

# Tomorrow's School Leaders: What Do We Know about Them?

A Case Study

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*Abstract: Large numbers of projected retirements have created the need for recruiting and preparing capable school leaders for the future. This study explored the characteristics of candidates in an administration preparation program, factors for their career decisions, and the implications of these factors for recruiting candidates and building stronger preparation programs.*

## Background

In the years ahead, the nation and State will witness a massive change in educational leadership due to the large number of projected retirements among educational administrators (Peterson & Kelley, 2001). This shift in leadership poses significant implications for those institutions that prepare school administrators. The development of new school leadership, including recruiting and preparing capable leaders, promises to remain a critical priority for the years to come.

Educators committed to the long-term survival of public schools know that the leadership of the schools of tomorrow will be entrusted to

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the generation of school leaders now preparing for that challenge. A 2003 study by the Mid-Continent Research for Education and Learning (McRel) group examined the issue of effective school leadership by analyzing significant studies of school leadership completed in recent years. The conclusion of the McRel study was that competent leadership does indeed contribute to improved performance for schools (Waters, Marzano, & McNulty, 2003). It seems, therefore, logical to also conclude that the development of competent leadership is a critical self-renewal function for public schools. It has long been argued that the quality of public schools is largely dependent on the quality of its leaders (Fullan, 2003; Heck & Hallinger, 1999). In a recent review of the literature, Heck and Hallinger (1999) concluded "principal leadership does have indirect effects on student outcomes via a variety of in-school processes" (p.141). It seems critical that those responsible for preparing the next generation of school leaders need to develop and maintain high quality leadership preparation programs that address both the needs of schools and the needs of candidates who are in the programs.

In spite of substantial evidence that the leader of the school is critical to the progress the school makes, the *No Child Left Behind Act* (U.S. Department of Education, 2002) aggressively speaks to the importance of a highly qualified teacher in every classroom, yet largely ignores requirements about school principals. Some districts and states are developing more proactive, purposeful, recruiting methods for prospective principals that look for specific leadership qualities. Such districts often actively recruit among their employees, and then ask individuals to enter a training program where a specific set of competencies is taught (Russo, 2004). It would seem apparent that the recruitment of capable new leaders is becoming a critical issue in school improvement.

Efforts to attract appropriate, high quality candidates to school leadership training must be strategically undertaken. Who are the future leaders now preparing to be the next generation of educational leaders? What motivated them to undertake this preparation? What can be learned from an analysis of candidates entering an administrative credential preparation program? This study presents an analysis of data from two years of candidates entering the administrative credential program at a public university in California. This paper focuses on the results of that study, as well as includes a discussion about implications from this study for recruiting new leaders.

The careers of educators generally reflect certain stages and developmental needs (Lindstrom & Speck, 2004). The key career stage for developing school leaders appears to be in the *striving years*. Table 1 shows the career stages for most teachers.

Table 1  
Career Stages and Developmental Needs of Teachers

Career Stage	Developmental Needs
Formative years (1-2 years)	Learning day-to-day operations of classroom and school
Building years (3-5 years)	Developing confidence in work and multifaceted role of teaching
Striving years (5-8+ years)	Developing professionally and achieving high job satisfaction
Other issues	
· Crisis periods	Teacher burnout and need for renewal
· Complacency	Complacency sets in and innovation is low
· Career wind-down	High status as a teacher without exerting much effort
· Career end	Retirement

Source: Lindstrom & Speck. *The Principal as Professional Development Leader*, p.44, copyright © 2004 by Corwin Press. Reprinted with permission of Corwin Press, Inc.

The induction period for beginning teachers is generally one to three years (Feiman-Nemser, 2000). During that time, teachers determine whether they will remain an educator or move to a different career. During the striving years, teachers become more confident and many consider moving into leadership roles.

## Methodology

### *Population and Sample*

The population for this study was approximately 500 candidates enrolled in the university's Educational Leadership Program in 2002 and 2003. The survey sample for this study was 109 candidates. The average candidate entering the educational leadership program in this study has taught for 8.8 years, with a mode and median both 6.5 years.

### *Research Questions*

Several questions emerged as points of inquiry for this study. Who were the candidates entering preparation programs for educational leadership at this university? How well did these candidates reflect the diversity of the teaching population they may be chosen to lead? What motivated these candidates to begin preparation for educational administration roles? Who encouraged the candidates to enter the educational

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leadership program? What factors influenced their entry into the educational leadership program?

