

Little attention has been given to the professional development needs of educational administrators. Administrator surveys offer a comparative advantage for efficient data collection and meaningful process for policy formulation regarding personnel issues.

Administrator Surveys as Alternative Policy Instruments

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The educational reform movement presents a unique opportunity for assessing a number of critical and substantive issues for school districts. Past research efforts, however, have had either a local context focusing on school improvement efforts and the leadership role of principals or a concentration on the effect of federal categorical programs. Little attention has been given to the professional development needs of educational administrators at both the school and district levels. Tied narrowly in many respects to student outcome data, the educational reform movement

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has ignored the importance of addressing the professional development needs of current educational administrators and the preparation and training required for those newly appointed.

To address these shortcomings, the Massachusetts Leadership in Educational Administration Development project crafted a framework for identifying professional development interests and opportunities for educational administrators and the organizational context in which school district, universities, or professional associations must respond. The rationale for the use of administrator surveys is derived from both a theoretical and practical orientation. Of particular importance to the theoretical basis of administrator surveys or what can be referred to as an alternative policy instrument is articulated by one researcher who suggests less reliance upon techniques geared to the analysis of individual or categorical problems (Salamon, 1981). The use of administrator surveys is an attempt to provide a broader perspective by which research agendas are constructed for educational policy reform.

The practical considerations of this approach accrue benefits to educational administrators and policy makers. Since much of the educational reform studies have concentrated on the results of school effectiveness programs, little effort has been made to specify the requirements for a qualitative relationship between the central office and school site. Data from administrator surveys can be helpful in that task. Moreover, the need for school improvement coupled with generally an older building administrator suggest an increased focus for productive professional development programs as well as new recruitment programs. Even more important, any success from educational reforms may add to the existing performance and policy demands of practitioners and policy makers. To maintain quality performance standards, school districts need continued support from universities and State Departments of Education.

This article will discuss the use of administrator surveys and their value in shaping policy recommendations for school districts and their service providers in addition to educational administrators and the professional associations to which they belong. Respondents typically include elementary, middle, and secondary principals and superintendents. Other groups of respondents which can be part of administrator surveys are assistant principals, supervisor/directors, school business administrators, and assistant superintendents. To each of these groups, researchers have assigned varying amounts of responsibility and authority for planning and implementing educational reform strategies. Much of the focus of the educational reform movement and the leadership required to implement district policies or school improvement programs rest with this community of professional educators. Is the importance attached to the role of administrators just cause for the use of administrator surveys? Will the data derived from the survey be of such qualitative value to describe it as an alternative policy instrument?

The value of administrator surveys is not one-dimensional. Data derived from the instrument are an important source of *demographic information*. The characteristics of the respondent groups with respect to the length of time in one's job has significant implications for recruitment and training of new and current personnel. For example, the Massachusetts LEAD Center project School Administrator Survey revealed that more than 40 percent of the administrators expect to leave their jobs within the next five years. With such predictable information, school boards, superintendents, and service providers are able to engage in appropriate activities for planned change.

Another reason for the use of administrator surveys lies with their ability to define *career interests* and identify the direction in which professional development support should be provided. In many ways the career interests of educational administrators particularly at the secondary level, are expected to create a certain degree of change in a school district. The ability to anticipate the locus of change and the personnel impact are fundamental to ensuring effective transitions of professional educators. Unlike roundtable discussions or isolated stakeholder meetings, administrator surveys enable policy makers to assess in a more systematic way the issues in the forefront of the "third wave" of educational reform—decentralization, deregulation, and the professionalization of leadership roles, particularly within the classroom.

Perhaps the most compelling reason for the use of administrator surveys has to do with the *training needs* and opportunities which are not inclined to abate, given two key factors: the growing impact of technology on teaching, learning, and administration and the relationship between the future challenges facing especially high school seniors and the current success or failure with which they meet these challenges. Can improved training and professional development programs blunt the growth or resolve the high school dropout problems? A footnote of caution is offered by Clune (1987) who thinks a paradox exists between the need for indicators of success and the desire to monitor. While further training is obviously needed, school districts must be careful that the training programs do not limit themselves in perspective or purpose. In other words, when training programs result only in more sophisticated ways, for example, to measure or monitor dropouts instead of implementing successful dropout prevention programs, the use of administrator surveys as alternative policy instruments becomes remote.

Sensitivity to this concern is highlighted in the results of a training survey conducted by the Office of Leadership and School Improvement of the State Department of Education in South Carolina. The survey attempted to obtain information from several respondent groups (superintendents, high school principals, middle school principals, and elementary principals) regarding thirty-six areas or topics which were considered to be desirable for training programs. Regardless of respondent group, it was clear that the training programs preferred were not merely new ways to *monitor student performance*. Rather, strategies to *motivate students* were identified among all respondent groups as a highly desirable topic for training programs. Middle and high school principals considered "motivating students" as the most highly desirable topic.

