

**Connecticut Principals' Center
The Connecticut Association of Schools**

POSITION PAPER

THE 21ST CENTURY PRINCIPAL: A CALL TO ACTION

The Importance of Developing Leadership Capacity for the Improvement of Student Learning

JANUARY, 2004

“These recommendations are addressed to the State Board of Education, every local board of education, the General Assembly and Governor, and other state and local officials and interested parties. ---- Strong steps motivated by a sense of urgency will allow Connecticut to continue its long tradition of high-quality leadership throughout the state’s public schools.”

From the conclusion of “The Future of School Leadership in Connecticut” (2000).

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SUMMARY

The Critical Issues Committee of the Connecticut Principals' Center has become increasingly concerned about the status of the principalship and school leadership in Connecticut schools. The lack of highly qualified candidates for openings, the change in the role of school leaders, the increased demands on the position and related complexities have not been addressed, despite such high profile studies such as the "The Future of School Leadership in Connecticut," known as the "Hartley Report" (2000).

It is the committee's hope that this monograph will serve as a platform from which the state's public school constituencies, from schools to the legislature, will launch action plans to address the critical issues identified in this paper. The goal is to create the conditions that ultimately allow principals to do the work they are charged with achieving; developing the capacity of the school community to attain high levels of student achievement for all students.

The paper **addresses the problem of 21st century school leadership and includes a discussion of (1) the contemporary school principal; (2) the leadership responsibilities of the principal; (3) the conditions required for effective contemporary leadership; and, (4) the necessary actions to develop school leadership capacity.**

This position paper was approved by the board of directors of the Connecticut Association of Schools on October 9, 2003.

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A CALL TO ACTION

PREFACE

The Hartley report on the “Future of School Leadership” (2000), prepared for the Connecticut state legislature and the governor, identified several issues related to school leaders. **Key among those issues were: (1)** insufficient authority given to the principal compared to the responsibility of the position; and, **(2)** a lack of public understanding of the role of and escalating demands on educational administrators. In the last three years we have seen no **statewide** improvement in these issues **nor has any** substantive attention been given to their resolution. This paper is **both** a reaction to **inattention** and a call to **dialogue and subsequent action without further delay**. It is intended to provide a forum through which these **unresolved** issues could be addressed and helpful action initiated.

Despite the challenges presented and the lack of action on the part of the constituencies addressed, principals remain committed to continually pursuing **the “prize” of quality student learning for all students within a caring school community**.

This monograph is dedicated to those school leaders pursuing **“the prize”** and offers guidance to citizens, board members and legislators interested in creating and maintaining successful schools through quality school leadership.

THE CONTEMPORARY SCHOOL PRINCIPAL

While the importance of school leaders has been long acknowledged, the role, responsibilities, functions, contexts and goals of leadership have significantly changed over the years. Unfortunately, concomitant changes in job expectations and practice have lagged behind the situational and contextual change forces, creating day-to-day job pressures and affecting the outcomes of leadership. As noted in the Institute for Educational Leadership report, Reinventing the Principals (2000), “Demands placed on principals have changed, but the profession has not changed to meet those demands and the tension is starting to show.”

The National Association of School Boards of Education (NASBE) Study Group on School Leadership (1999) **stated**, “Good principals are more important than ever.” **They further cautioned**, “School principals now find that their job in the 21st century schools will have little in common with their job in years past.” An **Educational Research Service (ERS)** report in 2000 **agreed**, “The context of the principal’s job has changed dramatically in the last 20 years, shifting the emphasis from managerial functions to a balance of leadership and administrative functions across a wide spectrum of responsibilities.”

A fundamental difference in contemporary schools is that principals are now ensuring **systemic change** rather than simply **managing** schools and the people in them. Effective principals have been described as the “lynchpins of school improvement” and the “gatekeepers of change” (ERS 2001). These characteristics stand in stark contrast to the roles of protector-of-the-status-quo, authoritarian manager-of-day-to-day-business, **and school-wide disciplinarian** that characterized the job of **yesteryear**.

Even when principals are convinced about which roles are best suited to particular contexts and situations, often staff, supervisor, student and community member expectations differ, placing principals at odds with one or more stakeholder groups.

Therefore, in consideration of these changes and the accompanying problems of perception, it is imperative to clearly identify the roles of the contemporary principal. The authors of this monograph submit that today’s principal’s overarching role is to develop the capacity of the school to achieve high levels of achievement for all. The distinguished authors Michael Fullan and Richard Elmore provide descriptions of contemporary leadership roles.

In Leading in a Culture of Change (2001), Fullan describes the four critical roles of leadership as:

“...developing teachers’ knowledge, skills and dispositions; a culture characterized as a professional learning community; program coherence; and the materials, equipment, space, time and access to new ideas that comprise a school’s technical resources.”

