

## **Meadville Tribune**

### **Report: Training for school officials very poor**

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What kind of leadership education does it take to make a good principal or superintendent? From the perspective of education-industry leader Arthur Levine, president and professor of education at New York City's Teachers College, Columbia University and author of a recently-released study titled "Educating School Leaders," the right stuff, so to speak, is pretty much not out there.

"The majority of programs range from inadequate to appalling, even at some of the country's leading universities," Levine writes, cutting directly to the chase. "Collectively, school leadership programs are not successful on any of the nine quality criteria (examined in the study)."

Overall, the 90-page study, which is available online at [www.edschools.com](http://www.edschools.com), categorizes the quality of educational administrations programs throughout the United States as poor. In fact, the chapter titled "A Promising Model" notes that when experts in school leadership were asked to help find exemplary programs that might have been overlooked, "they were generous in their counsel, but their suggestions, while instructive did not bear fruit."

One highly-recommended program with a curriculum designed to prepare urban school leaders, for example, was said to be on the cutting edge of the field. "When we looked for ourselves, though, we found the program had low admissions requirements, weak academic standards, and students who were interested mainly in obtaining credentials rather than in learning new content or skills," Levine wrote. "On paper, the program was as creative, coherent, and appealing as any other we encountered, but in reality its standards for admission and graduation were embarrassingly low and its impressive design could not be realized." The most promising model they found, he added, was England's National College for School Leadership, which was established by British Prime Minister Tony Blair in 1998. Instead of awarding credits or degrees, the free-standing government agency was "created to be the equivalent of a national war college for school leadership."

Back in the United States, "This study was unlike any other the author had conducted," Levine wrote. "It quickly became apparent that in today's highly charged environment, there was less interest in 'truth telling' than in defending one's position. Repeatedly, members of the education school community asked for a compelling defense of their schools, and those external to the academy requested a stirring condemnation. Insiders worried that any criticism would provide fodder for their opponents and outsiders feared any praise would protect the status quo."

The report includes a series of recommendations, including finding alternatives to salary scales that grant raises "merely for accumulating credits and degrees"; properly funding

educational leadership programs; strengthening or closing weak programs; eliminating the current “grab bag” of courses and developing a new degree, the Master’s in Educational Administration; eliminating the doctorate of education degree (Ed.D.) in school leadership; and reserving the doctor of philosophy degree (Ph.D.) in school leadership for preparing researchers.

While Arthur E. Wise, president of the National Council for Accreditation of Teacher Education, agreed with the analysis and most of the recommendations, he took issue with the report’s overall description of the bleakness of the picture. In a prepared statement, however, he noted that “neither the education profession nor the states are yet as serious about quality assurance for education leader or teacher preparation programs as they should be. We do not follow the same quality control procedures, including accreditation and strong licensing procedures as do other professions. When we begin to do that, then we can fulfill the promise that these preparation programs have the potential to deliver.”

In a Friday interview, Sanoff noted that a number of professionals in the field, while not always in complete agreement with the report, have already acknowledged that its points were well made. “When someone who is part of the leadership establishment took the position that we didn’t go far enough, we were surprised,” he added.

“Educating School Leaders” is the first in a series of policy reports. Funded by the Annenberg, Ford, Kauffman and Wallace foundations, The Education Schools Project is studying surveys and studies gathered over a four-year period investigating characteristics and performance of the nation’s more than 1,200 departments and schools of education. An examination of the education of classroom teachers is due in the fall of 2005, while the quality of education research and the preparation of scholars and researchers who conduct it will be examined in a study scheduled for release in 2006. The fourth and final volume in the series will be a study of America’s schools of education.