

The Institute for
Education Leadership

A DETAILED REVIEW OF THE RESEARCH

*on Leadership and
Student Achievement*

A Support Document for the Leadership Self-Review Tool



Ministry of
Education

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This report looks at recent educational research and educational publications related to the role of senior administrators. The purpose of the research was to examine the role that districts, boards, and senior administrators play in the area of student achievement. The review focuses on the following research questions:

What is the current thinking regarding the role of senior administrators/school boards?

What does the research say about effective school boards and senior administrators?

What approaches/models are particularly effective and have been shown to be successful in supporting student achievement?

What are the key issues that senior administrators contend with – for example, workload issues, lack of supports to function in an administrative leadership capacity?

What kinds of professional development and performance management systems have been found to be successful?

What kinds of qualification systems are in place?

Are there issues related to recruiting qualified individuals to positions of senior administration? What is the nature of the issues? What kinds of succession planning strategies are in place or need to be developed?

What accountability systems are effective in aligning boards, senior administrators, and schools with improvements in student achievement?

A new view of effective schools is emerging in the research. Rather than just targeting what individual principals do in schools to be effective, the focus is shifting to what districts must do and what whole

systems must do to support student achievement.

District vision and accountability focused on student achievement coupled with good relationships between boards of education and senior administrators are cited as critical to success. Leadership must be shared across a wide spectrum of stakeholders and system-wide capacity must be addressed to get sustainable results. The role of the superintendent is crucial to making this work.

Performance standards are needed to define the role of senior administrators before effective performance appraisals can be designed and implemented; these standards would also help to define pathways to improvement. Ontario leads the sector in its requirement for supervisory officer certification for its prospective candidates for the superintendency, but lags behind some jurisdictions in not having a structural framework of standards, performance indicators, and appraisal systems to maintain a high level of quality in senior management.

Superintendents and board members need training and support to measure up to the requirements of the role. While a variety of supports exist, there tends not to be a comprehensive and cohesive plan to provide them in most districts. Recruitment and succession planning strategies for superintendents are routinely ignored, and districts rely on informal, passive methods to find leaders for their districts. Given the emerging importance of district leaders in supporting student achievement, attention should be given to each of these factors to ensure the highest quality of leadership at the top.

IMPACT OF DISTRICT ACTIONS ON STUDENT ACHIEVEMENT

I used to believe that the school was the primary unit of educational change, and the literature repeatedly insists that it is. However, I'm now persuaded that we can't save education one school at a time. Excellent schools in poor districts implode over time, whereas poor schools in excellent districts get better. (Lambert, 2003, p. 80)

If reform activities are undertaken ... one school at a time, it will be a long time before student achievement reaches "world class standards" in all of the more than 14,000 districts in [the United States]. (Cawelti and Protheroe, 2003, p. 4)

Linda Lambert is professor emeritus at California State University, Hayward. She has worked with thousands of principals, teachers, and district personnel in the United States, Canada, Mexico, Australia, and Thailand, and has written extensively about leadership in schools. In her book *Leadership Capacity for Lasting Improvement* (2003), in a chapter devoted to district leadership, she presents the "District Leadership Capacity Matrix", which describes districts in four quadrants, with each quadrant having a different combination of participation and skill. At the highest level of participation and skill, the Quadrant 4 district will exhibit student achievement and development to be high or steadily improving regardless of student ethnicity, gender, or socio-economic status. Lambert

argues that this situation will occur in a district that has achieved broad, skilful participation in leadership work at all levels, widely distributed among stakeholders. The district will also have a shared vision and an inquiry-based accountability system in practice at all levels. She describes the "dual nature of district leadership", in which the district must create high leadership capacity itself, while simultaneously supporting leadership capacity in its schools (p. 84). Although schools are no less important to the leadership equation, districts are critical to schools' success.

A review of the literature on the impact of district actions on student improvement indicates that there are two areas of influence that are commonly studied: one is the role of school boards and the other is the role of senior administration. School boards are made up of the elected officials who are entrusted by the voters in their communities to oversee the education of children in the publicly funded schools. Senior administration includes a senior administrative officer – in Ontario, referred to as the Director of Education – along with other superintendents or assistant superintendents who have a variety of portfolios, to support the work of the district. While these two groups are interconnected, some of the literature tends to examine their roles separately. This paper looks at the impact of boards and senior administrators separately,

following the trend of the literature, but also makes connections between boards and their senior administrators where necessary to understand their combined impact on student achievement.

School Boards and Student Achievement

Deborah Land at Johns Hopkins University conducted an extensive review of the literature on the role and effectiveness of school boards in relation to student achievement over the past 20 years. She presents what school board experts believe to be the characteristics of effective school boards. Effective school boards have appropriate overarching focuses, good relations, effective performance, and adequate evaluation and training.

Appropriate Overarching Focuses

Land's research confirms that boards should concentrate on student academic achievement and policy making, not on administration. In the past, boards have traditionally focused on financial, legal, and constituent issues, and have left responsibility for student achievement to administrators (Resnick, as cited in Land, 2002, p. 23). While there is a convergence of opinion from a variety of sources, according to Land, on the need to concentrate on student academic achievement, limited research exists to provide guidance to boards as to what this focus looks like. Generally, the experts advise that boards achieve it by establishing a vision for educational excellence, advocating for the vision inside and outside the school system, providing the resources and structure necessary to achieve the vision, and holding programs and people accountable for success (Bracy and Resnick, 1998; Goodman et al., 1997; Speer, 1998; as cited in Land, 2002, p. 24).

The California School Board Association (CSBA) engaged in a two-year project to formulate statements about the leadership role for boards of education, particularly in the establishment of a long-term vision:

Of all the roles and responsibilities of school boards, none is more central to the purpose of local governance than ensuring that a long term vision is established for the school system. The vision statement reflects the consensus of the governance team (the entire board and superintendent) on what children need in order to achieve their highest potential and which educational programs will be offered to reach that ideal. The vision reflects the shared values of the community and the governance team and as such should drive virtually every aspect of the district's program. (Campbell and Greene, 1994, as cited in Land, 2002, p. 37)

In addition, CSBA defined the creation of a climate for excellence as a component of the vision, as follows:

Providing direction for the district also includes a more subtle, but nonetheless real, board function – creating a climate that makes possible the achievement of excellence in the system. Much of what the board does to establish a climate for excellence emanates from the tone it sets individually and collectively. By setting fair but rigorous standards of performance, establishing well-considered policies, and treating its own members and others with dignity and respect, the board communicates a professionalism at the top that becomes a model for the entire school system. (Campbell and Greene, 1994, as cited in Land, 2002, p. 37)

With respect to focusing on policy making, not administration, Land indicates that micromanagement is likely the most common, and often deserved, criticism of school boards. According to the Twentieth Century Fund (1992, as cited in Land, 2002):

What has made many school boards an obstacle to – rather than a force for – fundamental education reform? Our answer: The tendency for most boards to micromanage, to become immersed in the day-to-day administration of their districts that is properly the realm of the professional administrator. (p. 27)

Land cautions that separating policy making and administration as a rule is too simplistic, and that, in the best-case scenario, the board and administrators need to work together to determine the best division of responsibilities according to the needs of their district, and to continually evaluate and reassess the arrangement.

Good Relations

The literature also shows that good relations between boards and superintendents, among board members, and between the board and other local agencies, the public, and the state are important for success.

