

# Tracking Transitions:

Recruiting, Developing, Supporting, and Retaining  
Delaware's School Leaders

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## **Introduction**

Both national and local dialogue around leadership have increasingly focused on a) the impact of school leaders on teaching and learning, b) concerns about recruiting and retaining quality administrators, and c) recognition of mobility and turnover of leadership in schools. In response to this dialogue two research reports were commissioned by the Delaware Academy for School Leadership to examine issues of administrator mobility and retention, and to understand the career paths of school administrators and the causes of turnover in the state of Delaware.

In the report, *Tracking Transitions: An Analysis of Principal Career Paths in Delaware* (Farley-Ripple, Mead, Raffel, Sherretz, & Welch, 2011), our research presents the voices of administrators throughout the state of Delaware. This qualitative study sought to provide an in-depth inquiry through the use of interviews of a representative sample of administrators who served between 2003 and 2008. The report documents the work of principals and assistant principals (APs)— their roles and responsibilities as well as the context and relationships in which they operate—and examines the ways in which administrators prepared for and continue to learn from their work. The companion report, *Principal Retention in the State of Delaware, 2001-2008* (Solano, McDuffie, Farley-Ripple, & Bruton, 2011), uses quantitative analyses to provide an initial evaluation of trends in administrator retention and turnover as well as administrator, school, and district factors that predict career behavior. Together, these unique and complementary reports offer important lessons about what factors influence decisions about an administrator’s career path, from entry to exit and all of the changes in between.<sup>1</sup>

We present this white paper as a means of moving from the challenges voiced in our research toward fuller implementation of a statewide cohesive leadership system. Here we summarize the findings of both reports in order to develop a set of recommendations we believe will address the challenges, disconnects, and tensions we found in our qualitative and quantitative analyses.

## **A Word of Caution**

In light of recent research examining the degree and nature of turnover in school administration, the objective of our work was to understand *why*. We sought to produce important and, to date, unavailable information that could be used by policymakers and practitioners to improve processes related to recruiting, developing, supporting, and retaining quality school leaders. While the research offers a great deal of actionable information, the complexity of what we found is difficult to translate into simple recommendations. Rather, based on this research we advocate that *any* strategy to support school leadership be comprehensive, coherent, and responsive to the six tensions resulting from the study. These six tensions are<sup>2</sup>:

- Instructional leadership versus management roles
- Informal versus formal preparation

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<sup>1</sup> The executive summary of *Tracking Transitions* can be found in Appendix A. A full copy of the report can be read online at <http://www.dasl.udel.edu/research-and-policy>. The executive summary of the supporting quantitative report can be found in Appendix B.

<sup>2</sup> See Appendix A for a full description of each of the six tensions.

- Change versus status quo
- Extrinsic versus intrinsic motivators
- Stability versus mobility
- Autonomy versus accountability

We therefore consider our findings in light of a RAND study (Augustine, et al., 2009) of cohesive leadership systems nationwide—that what makes a system *cohesive* is the *comprehensiveness and alignment of policies and initiatives coupled with the engagement, agreement, and cooperation of relevant stakeholders*. To that end, we focus our recommendations on how these dimensions of cohesion can be strengthened in support of leadership for Delaware’s public schools.

Further, we find that these tensions are woven throughout the various career stages of administrators, such that for a strategy to effectively improve supports for school leaders, it *must* address the continuum of administrator careers from early stages of leadership development (e.g. recruitment or preparation) through later stages (e.g. promotion, professional development) rather than targeting issues in piecemeal or disconnected ways. We therefore organize our recommendations along that continuum, moving from recruitment to development to support to retention.

### ***Recruitment***

The vast majority of respondents became school administrators because someone recommended they do so. The recommenders ranged from superintendents to fellow teachers, a husband, and even a custodian. The recommenders urged the respondents to formally prepare for the role and/or apply for or accept a school administrator position. A minority of respondents indicated that self-motivation led them into administration, whether they believed it was a natural outgrowth of their career as a teacher or a longstanding goal they had set for their career. Male respondents were notably more likely to cite self-motivation, while females were more likely to cite having been “tapped”.

