01-Smith 4e-4954.qxd 5/10/2006 6:08 PM Page 18

1

The Landscape of School Leadership

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Travelers across America see a landscape that changes, but at variable rates. Board a Seattle-bound train in Chicago, and you'll find a long stretch through North Dakota and eastern Montana where the scenery hardly seems to change at all. The world outside the window is a flat, featureless terrain punctuated only by the occasional small town flashing past. You can doze off for an hour or so and be confident that when you awake, things will still look the same.

The experience is quite different near the end of the journey as the train climbs into the Cascades. Every few minutes brings a different vista: mist-shrouded peaks, tumbling rivers, dense conifer forests, or a small town nestled in a valley. Within an hour, the mountain view is replaced by ocean, and then a final quick run through an increasingly urban landscape.

For anyone journeying in the landscape of school leadership in recent years, the experience has been much more like Washington than North Dakota. The view seems to change almost every time you look up: new standards, new policy mandates, new demands for accountability. Whereas school leadership once changed at a measured pace, it now seems to ricochet from one new goal to another, each of which raises profound (and so far unanswered) questions:

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01-Smith 4e-4954.qxd 5/10/2006 6:08 PM Page 19

- How do we reduce the achievement gap?
- What are some viable strategies for reaching Adequate Yearly Progress?
- In a nation in which the gap between rich and poor is growing, how can we develop a school system that promotes social justice?
- How can school leaders manage the political tensions that surround today's schools?
- What is the proper balance between efficiency (doing things right) and effectiveness (doing the right things)?
- In an increasingly multiethnic and multilingual society, how can schools educate children in a way that celebrates difference yet creates unity?
- How can principals share leadership responsibility to develop a true community of learning?
- How do we prepare and develop leaders who can find answers to these questions?

Efforts to find answers have led to a plethora of policies, experiments, theories, and proposals aimed at improving leadership practice. As the field of ideas competing for attention has become increasingly crowded, so too have other trends added to the complexity of school leadership. Since the previous edition of this handbook, published in 1997, the following developments have occurred:

- The Interstate School Leaders Licensure Consortium (ISLLC) standards, which were brand-new in 1997, have been adopted in the majority of states as the guiding framework for principal preparation and development.
- Accountability, which barely rated a mention in 1997, has become the core challenge for many principals.
- Education has become much more politicized, with disputes over evolution and sex education increasingly common.
- Advocates of collaborative leadership have gone from saying that leaders should share certain decisions to saying that everyone in the school is a leader.
- The federal emphasis on scientifically based research has challenged scholars to prove the common intuition that leaders make a difference and to show how they get results.
- School renewal, which in 1997 was considered a priority for a relatively small number of distressed urban schools, is now a way of life for almost everyone.
- The No Child Left Behind Act has elevated testing to a high-profile annual event that increasingly controls and (some say) distorts normal learning processes.
- Data-based decision making, which wasn't even mentioned in the previous handbook, gets a full chapter in this edition.
- Market-based solutions such as charter schools and vouchers remain hotly contested but are growing in strength.

Other developments could easily be added to this list, but it's clear that the number and complexity of the challenges facing school leaders are growing. Not surprisingly, recent discussions of the principalship have been laced with the word *crisis.* The Institute for Educational Leadership provided a typical example when it said that a lethal combination of escalating job demands and a shrinking pool of candidates meant that "the

01-Smith 4e-4954.qxd 5/10/2006 6:08 PM Page 20

future of the principalship is in question" and that failing to address the issue could result in "catastrophe."

Although the institute's strong language has been echoed in numerous journals, conferences, and district offices across the country, principals themselves seem more upbeat. A number of recent surveys have revealed a leadership cadre that seems confident it can do the job. Today's principals will admit to being frustrated by the system, pressured by demands for accountability, and busier than ever, but they convey no hint that things are falling apart (James L. Doud and Edward P. Keller; Steve Farkas and colleagues; National Association of Secondary School Principals [NASSP]).

This apparent discrepancy between analysts and practitioners may arise from their different frames of reference. Principals live in a world of very immediate demands and measure their success by how well they handle the tasks before them. Most schools, most of the time, function well, offering safe environments for learning, employing well-qualified teachers, and working hard to meet the needs of an increasingly diverse student population. Whatever their complaints—and they have many—principals take justifiable pride in what they have been able to accomplish under difficult conditions.

The scholars, policymakers, and superintendents who have been sounding the alarm take a longer view and perceive a crisis that may be embryonic but is nonetheless dangerous. Seeing an ever more demanding job description and fewer people interested in filling it, they worry that the leadership pipeline is about to run dry. They also see a problem that goes beyond numbers: Given the increased complexity of today's schools and the relentless demands for deep reform, are traditional definitions of the principal's role adequate, or must the job itself be redesigned?

That question lurks in the shadows of most discussions of the principalship today, and it increases the difficulty of the principal's job exponentially. School leaders are not only expected to reinvent the school system, they are often simultaneously urged to reinvent the way they go about their work. Appreciating the magnitude of this challenge is the key to understanding the topics in the rest of this handbook. For that reason, this chapter examines the status of the principalship and the debates surrounding it.

We begin with a brief snapshot of today's principal, followed by a discussion of the core issues at the heart of the profession's identity, which affects candidates' attraction to the position. The final section, on the principal's role, places the issues in the context of the ISLLC standards.

THE STATE OF THE PRINCIPALSHIP: A SNAPSHOT

Before considering the somewhat theoretical debates over what the principalship should be, we may benefit from a quick look at what it currently is. A number of surveys and reports over the past seven years provide some insights.

Demographics

Susan M. Gates and colleagues, who analyzed 1999–2000 data from the federal Schools and Staffing Survey, found that the 84,000 public-school principals in the United

01-Smith 4e-4954.qxd 5/10/2006 6:08 PM Page 21

States had an average age of 49, with 9 years of experience as a principal and 14 years of experience as a teacher. The authors concluded that "overall, the data suggest that principals are an aging population," a matter of some concern because public-sector principals tend not to remain on the job much past 55.