Goodman and Zimmerman, in their report for the New England School Development Council (NESDEC), *Thinking Differently: Recommendations for 21st Century School Board/Superintendent Leadership, Governance, and Teamwork for High Student Achievement* (2000), make the case for strong, collaborative leadership between local schools boards and school superintendents. Their research has identified a number of successful school systems that are distinguished from others by the teamwork between board and superintendent. When freed from political distraction, the board-superintendent team is able to focus on the most important goal – improving student achievement. Goodman and Zimmerman outline seven key strategies to strengthen the work of the team:

- redefinition of student achievement to include a broad array of educational goals
- development of a strong, unified leadership and governance body at the school district level, with the overriding goal of providing quality education for all children
- enactment of new state laws on school district governance to support a unified board/superintendent team
- mobilization of communities and staff to focus on student achievement

- adoption of a new approach to preparing and training school boards and superintendents for teamwork
- public consciousness-raising for high student achievement
- establishment of a national centre for board/superintendent leadership, responsible for implementation of these strategies and carrying out further research (p. 8)

In a separate study conducted by Goodman, Fulbright, and Zimmerman (1997), poor governance by school boards was found to be characterized by the following:

- micromanagement
- role confusion between board and superintendent
- conflict between board and superintendent
- poor communication
- lack of trust and respect
- bickering among board members
- board members' actions reflecting their personal interests
- board members' disregard for the agenda process and the chain of command
- board members playing to the media
- limited commitment by board members to improve governance (as cited in Land, 2002, p. 25)

The Iowa Association of School Boards (IASB) conducted a study in six districts in Georgia – three with high student performance and three with low student performance – over a period of three consecutive years. The study identified major differences between the high- and low-performing districts:

- In high-achieving districts, board members believed that they could elevate student achievement, while those in low-achieving

districts believed that there were insurmountable barriers to achievement for some students.

- In high-achieving districts, board members demonstrated a greater understanding of the critical conditions for school improvement,¹ and they could identify and describe school improvement initiatives.
- In high-achieving districts, the boards' focus on school improvement initiatives was shared by school personnel and was linked to school and classroom level actions. (Rice et al., 2000, p. 5)

In contrast to the boards in the 1997 Goodman, Fulbright, and Zimmerman study, all of the boards in the IASB study had positive relationships with their superintendents, which may suggest that positive relations are a necessary, but not sufficient, condition for effective governance.

Effective Performance

Land concludes from the research that boards must demonstrate effective performance in the areas of policy making, budgeting, and leadership. In order to make improved student achievement an overarching focus, boards need to aim their policy making towards this goal. According to experts, good policies reflect the board's vision for the district, are consistent with other policies, specify goals, define roles and responsibilities, allow for flexibility in operation, specify outcomes to measure success, and comply with state and federal mandates (Danzberger et al., 1992; Resnick, 1999; as cited in Land, 2002, p. 35). Land argues that achievement-targeted policy making is a ripe topic for research: first, to substantiate the relation between policy making and student achievement, and also to specify the crucial elements of the policy making (p. 36). Currently there are few research studies that link school boards' policy making to students'

academic outcomes, and those that do exist include limited details about the actual role of the board.

Land cites studies that indicate that a critical task for school boards is the allocation of resources to strengthen student achievement. Boards need to identify and fund effective policies and programs, and cull those that are ineffective from their budgets, instead of continually adding new policies and programs and seeking increasingly more money (Picus, 2001, as cited in Land, 2002, p. 38). Recently, Standard and Poor's developed and released an independent evaluation system, called School Evaluation Services, that assesses, based on a combination of financial and academic indicators, district performance, and produces data that school boards can use to guide the reallocation of funds to improve achievement (Cox and Stewart, 2001, as cited in Land, 2002, p. 38).

Land finds in the literature that there is a common perception that school boards are not effective leaders for the 21st century: they are reactive rather than proactive, they frequently rubber-stamp policy initiatives presented by their administrations, and they follow rather than lead (p. 37). She points out that, to date, there is mixed research evidence that school boards have the ability to, and can effectively, lead major reform efforts, and she concludes that more research is necessary to identify the critical components of board leadership for effectiveness.

Adequate Evaluation and Training

The research speaks to evaluation that guides the boards' activities, evaluation that holds staff, individual schools, and the district accountable, and evaluation that holds boards themselves accountable. Public demands for accountability have created the climate for such evaluation to gain more prominence; however, board members have tended to emphasize the

1. IASB researchers based their interviews around seven key conditions for school renewal: shared leadership, continuous improvement and shared decision making, ability to create and sustain initiatives, a supportive workplace for staff, staff development, support for school sites through data and information, and community involvement.

accountability of others, rather than themselves (Land, 2002, p. 39). In a survey of 216 school board chairpersons, only about one third reported that their boards regularly conduct evaluations (Carol et al., 1986, as cited in Land, 2002, p. 39). As well, other research indicates that, for boards that do engage in self-evaluation, the criteria tend not to focus on student achievement. The literature contains only limited evidence that board evaluations improve student outcomes (Robinson and Bickers, 1990, as cited in Land, 2002, p. 40); however, forthright communication of boards' self-evaluation findings could build trust with administrators, teachers, and the public, and could also make these groups more receptive to working towards common goals (Carol et al., 1986; Gates and Wall, 1986; McGonagill, 1987; Resnick, 1999; as cited in Land, 2002, p. 39).

There is widespread consensus in the literature that board members should obtain training to improve their individual and board effectiveness (Capital Area School Development Association, 1990; Carol et al., 1986; Danzberger et al., 1992; Goodman and Zimmerman, 2000; IASB, 1996; Kansas City Consensus, 2001; Schmidt, 1992; as cited in Land, 2002, p. 41). The literature is not as clear about the specifics of what the training should entail. Certainly there is a need for the transmission of knowledge, particularly for new trustees, but as was identified earlier in this paper, good relations and teamwork constitute other important areas for training. A study of effective districts in Alberta recommends that trustee associations evaluate their development programs, particularly in the areas of vision and communication (Maguire, 2003).

What emerges from the research on the impact of school boards on student achievement is that, while there is a need for more empirical evidence and detailed research to determine the precise actions or policies that make a difference in student achievement, there is strong agreement among the researchers that boards have a much bigger role to

play than was previously thought or than has been the practice. Whereas “overseeing the education of children in their districts” used to mean approving budgets and dealing with constituent issues, it is now believed to include a far more important role – envisioning and enacting policies to improve student achievement. To some extent, this change may have been prompted by stronger accountability expectations from the public and from other layers of government; for example, the No Child Left Behind (NCLB) program in the U.S. (described later in this paper), or even the advent of testing by the Education Quality and Accountability Office in Ontario. High-stakes accountability, such as that required by NCLB, demands a focus by boards on student outcomes, and boards may no longer be willing to leave all of the responsibility for meeting this demand to their senior administrators or principals, given the consequences of not meeting it. However, the challenge for boards is how to assume their rightful place in addressing accountability issues without falling into the trap of micromanagement, which may actually have a negative impact on the effectiveness of the work of the district. Skilful collaboration between boards and administrators and role definitions are needed to get the balance right.

Senior Administration and Student Achievement

MacIver and Farley (2003) conducted a review of the role of the central office in improving instruction and student achievement. They cite sufficient research in districts with high achievement to identify the underlying strategies and effective practices that are linked to improvement in student achievement. MacIver and Farley conclude, “While a degree of school-level autonomy is essential in improving instruction for students, and re-centralization is certainly not the answer, the role of the district central office in positively influencing those factors that raise the quality of classroom instruction cannot be ignored” (p. 29).

They indicate that, among the most useful recent research studies, there appears to be a consensus about the importance of the following:

- a district culture emphasizing that achievement is the primary responsibility of every staff member in the district and that the central office is a support and service organization for the schools
- a primary focus on improving instruction, accompanied by a high level of resources devoted to coherent professional development linked to research-based practices
- focused attention on analysis and alignment of curriculum, instructional practice, and assessment
- professional development for principals and teachers in interpreting data to make good instructional decisions (p. 25)

Four Key Factors Influencing Student Achievement

MacIver and Farley identify hiring practices, curriculum/instruction support, support for principals, and professional development for teachers as four key factors influencing student achievement, and they suggest the following performance indicators for district administrators to determine their progress in these areas (pp. 26–28).

Hiring Practices

To what extent does the district:

- use sophisticated information technology in personnel systems?
- advertise positions widely (including through its website)?
- engage in recruitment efforts at colleges of education (including personal visits)?
- set high standards for teacher quality?
- emphasize and execute “welcoming” policies in recruiting new staff?
- make hiring decisions early (in comparison to surrounding districts)?

- maintain a database of qualifications of applicants and hirees?
- analyse the outcomes of hiring practices, and make changes to increase the qualifications of teachers hired?

Curriculum/Instruction Guidance and Support

To what extent does the district:

- evaluate the effectiveness of different curricular/instructional practices in the district?
- make decisions about textbook/curriculum adoptions based on evidence of effectiveness (using research conducted internally and elsewhere)?
- assure that the curriculum, instruction, and assessment are aligned?
- provide materials to schools in a timely fashion?
- provide detailed guides to schools and teachers about how to use the curriculum (e.g., pacing guides, sample lesson plans, guides for assessment of student learning)?