### *Instrumentation*

The instrument used in this study was a survey developed by the researchers. The survey consisted of eight questions that asked about current job information as well as information on the number of years candidates had worked in California education and other types of work. The demographic variable information was collected as a way to profile the candidates who participated in this study. The instrument also collected narrative responses to questions regarding who encouraged candidates to enter the administrative credential program and what influenced the candidates' decision to enter the program.

### *Data Collection and Analysis*

Surveys were administered to two cohorts of candidates entering the administrative credential program in 2002 and 2003 ( $n=109$ ). Cohort I was comprised of thirty-nine ( $n=39$ ) candidates beginning preparation in 2002. Cohort II was comprised of seventy ( $n=70$ ) candidates beginning preparation in 2003.

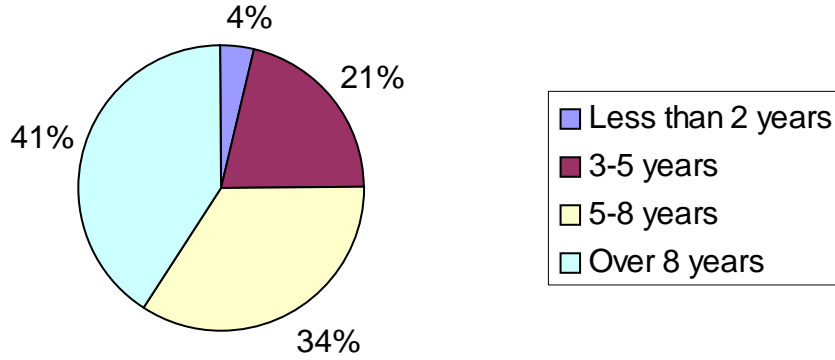
The demographic factor information on the survey, which included number of years in teaching and number of years in education, was analyzed and compared to demographic data for the region based on information from the California Department of Education website. Quantitative analyses were used to examine some of the responses on the survey and were coded and summarized in tables. The findings from these data are described below by research question.

## Results

### *Who were the candidates entering preparation programs for educational leadership at this university?*

As noted in Figure 1, most of the participants in this study were teachers in their *striving years*. Further, most of the participants in this study (41%) had over eight years experience teaching in California, while another 34% had between 5-8 years of teaching experience. Twenty-one percent of the participants in this study had between 3-5 years of experience as teachers. Finally, four percent (4%) of the participants had less than two years experience as teachers. Figure 1 displays demographic data for participants in this study.

Figure 1: Years as California Educator



*How well do these candidates reflect the diversity of the teaching population they may be chosen to lead?*

As noted in Table 2, the candidates in this study closely reflected the ethnicity of the teaching population in the area, except for the White and Asian American groups. Nearly thirty-three percent of the area teachers were White as compared to 49.7% of the candidates entering the leadership preparation program being White. Asian Americans represented 22.8% of the teaching population in the area, while 5.5% of the candidates in the educational leadership program were Asian Americans.

Table 2 also displays a comparison of the demographic profile for candidates in the educational leadership program by gender for the classes of 2002 and 2003 compared to teachers in the region's public schools. A larger percent of females (80%) entered administrator preparation programs compared to the male population (20%). Additionally,

Table 2  
Ethnicity and Gender of Teachers in Region Served by the University in 2002, and Entering Candidates, 2002 and 2003

	Total	Female	Male	African American	White	Asian American	Filipino	Latino	Native American
Area Teachers	16,889	73%	27%	3.5%	32.9%	22.8%	5.2%	33.5%	.7%
University Candidates 2002 & 03	109	80%	20%	3.6%	49.7%	5.5%	11%	30.2%	.009%

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males entered the program to a lesser degree (10%) than they entered into teaching (27%).

*What motivated these candidates to begin preparation for educational administration roles?*

Survey responses indicated that, while motivations for undertaking preparation leading to an administrative credential varied by individual student, some candidates cited the poor quality of the educational leadership with which they worked as a significant factor in their decision. Many candidates came to this program as a result of encouragement received from an administrator or colleague whom they respected. Other candidates simply wanted to learn more about educational leadership, while others wanted to lead adults in important work.

*Who encouraged the candidates to enter the educational leadership program?*

Table 3 shows the grouped responses regarding the person who encouraged the candidate to enter the leadership preparation program. Responses such as director, assistant superintendent, principal, and former principal were grouped as a *school-related person*. The *self* category contained responses that referred to the individual such as myself, me, and self-encouraged. The *family or friend* category included responses about spouses, parents, and personal friends. *Immediate work colleagues* refers to other teachers and co-workers, such as principals or superintendents. Specific references to higher education individuals, such as the college professor or college dean, were grouped as *higher education person*.