Surveys in the past decade from the National Association of Elementary School Principals ([NAESP] Doud and Keller) and the NASSP support the idea of an aging population. Among high school principals, 28 percent in 2001 reported they had been principals for more than 15 years, compared with 23 percent in 1988. Elementary respondents in 1988 had a median age of 50, 3 years older than in 1988, and the oldest ever reported in an NAESP survey.

The analysis by Gates and colleagues found that more than 43 percent were women—a gain of almost 20 percent over 1987–1988; almost 60 percent of the new principals in 1999–2000 were women. The number of minority principals remained low at 17.8 percent, with some indication that numbers were growing (20 percent of new principals were minorities, compared with 15 percent of new principals in 1987–1988).

Working Conditions

A national survey of salaries and wages in public schools from the Educational Research Service (Alicia R.Williams, Nancy Protheroe, and Michael C. Parks) reported that in 2002–2003, the average annual salary for principals ranged from $75,291 (elementary) to $86,452 (high school). The range for assistant principals was $62,230 to $70,847. Typically, average figures can disguise some rather startling variations, depending on size and geographic region. One survey reported that in 2001, the salaries of Illinois high school principals stretched from $46,071 to an eye-opening $191,650 (Robert F. Hall and Max E. Pierson).

Psychologically, compensation is relative as well as absolute. That is, the size of the salary seems larger or smaller when it is compared with alternative jobs available to jobholders—a key concern at time of shortages. Gates and colleagues analyzed information from 1999–2000 and found that public-school principals made an average of 33 percent more per year than experienced teachers (when adjusted for length of contract). Again, the range was considerable, with some principals earning less than experienced teachers at their school. The Gates team also found that relative compensation for principals and other types of managers had remained stable from 1984 to 1999.

Only 15 percent of elementary principals in NAESP's 1998 survey (Doud and Keller) reported that their salary was based on any form of merit pay, and only a fifth of those said that student achievement was a factor. (More recent data are not available, but anecdotal evidence suggests that the pressures of No Child Left Behind may be pushing these numbers up.) Almost 80 percent had a contract, and a similar percentage had a written job description. The typical elementary principal worked 54 hours a week, up more than 3 hours from 1988 and 9 hours from 1978.

Stresses

Principals responding to these surveys were not shy about identifying their frustrations with the job. Almost unanimously, "time" topped the list. In the NAESP survey,

01-Smith 4e-4954.qxd 5/10/2006 6:08 PM Page 22

72 percent of the respondents said that "fragmentation of my time" was a major concern; in the NASSP study, almost 70 percent listed time as a major or somewhat major problem. Principals in a 2001 survey by Public Agenda (Farkas and colleagues) identified "politics and bureaucracy" as a major concern; only 30 percent said the system helped them get things done (48 percent said they could get things done, but only by working around the system).

Principals were particularly frustrated by their limited authority to deal with low-performing teachers. The Farkas and colleagues survey also revealed some ambivalence about testing and accountability. In the words of one principal, "Accountability is great, but schools should not be judged by what students do on one test on one day in March." A plurality (48 percent) thought holding principals accountable for test results was a bad idea, whereas 34 percent said it was a good idea.

Optimism

For all their frustrations, principals seemed engaged with their jobs and confident of having an impact. In the Farkas and colleagues survey, 97 percent of the principals agreed that "behind every great school is a great principal." Fully 90 percent of respondents to the NASSP survey graded the quality of education in their school as an A or B. Less than 1 percent of elementary principals reported that their morale was low; more than 90 percent described it as good or excellent.

A 2004 survey found that 96 percent of principals were either "very" or "somewhat" satisfied with their jobs (MetLife).

This quick overview shows the daily world of the principal to be complex, fragmented, and stressful—but still manageable. School leaders face enormous challenges and at times feel overwhelmed, but so do professionals in many other fields. They still see themselves as leaders (in the sense of having followers) and believe they can have a positive impact on students.

THE SUPPLY AND DEMAND CHALLENGE

What created an aura of crisis around so many recent discussions of school leadership was the prospect that there simply wouldn't be a sufficient number of qualified people to do the job. The concern originated in the late 1990s in anecdotal accounts by superintendents who reported alarming decreases in the number of active candidates for principalships. Undoubtedly, the worry was also fed by then-current predictions that schools would have to replace 2 million teachers over the coming decade.

Despite the gloomy predictions, survey research has painted a more complicated picture, especially if *shortage* is defined as an "absence of warm bodies." A 1998 survey by the Educational Research Service found half the districts reporting a shortage of qualified candidates. The 2001 Farkas and colleagues study painted a more favorable picture. Only 3 percent of superintendents reported a "severe" shortage of principals, and almost 60 percent reported no shortage.

Similarly, a 2003 study by Marguerite Roza and colleagues found little evidence of an immediate crisis. At a minimum, virtually all districts are still able to find an appropriately credentialed candidate to fill the position.

01-Smith 4e-4954.qxd 5/10/2006 6:08 PM Page 23

Of course, supply and demand are not evenly distributed. For example, districts in urban or high-growth regions are frequently hard pressed to fill their leadership needs (Farkas and colleagues; Roza and colleagues). For small districts, the margin can be razor thin. Commenting on a survey of Colorado schools, Kathryn Whitaker noted that some rural districts were reporting one to three candidates for secondary principalships.

And even within districts, candidates seem to seek out some schools while going out of their way to avoid others. Schools serving low-income or minority students often have the hardest time attracting candidates (Cynthia Prince; Roza and colleagues).

Demographic projections show a substantial number of principals approaching retirement age (Doud and Keller; Gates and colleagues; NASSP). Eligibility for retirement does not automatically lead to retirement, but it does create a pool of leaders who could walk away on relatively short notice. Any deterioration in work conditions—at the district, state, or even national level—could lead to a sudden exodus of talent.