These ideas complement Richard Elmore’s succinct and accurate summary of the contemporary principalship offered in Building a New Structure for School Leadership (2000):

“The job of administrative leaders is primarily enhancing the skills and knowledge of people in the organization, creating a common culture of expectations around the use of those skills and knowledge, holding the various pieces of the organization together in a productive relationship with each other, and holding individuals accountable for their contributions to the collective results.”

While most principals and educators would theoretically agree with Fullan’s and Elmore’s positions, many find it difficult to design and construct structures, routines and priorities that allow for this kind of leadership. Based upon a review of contemporary literature, an extended face-to-face conversation with Dr. Elmore, **as well as** input from a variety of educators, the authors of this monograph have identified the following **responsibilities and conditions** as those that contribute significantly to the success of principals in fulfilling their major and critical contemporary roles:

- **establish moral purpose**
- **develop relationships, set expectations**
- **build capacity, model learning**
- **lead symbolically**
- **manage effectively**
- **respond to constituent groups and community, and**
- **ensure the establishment of the strategic plan.**

LEADERSHIP RESPONSIBILITIES OF THE PRINCIPAL

“The principal of the future must lead a complex learning organization by helping to establish new cultures in schools that have deep capacities to engage in continuous problem solving and improvement.”

Michael Fullan
The Moral Imperative of School
Leadership (2003)

Establish Moral Purpose: The principal must establish the moral purpose of the school by making **student learning** the central focus for all decisions and modeling the courage to maintain this focus. The principal inspires and develops commitment to a vision of the school as a community of learners and provides a coherent approach to meet this vision. The principal **(a)** fosters the belief that all children can learn at high levels; **(b)** leads staff in reducing the achievement gap between high and low performing students, while raising standards for all children; **(c)** prepares students with skills needed for further learning, active citizenship and work; **(d)** develops conditions and culture to promote staff inquiry and continuous learning; and, **(e)** supports the improvement efforts of the school district.

Develop Relationships: The principal develops relationships that instill trust, integrity, interdependence and commitment from the members of the school community. The principal models and fosters open **honest** communication and respect among staff as the foundation for collaborative learning. Principals rely on the commitment of individuals to the purposes of the organization and foster it through positive interdependence. Support from the full school community is achieved through structured opportunities for input into appropriate decision-making processes. The principal leads with the heart.

Set Expectations: “Effective principals set high expectations and standards for the academic and social development of all students and for the performance of adults” (NEASC Standards 2003). The principal sets the expectations that: (a) professionals are responsible for the learning of **all** students; (b) teachers focus instruction, curriculum materials and use of time on agreed-upon standards; (c) the

school continually develops its capacity to improve instruction and related services for students and families; (d) teachers collaborate on issues of student learning and develop personal and team goals and priorities consistent with the school improvement plan; and, (e) staff maintains and implements procedures and routines that support a positive, consistent tone within the school.

Build Capacity: Building capacity is critical to the success of the institution and is an essential responsibility of the principal. The principal accomplishes this by recruiting, inducting, and developing quality teachers; supervising staff and instruction; providing leadership for professional development; building culture; and, planning school improvement. The principal creates an environment in which all adults take **collective** responsibility for **student learning** and the changes in practices that this may necessitate. The school leader assures that reflection, accountability, sustainability and resilience are embedded in the school's culture.

Model Learning: The principal must be an expert on teaching and learning. The principal assumes the role of lead researcher, guiding and modeling inquiry into questions of implementation and effectiveness of instructional practices through the examination of **student work** and other performance data.

Lead Symbolically: The principal is a symbolic leader, a model of those values that are desirable for a continuously improving organization, and aspires to those personal attributes that the community desires of every teacher. The principal models commitment to the school and profession, empathy to the needs of individuals, passion about student learning, and openness and responsiveness to feedback and differing points of view.

Manage Effectively: Effective principals perform management functions strategically and efficiently, adapting these functions so that they facilitate the **learning goals** of the school through the use of an effective management team. Principals ensure that schedules, routines, and professional development increase time for learning and facilitate professional interactions around problems of practice. They develop and supervise effective and efficient management teams.

Respond to Constituent Groups and Community: As school leader, the principal works to understand and show respect for the culture and needs of the community and its various groups. Consistent with the school's mission, the principal takes an active role in building and maintaining **partnerships** with parents and community groups, businesses and agencies.

Establish the Strategic Plan: The principal is responsible for ensuring the development and promotion of a **school improvement plan**. Working with teachers, staff, district leaders and community members, the principal leads the process of **gathering** and analyzing performance data; setting goals and priorities that address identified needs; and **aligning** professional development, personnel and other

resources **with the goals of the plan**. **Aligned with district goals**, the strategic planning process promotes commitment to the goals of the improvement plan and provides coherence and focus to the activities of the school.

CONDITIONS REQUIRED FOR THE EFFECTIVE CONTEMPORARY PRINCIPAL

School and System-wide Conditions

A mutual obligation must be engendered among all stakeholders, including students, parents, community members, political boards and school employees, to make increased **learning** and responsible, respectful **citizenship** core goals of the school and school system.

