

Collaboration can fuse, strengthen, and focus needed efforts by those organizations responsible for the development of educational leaders.

Statewide Collaboration in Alabama

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Collaboration of responsible organizations within the state for the purpose of providing professional development programs to educational administrators and supervisors became a reality with the implementation of the Alabama LEAD Academy in May 1987. Before that time sporadic efforts to implement cooperative programs either died from lack of maintenance or sharpened differences among the organizations until collaboration gave way to competition for political power and/or scarce financial resources. The organizations involved are three institutions of higher education offering doctoral degree programs in educational administration, the State Department of Education, and the various professional organizations of educational administrators and supervisors.

The fact that the Alabama LEAD Academy has survived for nearly two years is remarkable considering the record of past efforts to collaborate. One of the obvious reasons for current continuing unity is the success of the Academy in delivering instructional programs that were cooperatively planned. Representatives of professional associations of administrators and supervisors identified instructional programs they felt were needed. Over 1,700 administrators and supervisors were involved in training sessions during the first 18 months of the LEAD program and over 90 percent of those participating rated the events either very good or excellent. Participation was voluntary and often at the expense of the practicing educational leaders.

The demand for relevant and effective professional improvement programs far exceeded the resources available

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to supply them. The political implications of so many leaders engaged in and demanding the programs required some unity among organizations serving them. Thus, the Academy became a significant reality; a different kind of political and educational force than had ever existed before in Alabama, and its creation and operation provided some lessons that may be of interest to those concerned and involved in the preparation and professional development of educational leaders. The purpose of this paper is to identify some of those lessons that may be applicable in other states as well as in Alabama regarding the development of statewide alliances. As usual, Alabamians have learned the hard way—by trial and error. There is no assurance that the Alabama LEAD Academy will survive, but it has the potential to become a vehicle for developing exciting, new, and effective ways of preparing and continually improving educational administrators and supervisors. This brief analysis may provide a benchmark for learning from whatever occurs, but first a summary description of the Alabama LEAD Academy is in order.

The Alabama LEAD Academy

The Academy's purpose is to provide professional development opportunities and training for potential and practicing school administrators and supervisors. Its basic operational principle is cooperation.

The governing body of the LEAD Academy is a board of directors composed of a representative from each of five organizations that have formed a consortium. All of the organizations are directly responsible for some aspect of professional preparation and development of educational administrators and supervisors. Three of these organizations are institutions of higher education: Auburn University, The University of Alabama, and The University of Alabama at Birmingham (UAB). Statewide, the professional associations for administrators and supervisors are represented by a coordinating umbrella organization called the Alabama Council for School Administration and Supervision (ACSAS). In addition, the professional certifying agency, the Alabama State Department of Education, is a member of the consortium.

Members of the Board of Directors serve by virtue of their positions in the organization they represent. The positions are the Dean of the College of Education, the Executive Director of ACSAS, and the State Superintendent of Education. The Board elects its own officers, employs the Alabama LEAD Academy staff, and is responsible for establishing operational policies. The umbrella organization, ACSAS, serves as fiscal agent.

In addition to the LEAD grant, financial support comes from the organizations in the consortium. The Alabama State Department of Education has contributed more than the others. The salary of the Executive Director has been an in-kind contribution of Auburn University.

The Executive Director of the Academy reports directly to the Board and is responsible for planning, development, evaluation, and implementation of the program and for supervision of the staff, as approved by the Board of Directors.

The program of the Academy has five major components: (1) Assessment—to determine the professional needs of individuals and the schools they serve, (2) Preparation—to help prepare educators for leadership positions they have not held before, (3) Proficiency enrichment—to improve leadership and managerial skills, (4) Cultural enrichment—to help provide a broader understanding of the state-of-the-art in business, industry, science, the humanities, and relevant current issues affecting schools, and

(5) Follow-up—to assist participants in implementing what they have learned in the Academy.

In essence, the Academy functions as a broker by arranging appropriate instruction and experiences to meet the needs of educational leaders. Services and instructional activities are provided by numerous individuals, agencies, and organizations from throughout the country. Utilization of persons with demonstrated expertise in Alabama is given first priority. Since its beginning in May 1987, the Academy has provided two- and three-day workshops for assistant principals, principals, central office personnel, supervisors, and superintendents. Some of the topics were: Improving Community Relations, Directing the Curriculum, Legal Responsibilities, Stress Management, Conferencing Skills, and the Role of the Assistant Principal.

In September 1988, a person occupying each of the above named positions representing each of ten geographical areas in Alabama were chosen to serve as area contact persons for the Academy and to train as trainers in conferencing and coaching skills. Planning had already been decentralized by representative groups, and the workshops for the area representatives in September helped make possible the decentralization of program delivery. Organizationally, the Academy appeared in September of 1988 to be ready for making statewide sustained collaboration a reality.