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Table 3  
Person Who Influenced Candidate's Entry  
into Educational Leadership Program

Motivation Factor	#Responses	%
School-related Person	51	39.5
Self	28	21.7
Family or Friend	23	17.8
Immediate Work Colleagues	21	16.2
Higher Ed Person	6	4.6

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Note: Some candidates listed multiple encouragers. Six surveys had an incomplete response, a response unrelated to the question, or the item was left blank.

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These findings suggest that there are many motivational factors that influence a teacher's decision to enter an educational leadership program. Of the more frequently mentioned people who influenced entry into the program, over 55% were colleagues and other school-related individuals such as a teacher, superintendent or principal.

*What are the factors that influenced entry into the educational leadership program?*

Data about the factors that influenced entry into the program were coded for the areas of value, position, encouragement, and discouragement. Typical responses grouped into the category of *value* were "I was ready to take on new challenges" and "I feel I can make a difference." Many candidates either were required to have a credential for their current positions or expected to acquire an administrative position rather quickly.

Responses related to job requirements for a credential were grouped in the category of *position*. Responses such as "other leaders who acknowledged my potential and leadership skills" and "my supervisor's encouragement" were grouped into the category of *encouragement*. The final category, *discouragement*, included comments that referred to current conditions such as "frustration with leadership at some schools" and "dissatisfaction with administrators." Table 4 shows the factors that influenced participants in this study to enter the educational leadership program.

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Table 4  
Factors that Influenced Candidate Entry  
into the Educational Leadership Program

Factors	N	%
Value	56	49
Position	29	25
Encouragement	19	16
Discouragement	12	10

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Note: Some candidates listed multiple factors

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These data suggest that most of the candidates (56) entered the educational leadership program because they felt they could make a difference in schools. The second highest influence was the requirement of a position for the administrative credential (25%). Less than 20% of the survey respondents commented on encouragement and 10% reported discouragement as major factors in their entry into the program.

Discussion

The results of this study suggest that efforts to recruit leadership preparation program candidates must be monitored to insure that tomorrow's school leaders will reflect the demographic composition of the teaching staffs they will lead. The data seem to indicate that at this university there was a close relationship between program candidates' ethnicity and area teachers ethnicity, but the data also indicate there is more work to be done in this area. A notable effect of district and State efforts to actively recruit successful teachers who have worked with other teachers was that they generated a more diverse group of candidates than was typical (Russo, 2004).

Candidates entering educational leadership preparation at this university were influenced in their decision to undertake this study by a variety of factors, most significantly by other school professionals. The data from this survey suggest that some candidates find their own way to university leadership training programs, essentially self-selecting. When self-selection is the case, the motivation expressed for undertaking training is often frustration with the school or district leadership coupled with a strong feeling that the candidate might be able to lead as well or better than the leadership they see. The data also suggest that being encouraged to enter leadership training by colleagues and supervisors is a strong motivator for those who enter this leadership preparation program.

These findings also point out that most of the candidates in the educational leadership program at this university are teachers in their *striving years* who are seeking to learn more about leadership, but may never become administrators. However, some of the candidates surveyed were in the program because their position required an administrative credential. These candidates, who are in administrative intern positions, may not be fully qualified to lead schools but have been placed in these positions because of their leadership potential, or because of the needs of their school or district. If a shortage of qualified school leaders intensifies as many predict, preparation of administrative interns, who are trying to learn the job while doing it, may develop as an even more important factor for administrative training programs. The demands of these candidates should be closely monitored since their needs for support in areas, such as fieldwork, may differ from the needs of the traditional non-intern candidate.

Many leadership preparation program candidates determine on their own, without apparent external influence, that they wish to undertake educational leadership study. This *passive* system, which allows teachers



and others who are interested in administration to select themselves for leadership preparation (Russo, 2004) is not likely to adequately serve the needs of school districts seeking specific qualities in their school leaders. Rather, to assure that capable candidates for school leadership are being prepared, universities need to partner closely with local schools and districts to plan and coordinate recruitment efforts that will attract a strong, diverse pool of candidates while delivering training that addresses the current and future needs of districts.

Fifteen states have begun to offer *alternative routes* to administrator licensure (Feistritzer, 2003). Whether or not these alternative routes to administrative licensure prepare more effective leaders, remains to be seen. It does seem clear, however, that institutions of higher learning must monitor the recruitment and progress of candidates toward leadership competence carefully, partnering with districts to be selective in identifying candidates; counsel out of programs those candidates who are of limited potential or who may need to pursue other areas of advanced study; and focus efforts on providing strong leadership training so that the next generation of school administrators can effectively lead school improvement efforts that will improve school performance.

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