

State-level school leadership academies offer a state the potential to profoundly affect school reform throughout the state.

Developing Instructional Leadership: The Challenge of Statewide Leadership Academies

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The call for educational reform has become a persistent and persevering cry from which we cannot avert our attention. Public opinion polls, reports on "the state of" public education, declining student achievement, and increasing student dropout rates are all significant reminders of the serious problems confronted by our schools. Emphasizing the need for "an educational renaissance," the Carnegie Forum report, *A Nation Prepared: Teachers for the 21st Century* (1986) stressed "the urgency of making our schools, once again, the engines of progress, productivity, and prosperity." This attention focuses on a central message: We must reconsider both the role and the capacity of schools in the preparation of our nation's young people for the complex and rapidly changing world in which they will live and work.

This article examines state-level responses to this challenge—specifically, the state-level initiatives that have resulted in the establishment of statewide school leadership academies and the role of the state educational agency in developing the instructional leadership of its state's principals. A fundamental question addressed in the article is: In what ways and to what degree do such state-level initiatives influence the instructional leadership of school principals and other school administrators?

To date, at least thirty eight states have established school reform legislation that regulates improvement procedures and facilitates catalytic strategies designed to promote, reform, and institutionalize improvement processes.

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Most of these "reform packages" reflect recent research (Purkey and Smith, 1982; Brookover et. al., 1982; Lipham, 1982; Bossert et. al., 1981; Edmonds, 1979) which emphasizes the key role of principals in initiating and implementing school improvement efforts. Many of these state-level policies cast the principal as a powerful agent, who as the formal head of a school, can and should have a positive influence on student achievement. Such policies argue for the role of the principal as an "instructional leader"—spending more time on instructional and curricular issues and less time on managerial tasks. With the present estimates of administrative turnover in the next decade hovering between 50 and 70 percent, the implications of the research and the potential impact of state-level initiatives are amplified.

Currently, many states are defining or clarifying the roles that they will play in the process of school reform. Inspired by the research and literature citing the central role of the principal in school reform, many state reformers have come to believe that "improving" the leadership of the school can enhance a school's performance as well. As a result, many state departments of education have begun professional development programs that focus specifically on the strengthening of school leadership. Most often, these programs are referred to as "academies" and most commonly they emerge from and are supported by state legislative mandates. Such state-level school leadership academies are sometimes a component of a state's school reform "package" and are viewed by the state's school reformers as a vehicle for articulating the state's vision and goals for school reform throughout the state. As such, the training of school administrators offers a lever for school reform that is both influential and cost-effective.

State-level school leadership academies offer a state (through its department of education) the potential to profoundly affect school reform throughout the state. To achieve such an impact, however, three critical factors must be in place. First, and of utmost importance, the state must clearly define its own vision of what its schools both could and should become. The state's vision must simultaneously be specific enough to stimulate and direct action and general enough to allow individual districts and schools to adapt it to their own contextual specifics. By creating and articulating such a vision, the state will be in a position to assume an active and guiding role in school reform while, at the same time, acknowledging that school reform is a contextually specific process that occurs most successfully on a school-by-school basis (rather than on a state, district, or classroom level).

Our experience in California illustrates the potential of a clearly conceived and articulated vision. Inspired by the ideal of educational equity proposed by Goodlad (1984), Bill Honig, Superintendent of Public Instruction for California, has built commitment throughout the state to a vision of schools in which all students have access to a core body of knowledge that will allow them to compete effectively in the state's work force, to fulfill their responsibilities as citizens of a democracy, to understand the contributions of culture, and to continue the pursuit of knowledge. For this to happen across the state, the definition of the core body of knowledge, the models and frameworks for the curriculum required to make that core body of knowledge accessible to all students, and the technical assistance necessary for schools to develop their own curriculum has occurred at the state level. In addition, California has developed an enabling structure of clear expectations and goals by establishing content and competency specifications, graduation requirements at the high school level, and required subject

area time allocations at the elementary and middle school levels. These catalytic actions by the state have resulted in the placement of school reform high on the local agenda. Districts are involved in upgrading curriculum and course requirements and considerable progress has been made (Odden and Marsh, 1987).