The Conditions of the Alliance

Research by Reed and Cejda (1987) accurately identified conditions organizations must maintain if collaboration is to occur and be sustained. In brief, they must: (1) have common goals, (2) derive a clearly balanced benefit, (3) share decision making, (4) adapt to change, and (5) have a framework in which to function together. They also must have a cadre of individuals in each organization who believe collaboration is necessary and who actually serve as "boundary spanners" (*The Key*, 1988).

Achieving these conditions requires much more than a common cooperative attitude among key organizational leaders. If collaborative efforts of the organizations represented in the governing board of the Alabama LEAD Academy are not sustained, it will not be because of lack of belief and dedication to cooperation and collaboration on the part of the respective members of the Board of Directors. Problems in making collaboration an operational reality lie within the organizations and institutions they represent. Some changes in the parent organizations must occur for the collaborative efforts to be successful, and significant changes in large, well-established bureaucracies are usually painfully slow in emerging as operational realities.

It has also become more apparent over the past eighteen months that political controversy involving one member of the consortium affects the total collaborative effort. The individual members of the consortium not only share common goals but also common and unsought opponents. For example, periodic conflicts between the school administrators and the teachers' union are common at the local school district level and, at times, at the state department of education level. These conflicts are not usually shared directly by the universities in Alabama, but all collaborating partners are buffeted by battles waged outside the LEAD consortium simply because of collaborative work.

Some problems are created because an organization governed by a number of different organizations, i.e., a consortium, is not generally understood. The same kind of misconception on the part of the general public often plagues school boards that govern as a committee of the whole. Members of the Alabama LEAD Academy board have been

very aware of their respective roles as board members. Each has tried very hard not only to participate as a member of a committee of the whole but also to prevent other members of the board from feeling that any one was trying "to run the show." Their honest attempts to work cooperatively have made it possible for them to get to know one another better and to begin to develop feelings of mutual trust. This has not been easily achieved and there is still some questioning of one another's motives at times. It is very difficult for leaders of organizations who must compete continually for each dollar spent for education to put their trust and confidence in one another. Like many marriages, if there is a split it will probably be over finances.

Shared assumptions by members of the consortium have been that the respective roles of the organizations should change in regard to professional preparation and development of administrators and that the Academy can serve as a vehicle to help identify and implement those roles. It is becoming increasingly apparent, for example, that preparation programs in institutions of higher education must include more and better clinical experiences. Clinical experiences, however, take place for the most part in elementary and secondary schools, not on the university campus. Professional educators in the schools must assume roles as clinical instructors in addition to their regular duties, and they are usually already overworked. These problems still demand solutions that must be derived from collaborative planning among the organizations. An all inclusive, single, best model probably will not be developed. However, it is almost impossible for any successful model to be conceived without involvement of all organizations directly concerned. It is very unlikely that institutions of higher education will even attempt to depart radically from the traditional on-campus-residency-research-dominated practices. There is no reward in academe for such radical behavior, no matter how educationally sound it may be. Also, since the practicing educational leaders in the elementary and secondary schools are so consumed by the demands of the job, they have little interest and knowledge of effective preparation programs primarily because they have little time to deal with them. Innovation based on collaboration is essential. Whether or not it will be achieved remains to be seen.

Some evidence that a different role for the state department of education is also emerging. The Alabama State Superintendent of Education has recently appointed a "task force" to study preparation programs and standards for certification of administrators. The appointed group has already made some of its deliberations public but will not submit its final recommendations until December 1989. The issue of who will control the content of preparation programs is very much in contention. Except for a few members of the task force, most people in the state find it inconceivable that control could be vested in a collaborative body rather than in one organization. At the writing of this article a majority of the task force seems to feel that the State Department of Education should assume responsibility for the coordination and control of all professional preparation and development programs but not for their delivery. The obvious confusion over authority and responsibility will be resolved eventually. It is evident, however, that for the first time leaders in professional associations of elementary and secondary school administrators and supervisors have a voice in making decisions about the content and activities for their own professional development. They are not likely to surrender that opportunity to a state agency, universities, or any other authority without a struggle.

The Future

Regardless of what happens next, the Alabama LEAD Academy has had a statewide impact. It has served as a vehicle for planning, developing, and implementing practical solutions to the issues of how best to improve professional preparation and development of administrators. Clamor for improvement increases every week. The pressures for improvement are very evident throughout the United States (Murphy and Hallinger, 1987). In Alabama LEAD was used to plan, develop, and implement innovative approaches to the control and delivery of programs. The direct involvement of school administrators and supervisors in professional development programs that are functions of continuous cooperative planning and are controlled by a consortium responsible for professional preparation, certification, and improvement holds promise for the future. Collaboration can fuse, strengthen, and focus needed efforts by those organizations responsible for the development of educational leaders. Each type of organization will have to develop roles different from those they traditionally perform, however,

and institutional change remains difficult to achieve. The future of education in Alabama appears brighter because of the LEAD Academy. It is hoped that efforts to continue the improvement of educational leadership will continue for many years to come.

References

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