Support for Principals

To what extent does the district provide:

- mentoring programs for new principals?
- hands-on guidance (including school visits) from central office supervisors?
- professional development in how to be an instructional leader?
- professional development in how to use data to improve instruction?
- relevant student data in a timely fashion?
- relevant budget information in a timely fashion?
- relief from bureaucratic demands that take time away from instructional leadership?

Professional Development Support for Teachers

To what extent does the district provide support for:

- mentoring programs for new teachers?

- professional development linked to specific curriculum and textbooks used?
- follow-up, including hands-on guidance (with classroom visits) from central office staff or highly qualified coaches?
- time for teachers to observe master teachers, talk with colleagues about instructional issues, and reflect on learning to better put it into practice?
- instruction on how to use data from classroom assessments to improve instruction?

A more complex model, MacIver and Farley suggest, would also include factors influencing district practices, such as state or union policies related to hiring practices, financial resources available, quality of central office staff, and the political context (pp. 26–28).

Policy Implementation

Another aspect of the district’s impact on student achievement stems from the district’s role as implementer of state policy. As an example, three approaches are found in studies of districts’ implementation of state assessment policy: “fragmented” (little leadership support for change and no interest in the state test), “communicating” (efforts made to coordinate instruction and support higher-order thinking, but still little interest in the state test), and “coordinated” (deliberate effort to raise test scores, district-run instructional activities, formal use of data) (Firestone and Fairman, 1998, as cited in Marsh, 2000, p. 3). Depending on the approach taken, districts may undermine state efforts, they may help or hurt state efforts to transmit messages for instructional change to practitioners, and they may influence positively or negatively state efforts to increase the coherence of messages (Spillane, 1996, as cited in Marsh, 2000, p. 3).

[Local district administrators are] very sophisticated players, adept at anticipating new policy initiatives and using them to their advantage. Local leaders know how to use state and federal mandates as leverage to accomplish what they might wish to

anyway – as opportunities to and as rationales for persuading reluctant educators or citizens. [But] they also know when and how to ignore or circumvent regulations that trouble them, when the state will fail to notice or “blink” in not noticing. (Fuhrman and Elmore, 1990, as cited in Marsh, 2000, p. 5)

Shared Leadership

Much has been written about the importance of sharing leadership among education stakeholders in order to effectively improve student achievement. Stakeholders in leadership often includes teachers, school administrators, and district administrators, and, in some settings, also include parents, students, and other community members. The research points to a need for distributed leadership, shared responsibility, lateral capacity building, and professional learning communities.

Distributed Leadership

Administration in education... has come to mean not the management of instruction but the management of the structures and processes around instruction. That which cannot be directly managed must ... be protected from external scrutiny... Superintendents come and go based on their capacity to maintain a working majority on a relatively unstable elected board, rather than on their capacity to focus the institution on its core functions and make steady improvements over time. (Elmore, 2000, p. 6)

Elmore’s study of high-performing districts in a number of states (California, Texas, and New York) indicated that district leaders exercised their leadership very differently from the traditional one described above. Instead of leaving teachers in isolation to manage the “technical core” of education, and principals to buffer teachers from outside interference, high-performing districts have senior administrators who lead improvement, sustained over time, that moves the entire system, raising the average level of performance and closing the gap in achievement. Elmore uses the term

“loose coupling” to describe this dichotomy between the weak professionalism of teachers and the elaborate system of administrative overhead. He describes “distributed leadership” as the essential method to accomplish the complex tasks of effective teaching and learning in schools. He says:

Distributed leadership, then, means multiple sources of guidance and direction, following the contours of expertise in an organization, made coherent through a common culture. It is the “glue” of a common task or goal – improvement of instruction – and a common frame of values for how to approach that task – culture – that keeps distributed leadership from becoming another version of loose coupling.

(Elmore, 2000, p. 15)

He presents five principles for a model of distributed leadership focused on large-scale improvement:

- The purpose of leadership is the improvement of instructional practice and performance, regardless of role.
- Instructional improvement requires continuous learning. Leaders must create environments in which individuals expect to have their personal ideas and practices subjected to the scrutiny of their colleagues, and in which groups expect to have their shared conceptions of practice subjected to the scrutiny of individuals. Privacy of practice produces isolation, and isolation is the enemy of improvement.
- Learning requires modelling. Leaders should be doing, and should be seen to be doing, that which they expect or require others to do.
- The roles and activities of leadership flow from the expertise required for learning and improvement, not from the formal dictates of the institution. Learning grows out of differences in expertise, rather than differences in formal authority. It is important to acknowledge and make use of differences in expertise.
- The exercise of authority requires reciprocity of accountability and capacity. Leaders who have formal authority to hold others accountable for some action or outcome have an equal responsibility to ensure that those held accountable have the capacity to do what is being required of them. (pp. 20–21)

Elmore’s chart, on page 11, shows a way of defining leadership roles within his theory of distributed leadership. This chart is based on an assumption he calls “comparative advantage”, which says that people should engage in activities that are consistent with the comparative expertise of their roles and avoid activities that are beyond their expertise. For example, policy makers should have a comparative advantage in adjudicating conflicts among competing interests to develop goals and standards for what should be taught, but they should not have a comparative advantage on issues related to the specific content of standards or practices that lead to student performance of a certain kind, because the nature of their work does not permit them to develop it (p. 23).

Through his study of high-performing districts, Elmore identified the following characteristics and actions of superintendents in these districts:

- They are knowledgeable about, and the key initiators of, changes in curriculum and teaching strategies.
- They are active in monitoring curriculum and instruction in classrooms and schools.
- They are active in the supervision, evaluation, and mentoring of principals.
- They are more likely to dismiss principals on the basis of their performance.
- Their districts show much greater clarity of purpose.
- Their districts show a much greater willingness to exercise tighter controls over decisions about what will be taught and what will be monitored as evidence of performance, and greater looseness about,

Leadership Roles	Leadership Functions
Policy Elected, Appointed Officials: Legislators, Chief State School Officers, State Board Members, Local School Board Members	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • set performance targets • approve standards • monitor performance • approve, monitor incentive structures • monitor design problems, redesign • adjudicate conflicts over design, performance issues • administer rewards and sanctions • buffer non-instructional issues
Professional Distinguished Practitioners, Professional Developers, Researchers	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • develop, vet standards • develop, pilot new instructional practices • design pre-service, in-service learning • conduct model professional development • create benchmarks for content, practice • develop, pilot new structures
System Superintendents, Support Personnel	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • design system improvement strategies • design, implement incentive structures for schools, principals, teachers • recruit, evaluate principals • provide professional development consistent with improvement strategy • allocate system resources towards instruction • buffer principals, teachers from non-instructional issues
School Principals, Support Personnel	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • design school improvement strategies • implement incentive structures for teachers, support personnel • recruit, evaluate teachers • broker professional development consistent with improvement strategy • allocate school resources towards instruction • buffer teachers from non-instructional issues
Practice Teachers, Professional Developer	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • design, conduct, participate in professional development • participate in recruitment, hiring of new teachers • evaluate professional development • consult, evaluate professional practice of colleagues • evaluate student work • participate in development of new professional development practices

(Elmore, 2000, p. 22)

and delegation to the school level of, specific decisions about how to carry out an instructional program.

- Their districts are less bureaucratic than their counterparts, relying on a common culture of values to shape collective action. (Elmore, 2000, p. 26)

New York City's District #2, Elmore says, applies a strategy of differential treatment to the various schools it governs, depending on their needs and stage of improvement, and it affords more discretion in practice and professional development to high-performing schools.

Shared Responsibility

Conzemius and O'Neill, in their book, *Building Shared Responsibility for Student Learning* (2001), talk about the importance of the central administration in supporting and encouraging the change process in schools and in eliminating barriers to innovation. They suggest that many administrative systems actually get in the way of improvements, as school personnel feel that they lose time to bureaucratic paperwork and central-office-mandated procedures. As a result, administrators may find a way to "work around the system" in order

to focus on student achievement issues. Paperwork and reports required by the district may be given lip-service or completed inaccurately, because they are not important to the school; protocols for hiring procedures may be circumvented, with the justification that the principal hired an excellent candidate even if correct hiring procedures were not followed; principals may learn whom to call at the district office to get a job done, instead of joining the queue of other principals waiting for service.