Since carefully articulated training programs are shown to result from administrator surveys, how should organizations proceed in developing their own surveys? What types of surveys should be regarded and for what purpose? These questions are fundamental to the task of constructing meaningful survey instruments.

The tendency not to associate the reason for developing administrator surveys with the manner in which they should be constructed often establishes problems for district policy makers, educational administrators, and service providers. Surveys tend to be derived from one of several perspectives. A review of selected LEAD Projects points to the need for articulation of the survey questionnaire with its intended purpose—*demographic data bank*, *career interest profiles*, and *professional training surveys*. Several examples illustrate this point.

The North Dakota LEAD Center in collaboration with the University of North Dakota Bureau of Educational Re-

search conducted two surveys. One was designed to provide information to the University and LEAD for decision making with regard to the educational administrator activities of *female teachers*. With a reasonable response rate of 47.2 percent, organizers of the project were able to determine the *career interests* and *training needs* of female educators. Respondents who expressed interest in educational administration as a career were asked to rate on a five point scale thirteen topics embracing issues of leadership and management of schools. The topic which received the greatest amount of interest (more than 70 percent of the respondents) was "what it takes to become an effective administrator." Inquiries of this nature provide a good basis for the development of professional training programs. Comparatively, the results of the second survey were equally convincing with regard to topics for professional training. Of the respondents in the second survey, over 70 percent indicated great interest in the same topic—"what it takes to become an effective administrator."

The Virginia LEAD Center also recognized the importance of *collaboration* with professional associations and the State Department of Education. The focus of the survey was to obtain *demographic profiles* of educational administrators and to assess *the professional development needs of school administrators* in the state. The development of the survey instrument was a collaborative endeavor. Responses from the 52 question survey were later reviewed by the Virginia Department of Education and colleges and universities as a formative step in planning in-service and pre-service programs for educational administrators.

It appears that the *collaborative nature* of this project was a conscious effort to maximize the response rate to the survey and to maintain open lines of communication with universities and professional associations. Of the 4,677 survey instruments distributed, 77 percent were retrieved. Of the 3,728 returned, 76 percent were considered to have valid responses. In addition, the Virginia survey identified preferred types of professional development activities and desirable training schedules. One-day regional workshops, visitations to other school divisions and state level conferences were the preferred types of professional development programs, while Thursdays, Wednesdays, and Tuesdays respectively were the most desirable days to hold training activities. Information from the survey results was utilized for both scholarly research in the university community and for the development of promising training programs which enhance leadership and management skills.

Survey results from a variety of LEAD Center projects underscore the benefits of collaboration in designing the instrument and data utilization. Massachusetts, North Dakota, South Carolina, and Virginia LEAD Centers in particular illustrate the value of planning, implementing, and evaluating research projects in concert with the university community and professional associations. The reasons for conducting surveys seem to have sufficient justification. *Demographic information* points to the increasing need to have good data which will allow for timely and responsive policy decisions to problems of administrative turnover rates and the increased age of current administrators. In fact, a recent report of the American Association of School Administrators indicate the number of older administrators has increased, especially for those 55 years of age and over. Increased age coupled with longevity in position (Massachusetts LEAD Project reports that 50 percent of elementary principals have been in their positions for more than 10 years) present serious challenges to the consortium members involved in LEAD Center Projects.

While the recent educational reform movement has focused on such critical issues as student academic achievement, professionalizing teaching as a career and restructuring schools, little attention has been given to the need to attract and develop cadres of talented professionals who seek *career advancement*. The task of deciding on a data gathering instrument or a process to identify issues or concerns regarding career interests could be accomplished in a number of ways. Administrator surveys offer a comparative advantage for efficient data collection and meaningful process for policy formulation regarding personnel issues. Other policy instruments might be chosen on the basis of variables of costs, the bearers of costs and constituents served. This method, while practical in nature, becomes over time more idiosyncratic to the political winds of negotiation. In contrast, administrator survey instruments contribute to the building of generalizable models of policy instruments.

Despite the range of issues identified in the educational reform movement and the number of unanswered questions regarding successful practices of *professional development activities*, the use of administrator surveys is considered to be productive. This approach seeks to develop a link between the needs of practitioners, the goals of policy makers, and the desired effects of reform strategies conceived by service providers. Administrator surveys serve a valuable descriptive function. Yet the ability to provide the policy community with an insightful alternative instrument may be its strongest asset.

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