These entry processes raise equity and change management questions for the school leadership profession. “Tapping” itself may be a powerful force for the status quo if those making the recommendation are likely to select candidates with similar skills or abilities. Further, the informal process of selection into the profession may not attend to issues of diversity and equity in gender and race. In light of perceived challenges finding quality candidates reported by state Human Resources Directors (Raffel & Alemayehu, 2010), we recommend the following as strategies for improving leadership recruitment in Delaware:

1. *Conduct formal assessments of current and future school leadership needs to enable states and districts to plan for recruitment.*

2. *Establish succession plans at the state, regional, or district level, which include talent identification as an explicit and purposeful component, as a means to a diverse and highly effective leadership cadre*<sup>3</sup>.

### **Development**

Our analysis focused on many aspects of leadership development, which include pre-service preparation, on-the-job learning experiences, and professional development. We found that these experiences can be, but are not always, meaningful to school leaders. We draw on both positive and negative experiences to develop recommendations for ensuring a comprehensive and aligned approach to leadership development.

### *Certification*

Administrators we spoke with had mixed feelings about their certification process, ranging from the sense of just jumping through hoops to having a meaningful experience that shaped their decision to become an administrator. Strengths of this process, as related in interviews, were courses taught or co-taught by practicing administrators, cohorts that include practicing administrators, and courses that utilize group and other active learning strategies. A challenge we found was the certification requirements' emphasis on instructional leadership, which we later observed to be a major disconnect with the actual work of administrators, who felt that management tasks dominated their daily agenda.

Many of our respondents described being unprepared for the challenges of school administration and described the "rude awakening" they faced on the job. They gave colorful examples of the unique challenges of the principalship, such as having to face screaming parents who denied their child's misbehavior, conflict with teachers manifested in an "us vs. them" mentality, and difficulties dealing with the emotional toll of a 24-7 job. Administrators also described political conflict. Specific challenges such as dealing with students who have a troubled home life, the 9-11 aftermath, and emotional situations among teachers such as dealing with divorce, the death of a spouse, or health complications were mentioned. These are not the kind of issues that are easy for university-based programs to address; however it would help students preparing for the principalship to understand they may face unique challenges like these. Moving forward, there is a need for pre-service (certification) preparation to be more clearly aligned to both the actual roles and responsibilities of administrators as well as what is demanded of them under accountability policy. This tension—between needing to be a manager and a change agent in improving teaching and learning—needs to be addressed concurrently in pre-service preparation, in the organization of administrators' work at the school level, and in support from the

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<sup>3</sup> *Leadership Succession* (Hargreaves, 2005) offers a general discussion of succession planning (<http://www.eric.ed.gov/PDFS/EJ683741.pdf>). The District Management Council has created an 8-step process to guide school districts through implementation of systemic succession planning which can be found at <http://www.dmcouncil.com/succession-planning>. Maryland's state-wide succession plan can be viewed at <http://www.eric.ed.gov/PDFS/ED505849.pdf>.

district office. Later recommendations focus on reconsidering the work of principals and assistant principals, and efforts to align pre-service preparation should be consistent with those changes.

As districts and/or the Delaware Department of Education consider the work of administrators, they are positioned to be consumers of pre-service preparation. Establishing more explicit partnerships with university-based or other programs to ensure quality and alignment is a critical component of improving leadership development. Such partnerships should explicitly establish goals for both course-based learning and on the job or clinical learning on site, as well as who or what part of the system will be responsible for the various aspects of leadership development.

Our respondents gave several specific recommendations for aligning pre-service preparation to the current demands on school leaders. These include better training in budgets and the state finance system, data use, politics of leadership (within schools and within the system), and managing instructional and management work.

In summary, we recommend the following to improve leadership development through certification programs:

3. *Align pre-service preparation, administrators' actual roles and responsibilities in practice, and the expectation and need for instructional leaders/change agents under accountability policy.*
4. *Establish formal partnerships between districts and preparation programs to ensure quality and alignment to needs<sup>4</sup>.*
5. *Address specific content areas in budgets/finance, data use, politics of leadership, and managing instructional and management work.*

#### *On the job learning*

Administrators valued on-the-job learning extensively, and we focus here primarily on two forms: the internship and the assistant principalship (AP). School leaders stated that hands-on experiences with the actual roles and responsibilities they would be asked to perform was among the most valuable experience, or the one that they wish they had had the most. At the time that our sample earned certification, internships were not generally required of certification programs. This has changed as a result of significant revisions to certification and accreditation processes. With regard to the assistant principalship, however, we observed great variability in the breadth, quality, and value of this opportunity in administrators' career development. In some cases, the AP role was so distinct from the principal's that some APs made a choice not to pursue the principalship in their career, while for others, their time as an AP was considered the best preparation for becoming a principal.