In some quarters, the apparent shortage has sparked recommendations that schools recruit leaders from nontraditional sources (Frederick Hess; Thomas B. Fordham Foundation). Advocates maintain that when qualified candidates are scarce, the education system cannot afford to overlook any source of talent, and that there are many exceptionally talented leaders who come from noneducational backgrounds. But because most states require administrators to have teaching experience, outsiders find the path blocked. A few innovative programs are opening the door, but alternative routes remain relatively scarce and not well used (C. Emily Feistritzer).

Diminishing Quality?

Beyond the immediate concern with raw numbers, some recent research suggests that the real shortage may be qualitative rather than quantitative. A surprising number of district administrators report misgivings about the ability of today's principal candidates to handle the job. For example, no more than a third of superintendents in one survey pronounced themselves "happy" with principals' ability to communicate a clear vision, use money effectively, make tough decisions, and—most of all—hold teachers accountable for results. Most superintendents said those skills should be "a little better," but 10 to 20 percent saw serious deficiencies (Farkas and colleagues).

The survey did not directly ask whether the perceived problems were greater with new principals, but only a third of superintendents believed that the quality of applicants had improved in recent years, 36 percent said it had stayed the same, and 29 percent said it had gotten worse (Farkas and colleagues).

In another survey, 80 percent of superintendents agreed that finding qualified candidates was either a major or moderate concern (Roza and colleagues).

In that context, a diminishing candidate pool intensifies the quality concerns. One midwestern administrator put it this way: "Four or five years ago, there might be 50–200 applicants for a principalship, then there were 25 to 50—now it's only 15 to 20" (Educational Research Service 1998). The smaller the pool, the less likely a district will find someone with exactly the qualities it is seeking.

Doubts about the quality of new principals usually reanimate long-standing suspicions that university preparation programs are failing to fulfill their mission. Practitioners have long expressed disenchantment with the relevance of their formal training. For

01-Smith 4e-4954.qxd 5/10/2006 6:08 PM Page 24

example, 80 percent of the superintendents in the Farkas and colleagues survey felt that typical leadership programs were "out of touch with the realities."

A recent study by Arthur Levine cited even more negative views and went on to say that the quality of the majority of programs ranged "from inadequate to appalling." Critics of Levine immediately questioned his method and also noted he failed to recognize a wide range of reforms under way (Michelle D. Young and colleagues). Other sources present a more hopeful picture that suggests many states are making progress in improving the preparation of principals (Southern Regional Education Board).

Because the rapidly changing nature of school leadership implies the need for ongoing training, more attention is also being paid to the often-ignored issue of professional development for principals. Kenneth Leithwood and colleagues acknowledge that "we know little about which experiences are helpful and why." They note, though, that the complexity of the principal's world requires learning opportunities that are authentic and job embedded. (There is little need to present principals with textbook problems when their day is already filled with real problems involving real people.)

Does Anybody Want This Job?

Another question generated by the perceived shrinkage of the candidate pool is whether the principalship is losing its appeal as a career choice. One of the oddities of the shortage is that administrator preparation programs turn out ample numbers of certificated principals, but many never take an administrative position or even apply for a job (Educational Research Service 2000).

A 1999 Minnesota study estimated that whereas some 6,500 licensed school administrators lived in the state, state schools employed only 1,800 principals and superintendents (Timothy D. Sheldon and Lee W. Munnich Jr.). The others fell into the "replacement" group (currently employed as educators but not administrators), the "new" group (recent graduates of preparation programs), and the "hidden" group (status unknown). The clear implication is that some licensed individuals must be consciously declining to throw their hats into the job ring. Why?

Some of the reluctance may have nothing to do with the job. Teachers who enter administration programs may have no intention of becoming administrators, but instead find the program a convenient way to earn a master's degree and move up the salary schedule. Others enter a program undecided and gradually realize that the job simply isn't a good match for their temperament or skills; they may finish the program but never apply for a position.

Many reasons could make well-qualified candidates hesitate. Teachers eyeing an administrative career see long days, substantial stress, and a salary not commensurate with the responsibilities. Many may simply say, "No, thanks" (Van Cooley and Jianping Shen 1999; Diana G. Pounder and Randall J. Merrill).

One obvious concern is salary. When Educational Research Service (1998) asked administrators what discourages principal candidates, 60 percent identified "salary/compensation not sufficient as compared to responsibilities." The Farkas and colleagues study likewise found 65 percent of principals believing that "improving the pay and prestige of administrators" would be a "very effective" way of upgrading the leadership cadre.

01-Smith 4e-4954.qxd 5/10/2006 6:08 PM Page 25

But even apart from salary, the sheer burdens of the job may discourage applicants. Pounder and Merrill cited a promising young assistant principal who was willing to move up to the principalship—but only for 3 to 5 years. He said, "The demands of the job are just too great—the time commitment, the stress, and the difficulty in implementing change due to organizational, political and legal constraints." He liked the idea of making a difference in students' lives, but was not willing to subject his family life to the kind of stress that would be involved.

Some 92 percent of the principals surveyed by Farkas and colleagues believed that the time and responsibilities associated with the job discouraged candidates. When discussing the parts of the job that were most stressful or discouraging, they identified such things as dealing with politics and bureaucracy, handling public criticism, and trying to remove ineffective teachers.

Some researchers have gone directly to potential applicants to find out how they viewed the principalship. Pounder and Merrill interviewed high school assistant principals and middle school principals and found that only 30 percent intended to apply for a high school principal position in the next three to five years. Members in this group, who are probably the most immediate source of principals, were ambivalent about the job. They were drawn by the opportunity to make a difference, help students, and reform schools, and they also found the increased salary to be attractive. But they hesitated because of the hours, job stress, political pressure, teacher grievances, and difficulty of balancing job and family responsibilities.

Paul A. Winter, James S. Rinehart, and Marco A. Munoz surveyed all the holders of principal certificates in a large midwestern city and found that only 10 percent were likely to apply for principalships in the near future. Many were approaching retirement or were simply satisfied with their current positions, but others identified specific disincentives such as long hours, less job security, and time away from family.

An Impossible Job?