However, Conzemius and O'Neill argue that working around the system leads to inconsistencies, inequities, and, ultimately, the generation of more procedural rules to put a stop to those who are working around the system. They advise that a very important role for central office administrators is to make improvements that will minimize the need for working around the system, and simultaneously preserve valuable time for schools to conduct their real business – improving student achievement. They describe the Accelerated Improvement Process (AIP)² developed by the Office of Quality Improvement at the University of Wisconsin, Madison, as one model for making these types of system improvements in a very short period of time. They cite examples in which large districts used the AIP system to improve the efficiency of their purchasing process, their process for registration and enrolment of students, and their hiring process, which led to a new availability of resources that the district could then devote to value-added work (pp. 70–71).

At the same time they indicate that it is the responsibility of the senior administrators to facilitate the development of system-wide standards and a district assessment plan, provide strategic staff development, and coordinate data analysis for schools to use in their planning. They recommend that the centre should “lead by creating the place, time and expectation for

interschool connections that will support system wide learning” (p. 123).

Lateral Capacity Building

The Bristol Local Education Authority in England is using “lateral capacity building” to improve its 19 secondary schools (Fullan, 2005). Schools are paired – one a high-achieving school compared to national norms, and one a low-achieving school. The aim is to create cross-school improvement so that the whole district improves. Fullan includes this case as an example of “systems thinking” for leadership sustainability. His approach to school improvement, as described in *Leadership and Sustainability* (2005), is partially a response to studying a large-scale reform movement in England, the National Literacy and Numeracy Strategies. The results of this reform movement were remarkably good from 1997 to 2003, but Fullan questions the sustainability of the results, and notes that they had plateaued since 2003 (pp. 5–6). He says that, for the system as a whole to change, it must have school and district leaders who are committed to interacting laterally with other schools and other districts in order to learn from each other. The reform movement in England stemmed from a national plan, with direction from a national “Standards and Effectiveness Unit” and inspection by the national inspection agency, the Office for Standards in Education (England). Fullan argues that the strategies involved have required tremendous energy and supervision, which in their own right cannot be sustained for long without lateral capacity building (p. 6).

Professional Learning Communities

Important to the discussion of effective senior administrators and district effectiveness is a discussion of the impact of district actions as a collective, rather

2. AIP involves identifying the problem, holding three intensive improvement marathon meetings, performing the majority of the work between meetings (gathering data, “flowcharting” solutions, analysing potential solutions), and then implementing the chosen solution.

than as the sum of the individual actions or characteristics of senior personnel. Richard Dufour and Robert Eaker, in their book, *Professional Learning Communities at Work* (1998), note: “The most promising strategy for sustained, substantive school improvement is developing the ability of school personnel to function as professional learning communities” (p. xi). They define the six characteristics of professional learning communities as follows:

- shared mission, vision, and values
- collective inquiry
- collaborative teams
- action orientation and experimentation
- continuous improvement
- results orientation

They advocate the use of goals that are strategic, specific, measurable, attainable, results-oriented, and time-bound (pp. 100–103). Conzemius and O’Neill (2001) call these SMART goals (p. 85).

While much of Dufour and Eaker’s work is centred on the work of schools and individual principals developing professional learning communities, they identify a key role for districts in the school improvement process. It is the district, they say, that must promote and support the six characteristics presented above in all of its schools. They argue:

When a district focuses on helping its educators develop their ability to function as members of a professional learning community, the district will realize the greatest dividends from its investment. The focus on the professional learning community also enables districts to provide a framework for individual school improvement that offers tremendous autonomy to individual schools. (p. 272)

Dufour and Eaker reference organizational culture as fundamental to successful change. Coleman and Larocque studied 10 school districts in British

Columbia, and they link positive student outcomes to a positive district “ethos” (1990, as cited in Maguire, 2003, p. 20). A positive district culture or ethos is seen as the essential context in which professional learning communities can flourish.

What is evident in the research about improving student achievement is that the locus of responsibility has become much broader. The focus can no longer be what individual gifted principals do to make their own schools highly effective. Instead, it must be expanded to include shared leadership among teachers, principals, and senior administrators, and collaborative work across schools and districts. Senior administrators are those with the authority to exercise the reciprocity of accountability and capacity, as described by Elmore. They must ensure that the other stakeholders upon whom they rely to share the responsibility for student outcomes have the capacity to do what is required of them. And they must structure the governance, management, and ethos of their districts so that important work can be accomplished collaboratively. It is only from a whole-system reform perspective that equity of outcomes for all students can be achieved; hence, the importance of the role of the senior administrators. This leads to the question of whether senior administrators are properly prepared for the demanding role required of them.

SUPPORT AND PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT

The Need for Support and Training

A survey of the 100 largest urban and ex-urban districts in the United States found that the majority of superintendents say the job cannot be done. They are frustrated by district governance and feel they have had inadequate job preparation (Fuller et al., 2003, p. 73). In another survey of 853 superintendents and 909 principals, conducted by the Wallace Foundation, when asked the most likely reasons for talented administrators to leave the field, they said, “politics and bureaucracy” (Farkas et al., 2001).

Superintendents in the Superintendents Leadership Network (described below) identified pressure from school boards as a factor in their work. They feel that they are managing their boards effectively, but, as one superintendent put it, “I am good at this because I think about it and work at it constantly – I can’t let up for a minute. But that’s not what I want to do or feel I should be doing: my job should be focused on the work we give to our students” (Kronley and Handley, 2001, p. 32). Many superintendents feel that their profession is an isolating one that affords them few chances to discuss problems and share advice with colleagues (Farkas et al., 2001). One of the benefits cited by participants in the Superintendents Leadership Network was that the network is a way of combating the isolation of their roles. It is a safe space to gather with and learn from their peers.

Models of Support and Training

Studies of the role of the superintendent recommend professional development (Beaudin, Thompson, and Jacobson, 2002), paid internships for aspiring superintendents, and stronger preparation programs at state colleges (Glass, 2001; Beaudin, Thompson, and Jacobson, 2002), the use of outside observers as “critical friends” (Pardini, 2000) and leadership networks (Kronley and Handley, 2001) to support the efficacy of superintendents. Training should be reconceptualized to pay attention to the public dimensions of the job. It also should be on demand, and customized to suit individualized needs (Farkas et al., 2001). Mentorship is also identified as an effective support, especially for new superintendents (Glass, 2001; Fuller et al., 2003).

Superintendents Leadership Network

The Center for Leadership in School Reform (CLSR) partnered with the BellSouth Foundation, representing nine south-eastern states in the U.S., to build and sustain a leadership network for superintendents. The program was to balance skill building, networking, and corporate and educational training. CLSR was founded by Phillip C. Schlechty, who believes that real reform cannot be achieved by adopting a school-by-school approach, but rather demands a systemic approach (Kronley and Handley, 2001, p. 10). The center operates on the basis of 10 system standards for student-focused, change-adept districts:

- develop a shared understanding of the need for change
- develop shared beliefs and vision
- focus on the students and the quality of their work
- develop structures for participatory leadership
- develop structures for results-oriented decision making
- develop structures for continuity
- provide ongoing support
- foster innovation and flexibility
- employ technology
- foster collaboration

CLSR then identified leadership competencies, aligning them with the standards. They are the ability to do the following:

- market the need for change
- reframe problems
- create a sense of urgency
- build a sense of community
- forge compelling beliefs and communicate a vision
- organize all district and school activity around the work of students
- foster innovation and continuous improvement
- frame new roles
- manage by results
- ensure continuity
- invest in professional development
- allocate resources (time, space, knowledge, technology) strategically
- employ technologies as a transformation tool
- foster collaboration (Kronley and Handley, 2001, p. 13)

The Superintendents Leadership Network was founded on the basis of these standards and areas of competency, and candidates were selected who demonstrated a commitment to district reform, who had the respect of their peers, and who were in mid-career, so that they might share their learning with others. The network was designed and implemented collaboratively, rooted in theory and practice, flexible and pragmatic, as a learning community able to reach beyond the field of education for new ideas and perspectives. It was also focused on a region (the U.S. south-east), and devoted to inculcating technological proficiency in participants.