Our research suggests that, while nearly all advocated having an internship and/or serving as an assistant principal, simply having that experience does not guarantee its value. Specific

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<sup>4</sup> SREB (2007) offers a comprehensive list of actions that states can take to promote partnerships among universities and districts. Darling-Hammond et al. (2007) also write extensively about the value of university-district partnerships and Orr et al. (2010) discuss district development of leaders. All of these reports can be found online at [www.wallacefoundation.org](http://www.wallacefoundation.org) (direct links are in the bibliography).

recommendations for ensuring the quality of these opportunities as part of administrators' preparation and development include:

- Serving at multiple school levels
- Serving under multiple supervising/mentoring principals
- Rotating (if sharing AP role with others), while also ensuring depth of experience in each role, or having a sustained opportunity to experience the full range of responsibilities
- A residency or other opportunity to learn under the wings of a more seasoned school leader (note: this could be conceptualized as the AP or the internship)

Thus, we recommend the following as ways to more effectively develop leaders through on the job learning experiences:

6. *Develop intensive and structured on-the-job learning experiences that provide an opportunity for leaders to develop skills relevant to their current and future roles<sup>5</sup>.*
7. *Develop a more explicit and shared approach to the Assistant Principalship, which considers both the leadership pipeline as well as the role and value of career APs.*
8. *Prepare current principals to delegate and mentor their interns and/or APs and evaluate their ability to do so<sup>6</sup>.*

### **Support**

Once in formal leadership roles, the learning of school administrators is by no means done. Administrators we spoke with dealt with transitions in their roles, changes in expectations, movement across sites, and a number of other experiences for which they needed support to continue to be effective in their work. We examined the roles and responsibilities of school leaders alongside the important working conditions and relationships in which they operate, from which we develop several recommendations for the ongoing support of school leaders in Delaware.

### *Roles and Responsibilities*

School administrators' description of their work was categorized in four ways: instructional, managerial, political, and community-based roles and responsibilities. Few administrators indicated that they were prepared for some of these roles and experienced rude awakenings, particularly in regards to political and community roles. Principals also noted a disconnect between what they aspire and need to be

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<sup>5</sup> "There is no comparable substitute...for the learning that comes as a result of acting in the role of leader contending with the authentic situations and real-world consequences that can be garnered from a school-based field experience, practicum, or internship" (Gray, C. & Bishop, Q., 2009). For more information on programs that use these types of experiences see: *Preparing Principals for a Changing World: Lessons from Effective School Leadership Programs* (Darling-Hammond et al., 2010).

<sup>6</sup> SREB's report, *Good Principals Aren't Born—They're Mentored* offers survey data about the value of mentoring for principals. An online version of the report can be found at <http://www.wallacefoundation.org/SiteCollectionDocuments/WF/Knowledge%20Center/Attachments/PDF/GoodPrincipalsArentBornTheyreMentored.pdf>.

(change agents) and what they feel they are able to be. In part this was attributed to the overwhelming managerial requirements of the job, some of which were a result of continual additions to their workload (e.g. new programs, plans, required paperwork) without taking anything off the plate. As a result, some school administrators feel they are less able to be in classrooms serving as an instructional leader than ever before. This has implications not only for principals but for assistant principals. In some cases, APs become the manager, which deprives them of important opportunities to develop instructional leadership skills. In others, the APs benefit from serving as instructional leaders but no longer want to be a principal because they do not want to deal with the bureaucracy.

In response to the complexity of administrator roles and responsibilities, we recommended the following changes as steps toward creating a more coherent and manageable set of expectations for school leaders:

9. *Have representative stakeholders examine the current expectations of APs and principals and identify core job responsibilities centered around instructional leadership.*
10. *Develop and implement supports and/or structures that ensure school leaders are able to focus on those core responsibilities for instructional leadership.*<sup>7</sup>
11. *Coordinate recruitment, preparation, and on-the-job learning for existing (and any new) roles through previously mentioned strategies.*

#### *Working Conditions*

Administrators in our sample mentioned a variety of working conditions that influence their work and how they feel about their work. Our analysis of the data suggests that these conditions are grouped around characteristics of their school context, system-level issues, compensation, affective dimensions of the job, and administrator's personal lives.

