

THE EDUCATION SCHOOLS PROJECT

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CONTACT: Shep Ranbom, Lani Poblete, Perry Grossman
(202) 955-9450 sranbom@commworksllc.com
lpoblete@commworksllc.com
pgrossman@commworksllc.com

Quality of Preparation of Nation's School Leaders Ranges from 'Inadequate to Appalling,' Says Comprehensive National Report by Teachers College President Arthur Levine

Programs Marked by Low Standards, Weak Faculty, Irrelevant Curricula

Report Urges Universities and States to Raise Standards or Close Programs; Calls for Elimination of the Ed.D Degree and Creation of a New Master's Degree

WASHINGTON, D.C. – March 14, 2005 – At a time when high-quality educational leadership is critically needed for the nation's schools, the quality of most preparation programs for education leaders ranges from "inadequate to appalling," according to a major study to be released Tuesday by the Education Schools Project.

The study – written by Arthur Levine, the president of Teachers College, Columbia University – provides an indictment of leadership programs today and a roadmap for improvement.

Now more than ever, the nation's educational administration programs need to prepare high quality principals and superintendents, who can lead schools and school districts through the profound changes called for under state improvement plans and the federal No Child Left Behind legislation. More than 40 percent of principals, and an even higher percentage of superintendents, are expected to leave their jobs over the next decade, says the study, and this means the nation faces an urgent need to educate large numbers of highly skilled administrators.

Yet the study found that the university-based programs designed to prepare the next generation of educational leaders are not up to the task. Moreover, adds Levine, many of those programs are engaged in a counterproductive "race to the bottom," in which they compete for students by lowering admission standards, watering down coursework, and offering faster and less demanding degrees.

This downward trend is exacerbated, the study found, by states and school districts that reward teachers for taking courses in administration whether or not the material is relevant to their work, and whether or not those courses are rigorous. Further, many universities treat leadership education programs as "cash cows," using them to bring in revenue for other parts of the campus and denying them the resources that might enable them to improve.

Credit Dispensers

"Too often these new programs have turned out to be little more than graduate credit dispensers. They award the equivalent of green stamps, which can be traded in for raises and promotions, to teachers who have no intention of becoming administrators," says Levine, a renowned scholar in the field of higher education.

“These programs have also been responsible for conferring master’s degrees on students who demonstrate anything but mastery. They have awarded doctorates that are doctoral in name only. And they have enrolled principals and superintendents in courses of study that are not relevant to their jobs.”

This report provides a detailed diagnosis of what’s wrong, criteria for judging the quality of programs, and a prescription that calls for the elimination of incentives for reducing program quality, higher standards for leadership programs, shutting down poor quality programs, and a new course of study. The report calls for eliminating the Ed.D. degree in Educational Administration, introducing a new Master’s in Educational Administration, and gearing the doctor of philosophy degree (Ph.D.) in school leadership solely for preparing researchers. ([See recommendations attached.](#))

The four-year study was based on an extensive national survey of deans, faculty, alumni, and principals, as well as 28 in-depth case studies. It is the first of a four-part series of reports on schools of education.

Falling Short on All Criteria

The study evaluated leadership-education programs using nine criteria, and found that in most cases the programs fell short. The problems were the following:

- ***An Irrelevant Curriculum.*** The typical course of study amounts to little more than a grab bag of survey classes – such as Historical and Philosophical Foundations of Education, Educational Psychology, and Research Methods – taught elsewhere in the education school with little relevance to the job of school leader. Almost nine out of ten (89 percent) of program alumni surveyed said that schools of education fail to adequately prepare their graduates to cope with classroom realities.
- ***Low Admission and Graduation standards.*** Education school faculty give students in leadership programs their lowest ranking on academic motivation and performance. As a group, those students appear to be more interested in earning credits (and obtaining the salary increases that follow) than in pursuing rigorous academic studies. Further, their standardized test scores are not only among the lowest in education related fields but are among the lowest in all academe. For instance, elementary and secondary level teaching applicants outscore them on all three sections of the Graduate Record Examination, and while they score at the national average on the analytic portion of the GRE, their scores trail the national average by 46 points on the verbal portion of the exam and by 81 points on the quantitative section.
- ***Weak Faculty.*** Graduate programs in educational administration depend too heavily on adjunct professors, most of whom lack expertise in the academic content they are supposed to teach. Their dominant mode of instruction is providing personal anecdotes from their careers as school administrators. At the same time, programs employ too many full time professors who have had little or no recent experience with the practice of school administration – just six percent of all education faculty have been principals, and only two percent have been superintendents. Further, in many programs even senior faculty are notable for their lack of scholarly productivity, and some of those faculty members supervise doctoral students in educational administration even though they have neither the expertise nor the time and resources needed to do so effectively. Only in the most elite research universities can a majority of professors (55 percent) be described as highly productive scholars.
- ***Inadequate Clinical Instruction.*** Although many aspiring administrators say they want opportunities to connect university study with practical experience in the schools, meaningful clinical instruction is rare. It tends to be squeezed in while students work full time, and

assignments tend to be completed in the schools where students are employed already. The quality of the administrator presiding in these schools can vary from excellent to failing. Few leadership programs help set up mentoring relationships, and most full time professors are unable to serve as or effectively supervise mentors.

- ***Inappropriate Degrees.*** There are too many degrees and certificates in educational administration, and they mean different things in different places. The doctor of education degree (Ed.D.) is reserved by some institutions for practitioners, but others award it to academics and researchers as well. The Ph.D. tends to be thought of as a degree for scholars, but some institutions award it to practitioners. Some universities award only one of the degrees, some offer both, and others offer an entirely different degree. Further, aspiring principals and superintendents are often set to work toward a scholarly degree – the doctorate – which has no relevance to their jobs.
- ***Poor Research.*** Educational administration is overwhelmingly engaged in non-empirical research and it is disconnected from practice. Currently, the research in educational administration cannot answer questions as basic as whether school leadership programs have any impact on student achievement in the schools that graduates of these programs lead.

New Competition for Ed Schools

The study notes that practitioners and policy makers have not waited for schools of education in this country to reform themselves. Rather, they have created an array of alternatives to prepare school leaders – including programs operated by states, school districts, school networks, and private organizations. These alternative programs rely more on business school faculty than educational leadership faculty, and they place a greater emphasis on clinical experience than classroom-based learning. But the report notes that there is little proof of their effectiveness. “At this point, we know that the alternative programs are different than those found at universities,” the report states. “But we have no idea whether they are better or worse.”

Further, the report notes that university-based programs offer a number of advantages over possible alternatives and suggests that, “It would be best if education schools and their educational administration programs took the lead in bringing about improvement. But the clock is ticking, and it would be a grave disservice to our children and schools if the problems of the field remain unaddressed.”

The Education Schools Project promotes well-informed and non-partisan policy debate on how best to prepare the teachers, administrators, and researchers who serve the nation’s school children. The Project’s reports are drawn from the most extensive study ever conducted into the strengths, weaknesses, and overall performance of the more than 1,200 departments and schools of education at colleges and universities across the country. The Project plans to release equally comprehensive reports on teacher education in fall 2005 and research on education next year.

The project was funded by the Annenberg Foundation, the Ford Foundation, the Ewing Marion Kauffman Foundation, and the Wallace Foundation.

Copies of the report, *Educating School Leaders*, are available at the Education School Project’s Web site, www.edschools.org.

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