Feedback from the participants indicates that the opportunity to meet regularly with peers was the most often cited benefit. Participants also appreciated the CLSR frameworks and standards. They reported that they now have greater focus on student work, that they are using technology more effectively, and that they have enhanced their communication skills. They believe that the network has led to real and tangible change in their districts.

A note of caution: Candidates were selected on the basis of specific criteria that included a readiness for learning. There is no assurance that the same benefits would be found if the program were extended to all superintendents, without using a selection process to include only those who expressed an interest in new learning and networking.

Preparation Programs and Internships

In 1990, the Harvard Graduate School of Education established the Urban Superintendents Program “to respond to the nation’s call for educational leadership” (<http://gseweb.harvard.edu/academics/doctorate/usp>). The doctoral program has three components: 12 months of coursework in full-time residency at Harvard, a full-time six-month internship in the field, and a research dissertation requiring approximately 24 months of work.

Interns work under the direct guidance of an urban superintendent who serves as role model, teacher, and mentor. Interns shadow and debrief with their superintendents in daily activities, and they also undertake assignments that contribute to school district priorities. Between 1990 and 2002, students in the program undertook internships with 57 superintendents in cities across the U.S.

First-year students in the program receive merit-based fellowships that cover tuition and some living expenses. Second-year students receive larger stipends during the six-month internship to cover relocation and living costs, as well as tuition. Additional financial support is available for students working towards completion of the program in the third year.

A number of other graduate education programs in colleges and universities in the U.S. require internships of varying lengths as part of their programs, but it is not required by state law. Most, but not all, states require superintendent certification through a graduate education program. The requirements and exit criteria vary considerably from state to state (Feistritzer, 2003). In Canada, requirements to become a superintendent vary from province to province, and tend to be informal. Applicants for a superintendent position may or may not be required to have a graduate degree in education.

In Ontario, superintendents must have supervisory officer certification, which is earned through university additional-qualification programs. The Supervisory Officer Qualification Program consists of four instructional modules of 50 hours each and one module involving at least 50 hours of practical experience. The practicum is not, strictly speaking, a mentorship or internship, but is conducted under the direction of a practising supervisory officer. The topics included in the modules are as follows:

- personal perspective: personal and professional profile; professional skills

- leadership management theory: leadership, curriculum, management, and organization change; understanding the educational system
- provincial perspective: Ministry of Education, legislation, Ontario College of Teachers, school and society
- professional practice: vision, building relationships, sharing information, system thinking (Ontario College of Teachers, 2002)

In New York State in 1996, a network of district superintendents and the Educational Administration Department at Oswego State University began a joint effort to develop a program to identify and prepare successful middle-level administrators for the superintendency. The program, called the Superintendent Development Program (SDP), includes a mentoring component, along with learning activities. Distance learning technology is used to address the issue of the geographic dispersion of participants. The program was developed in response to a perceived need for a large number of highly qualified superintendents over the next decade, and a concern that there was a weak preparation system in the state to help aspirants learn the role. Participants in the program earn credits towards a graduate degree at the university. SDP tracks its graduates to assess their readiness for, and their ultimate success in, the role of superintendent. Data was not found to substantiate success rates of participants; however, testimonials from participants are encouraging, and the program is flourishing across the state. The website set up by New York State superintendents (<http://www.superintendentofschools.com>) highlights participants in the mentorship and development program who have gone on to superintendent positions within the state.

Critical Friends Programs

Some superintendents in the U.S. who are transitioning to a new leadership post employ consultation with a group of experts from both the education sector and

elsewhere to make an effective start on their new positions (Pardini, 2000). Using groups as small as four experts and up to a team of 18 consultants, these superintendents used the expertise, experience, and objectivity of these outsiders to evaluate existing structures and to design a plan for the first six months or so of their tenure in new positions. Some of the superintendents also invited the consultants to observe them in the role and to provide feedback on their ongoing work. Participating superintendents reported that the program offered the following benefits:

- helps in quickly identifying, prioritizing, and beginning to address longstanding and intractable problems
- focuses on a few short-term goals to get immediate credibility
- results in an improvement in test scores from recommendations implemented
- leads to an improvement in communication between the district and the state oversight panel, resulting in an increase in the district's budget
- ensures that feedback is done privately and can be supportive and constructive
- combats isolation (Pardini, 2000)

Cautions identified by participants included the following:

- Outsiders (the Critical Friends) may come with a set of faulty preconceptions that do not apply to the candidate's own district.
- There may be negative feelings among long-time employees who may feel that their talent is not appreciated if outsiders are brought in to assess the situation and give advice, instead of having the superintendents in the program rely on the long-time employees for advice.
- Experts must be "brutally honest" about what they see and how they perceive the superintendent

to be performing in the early stages; otherwise, they do not serve the candidate well. (Pardini, 2000)

It is also important to note that there could be costs involved in acquiring services such as those described in the Critical Friends programs. These cases involved *pro bono* work by colleagues and funding from outside agencies and private donors. Can these conditions be replicated in other jurisdictions?

Executive Coaching

Executive coaching is similar to the Critical Friends programs described above, but it stems from a more formalized, marketed service that originated in the private sector. A 2002 survey by the Hay Group, a management consulting firm, found that up to 40 percent of Fortune 500 companies use coaching with their executives (Pardini, 2003). The National Staff Development Council has been bringing executive coaching to the field of education and has partnered with The Brande Foundation, which has been involved with coaching programs for directors of non-profit organizations. In the private sector, companies have found that, if their executives received coaching, they were able to achieve increased productivity, expressed greater job satisfaction, sustained higher retention rates, and showed more skilled leadership. No definitive data links coaching for superintendents to improved student achievement, but those who have been involved in coaching cite better focus and balance in their work.

Judy Feld, president of the International Coach Federation, defines coaching as "an ongoing professional relationship" that helps clients "deepen their learning, improve their performance and enhance their quality of life" (Pardini, 2003). Coaches do not offer solutions to problems, and, unlike mentors, they do not give advice, but they listen and respond in

ways that help clients think through what they want to do. As one coach describes it, “A coach helps clients find a course through [the] whitewater by learning to recognize their own blind spots and opening up new possibilities for action” (Pardini, 2003). Typically, those looking for a coach are advised to find someone with similar background and experiences to their own, so either retired or practising superintendents from other districts could act as coaches for superintendents.

Coaching is promoted as a professional development tool that can be individualized to meet the individual’s needs and that is embedded in the work day. Most coaching is done by phone, with an occasional in-person meeting. Most coaching relationships last from six to 18 months. The Brande Foundation offers four to six hours of coaching per month over the telephone for \$8,500 (U.S.) per year. Some state professional associations for superintendents underwrite some of the costs of coaching, with the state covering the rest of the cost, so that participants can be coached at no cost to themselves or their boards.

Centre for Leadership

Goodman and Zimmerman (2000) propose the creation of a national centre for leadership for boards and superintendents, guided by a board of directors that would include all stakeholders: teachers, principals, parents, students, representatives of the private sector, institutions of higher education, government leaders, boards, and superintendents. The responsibilities of such a centre would include the following:

- setting and advocating standards for superintendents, boards, and board/superintendent teams
- creating model workshop programs and materials, and making them available on the Internet

- sponsoring research on governance and teamwork issues related to the roles
- advocating for national-level funding for leadership development
- encouraging outstanding educators to become system leaders (p. 23)

The purpose of such a centre would be to support the development of board/superintendent leadership teams that would work for high student achievement. It would ensure that future boards and superintendents are equipped to be leaders in a context that includes standards for superintendents, state certification linked to national standards, and sponsored research on the role of the superintendent.

A review of the literature reveals a jagged front in the area of support and training for senior administrators. While there has been positive feedback from each of the models tried, as described in this report, there is insufficient experience with and study of these models to be certain about what works best. Further research needs to explore the success of such models, in terms of both the feedback from participants as well as the impact on student achievement.