When Harry Wolcott published his classic 1973 ethnographic study *The Man in the Principal's Office,* it was widely regarded as a realistic and in-depth portrait of the principal's work life. For an entire year, Wolcott shadowed his subject, "Ed Bell," as he went about the daily business of running an elementary school.

Principals who read this account today will recognize much in Ed Bell's world, particularly the countless unplanned and unscripted encounters that filled each day and the constant demands for attention from teachers, students, and parents. Yet his world clearly belongs to another time, one that from today's perspective seems almost quaint.

Bell's job strikes us as orderly and largely predictable, offering challenges but rarely a major crisis. His concerns about discipline did not include gangs, guns, and lewd T-shirts; parent involvement was channeled into Parent Teacher Association (PTA) discussions about menus at the school fair; and teacher-union militancy was just a distant cloud on the horizon.

Although Bell often talked about change, no one was clamoring for him to reinvent education. In fact, Wolcott noted that Bell devoted most of his efforts to controlling change and maintaining stability. Having inherited a functioning school, he was clear about his mandate: Don't make mistakes.

01-Smith 4e-4954.qxd 5/10/2006 6:08 PM Page 26

Almost four decades later, Ed Bell would hardly recognize the world of the school leader. Massive social, demographic, and cultural changes have overtaken schools, upsetting comfortable old assumptions and behaviors. These outside forces have a major impact on the shape of education as well as the recommendations for school renewal (Pedro Reyes, Lonnie H. Wagstaff, and Lance D. Fusarelli). For example:

- Population shifts have greatly increased student diversity, not just in the usual urban pockets but throughout the country. Schools everywhere are confronting unprecedented ethnic, cultural, and linguistic differences that they are ill prepared to deal with.
- A society that expects schools to be positive moral influences has become much less confident in its definitions of right and wrong and much less capable of providing firm guidance to children. A rising divorce rate and the entry of women into the workforce have left many children on their own much of the day, saturated with media images.
- School safety, which once meant not putting the swings on asphalt, now requires metal detectors and SWAT teams.
- Student achievement remains unacceptably low, at least for policymakers, and all 50 states, supported by the federal government, are engaged in a massive effort to overhaul both curricular goals and instructional methods.
- Schools that once were considered a safe haven from the bickering of politics have become heavily politicized, subject to relentless legislation and litigation. Some initiatives offer sweeping changes that would transform education from a public agency to a consumer commodity.

In the face of these challenges, society's expectations for schools keep rising. Legislators continually turn to schools for a cheap fix to vexing social problems. (Perhaps policymakers reason that if they cannot actually solve problems such as AIDS, violence, and drugs, they can at least try to help the next generation gain the proper outlook.) Policymakers have likewise set a high standard for achievement and have decreed that those high standards are for all students, but without providing any kind of road map for getting there.

Just as expectations for schools keep escalating, so do the expectations for school leaders. Descriptions of school leadership for the 21st century are both visionary and ambitious:

> The principal—the instructional "artist in residence"—establishes a climate for excellence, puts forth a vision for continuous improvement in student performance, promotes excellence in teaching, and commits to sustained, comprehensive professional development for all staff members. (Gerald N. Tirozzi)

> Good principals lead change, inspire students and staff, leverage resources to make improvement happen, and bring community members into the process of change. (National Association of State Boards of Education)

> Principals today must also serve as leaders for student learning. They must know academic content and pedagogical techniques. They must work with teachers

01-Smith 4e-4954.qxd 5/10/2006 6:08 PM Page 27

> to strengthen skills. They must collect, analyze and use data in ways that fuel excellence. They must rally students, teachers, parents, local health and family service agencies, youth development groups, local businesses and other community residents and partners around the common goal of raising student performance. And they must have the leadership skills and knowledge to exercise the autonomy and authority to pursue these strategies. (Institute for Educational Leadership)

The new expectations aren't simply replacing the old ones. Van Cooley and Jianping Shen (2003) found that secondary principals were engaged in new roles that had simply been "layered" over the old job. That is, instead of replacing former responsibilities or integrating them into the job, the new duties were simply added to what was already there.

Thus, it isn't surprising that many principals feel overwhelmed or that superintendents report difficulty in finding candidates who can deftly handle the many strands of the job. Already, some observers have suggested that the job may have become impossible for all but a few "superleaders" (Michael DiPaola and Megan Tschannen-Moran; J. Casey Hurley).

This realization has generated calls to redesign the job to make it more manageable, mostly by spreading out the principal's duties across a greater number of people. In some cases, the proposals involve reallocating duties among administrators in a co-principalship or "multi-principalship" (Michael Chirichello; Peter Zeitoun and Rose Mary Newton).

Another body of work urges more far-reaching and complex forms of "distributed" leadership, taking advantage of the leadership capacity of everyone in the organization (Richard F. Elmore; James P. Spillane, Richard Halverson, and John B. Diamond). These efforts raise the possibility that thoughtfully structuring the principalship to fit human capabilities may be more productive than trying to recruit candidates with superhuman attributes.

WHAT IS THE PRINCIPAL'S PROPER ROLE?

All these conditions—the shortage of applicants, questions about quality, escalating expectations—have given new life to a perennial question: What should be the principal's role?

This is a question with deep roots. As Lynn Beck and Joseph Murphy have noted, the principalship since the early 20th century has been "extremely malleable," with each generation molding its image of the principal to fit the needs of the time. During economic depression, principals were expected to be thrifty stewards of limited resources; in time of war, they were expected to mobilize the next generation to defend democracy; amid fears of declining achievement, they were expected to be instructional leaders.

How is school leadership defined today? Kenneth Leithwood and Daniel Duke, having examined all articles on educational leadership published in four major administration journals from 1985 to 1995, identified six distinct conceptions of leadership:

1. instructional (influencing the work of teachers in a way that will improve student achievement)
2. transformational (increasing the commitments and capacities of school staff)
3. moral (influencing others by appealing to notions of right and wrong)

01-Smith 4e-4954.qxd 5/10/2006 6:08 PM Page 28

4. participative (involving other members of the school community)
5. managerial (operating the school efficiently)
6. contingent (adapting their behavior to fit the situation)

Without a doubt, the most talked-about role is "instructional leadership," a phrase that echoes throughout current discussions. Hardly anyone would deny that improved student learning should be at the heart of the principal's job. But once one moves beyond the easy consensus that student learning is the ultimate measure of the principal's success, the picture becomes muddier. Exactly what does it mean to be an instructional leader, and how do principals accomplish it?