Coherence between the district's and school's **goals**, priorities and improvement plans must be **articulated and established**. This is a necessary condition for continuous and sustainable improvement. As districts call upon teachers to achieve measurable improvements, they have the obligation to improve the capacity of the staff members to meet those expectations through quality curriculum and teaching materials and sustained professional development that is centered on challenges of classroom practice.

Support systems must be in place to sustain and encourage the resiliency and personal development of school leaders. These support systems will help principals establish a balance between their professional lives and personal lives, to maintain their **moral** purpose, and to model strong **values**.

Policies and procedures that provide the principal the authority, resources and support required for school improvement must be developed and honored.

The district must provide external and internal **supports** for the management functions of the principal, including safe and clean buildings, quality food service programs, efficient bus services, support in hiring and supervision of non-certified staff, comprehensive data-system and technology services, and adequate secretarial and clerical staff.

There must be active internal and external support, from the board of education, the local government, the public at large and the school community itself, for changes in past practices and contract provisions that **restrict the school improvement processes**.

In order to support reflective practice and problem solving, there must be increased opportunities for principals to **network** among schools and districts with colleagues who share job-alike responsibilities.

Pre-service and Induction Conditions

Quality pre-service programs for future principals need to be established that provide a solid **foundation** in the following areas: models of instruction; standards; student assessment; curriculum development processes; differentiated professional program development; program evaluation; education law; use of data to improve instruction; principles of learning, including adult learning; and, the facilitation, negotiation and conflict management skills required to lead and engage groups of adults and students.

Aspiring principals need to have the opportunity to participate in quality **internships** of sufficient duration and intensity to enable them to learn and be able to perform the various leadership roles of the position.

New administrators need to participate in a district supported induction program of at least **two** years duration that provides: a full orientation to the programs and practices of the school and district; mentoring; a support team; professional development and opportunities for personal reflective growth and development; a differentiated evaluation program; orientation to the school, district and community; understanding of the culture of the school and district; and knowledge of key relationships and the politics of the community.

Teachers should be socialized into a school and community culture that values leadership and **the role of** administration. **Multiple opportunities should be recognized and actively implemented** for teachers and beginning administrators to practice educational leadership and management skills.

School Conditions

Sufficient **support** personnel who can assist principals in the execution of their primary responsibilities need to be available, ensuring that the school functions in accordance with its mission and demonstrates consistent growth in student learning.

Distributed leadership models and structures to achieve the complex and diverse goals of today's schools should be instituted. District or **building-based** leadership for curriculum and instructional improvement are needed to assist with the activities of supervising **instruction**, evaluating curriculum, coaching teachers, and developing teacher knowledge and skills.

The principal should have access to quality professional development that continuously builds the principal's **capacity** to improve instruction, curriculum and student learning and to develop the potential of the staff to meet the learning needs of all children.

Practices in documented and effective program evaluation are needed that link professional development, data on student learning, teacher leadership functions and development of **team-based** goals.

The school district and community should develop and implement support systems that sustain and encourage the resiliency and personal development of school leaders, helping principals to establish balance between their professional and personal lives in order to maintain their moral purpose and to model strong **values**.

State/legislative Conditions

Action needs to be taken by the state legislature that will recognize the new complexities in school leadership and support statewide programs to enable the principal to be successful, including, but not limited to, expanding upon and implementing the provisions in the Hartley Report of 2000. Further, the state department of education should increase its efforts to minimize bureaucratic demands on the principal and facilitate the principal's efforts to improve student learning.

The Revised Elementary and Secondary Education Act (No Child Left Behind) needs to be modified and more realistic goals set. Implementation guidelines should be consistent with research-based best practices. **Local and state agencies and political figures, as well as professional organizations such as the National Association of Secondary School Principals, the National Association of Elementary School Principals, and the American Association of School Administrators should increase their efforts to modify the federal legislation.**

A CALL TO ACTION

In discussing the state of the principalship, Lashway (1998) noted that the changes in job demands and role expectations have created a paradox for principals who are often trapped between the need to act as a “heroic leader” – one willing and able to take charge and manage well - and an “empowering leader” – one capable of designing and supporting distributed leadership structures **involving all** stakeholders in continuous school **improvements** and reform.

Using today’s professional standards, principals are charged with the daunting task of integrating all of these roles and functions in order to achieve continuously improving student learning outcomes. The good news is that principals express belief in the importance of the roles and the promise of satisfaction and growth inherent in the job of principal.

This monograph provides a blueprint for **successful leadership development**. Only with study, understanding and action by all constituencies -- including local, state, and federal governments, institutions of higher education, local boards of education, the state department of education and professional associations -- will the steps needed to strengthen the principalship and improve student learning be possible.

We call upon these constituencies to engage in serious dialogue and both actively and substantively address the issues discussed in this paper with particular attention to the conditions needed to enable the principal to develop the capacity of the school to achieve high levels of achievement for all.

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