RECRUITMENT AND SUCCESSION PLANNING

Beaudin, Thompson, and Jacobson, in their paper, *The Administrator Paradox: More Certified, Fewer Apply* (2002), discuss succession issues for administrators at the school level and the district level. Their research, based on U.S. demographics, shows that in the next decade 8,000 of the 14,000 public school districts in the U.S. will search for new superintendents. As well, the current shortage of candidates for principal positions portends poorly for the future supply of candidates for district superintendents, since the career path of most superintendents includes service as a school principal (p. 7). The researchers surveyed new, aspiring, and experienced administrators to determine the factors that are attractors and detractors related to administrative roles, because, by understanding these factors, state- and district-level leaders will be better informed to develop appropriate policies to increase the appeal of public school leadership positions.

They found that attractors included, in this order: a salary and benefits commensurate with the role, the opportunity for a new challenge, a short commute, support for professional growth, and a supportive political climate. Detractors included, in order: an inadequate salary, a negative political climate, a longer commute, a lack of professional support, and longer days and hours. This last detractor was of less importance to those currently in administrator positions than to those aspiring to such roles. Beaudin, Thompson, and Jacobson's research in the state of Connecticut indicates that mentoring, networking

opportunities, and state-wide seminars addressing pertinent problems and issues that new administrators face are necessary as part of the induction and development of new administrators. They found that 36 out of 38 states reported superintendent and principal shortages. They advise that early identification of future school leaders, aspirant and internship programs, alternative routes to licensure and redesigned licensure, modifications of administrators' induction processes, and professional development are important factors to consider in making succession plans.

The Institute for Educational Leadership, based in Washington, DC, as part of its School Leadership for the 21st Century Initiative, published a report, *Leadership for Student Learning: Restructuring School District Leadership*, in February 2001. It describes the role of the superintendent as very challenging, due to factors currently affecting education systems in the U.S.: changing technologies, board member turnover, conflicts between board members and citizens, school privatization, mayoral takeovers, decentralization, teacher empowerment, and state and federal regulations. Given these challenging issues, the report concludes, the critical shortage of qualified superintendents is not surprising. The report proposes strategies for planning for the recruitment and succession of superintendents:

- Districts should design and install fail-safe systems for recruiting and holding onto top-quality leaders for their school systems.

- Gender-specific strategies should be developed to recruit more women into the role.
- Districts should target candidates who hold promise as leaders of large instructional enterprises, with special provisions to develop succession programs to groom women and minority candidates.
- School board members and superintendents need to support and promote professional leadership standards linked to student achievement standards, as measured by indicators of system-wide achievement, increases in student learning over time, as well as levels of staff and community satisfaction.
- Once standards have been adopted, they should provide the basis for staff development and accountability measures. (pp. 12–14)

Hargreaves et al. (2003) looked at the issue of succession planning for *principals* in Ontario secondary schools. This report is referenced here, in spite of its focus on principals, not senior administrators, because the framework for succession planning described in the report may be applicable to the role of senior administrator as well as to principals. The report presents private sector models and public sector models outside of education, and concludes that there are much better models of succession planning outside of the public education sector. The researchers claim that succession planning ought to involve deliberate, systemic, and sustainable efforts to project leadership requirements, identification of a pool of high-potential candidates, development of leadership competencies in those candidates through intentional learning experiences, and then selection of leaders from among the pool of potential leaders (p. 22). They describe public sector planning as more passive, focused on the short term, and informal compared to private sector planning. They argue that educators have much to learn from the practices of forward-looking businesses in aligning their succession plans

with their processes of goal setting, recruitment, development, and accountability (p. 28).

The report presents recommendations for the principal succession process, and those that seem applicable at some level to senior administrators are repeated here:

- Make principal succession a thoughtfully planned and ethically managed process. Greater transparency and less secrecy should be evident in the plan. Authentic consultation is necessary.
- Give more attention to outbound knowledge and to distributed leadership, so that successive leaders can be groomed and ready for takeover. Inspirational leaders who share investment in change and distribute it widely support succession principles better than charismatic leaders who leave an unfillable void.
- Develop deeper pools of talent, using early identification strategies, better mentorship, and peer leadership networks.

Hargreaves and his colleagues also recommend that principal qualification courses need to be more flexible to be more compatible with the lives of younger women, who will increasingly comprise the pool of potential leadership talent (pp. 82–86). While there is no claim that this factor also applies to senior administration at this time, it may have an impact in the future, and districts may wish to consider it in designing succession planning for the next layer of administration.

Leaver and Kelly (2002) talk about the impact of reform on traditional models of leadership, and they state that it will be necessary to provide leaders with significant training in the management of complex systems and that preparation of senior education leaders should take this need into account:

District school boards can no longer wait for candidates to apply. They must seek, select, and nurture

strong employees who have the aspiration and the potential to lead positively. They must provide mentors to work with these candidates and give them personal attention and practical tips. Boards must train the mentors so that they are kept current on local expectations and demands of the job...

District school boards must view succession for their leadership as a necessity and they must budget for it on a regular basis. That budget must include allocation of time for the project work, provision of courses where needed, and payment to mentors to improve their contribution. Finding and sustaining good leaders will be the mark of a progressive district school board in the next few years. Those boards which are successful will demonstrate their results through growth and effective and progressive programs. The results will be seen in continued student achievement and parental satisfaction. (Leaver and Kelly, 2002)

In the fall of 2004, the Ontario Public Supervisory Officials' Association (OPSOA) began a pilot project for mentoring newly appointed superintendents. It invited interested boards to partner with it, sharing the costs of the program, to provide a mentor for

selected newly appointed supervisory officers in their boards. The pilot involves a combination of face-to-face meetings, telephone and e-mail contact, and the sharing of written materials. The relationship between mentor and mentee is intended to extend for the full first year of the superintendent's appointment.

Mentors in the programs are retired superintendents contracted by OPSOA. They received initial training based on best-practice research about mentoring, and then developed a common approach to the mentoring process. They also draw on their own personal experiences in the role to support the mentee. The group of mentors will meet regularly throughout the year to assess the effectiveness of the program and to make recommendations to OPSOA for the following year. This is a promising practice that warrants follow-up in terms of the assessment of its success.

PERFORMANCE APPRAISAL

Historically, personnel evaluations in education have focused primarily on classroom teachers and principals, but, as the case is made in the research that the role of the superintendent is critical to student achievement, it then becomes important to look at performance appraisal of superintendents. DiPaola and Stronge in 2003 conducted a national study of all of the 50 states in the U.S. to find out their policies and practices related to superintendent evaluation. They found that eight states reported neither having state guidelines nor providing recommended guidelines or instruments of evaluation for superintendents. From the other 42 states, they collected whatever documentation was available, and what they found was that checklists and management by objectives were the predominant evaluation models used. They argue that these models do not give superintendents rich feedback on how they are doing. They also found that many of the evaluation schemes did not match the performance standards set by the Interstate School Leaders Licensure Consortium (ISLLC) (shown on page 23). They maintain that special consideration should be given to designing, developing, and implementing a comprehensive and quality performance evaluation system for superintendents, and that performance standards are the basic building blocks of the evaluation system (DiPaola and Stronge, 2003).

The ISLLC, with 24 member states in the U.S., developed its *Standards for School Leaders* in 1996. It spent two years crafting the standards, relying heavily on

research that links educational leadership and productive schools, and considering significant trends in society and education that hold implications for emerging views of leadership. These trends included a more diverse society racially, linguistically, and culturally; increased poverty; a decreasing stock of social capital (physical, mental, and moral well-being); the shift to a post-industrial society; the advance of the global marketplace; and the increasing reliance on technology. The ISLLC developed seven overarching principles to guide its work, determining that standards should do the following:

- reflect the centrality of student learning
- acknowledge the changing role of the school leader
- recognize the collaborative nature of school leadership
- be high, upgrading the quality of the profession
- inform performance-based systems of assessment and evaluation for school leaders
- be integrated and coherent (p. 7)

While acknowledging that there are differences in leadership at different levels (principals, superintendents, district leader), the ISLLC members were unanimous in their belief that the central aspects of the role are the same for all school leadership positions, and so they developed one set of standards. These are set out in the table on page 23.