District expectations and accountability pressures were one important aspect of administrators' working conditions. Administrators noted limited autonomy to make decisions due to political constraints, including their short contract and their responsibility to the superintendent and school board. Further, we observed a great deal of reassignment of principals and assistant principals without their participation in the decision process. This is both an indication of their vulnerability in the system and a factor in their ability to be effective in a position while not knowing for how long they will be there or where they will be next. In this respect, district support was a critical issue and our interviews suggested a great deal of variability. While some principals felt like districts were supportive and provided them with enough autonomy to make decisions, other administrators expressed concern,

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<sup>7</sup> One example is the SAM Model, which offers explicit supports to administrators seeking to increase the percentage of time they spend on teacher observation, evaluation, modeling instruction, and other instruction-related roles and responsibilities. For more information on the SAM project visit [www.samsconnect.com](http://www.samsconnect.com). Additional examples of successful delegation and the implementation of support structures can be found in *Distributed Leadership in Practice* (Spillane & Diamond, 2007).

mentioned earlier, about mounting policy requirements coupled with growing accountability for school leaders

Consequently, we recommend the following strategies to improve principal working conditions:

12. *Engage stakeholders across districts and levels of the organization in the careful examination of variation in working conditions within and between districts and the impact of district and state-level policy on principal working conditions.*
13. *Create a process for district administrators to learn from each other to support the cross-pollination of best practices and innovative approaches to improving working conditions for leaders<sup>8</sup>.*
14. *Generate safe opportunities for administrators—both principals and assistant principals—to have a voice in district and state decisions that affect their working conditions.*

### *Working Relationships*

When we asked school administrators how they coped with the challenges of the position, many mentioned formal or informal relationships with a mentor. Several school administrators mentioned that they wished they had a formal mentor, yet those who did experience a formal mentorship program shared mixed feelings; some felt that the program benefited their professional development, while others felt informal mentors were a better resource. We suggest that mentoring is a valuable working relationship but any program must be considerate of individual needs and mentor/mentee “fit”, and ensure mentors are able to dedicate sufficient time to supporting their mentee.

Administrators particularly valued their informal mentoring relationships, some of which were sustained over the course of a career. This complements another finding: administrators shared that their peer-administrator relationships across the district were a valuable source of both continued learning and coping with challenges. Together, these findings suggest that a meaningful way to support administrators, not only at the beginning but throughout their careers, is by creating structures that foster informal networks and relationships.

Additionally, school administrators’ relationships with district staff influenced their own sense of efficacy. Administrators in our sample described a full continuum of relationships, from highly supportive to completely absent. Our analysis does not compare specific districts; however, comments from leaders suggest that there is variation in support associated with district size, with smaller districts generally offering a more supportive environment. In developing a cohesive approach to school leadership in Delaware, it appears that engaging stakeholder across the district and levels of the system in the dialogue about and development of supports for administrators, as well as sharing best practices across districts, would be helpful in improving the level of support for administrators statewide.

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<sup>8</sup> Many districts already encourage and facilitate teachers visiting each others’ classrooms and principals visiting each others’ schools. One way of achieving this recommendation is to scale these opportunities to central office administrators as well.

In summary, we recommend the following strategies to improve and facilitate strong working relationships for administrators:

15. *Create structures that facilitate the development of informal networks and relationships for administrators.*
16. *Engage central office staff, superintendents, and school boards in dialogue about and development of supports for administrators<sup>9</sup>.*
17. *Study the variability of transition across district and consider the working conditions that are most conducive to stability. This work could be conducted or contracted by DDOE and shared with district superintendents.*

### **Retention**

Retaining quality leaders in our nation's schools matters for student success, and there are negative implications of a high level of instability in the field of school administration (Education Research Service, 2000). When asked, "How long do you believe it takes for a principal to be truly effective in his/her job?" most principals indicated they needed at least three years. Yet only 21% of 2003 administrators stayed in the same role and location in a five year period, and of the 178 schools in Delaware in 2003, only 15 had no change in principal or assistant principal in that period.