Our experience in California exemplifies the second critical factor necessary to achieve the impact potentially offered through a state school leadership academy. The state must actively facilitate both a complementarity among its own and district and school roles, and an interrelationship between appropriate top-down and bottom-up roles and functions. To ensure that there is maximum momentum toward the achievement of its vision, the state must translate the vision into high quality methods and materials that serve as models for districts and schools as they initiate and implement school reform efforts. In providing the technology to make school reform possible, the state is assuming an active enabling role that moves beyond one of facilitation and support to one of actual technical assistance. In order to increase the impact of such technical assistance, the state must also establish the criteria for quality control and feasible, tangible strategies for local development and adaption.

Again our experience in California exemplifies the power of technical assistance that is focused on helping districts and schools initiate and implement school reform. The state—through such technical resources as the Model Curriculum Standards, the Curriculum Frameworks, and the California Assessment Program—has developed an enabling structure that provides the core technology to make school reform a real, tangible possibility. In addition, the state has established an instructional materials review process through which over 1,300 textbooks and other instructional media are examined in relation to their alignment with curriculum specifications and student performance guidelines prior to their approval for district-level adoption. An additional feature of California's enabling structure for school reform is the individual school "self-review" instrument which identifies critical program quality review factors that a school can use to monitor and assess the effectiveness of its own program. The quality review factors are research-based and enable a school to compare its own program to model standards of effectiveness.

The third critical factor that must be in place in order for a state to achieve full impact through a state school leadership academy is the focused alignment and commitment of state resources required to activate, energize, and sustain reform efforts in districts and schools. The momentum of reform must be fueled by levels of funding and resources that enable the effects of reform to continue, expand, and deepen. "Business-as-usual" funding and unspecified funding increases will neither provoke nor propel school reform efforts. By linking new state money to specific local reforms, the state is able to create both concrete and symbolic importance for its reform goals.

The California experience has been instructive in relation to the impact of targeted funding. The local district perception is that new state money has had significant impact in providing resources for implementing the more vigorous, academic program specified in state guidelines (Kirst, 1988; Odden and Marsh, 1987). The strategy of linking new state money to local reform has had a positive effect on district reform efforts and teacher morale (Kirst, 1988).

With these three critical factors—a clearly conceived and articulated vision, high-quality reform technology, and focused funding and resource allocation—providing an enabling structure, the state is in a position to initiate profes-

sional development for school administrators that has the potential of achieving a profound effect on statewide school improvement. Training through a statewide leadership academy is the vehicle by which school administrators become informed of the state's vision, adapt that vision to the specific needs of their schools, and acquire the technical skills and understanding that will enable them to provide the leadership necessary to initiate, implement, and sustain the school reforms envisioned by the state.

California, through the efforts of State Superintendent Bill Honig, has established the California School Leadership Academy (CSLA) which has its mission "to help school administrators strengthen their instructional leadership skills and strategies in order to improve student learning in California." The underlying assumptions guiding the work of CSLA are:

- the mission of school reform is to revise curriculum and strengthen instruction so that all students—regardless of incoming level of performance—will have access to a core body of knowledge that provides a sound academic background and promotes cultural literacy;
- well-informed and knowledgeable instructional leadership is a significant lever point for school reform;
- curriculum and instruction form the core technology of the school and, as such, provide significant leverage points for school reform;
- school reform is a process that occurs on a school-by-school basis, thus reform efforts must be adapted to the idiosyncratic characteristics of a particular school;
- school reform occurs as an outcome of simultaneous improvement in *both* the culture and core technology of the school;
- school reform is most likely to occur when the external organizational context (district and state) supports it and provides the necessary technology and resources to enable it to happen.