Interstate School Leaders Licensure Consortium (ISLLC)
Standards for School Leaders

Standard 1	A school administrator is an educational leader who promotes the success of all students by facilitating the development, articulation, implementation, and stewardship of a vision of learning that is shared and supported by the school community.
Standard 2	A school administrator is an educational leader who promotes the success of all students by advocating, nurturing, and sustaining a school culture and instructional program conducive to student learning and staff professional growth.
Standard 3	A school administrator is an educational leader who promotes the success of all students by ensuring management of the organization, operations, and resources for a safe, efficient, and effective learning environment.
Standard 4	A school administrator is an educational leader who promotes the success of all students by collaborating with families and community members, responding to diverse community interests and needs, and mobilizing community resources.
Standard 5	A school administrator is an educational leader who promotes the success of all students by acting with integrity, fairness, and in an ethical manner.
Standard 6	A school administrator is an educational leader who promotes the success of all students by understanding, responding to, and influencing the larger political, social, economic, legal, and cultural context.

For each standard, they developed a statement of the knowledge, dispositions, and performances to be expected (pp. 10–21). By the fall of 2004, over 40 states were using the standards to inform their licensure and/or appraisal practices for administrators (Waters and Grubb, 2004, p. 1).

Critics of the *Standards for School Leaders* claim that the standards lack an empirical base (Murphy, 2003, p. 23) and that they do not explicitly communicate the critical connection between the standards and improved student learning. As well, critics maintain, the standards do not offer any indication about which knowledge, disposition, or performances have a greater impact on student learning than others (Waters and Grubb, 2004, p. 4).

Mid-continent Research for Education and Learning (McREL) conducted an extensive study of over 5,000 studies published since the early 1970s that purported to examine the relationship between school leadership and student achievement, and it concluded that there are 21 distinct school leader responsibilities that

have a significant impact on student achievement. Some of these factors are included in the ISLLC standards and some are not (Waters, Marzano, and McNulty, 2003). This inconsistency would seem to be problematic in terms of agreeing on standards for leadership, but the discussion among stakeholders about standards, their purpose, and their framework might uncover some important principles or conflicts that need to be explored to bring about alignment. The ISLLC standards were developed prior to introduction of No Child Left Behind (NCLB) in the U.S., which increased the focus on student achievement, so perhaps dialogue initiated since NCLB about standards for leaders would have a different focus than in 1996. The factors in the McREL study were specifically matched to principals' responsibilities and actions, and it is not clear how well they transfer to senior administrators' responsibilities and actions. It would seem that the extent to which senior administrators can support principals' capacity to address these responsibilities may have an impact on student achievement.

The American Association of School Administrators (AASA) developed a set of standards to define the profession of the superintendency in 1993, along with a set of performance indicators to support each standard. Its standards are leadership and district culture (vision, academic rigour, excellence, empowerment, problem solving); policy and governance (policy formulation, democratic processes, regulations); communications and community relations (internal and external communications, community support, consensus building); organizational management (data-driven decision making, problem solving, operations management and reporting); curriculum planning and development (curriculum planning, instructional design, human growth and development); instructional management (student achievement, classroom management, instructional technology); human resources management (personnel induction, development, evaluation, compensation, organizational health); and values and ethics of leadership (multicultural and ethnic understanding, personal integrity and ethics) (AASA, 1993, as cited in DiPaolo and Stronge, 2003, p. 41).

The National School Boards Association identified eight key action areas for both boards and superintendents in a guidebook published in 2000. These areas included vision, standards, assessment, accountability, alignment, climate, collaboration, and continuous improvement (Gemberling et al., 2000, as cited in DiPaolo and Stronge, 2003, p. 42).

DiPaolo and Stronge, in their *Superintendent Evaluation Handbook* (2003), provide their own recommended framework of performance standards, having reviewed the existing national standards shown above. They define six domains: policy and governance, planning and assessment, instructional leadership, organizational management, communications and community relations, and professionalism. Within each domain are found several performance standards, and then, in further detail, are the descriptors or performance

indicators for each standard. The domains and standards are detailed in the table on page 25.

DiPaolo and Stronge indicate that it is critical to have a congruence among district goals, evaluation instruments, actual duties, and standards for the profession (p. 32). They also argue that the role of the superintendent should be described in the form of performance standards, so that all can know the key performance expectations, assess the performance, fairly judge the performance on objective criteria, and make informed decisions for improvement (p. 46).

The Ontario Public Supervisory Officials' Association (OPSOA) designed "A Framework for Leadership in Education" following a leadership review conducted with its members in 2002. It highlights nine essential qualities, divided into three strands – leadership, character, and relationships – and then it details skills that will support and enhance each of the qualities:

- acquiring broad-based knowledge of education issues
- modelling lifelong learning
- developing a vision for "strategic doing"
- taking and accepting responsibility
- building emotional resilience to sustain integrity
- ensuring quality and excellence
- demonstrating effective communication
- fostering positive relationship with all stakeholders
- building and nurturing relationships (OPSOA, 2002)

While these are not standards of performance, they do illustrate another initiative to define the role of superintendent and to provide a framework for staff development.

Information about performance appraisals of superintendents is less transparent than such information about other roles in the system. It is rarely found on

PERFORMANCE APPRAISAL

Domain	Standards <i>The superintendent:</i>
Policy and Governance	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • works with the school board to develop and implement policies that define organizational expectations • functions as the primary instructional leader for the school district, relying on support from staff as necessary when advising the school board • oversees the administration of the school district’s day-to-day operations • works with all individuals, groups, agencies, committees, and organizations to provide and maintain schools that are safe and productive
Planning and Assessment	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • effectively employs various processes for gathering, analysing, and using data for decision making • organizes the collaborative development and implementation of a district strategic plan based on analysis of data from a variety of sources • plans, implements, supports, and assesses instructional programs that enhance teaching and student achievement of the state educational standards • develops plans for effective allocation of fiscal and other resources
Instructional Leadership	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • communicates a clear vision of excellence and continuous improvement consistent with the goals of the school district • oversees the alignment, coordination, and delivery of assigned programs and/or curricular areas • selects, inducts, supports, evaluates, and retains quality instructional and support personnel • provides staff development programs consistent with program evaluation results and school instructional improvement plans • identifies, analyses, and resolves problems using effective problem-solving techniques • assesses factors affecting student achievement and serves as an agent of change for needed improvements • ensures that curricular design, instructional strategies, and learning environments integrate appropriate technologies to maximize student learning
Organizational Management	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • actively supports a safe and positive environment for students and staff • develops procedures for working with the board of education that define mutual expectations, working relationships, and strategies for formulating district policies • effectively manages human, material, and financial resources to ensure student learning and to comply with legal mandates • demonstrates effective organizational skills to achieve school, community, and district goals • implements sound personnel procedures in recruiting, employing, and retaining the best-qualified and most competent teachers, administrators, and other personnel • provides staff development for all categories of personnel consistent with individual needs, program evaluation results, and instructional improvement plans • plans and implements a systematic employee performance evaluation system
Communications and Community Relations	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • promotes effective communication and interpersonal relations within the school district • establishes and maintains effective channels of communication with board members and between the schools and community, strengthening support of constituencies and building coalitions • works collaboratively with staff, families, and community members to secure resources and to support the success of a diverse student population • creates an atmosphere of trust and mutual respect with staff and community
Professionalism	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • models professional, moral, and ethical standards, as well as personal integrity in all interactions • works in a collegial and collaborative manner with school personnel and the community to promote and support the mission and goals of the school district • takes responsibility for and participates in a meaningful and continuous process of professional development that results in the enhancement of student learning • provides service to the profession, the district, and the community

(DiPaolo and Stronge, 2003, pp. 114–119)

district websites or in published policies. Parents are more interested in the quality of performance of their children's teachers than in the performance of the superintendent, especially since they have little idea of what the superintendent actually does. So there has been little external pressure to establish or improve appraisal systems for senior administrators. However, superintendents themselves, through their own associations, have recognized the need for professional standards against which they can measure, and others can measure, their performance. There is strong evidence of this thinking in the U.S., but little in Canada.