While this research was not intended to determine the qualities of effective leadership, it *can* be utilized to assist DDOE and districts in identifying the incentives that will help retain effective leaders. Our research findings demonstrate that the incentives to enter and stay in the profession appear to be *intrinsic*. Principals largely focused on the support they received from districts, the working relationships they developed, and, most importantly, the kids they felt dedicated to serving. There was also some discussion of extrinsic motivators: although most of our sample did not consider salary as a motivating factor in their decision to enter, stay, or change, or leave the profession, administrators did acknowledge that their salary relative to teachers was not significantly different, given the change in hours and responsibility. However, quantitative findings found that higher salaried principals were more likely to be retained (and therefore less likely to move within or out of the profession) which suggests that while compensation may not attract administrators into particular roles, it may be an incentive to stay. Additionally, as administrators become eligible for retirement, the current pension structure—fully available after 30 years and with most schools administrators beginning their education careers in their early 20s—may not work in favor of retention, particularly when other opportunities in the field of education are available.

When comparing retention quantitatively at the school level, we found that retention is lower in more challenging schools and at lower salary scales. This suggests that there are contexts and career transitions in which extrinsic rewards may play a role. As districts and the state begin to think about

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<sup>9</sup> Currently, there are several state-wide PD opportunities for school leaders. Cohort based trainings such as those offered by DASL and Vision 2015 give administrators an opportunity to build informal supports, as well as professional organizations such as the Principal's Academy and the Delaware Association of School Administrators (DASA). District level meetings of all administrators may also provide opportunities for principals to network and engage district staff in conversations about their support-needs.

ways to incentivize quality leaders to stay in the profession, consideration of what motivates principals, in comparison to the incentives currently being offered, would be a wise place to start. Our findings highlight two specific demographics for future retention efforts: principals in challenging school contexts (where turnover is more prevalent) and principals eligible for retirement.

Aside from incentivizing retention, our research suggests a second approach to retaining quality leaders. When many administrators changed schools or roles, it did not reflect a choice driven by intrinsic or extrinsic motivators but rather the prerogative of the superintendent or school board. While we lack background knowledge on what precipitated these moves, these moves contribute to what is a substantial degree of turnover during the five years observed in this study. Consider this alongside the nearly universal claim by both assistant principals and principals in our sample that they need several years to be effective in their position. If retention—in some cases and for some period of time—is needed to implement and sustain improvement efforts, then reassignment practices in districts should take into account the impact on both schools and administrators and ensure administrators have sufficient time to affect the changes schools need.

In summary, we recommend the following strategies as they relate to principal retention:

18. *Develop a set of incentives consistent with what motivates administrators, with particular attention to challenging school contexts<sup>10</sup> and principals eligible (or nearing eligibility) for retirement.*
19. *Examine reassignment practices system-wide to develop and make explicit practices that ensure sufficient time for administrators to implement and sustain improvement efforts<sup>11</sup>.*

## **Conclusions**

The complexity of our research findings cautions against the adoption of a single program or policy. Instead, it affirms the need for a *cohesive leadership system* that considers the six tensions described above and engages teachers, administrators, central office staff, superintendents, school boards, the Department of Education and policy makers in the development of that system. It also affirms the need for a *comprehensive* approach to investing in leadership, focusing not on narrow areas for improvement, such as preparation or retention, but rather on the larger career path of administrators in order to address needs at each point in the career continuum: recruitment, development, support, and retention. In the last decade, Delaware has made significant improvements as a result of statewide engagement with issues of school leadership. The state has approved preparation programs, adopted the nationally developed and recognized International School Leadership Licensure Consortium (ISLLC)

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<sup>10</sup> One example is legislation from Georgia which offers a grant to move high performing principals into schools in need of improvement ([http://www1.legis.ga.gov/legis/2005\\_06/pdf/sb468.pdf](http://www1.legis.ga.gov/legis/2005_06/pdf/sb468.pdf)). However, little work has been done to understand and improve incentives for administrators. A great deal of work has been done to recruit and retain *teachers* in high needs schools. For a discussion of these strategies, see [http://www.teachingquality.org/pdfs/Nat\\_Strategy\\_Forum.pdf](http://www.teachingquality.org/pdfs/Nat_Strategy_Forum.pdf).

<sup>11</sup> *Basing Principal Rotation on System Needs* (Hagerty, 1998) offers a superintendent's perspective on why the viewpoint regarding principal reassignment should be "less rather than more, and later rather than sooner".

standards, and continues to develop statewide supports for leaders. Additionally, some districts have made great strides in creating strong succession and development plans, mentoring programs, and retention incentives. This progress should be celebrated, but our research suggests a need to sustain and scale up these efforts for all leaders and all schools. There remains a need to share these practices, improve existing efforts, and develop new strategies that support a cohesive and comprehensive leadership system. Drawing on our research, we argue these recommendations, with the cooperation and engagement of all relevant stakeholders, will have a state-wide impact on principal recruitment, development, support, and retention. In order to improve the quality and effectiveness of our school leaders it is critical that partnerships between higher education institutions, districts, and the state continue to be developed and nurtured.