Today's conceptions of instructional leadership are much more complex than earlier versions. In the 1980s, instruction was often portrayed as a straightforward management problem that could be tamed by communicating high expectations, focusing on curriculum, and increasing time on task. Today, instructional leadership is more often seen as a complicated problem of organizational learning that requires a well-grounded vision, deep knowledge of adult learning, and the ability to connect with the larger community—all under the spotlight of high-stakes accountability.

This conception obviously requires school leaders to have exceptional skills. It shouldn't be surprising, therefore, that many potential candidates might shy away from the job or that superintendents would report that principals are not completely up to the task. But even if we assume that the more ambitious visions of instructional leadership are feasible, questions remain:

- How, exactly, do principals perform the task of instructional leadership?
- What qualifications and training are needed to be an effective instructional leader?
- Does instructional leadership completely define the principal's role, or are there other crucial functions that must be fulfilled?

This section examines current thinking on the role of the principal as expressed in the ISLLC standards and then discusses several areas of ambiguity or tension not fully resolved by the standards.

ISLLC Standards

For many decades, debates over the role of the principal were vigorous, but those discussions took place over extended periods in a variety of forums such as academic journals, practitioner magazines, and professional conferences. Hence, it was difficult to get a clear fix on what ideas were driving professional practice.

Then, beginning in the 1980s, various groups of practitioners, academics, and policymakers began to articulate the specific skills needed by today's school leaders and to crystallize those many role expectations into explicit standards of performance. Unfortunately, each group formulated its standards to serve slightly different needs, so the profession found it necessary to sort through a series of competing documents that were not completely consistent (John Hoyle).

01-Smith 4e-4954.qxd 5/10/2006 6:08 PM Page 29

That inconsistency has become less of a problem over the past decade, as the standards of the ISLLC have clearly dominated the discussion. The product of a collaborative effort among university professors, state policymakers, and professional associations, the standards by 2005 had been adopted as a guiding framework in 37 states, were integrated into national accreditation of leadership preparation programs, and provided the foundation for the School Leaders Licensure Assessment used in a number of states as a licensure requirement (Murphy 2003).

The ISLLC standards are by no means universally admired. Murphy (2003), who played a key role in development of the standards, notes that they have been variously criticized as being too vague (or too prescriptive), undermining university autonomy (or strengthening the university monopoly), being too dominant (or teetering on the edge of failure), and favoring left-wing (or right-wing) philosophies. They have also been accused of elevating naive idealism over empirical research. Wryly observing that these criticisms can't all be right, Murphy (2003) defends the standards as a useful tool with a strong rationale.

Whatever the validity of the criticisms, the standards are the logical starting point for any discussion of the principal's role, both because they have been so widely accepted and because they were designed to make a clear statement about what that role should be.

The standards leave little doubt about the essential core of school leadership: improving student learning. Each of the six standards begins with the statement, "A school administrator is a leader who promotes the success of all students by . . ." (Council of Chief State School Officers [CCSSO]). Thus, even the mundane tasks of budgeting and bus scheduling are harnessed to the overriding goal of student success. The second standard focuses specifically on the leader's role in "advocating, nurturing, and sustaining a school culture and instructional program conducive to student learning and staff professional growth."

This language clearly puts instructional leadership at the heart of the profession. But exactly what does that mean? The authors of the standards provided hints with a listing of specific indicators. For example, indicators for Standard 2 include the following:

- Knowledge of student growth and development, learning and motivational theories, principles of effective instruction, and assessment strategies
- Dispositions that commit the leader to student learning as the fundamental purpose of schooling, the proposition that all students can learn, and the variety of ways that students can learn
- Actions that create a culture of high expectations, provide students with multiple opportunities to learn, eliminate barriers to student learning, and treat all individuals with fairness, dignity, and respect

Those examples suggest that the ISLLC's conception of instructional leadership is much broader than the rather hard-edged versions of the 1980s, which envisioned the principal as a highly efficient taskmaster who set high expectations, monitored curriculum and instruction, and assessed outcomes.

Did ISLLC Get It Right?

Although ISLLC's vision of instructional leadership seems to be widely accepted across the profession, it leaves a number of questions unanswered.

01-Smith 4e-4954.qxd 5/10/2006 6:08 PM Page 30

Describing the origin of the ISLLC standards, Murphy (2003) notes that the recommendations were broadly responsive to the research on school leadership at that time and have been further validated by more recent research. He also explains that the consortium intended the specific knowledge, skills, and dispositions associated with each standard to be suggestive rather than prescriptive. Also, the developers of the standards believed that desirable leadership skills and strategies could not be completely described and probably are relative to the context. Thus, they did not attempt to provide empirical justification for each indicator.

Taking a different position, Tim Waters and Sally Grubb have argued that principals should focus on specific strategies that research shows are linked to student learning: "When school leaders fail to identify and focus on the classroom practices that are most likely to improve student achievement, their leadership can have a negative impact."

Waters and Grubb, reviewing an extensive body of empirical studies, found complex relationships among leadership, instruction, and organizational change. For example, of 21 strategies correlated with student learning, 8 were linked to deep, sustainable change: flexibility, strong ideals and beliefs, knowledge of curriculum, instruction and assessment, monitoring and evaluation, change agent (actively challenges the status quo), intellectual stimulation (engages faculty in discussion of new ideas), and optimizer (inspires innovations).

At the same time, four leadership characteristics—communication, culture (fosters shared beliefs and a sense of community), input (involves teachers in decisions), and order (establishes regular operating procedures)—were negatively associated with second-order change. In other words, in schools undergoing changes that require new ways of thinking, principals (as perceived by teachers) rank lower on these characteristics.