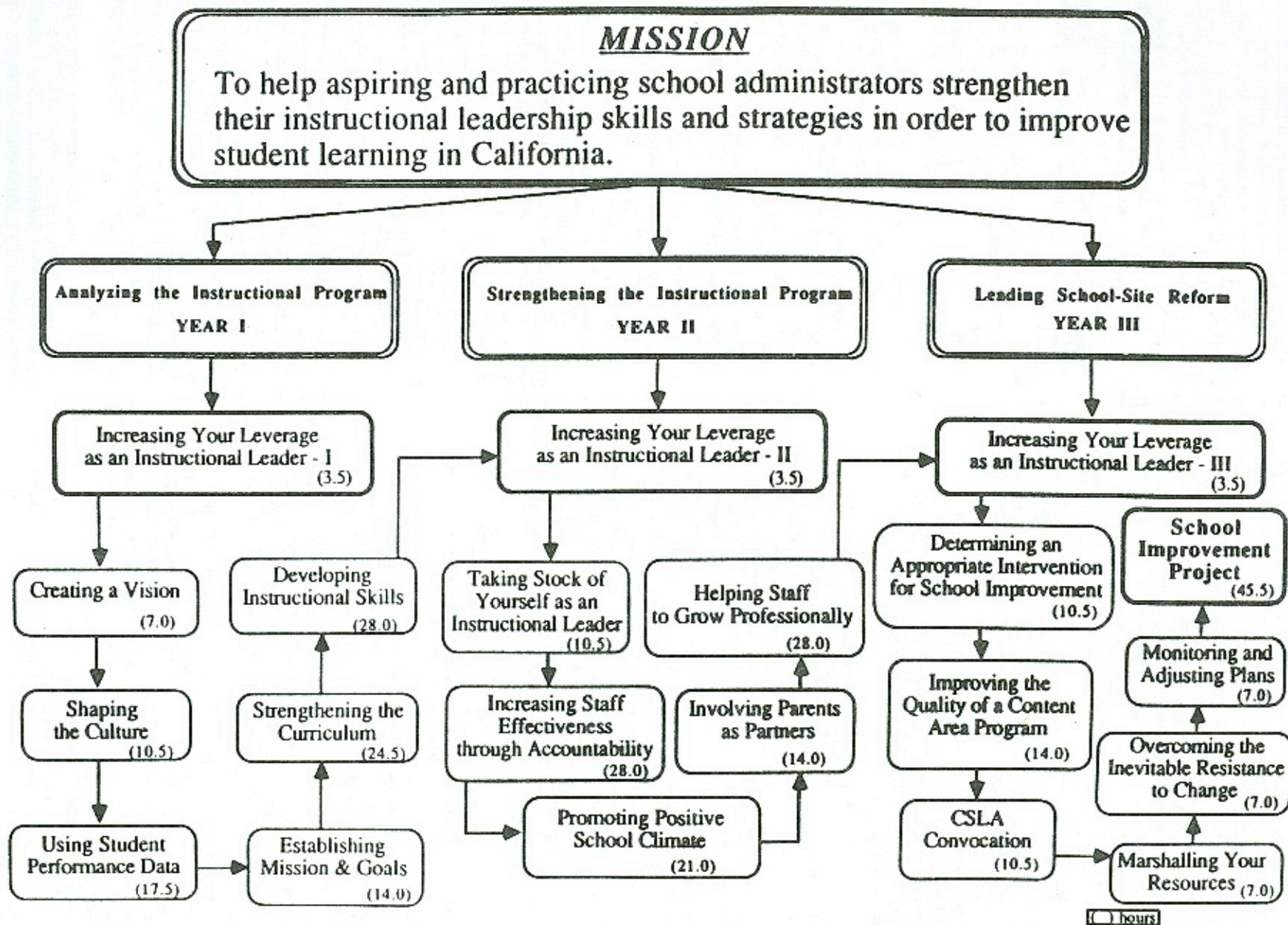
CSLA's vision of a school administrator is of one who at once is able to and understands the importance of providing the type of instructional leadership that can truly propel a school toward the vision of excellence proposed by the state. The three-year curriculum program of CSLA displayed in Figure 1 illustrates the direct linkages of the program components to the state's vision of school excellence.