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## **Appendix A- Executive Summary of *Tracking Transitions: An Analysis of Principal Career Paths in Delaware***

“Researchers, policy makers, and educational practitioners agree: good school principals are the keystone of good schools. Without the principal’s leadership, efforts to raise student achievement cannot succeed” – *Educational Research Service*

Without question, school leadership plays an important role in student success. Recruiting, training, and retaining quality leaders are vital to the efforts of national, state, and local reform movements. Consequently, there is a need for research that enables us to understand who our school-level administrators are, the transitions they make within and out of school administration, and the roles and responsibilities leaders have in our nation’s schools.

While there has been substantial research done to examine the labor market trends in school administration, there has been considerably less research done to explain why principals are making the decision to stay, move within, or leave the profession. Therefore, we view an analysis of principal career paths in Delaware using a mixed-methods approach as a meaningful contribution to existing research on the career paths of principals.

### *Method*

Our research focuses on the trends in principal career paths in the state of Delaware between 2003 and 2008. Though our purpose is predominantly qualitative, we utilize both quantitative and qualitative methods in this study. Initial quantitative data were collected from administrative records to identify the population of administrators in SY 2003-2004 and linked to their status in the Delaware education system in SY 2008-2009. Qualitative data in the form of interviews were collected for a sample of this cohort between November 2009 and March 2010, resulting in a total of 48 interviews. The interview protocol focused on pre-service experiences that led to positions in school administration, their position and experiences in SY 2003-2004, their position and experiences in SY 2008-2009, factors related to the decision to change positions, and general beliefs about the work of school administrators.

Our analysis of the data focused on identifying overall patterns in personal and professional experiences, working conditions, and working relationships that help explain career transitions of school administrators. Next, we examined these patterns and synthesized them into several key themes that permit a deeper understanding the nature of school leadership careers.

### *Major findings*

1. School administrators changed levels, positions, schools, and districts in a complex array of patterns. The implicit, linear model that our research team held, which was based on anecdotal and casual conversations with school administrators, was not found in the analysis of our data.
2. School administrators were far more likely to view their formal preparation as lacking management training than instructional leadership. While a few were inspired by academics, most

cited experiential learning with seasoned administrators in classes, internships, or AP positions as their most valuable learning experiences.

3. The vast majority of school administrators were asked, recommended, or even cajoled to become administrators, i.e., they were “tapped.” Few, mostly men, saw the position as a natural progression and were self-motivated solely to “advance.”

4. Most respondents expected long hours and many demands, but many noted they already worked long hours and sought difficult challenges. What was a surprise? They experienced reality shock of personal conflict with teachers and parents. School administrators noted that, when they transitioned from a long-time teacher in a school to an administrator, their friends suddenly became “we” to their new status now viewed as “they.” Many described conflicts with angry or even screaming parents who could not accept that their child could have misbehaved. *New administrators were not prepared for the emotional or affective component of being a school administrator.* This reality shock, at times, had an impact on principal career paths.

5. Many administrators did not make decisions as they changed positions or schools; they were reassigned by those above them in the hierarchy-- sometimes winners and sometimes losers in what must have seemed like a game of musical chairs.

6. Economic incentives and accountability measures were less significant in a principal’s decision to stay in a position than interaction with students. Some respondents reported making calculations about salary per hour but almost all, when asked what they liked most about their positions, stated, simply, “The kids.” They did not generally focus on raising test scores but their interaction with individual students, much like the teachers they were.

7. While working conditions were important to them, respondents were even more focused on working relationships and peer support. The range of district support varied widely, and respondents found themselves relying on various networks of those facing similar issues as well as a variety of personal coping mechanisms including exercise, prayer, and family support.

8. While several had retired, very few were, in the words of one respondent, “retired and done.” Many worked for a university in some capacity, albeit part-time. When asked what they planned on doing in five years, those contemplating retirement looked to higher education as a positive place to land. While we did find one retiree who was playing golf in Florida, we found none in another field and only one respondent even considering that in the future.