Waters and Grubb recommend that principals engaged in second-order change should keep one eye on how others perceive their efforts in these four areas. If their analysis is correct, it demonstrates that instructional leadership is a complex process and that we still have much to learn about it.

What Does It Mean to Be an Instructional Expert?

The recent focus on instructional leadership has reaffirmed a long-standing belief by many practitioners that principals should have teaching experience. Despite calls for opening the profession to qualified leaders from other occupations, virtually all states continue to require principals to have teaching experience, and on the rare occasion that states have eliminated the requirement, districts have continued to seek principals with such experience (Jeff Archer).

Some scholars agree. Mary Kay Stein and Barbara S. Nelson found in a case study that administrators acting as instructional leaders drew on their own classroom experience and knowledge of the subject. The authors concluded that school leaders should have in-depth knowledge of at least one subject:

> As we move away from the classroom, knowledge about subject matter does not disappear, and what administrators need to know does not become more generic. The needed knowledge remains anchored in knowledge of the subject and how students learn it.

01-Smith 4e-4954.qxd 5/10/2006 6:08 PM Page 31

Stein and Nelson claim that leaders need deep expertise in at least one content area, including knowledge of how children learn that subject. And they also should have

> substantial experiences of some depth in every subject, in which they experience what it is like to be a learner of that subject, in which they study what is known about how children learn that subject and become familiar with the best instructional methods for that particular subject.

That prescription faces some obvious practical difficulties. Where will busy principals find the time to gain the necessary breadth of expertise? Acknowledging that barrier, Stein and Nelson suggest that use of distributed leadership offers an alternative. That is, the principal can rely on the subject expertise of others and lead more through coordination and oversight than by direct decision making.

Similarly, drawing on insights gained from interviews with educators in 21 schools, Bradley Portin and colleagues say that instead of being "one-man bands," principals could function as "orchestra leaders." The leadership of conductors does not depend on playing an instrument but on coordinating the playing of others; the same can be true of instructional leadership. The principal's job is to see that it gets done, not to personally do it.

Whether or not principals require instructional expertise to be effective, research is beginning to show that their expertise (be it minimal or extensive) does make a difference. Jennifer Z. Sherer found that instructional leadership is not generic; the leaders she observed behaved very differently when overseeing literacy instruction than when overseeing math instruction. Sherer concluded: "It is no longer enough to state that leaders lead instruction. They specifically lead instruction differently in different domains."

Beyond Instructional Leadership

The ISLLC's emphasis on instructional leadership is echoed in many other discussions of the principal's role, and there is little doubt that most analysts and practitioners see improved student learning as the ultimate test of a principal's success. Another healthy body of thinking, however, takes a "yes, but . . ." stance. Without denying the importance of instructional leadership, some commentators suggest that it should not overshadow other key dimensions of the principal's job.

In some cases, the caution about instructional leadership may come from a belief that the phrase has become a euphemism for an overreliance on high-stakes testing. In other cases, it seems to spring from the recognition that in a time of major social transformation, defining the job too narrowly would fail to meet the needs of today's children. In particular, three alternative roles stand out as competitors to instructional leadership: the principal as manager, the principal as moral leader, and the principal as entrepreneur.

The Principal as Manager

In their study of how conceptions of the principalship have changed over time, Beck and Murphy found that the job itself—the day-to-day duties—actually remained quite stable over time. Irrespective of scholarly debates, principals stayed focused on the immediate need to build schedules, order textbooks, and maintain discipline.

Larry Cuban sees this tension running like a fault line through the history of school leadership. Even when principals are eager to transform, redesign, and create, they are unable to escape the "managerial imperative" that keeps them anchored to mundane tasks. Even the most visionary principals have to keep the buses running on time.

The leader/manager dichotomy is not absolute. A principal's walk around the school may serve both as an inspection tour to see that everything is functioning well and as a chance to demonstrate concern and support for teachers and learning. Indeed, Terrence E. Deal and Kent D. Peterson have suggested that effective principals have a kind of "bifocal vision" that allows them to invest routine tasks with deeper meaning.

Even with such virtuoso displays of leadership, just dealing with the dozens of administrative tasks that make up each day is often a full-time job. Advocates of a dynamic leadership role for principals have usually not explained where the additional hours will come from. For example, the ISLLC standards list management as just one of six standards—yet management tasks easily take up more than a sixth of the principal's time. Many principals try to fill both roles, and sometimes employers demand it, asking them to be Superman or Wonder Woman (Cuban).

Aside from the time issue, the leadership/management split may create a kind of psychic tension for principals. Most are former teachers, and many still have strong emotional ties to the classroom and to instructional issues; they easily feel guilty over the amount of time they have to spend on managerial concerns (Cuban).

In recent decades, many commentators have been somewhat disdainful of the managerial dimensions of the principalship, fearing that too sharp a focus on those responsibilities will produce unimaginative technocrats rather than real leaders. Some analysts have argued, in contrast, that managerial expertise is "fundamental to organizational stability" (Leithwood and Jantzi).

Philip Hallinger and Kamontip Snidvongs likewise suggest that today's emphasis on planning for school improvement requires principals who can not only formulate an educationally appropriate plan but use business strategies such as knowledge management, enterprise-resource management, and customer-service management.

The Principal as Moral Leader

Although the ISLLC standards clearly place instructional leadership at the center of the principal's world, they also recognize other responsibilities. For example, the school leader must be an ethical leader, must reach out to families and community, and must be responsive to the larger social, cultural, political, and legal environments. These ideas are expressions of a growing belief that the principal must be, in the words of Joseph Murphy (2002), "a moral steward."

The new expectations elevate ethics above the traditional concern with observing professional codes of behavior. Instead, principals' moral responsibility fits into a much broader context of social justice. For example, the ISLLC standards ask leaders to be committed to "the ideal of the common good, the principles in the Bill of Rights, and the right of every student to a free, quality education" (CCSSO). School leaders are expected to recognize the transformative power of education in the lives of children and to act as advocates for all their students, not only protecting their rights, but seeking to extend and improve those rights.

