certification processes.

- Use performance measures as a basis for certification decisions.
- Revise university preparation programs to focus more on core school functions and to include more mentoring and internships within schools.
- Provide alternative routes to leadership certification.
- Implement and enforce continuing certification requirements.

Universities should:

- Emphasize the core functions of teaching and learning throughout the curriculum.
- Design leadership programs based on successful school-improvement models.
- Provide increased mentoring and high quality internships.
- Establish group-preparation programs similar to company-based MBA programs that are supported by employers and delivered by universities.

Leadership Academies should:

- Develop modules to apply research-based knowledge to real problems.
- Assist school districts in identifying potential leaders.
- Utilize instructors with first-hand knowledge of successful school improvement strategies.
- Offer programs that emphasize improvement as an alternative to university preparation programs.
- Conduct school-based research to determine the effectiveness of academy programs.
- Partner with a network of school leadership developers from various schools.
- Utilize an advisory board composed of state educational leaders, business leaders, and successful school leaders.
- Enroll teams consisting of current and future school leaders, teacher leaders, and district office representatives from any given school.

Bottoms, G., & O'Neill, K. (April 2001). Preparing a new breed of school principals: It's time for action. Atlanta, GA: Southern Regional Education Board.