#### *Dealing with the dilemmas of school administration in Delaware*

The implicit model with which we began was far too rational and much too based on a calculating decision-making model and a linear progression in the field. It was also far too analytical rather than affect-based. Many school administrators have not made rational, calculated decisions about their careers. Indeed for some, school administration was chosen for them, and positions were assigned. Their formal preparation was often adequate, if not always appreciated, for handling educational issues

but not helpful in confronting the emotional aspects or the specific situations that arise in a school administration position. They are first and foremost teachers at heart, caring about the kids, not rational, calculating workers.

The findings herein lead us to see a number of dilemmas or tensions that those hoping to improve school administration and leadership will have to carefully balance in the reforms they implement.

(1) Instructional Leadership versus Management Roles: Most administrators accepted the instructional leadership role but generally viewed this as aspirational rather than fully achievable in the reality of their positions. Most significantly, they criticized their formal preparation far more for lack of attention to management preparation rather than instructional leadership. Our analysis leads us to question whether the school principalship as currently structured will be able to provide enough time and leeway for principals to serve in the instructional leadership role. In addition we question whether the assistant principal position provides adequate preparation for the role of principal, since many APs have not been assigned responsibilities or provided with experience outside of management and discipline.

(2) Informal versus Formal Preparation: The respondents clearly preferred informal preparation, or at least that based on experience as administrators through internships, serving as an AP, or other school-based experiences, to their formal preparation. It was disheartening for a university-based research team to hear that so many school administrators have a difficult time remembering what they learned in their academic preparation or not thinking it was helpful to them. Of course, for most, their formal preparation was not a recent memory, and university preparation programs have been redesigned in recent years. But the role of academic preparation and the balance between formal and informal preparation is certainly an issue here. Indeed, broadening this point would lead one to reconsider professional development efforts as well as implications for how on-the-job or clinical learning experiences are structured.

(3) Change versus Status Quo: Forces identified in this report work against change. To the extent school administrators view on-the-job training as much more significant than formal education, the status quo may be reinforced. Change comes from the instructional leadership domain, but, according to our respondents, most learning is on the job and focused on management. Our analysis of school administrators' roles and responsibilities also suggests that the emphasis on management dominates the school administrator's time, leaving little room for changing practice (for leaders or teachers). Finally, while most of the respondents believed it takes a principal three to five years to be effective, few spend the time needed. How do we expect principals to change schools before they are fully effective?

(4) Extrinsic versus Intrinsic Motivation: Certainly those who left school administration while remaining in the field of education may have been encouraged, or perhaps "enabled" is a better word, to do so because of the nature of the state's retirement plan. Eligibility for a full pension after 30 years allows people to retire from school administration at an age where in other fields leadership responsibilities may be peaking. But respondents made clear that interaction with the kids as well as teachers and parents and support from the school district (or lack thereof) played a large role in their decisions to

move or stay. We cannot ignore intrinsic motivation in considering policy recommendations for principal development and school change.

(5) Stability versus Mobility: Fuller and Young have pointed out the benefits of stability in school leadership. Indeed our respondents indicate it takes 3-5 years for a principal to learn the position. We found, however, that only one-fifth (76) of the 372 schools administrators in our 2003 sampling frame were in the same position in the same school five years later. The forces of mobility seem to outweigh the forces for stability in the administrator's position. As indicated above, much of the instability is not based on the decisions of school administrators but of those above them in the school hierarchy—the superintendent and/or the school board—and this shuffling may have negative impacts. Certainly one can understand the pressure to move or remove a school administrator not succeeding at a particular school. But the churning means that few school administrators stay in a school long enough to learn their position or lead change.

(6) Autonomy versus Accountability: Principals need the flexibility and resources to respond to school-based needs and meet the multiple demands of their various stakeholders including their teachers, students, parents, and local community. The federal government, state, and district set expectations for schools and principals that also must be addressed. For example, several school administrators discussed the amount of time it took them to complete reports required by units above them, thus taking time away from instructional leadership. As noted above, one principal summed up this conflict succinctly, "A lot of it is expected of you, but your true authority to implement change is really curtailed by a lot of other expectations or guidelines or mandates."