01-Smith 4e-4954.qxd 5/10/2006 6:08 PM Page 33

This belief is based on the recognition that schools reflect a society's deepest values and hopes and that administrators today are not just custodians of the school system, but creators of it. Required to spend much of their time defining purpose and choosing directions, they must operate from a strong base of beliefs that are sensitive to issues surrounding social justice, human dignity, and care for others.

A part of this moral responsibility comes from the principal's interpersonal connections with others. Schools are communities, consisting of teachers, students, parents, school boards, and the community at large, and principals must be community builders. This requires that they "lead not from the apex of the organizational pyramid but from a web of interpersonal relationships—with people rather than through them" (Murphy 2002).

As the NAESP put it:

> Schools and communities are inextricably intertwined, and the Principal is the linchpin in creating a learning community that seamlessly integrates the work and expectations of students, teachers, parents, citizens, community and business leaders and policymakers.

Living in simpler times, Ed Bell did not see a great need to cultivate community involvement, and sometimes resented it:

> I get pretty annoyed by the idea expressed that because a person has a child in school he is an expert about education. The learning process is so complex that parents should leave it up to school people and have confidence in them. (Wolcott)

Bell knew that his public generally respected and trusted the schools. Living in a homogeneous community, he also assumed that he knew what citizens needed and wanted. Therefore, except when a school budget was up for approval, good community relations required nothing more than a monthly PTA meeting, periodic open houses, and an occasional speech at a Rotary luncheon.

Today's social landscape is dramatically different. Distrust of government is high, citizens are more inclined to assert their rights, and schools have become a battlefield in the culture wars. As icons of American democracy, schools are inevitably pulled into the debates over public policy and the state of American society, and school leaders must be prepared to engage the public proactively, not just defensively.

And although educators today would agree with Ed Bell that learning is complex, they now take that as a reason parents should be involved. With the benefit of three decades' more experience, they believe that learning is a reflection of the total context of children's lives, not just the formal instruction that takes place during school hours. More conscious of the many styles and pathways to learning, they distrust a one-size-fits-all philosophy that ignores the diversity of today's population.

Thomas J. Sergiovanni has framed the principal's moral and community responsibilities in terms of the "lifeworld": the culture, values, and relationships that form the heart of school life. The lifeworld coexists with the "systemsworld" of rules, schedules, and mandates. Principals have obligations to both dimensions—and both are necessary—but Sergiovanni says the systemsworld keeps trying to assert its supremacy over the lifeworld (and is often successful). Thus, a key part of the principal's role is protecting the lifeworld.

01-Smith 4e-4954.qxd 5/10/2006 6:08 PM Page 34

The Principal as Entrepreneur

Historically, principals have functioned as middle managers, one link in a bureaucratic chain that extends from policymakers to students. They apply rules, soothe disputes, and make sure the cafeteria is supervised.

Today's principals operate in a tumultuous environment where schools now compete with market-based approaches such as charter schools and voucher systems. For this reason, some analysts are rethinking the principal's traditional role as middle manager. Robert J. Brown and Jeffrey R. Cornwall have argued that if principals are to succeed in this new environment, they must become entrepreneurial. Entrepreneurial leaders are those who

- view change as an opportunity as well as a threat;
- operate proactively, acting to control their own destiny rather than waiting for events to overtake them;
- understand the difference between a good idea and a great opportunity;
- are ready to exercise creativity and think out of the box; and
- are willing to take risks.

As employees and civil servants, principals will not be entrepreneurs in the classic sense, but they can act entrepreneurially in the district (sometimes called *intrapreneurship*), and they can work to build an entrepreneurial school.

Entrepreneurial leadership among principals has not been well studied, and most descriptions of it are anecdotal (for example, see Thomas B. Fordham Foundation; Bill Triant; Elaine K. McEwan). Such accounts leave the impression that today's principals are more likely to form partnerships, challenge conventional ideas, and assert their autonomy. These behaviors are often associated with charter schools and other schools of choice, with which principals may feel they need to compete.

Entrepreneurial leadership could equally well result from simple desperation. Faced with expectations of rigorous accountability for which conventional strategies are no match, some principals feel they have little choice but to try the unconventional.

Will the pressures of school reform and school choice sustain a sense of entrepreneurialism? One reason this question cannot be answered with certainty is that high-stakes accountability of the type legislated through No Child Left Behind engenders conflicting motivations. It may push some principals to take risks, but it also places a heavy emphasis on bureaucratic compliance.

New Ways to Lead

A role can do more than point out what principals are expected to do; it can also specify how they are to do it. Here, too, things continue to change.

Historically, principals have been seen as authoritarian figures. Their control may have been softened by an affable personality or sense of benevolence, but no one really doubted who was in charge. The early days of the school-reform movement reinforced this image, though with a heroic tinge. Successful principals led with a no-nonsense, take-charge stance that put them at the front of the educational parade.

01-Smith 4e-4954.qxd 5/10/2006 6:08 PM Page 35

The recent literature on distributed leadership places much more emphasis on community and shared leadership. For example, Joseph Murphy and Amanda Datnow found that successful principals in comprehensive school reform built "dense leadership organizations" by developing teacher leadership, finding resources to support the growth of professional community, giving teachers the confidence to grow, and managing the leadership agenda systemically. Collaborative approaches are not only viewed as more dynamic and productive, they are sometimes also seen as a solution to the growing demands of the principalship.

Sharing decisions and developing leadership in others can have benefits for any organization, but these behaviors also create ambiguity about authority and accountability. The relentless demands of accountability seem to call for energetic, take-charge strategies. Indeed, success stories typically focus on principals and superintendents who came in and "turned things around."

With a reform agenda that leaves little margin for error, principals may be ambivalent about putting their fate in the hands of others. (Likewise, teachers and others who are invited to take on the mantle of leadership may be ambivalent about accepting responsibility, preferring to leave accountability in the hands of the principal.)