Assessments of CSLA's impact on school reform indicate that since its inception in 1984, participants have a greater understanding of the state's vision of school excellence and of their roles in transforming that vision into a reality. The school administrators in the program report that they feel more knowledgeable of reform strategies and more skillful in adapting and implementing strategies to improve the instructional program of their particular schools (Barfield, 1988). Furthermore, the Council for Basic Education in its publication *Beyond Management: Improving Principals' Instructional Leadership* (1988) concluded that:

"The CSLA's success must be largely attributed to the quality of its program. Because the program's founders were so clear about what the Academy aims to do, the curriculum is rigorously structured around a clear set of concepts. An effort is made to ensure that participants always understand why they are learning a given topic." (p. 17)

Without the clear direction and expectations created by the state's vision, it is unlikely that CSLA would have both the clear vision and mission that it does. Indeed, a review of literature from many state academies has yielded an array of program descriptions that exemplify the superficial and

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fragmented nature of training programs that are developed in the absence of a vision. This "hodge-podge" type of program presents little, if any, leverage for a statewide reform effort (Council for Basic Education, 1988). Thus, to answer the question posed at the outset of this article—"In what ways and to what degree do state leadership academies influence the instructional leadership of school principals and other school administrators?"—the response is that to achieve the results that are potentially possible through a statewide leadership academy, the state must initiate and implement an enabling process that is "driven" by the state's vision of school excellence and a vision of the role of the school administrator in achieving that vision of school excellence. This process, which is depicted in Figure 2, has the potential of truly providing school administrators with the enabling skills necessary to lead their schools toward excellence.

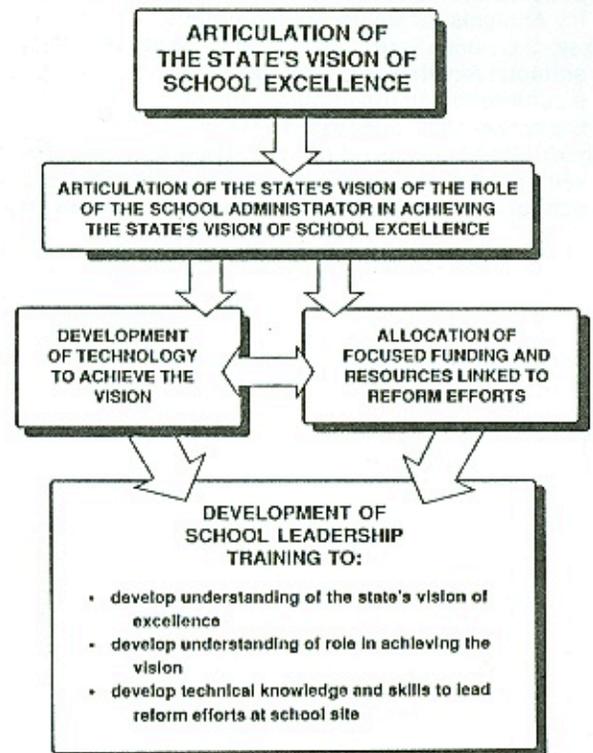
Conclusion

As noted earlier, the issue of training principals and other school administrators is receiving a great deal of widespread attention. The potential for these programs to have a profound impact on school reform is a real possibility. Without an enabling structure similar to the one discussed in this article, however, it is unlikely that the training of school administrators will have much impact on any real reform. Thus, any state, through a statewide school leadership academy, has a real opportunity to exert considerable leverage to achieve school reform by first of all, creating a vision of what school reform could and should achieve, and then by using that vision as the driving force for a planned program of school leadership development.

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Figure 2: Enabling Process to Achieve Effective School Reform



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