## **Appendix B: Executive Summary of *Principal Retention in the State of Delaware, 2001-2008***

This report presents an initial evaluation of the retention and turnover of Principals and Assistant Principals who supervise and manage educational instruction in the primary and secondary public schools of the state of Delaware. The evaluation was funded in 2010 by The Wallace Foundation and sponsored by the Delaware Academy of School Leadership (DASL) of the University of Delaware. The evaluation has been conducted in 2010 by the Health Services Policy Research Group (HSPRG) of the Center for Community Research and Service (CCRS) of the University of Delaware.

The following presents a summary of our findings:

- Over the past decade, as reported in various media, some public officials and educational administrators have voiced anxiety over the retention and turnover of Principals within the public school system in the United States. However, a review of the literature reveals that there has been no empirical study that verifies whether turnover is a mechanism which facilitates or hinders the promotion and retention of Principals with the highest qualifications. Moreover, there are no academic studies that document whether the level of turnover and retention is associated with Principal performance as well as student achievement within schools.
- The discussion of different possible moves available to Principals and Assistant Principals has revealed a high degree of complexity in the array of moves that could be made by individuals in their careers as school leaders, including role and place changes occurring both within and outside of the Delaware education system. In what is defined as a short-term perspective, multiple cohorts of either Principals or Assistant Principals who entered the public school system at different time periods are measured jointly for their retention and/or turnover behavior during the same particular time period, most commonly in a year. This perspective entails a static viewpoint or orientation in which retention and turnover are depicted at a particular point in time, e.g., annually. A long-term perspective focuses on separate groups of individuals who become Principals and/or Assistant Principals by determining their retention at jobs or moving among jobs over their tenure in the school system. This perspective encompasses a more dynamic view of retention and turnover that is concerned with the churning of positions by Principals and Assistant Principals as represented by their career path movements.
- A review of the literature found six published articles/reports on Principal retention and turnover. Many of these studies have either methodological, research design, and/or statistical and data limitations or weaknesses. None of the reviewed studies makes a clear distinction that retention and turnover can be viewed from two perspectives; in fact several studies provide a limited data profile based on one perspective and then conduct statistical modeling of data that measures the second perspective.
- The profile of the Delaware administrator workforce, -- (inclusive of Principals' and Assistant Principals' moves, and moves to and from central administrative offices), -- indicates stability in the gender, race, and state (of Delaware) origins of those leading our schools over time and across geographic locations. At the same time, there appears to be variation in the distribution

of gender across school level and some significant change over time in the age and experience levels of administrators. High schools have a larger proportion of male administrators while females are more prevalent as administrators in elementary schools. Over time, the average age and average years of teaching experience has declined for Delaware administrators.

- From a static view, the stability of administration within districts is very striking. Between 80% and 94% of Principals are retained in that role, though not necessarily the same school, between any two years. Of those remaining in their district, most continue in their same school, followed by between 2% and 10% of the total administrative population who move to another school.
- When examining cohorts of new Principals as they move through their careers (the dynamic or longitudinal approach), the picture is one of much greater mobility, with only a third remaining in their initial school after 5 years and nearly 43% no longer continuing as a Principal (i.e., retired, left (non-retirees, central office, returned to teaching). For Assistant Principals, a greater proportion move between districts and positions with fewer leaving the system.
- Statistical analyses were conducted to confirm the determinants (or bases) of tenure and retention behavior of *new* Principals. This analyses entailed the estimation of both tenure and retention equations. Two tenure equations were derived (tenure defined as length at a position and tenure defined as length of time as a Principal) using the Mincer human capital model from labor economics. Six retention equations were calculated using the complementary log-log model. Independent variables included individual characteristics (such as age, gender, administrative experience), school characteristics (such as percent of students suspended, level of school), and district characteristics (such as expenditure per pupil and number of schools within the district).
- Few statistically significant variables were verified as common determinants in the tenure and the retention equations. The demographic characteristics – age, gender, and race – have some effects on administrators’ behavior but they are strongest in predicting retirement. On the other hand, Principals’ professional characteristics appear to have a more substantial effect on their careers: administrative experience and number of prior moves as a Principal are significant in all models, salary is significant in four, and teaching experiences is significant in two. Differences between elementary, middle, and high schools weren’t evident, and geographic differences by county only affected retirement. However, in terms of movement between schools, across districts, to the central office and out of the Delaware system, it appears that more challenging school conditions increased the likelihood of turnover. Finally, across models, few district characteristics appear significant. The most notable is district expenditures per pupil, which was found to be positively associated with tenure in position, tenure as Principal, and movement to the central office.