Because society sends so many mixed signals about the nature of leadership, the marriage between accountability and collaboration is sometimes rocky, and there are few well-mapped pathways. Principals thus have to create their leadership styles even as they take on other unaccustomed responsibilities. (See Chapter 11, "Distributed Leadership," for additional discussion.)

Creating a Synthesis

The preceding discussion by no means exhausts the ways that scholars, practitioners, and policy analysts have characterized the principal's role. Other models and images compete for attention: the principal as change agent, the principal as cultural leader, the principal as lead learner, the principal as facilitator—the list seems endless.

Indeed, the proliferation of roles may itself constitute one of the key challenges for the profession. Each role carries a compelling rationale and responds to a real need, but if each is simply added to the to-do list as an equally urgent priority, the job quickly grows beyond human capability.

Hurley, discussing the trend toward ever-more-ambitious job descriptions for principals, asks, "Why are policymakers continuing to define the principal's role in such a way that few people want the job and even fewer can be effective at it? Do they really think it is possible for principals to do more?"

Moreover, the multiplicity of demands creates role conflict. For example, surveys persistently find that principals feel torn between the instructional leadership that almost everyone agrees should be their top priority and the daily management chores that are almost impossible to ignore (Tak Cheung Chan and Harbison Pool; Cooley and Shen 2003; Rebecca H. Goodwin, Michael L. Cunningham, and Ronald Childress; Diane Ricciardi and Joseph Petrosko). Failure to prioritize can lead to unproductive hopscotching from one task to another, or, alternatively, to paralysis.

In the ferment of current thinking about the principalship, is there any hope that a consensus will emerge from continued discussion or research, or must principals resign themselves to a career spent running after the latest set of expectations?

01-Smith 4e-4954.qxd 5/10/2006 6:08 PM Page 36

At first glance, prospects for consensus appear dim. As Beck and Murphy have reminded us, expectations for such a visible public position will always be subject to change as the society itself changes. When society changes quickly or deeply, as is currently happening, role expectations can shift even faster. Given all the forces pushing and pulling on today's principal, any kind of national consensus on the role is unlikely anytime soon.

Some analysts, relying on the promise of distributed leadership, paint a more hopeful picture. Portin and colleagues, after listing seven key leadership functions, say the important thing is that the seven functions are carried out, not that the principal is the one who does them. The principal's true role is "master diagnostician," the person who determines what the school needs and how to get it done: "It requires the ability to 'read' a school's goals, commitments, context, and resources. It requires understanding a school's strengths and weaknesses. It means setting priorities, spurring others to act, and thinking long-term."

This view seems consistent with the well-supported research finding that "setting direction" is a key leadership function (Kenneth Leithwood and Carolyn Riehl).

Carrying out this kind of diagnostic function undoubtedly requires a high degree of skill, but principals who do it well may gain the added benefit of relief from "role overload." Instead of trying to be all things to all people, the principal can concentrate on coordinating activities that allow others to step forward and take on various roles.

Another mitigating factor that may relieve role strain is that the context of a particular school may not require the principal to fulfill all roles at the same time with equal vigor. In a school that has endured years of less-than-competent leadership, a new principal may find that emphasizing his or her managerial role will be the healthiest strategy (at least for a while). In a school that has a long history of faculty collegiality and collaboration, the principal will surely find the community-building role easier than in a building where all the teaching was done behind closed doors.

In other words, in some settings, principals can perform their many roles selectively and sequentially rather than concurrently.

Nonetheless, today's principals are pursuing an ambitious agenda. The role that Wolcott's Ed Bell mapped out for himself—serving as a kind of genial shepherd—falls far short of the complexity and intensity of the new standards. Today's principalship is a high-stakes, high-pressure job that requires a high degree of knowledge, skills, and commitment.

CONCLUSION: WHAT'S OVER THE NEXT HILL?

This chapter began with the observation that landscapes sometimes change quickly. School leadership has unquestionably been going through such a period in recent years. Is it likely to continue?

Without the ability to predict what will happen in the social, economic, and political contexts that surround schools, the question is probably unanswerable in any meaningful way. But there seems to be little reason to expect any letup in the pace of change. The stable, self-assured world of Ed Bell is long gone, and many analysts predict that it won't return in the foreseeable future. More than ever, what happens in the smallest school in the

01-Smith 4e-4954.qxd 5/10/2006 6:08 PM Page 37

remotest part of America is influenced by what happens at the national—and increasingly, the global—level.

Most principals, given the choice, would probably vote for a breathing spell, but the prospect of unending change need not be the cause for despair. In fact, there are reasons to be optimistic and even excited by the changes in the educational system. A time of rapid transformation can present an opportunity for dramatic improvement. In some respects, school leaders today are like the leaders of the American Revolution—they have a chance to invent institutions that give voice to their ideals and shape the course of events for a long time.

And, at least so far, school leaders have exhibited remarkable resilience and resourcefulness. They are undoubtedly under stress, but they are also coping admirably. As these veteran leaders are joined by new principals who come of age in the changed world of schools, we can expect their collective capacity to continue growing.

The editors and authors of this handbook are not in a position to provide school leaders with a detailed road map; principals and others who lead must continue to blaze their own trails. This being said, the remaining chapters can serve as a compass that will provide familiarity with the major landmarks and a general sense of direction.

REFLECTIONS

1. Does the principalship remain an attractive career option in your school district? What dimensions of the job constitute major disincentives?
2. What is it about the principalship that has attracted you to the position or that keeps you going? What dimensions of the job give you second thoughts?
3. Do you see the principalship as being at risk? That is, under current conditions, will schools be able to find and retain principals who can provide the kind of leadership being demanded? If not, how should the job be changed?
4. In your view, how should principals exercise their responsibilities as instructional leaders? Does it require in-depth knowledge and a hands-on approach, or can the principal play more of a coordinating role, as Portin and colleagues suggest? Is it important that principals have teaching experience?
5. In your district, what are the different roles that principals play? Are some more important than others?
6. If you had complete control over your role as principal, what would the job look like? What barriers stand in the way of developing your ideal role? What steps would allow you to move closer to that ideal?