In Ontario, according to research conducted by the Ontario Ministry of Education in January 2002, only 29 per cent of boards have a policy in place for superintendent evaluation, and only 21 per cent have a policy for director evaluation. It is not known how many districts in Ontario actually conduct performance appraisals of their superintendents, because they

might do so in the absence of any published policy. But even if they do, how do they judge the quality of these appraisals without a set of performance standards to frame the appraisals? The Ontario College of Teachers developed a set of standards for teachers, prior to the Ministry of Education designing a province-wide appraisal system for teachers. This course of action may be right for senior administrators as well.

ACCOUNTABILITY SYSTEMS

The large-scale reform programs in the U.S. – No Child Left Behind (NCLB), initiated in 2001 – and in England – the National Literacy and Numeracy Strategies (NLNS), initiated in 1997 – are accountability frameworks for the alignment of board, district administrators, and schools with improvements in student achievement, directed from a national perspective.

No Child Left Behind

The four pillars of the program are stronger accountability for results, more freedom for states and communities, proven education methods, and more choices for parents. Specifically, states are required to do the following:

- implement state-wide accountability systems based on challenging standards in reading and mathematics
- provide annual testing for all students in Grades 3 to 8
- develop annual state-wide progress objectives, ensuring all groups of students reach proficiency within 12 years
- design progress objectives that show results broken out by parents' income level, race, ethnicity, disability and level of English proficiency

School districts and schools that fail to make adequate yearly progress (AYP) towards the state-wide goals will be subject to assistance and, if necessary, corrective actions and restructuring measures. Conversely, those

that meet or exceed AYP objectives or close achievement gaps will be eligible for academic achievement awards.

In addition, students attending a “failing” school must be given the opportunity to move to a “better” school in the district, with transportation paid by the district. Low-income students at persistently failing schools are to be offered supplemental educational services, again paid for by the district.

The focus in NCLB has been on schools, more than districts; however, the research outlined in this paper has shown how important districts and their boards and administrators are in supporting schools and in achieving large-scale reform. While the measuring stick in NCLB is aimed at schools, the solutions will be found through districts, and the stakes are high in terms of the consequences for districts in dealing with failing schools. This underlines the need for strong administrators in districts.

As indicated earlier, Fullan (2005) denounces NCLB. He says, “Any minor gains are bound to be out-weighted by a system that guarantees superficiality, temporary solutions, and cynicism in the face of impossible goals” (p. 11). As well, the Harvard Civil Rights Project, as reported by the National Education Association (October 2004), found that the effect of NCLB on disadvantaged and minority students was as follows:

- The law concentrates the costs and burdens of implementing its public school choice requirement on high-poverty urban districts.

- The tiny minority of students who used the public school transfer option went from one school with low-achieving levels to yet another school with similarly low-achieving levels.
- Federal accountability rules have no common meaning across state lines, so it is impossible to compare progress from one state to another.
- NCLB asks for more progress from the poor urban schools than from affluent suburban schools.

Richard Elmore, in his article for *Educational Leadership* (November 2003), “A Plea for Strong Practice”, enumerates what he perceives to be the design flaws in NCLB: over-investment in testing, under-investment in capacity building, ungrounded theories of improvement, weak knowledge about how to turn around failing schools, and perverse incentives for quality and performance. He argues that “internal accountability precedes external accountability”. He says:

Schools that do well under external accountability systems are those that have consensus on norms of instructional practice, strong internal assessments of student learning, and sturdy processes for monitoring instructional practice and for providing feedback to students, teachers, and administrators about the quality of their work. Internal coherence around instructional practice is a prerequisite for strong performance, whatever the requirements of the external accountability system. High internal agreement is the best defence against uninformed external pressure. (p. 9)

If we review Elmore’s comments about NCLB in the context of his theories about district reform and distributed leadership highlighted earlier in this report, we understand that schools will need the support of highly competent and well-trained senior administrators to develop the internal accountability necessary to meet the demands of external accountability.

Whether NCLB remains in its current format or is revised through the political process in the U.S., there is no evidence to suggest that external accountability will be lessened, so work to bolster the efficacy of senior administrators and boards will not be wasted. The lesson translates well to Ontario, as the government here has set a high external standard for achievement in schools.

National Literacy and Numeracy Strategies

In response to years of underperformance in the educational system in England, the government put in place a policy approach that is described as “high challenge, high support”. The framework for this initiative includes the following elements:

- ambitious standards – national tests at ages 7, 11, 14, and 16; detailed teaching programs based on best practices
- devolved responsibility – the school as the unit of accountability
- good data/clear targets – statutory target setting at district and school levels
- access to information about best practices and to high-quality professional development
- accountability – a national inspection system with public reporting
- intervention in inverse proportion to success³

The Standards and Effectiveness Unit of the British Department for Education and Skills commissioned the Ontario Institute for Studies in Education/ University of Toronto (OISE/UT) to do an external evaluation of the implementation of NLNS. OISE/UT identified the following successes after year two of the evaluation:

- breadth of influence on teaching and learning
- adaptation of strategies within a clear vision

3. This is the same concept that District #2 in New York City used, as described by Elmore (cited earlier in this report).

- good value for money
- institutionalization of a national infrastructure
- policy coherence
- balance of pressure and support (Earl et al., 2003)

The study identified some challenges and cautions: the depth of change in teaching practice, the unintended consequences of the focus on targets and indicators, the effect on other areas of the school curriculum, the sustainability of the strategies, the availability and use of data, and the need to more fully engage parents and families in children’s learning.

However, overall, the OISE researchers commented that NLNS has made “significant changes in primary education in England in a remarkably short period of time. The change is pervasive and has moved literacy and numeracy to the top of the teaching agenda” (p. xiii). As mentioned earlier, Michael Fullan, one of the OISE researchers, has indicated his concerns about the sustainability of the early success seen in NLNS, and points to issues such as lateral capacity building as important to consider in the next stages of implementation.

Fullan’s theory of capacity building strengthens support for the point made in this paper that the middle layer of management between government (whether national or provincial) and schools – that is, the senior administration – may be the linchpin that can make school reform work. It seems clear that there is a need to ensure that this middle layer has all of the capacity it needs to meet the responsibility for outcomes required of it.

Performance Contracts

Another form of accountability that is emerging in some jurisdictions is that of performance contracts for superintendents, or “pay for performance”. A performance contract is an agreement between a superintendent and the school board that links the administrator’s pay to indicators of job performance.

Indicators might include student achievement, student attendance, dropout rates, graduation rates, budgetary acuity, school safety targets, staff development improvements, curriculum updates, or increased parent/community involvement. Pay may be increased for meeting targets or decreased for failing to meet these targets.

Pay for performance is a controversial issue, and it has both supporters and critics within superintendent groups and boards. Advocates for the scheme cite the following potential benefits: performance contracts create a set of clearly defined goals on which the district can focus; they provide a detailed feedback-oriented evaluation system that rewards administrators for accomplishing goals; they can also signal a commitment on the part of the board towards hard-edged accountability; they can be a way of establishing a performance-based culture in education that rewards improvement and innovation (Lafee, as cited in Hertling, 1999).

Critics are concerned about the following issues: administrators may not be given the resources to reach designated targets; performance contracts should provide support for improvement, not just penalties; pay as a motivation for reaching targets may detract from the moral purpose of leadership; and superintendents might put unreasonable pressure on teachers and principal to reach targets (Hertling, 1999).

Deciding which indicators to use and how to measure those indicators are challenges for both board and superintendent. Test scores are often used as the measure for student achievement, an approach that some believe is an appropriate way to focus the work around helping students achieve standards (Graves, as cited in Hertling, 1999). Others are concerned about the possibility of manipulation of test scores, and they believe that test scores are too narrow a measure.

A survey in the U.S. conducted by the *American School Board Journal* and George Mason University indicated

that 54 per cent of board members believe that pay-for-performance contracts would likely help to improve student achievement, while 62 per cent of superintendents believe it would not. Neither group believes that pay for performance would improve board-superintendent relations (Hertling, 1999). This concern should be considered in the face of the research cited earlier in this paper that good relations between boards and superintendents are believed to be an important factor in improving student achievement.

The state of Illinois favours performance contracts, and has made it a state law that school boards cannot sign multiyear contracts with superintendents unless they tie compensation and contract renewal to gains in student achievement. In other states, there are widely publicized individual cases of performance contracts for newly hired superintendents, but this is not the majority practice for superintendent contracts.

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