

University preparation programs . . . must adapt and respond to administrators' needs for a greater range of field expertise. Among these are skills and knowledge about resource allocation at decentralized sites.

# PROGRAMS THAT PREPARE PRINCIPALS FOR ALLOCATING RESOURCES AT THE SCHOOL SITE: Principals and Superintendents Respond

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Conditions under which principals work have changed more rapidly than have programs to prepare principals. Calls for revitalization of the traditional school model began in the 1980s and have continued into the 1990s. From the general educational reform effort of the 1980s (Education Commission of the States, 1983; National Commission on Excellence in Education, 1983; Carnegie Forum on Education and the Economy, 1986; Holmes Group, 1986), emerged efforts to redesign educational administration preparation programs. Proposals for reforms of university preparatory programs for principals and other educational leaders were and continue to be advanced by educational

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scholars and organizations (e.g., Pitner, 1982; National Association of Secondary School Principals, 1985; National Commission on Excellence in Educational Administration 1987; Thompson 1988; National Policy Board for Educational Administration, 1989; Thomson, 1992). Private support has been made available to improve preparation programs; for example, the Danforth Foundation launched at least 18 program development efforts for training and certifying school principals (Twale & Short, 1989). Newly created and retooled preparation programs, intended to equip principals with the experiences and knowledge demanded in the field, are reaching beyond the recognized need for reflective practice (Sergiovanni, 1987), and the integration of theory and practice (McCarthy, 1987). University preparation programs intent upon meeting the challenges of the 1990s not only must sustain their current preparation efforts but also must adapt and respond to administrators' needs for a greater range of field expertise. Among these needs are skills and knowledge about resource allocation at decentralized sites (Thomson, 1992).

The National Goals for Education (White House, 1990) created demands for continued reform and asked that student achievement match international standards, that schools assume responsibility for graduating higher percentages of students, and that operational structures be decentralized. An effect of the continued attention to reforming schools has been a renewed emphasis on site-based management and the subsequent call for the school principal's role to be one of increased dynamism and interaction. Cooper (cited in Jacobson and Wentworth, 1992) suggests that the site-based management program is the beginning of a new paradigm.

The importance of administrator expertise at the site level is supported by Odden's (1992) conclusion that ". . . accomplishing high levels of student achievement, [as indicated in the national goals], is quintessentially a school, not a district, function" (pp. 327-328), supports the current thrust to increase principal responsibility for allocating and monitoring resources. Should future funding programs give greater emphasis to the concept of school-based funding, as is suggested by Odden (1992), schools, rather than districts, would become the primary recipient of local, state and federal revenues. He states,

The natural outcome would be the ultimate budgeting of such funds at the site. The school would have the authority to determine the mix of professionals—teachers, administrators, adjunct teachers, and so on—at the school site and to hire, supervise, promote, and fire them. The school would have fiscal and program responsibility for operations, maintenance, substitutes, books, materials, supplies and staff development (Odden, 1992, pp. 333-335).

Further support for concentrating preparation on resource allocation can be found in the school finance framework offered by Jones (1985, 26), who suggests that the three components for organizing the knowledge and skill base in educational finance include the study of allocation, distribution, and management functions. He emphasizes, however, that although the functions may appear to be distinct topics, that are, in reality, in "perpetual interaction." If site-based management is a new paradigm, and schools may become the principal sites for allocating and managing resources, then developers of preparation programs must weave the needs expressed by field professionals into resource allocation models (e.g., Guthrie, Garms & Pierce, 1988; LaCost, Grady, & O'Connell, 1993). In this article, we report and categorize experiences related to resource allocation that were reported by superintendents and principals as essential to an adequate and appropriate principal preparation program.

### Related Literature

School based budgeting, in theory, (a) should provide greater efficiency in allocating resources because decisions are placed close to those who are affected (Levin, 1987); (b) should increase flexibility in the instructional program by broadening schools' spending authority (Clune & White, 1988); and (c) should direct accountability to the school and away from the central administration and board of education (Ornstein, 1974). Under school-based budgeting, resource allocation decisions are transferred from the central administration to the smaller decision-making arena—the school. Thompson, Wood and Honeyman (1994) suggest that site-based budgeting "represents the most recent sophistication in learning theory because it finally recognizes the importance of resources at the point of utilization" and that [t]he process of site-based management requires much learning and training for . . . administrators . . . (p 314).

Clune and White (1988) concluded from their survey of over 100 school districts that in the context of school-based management, budgetary decisions were decentralized most readily, followed by personnel and then curriculum decisions. School-based budgeting changes the education system so that the main budgetary function of the central administration is to allocate funds to individual schools who are then empowered to decide how allocated funds will be spent (Hentschke, 1988). School-based budgeting requires changing the rules about who has decision-making authority over the use of resources. Hentschke suggests that principals will need to be given greater authority over use and mix of utilities; the use of substitute teachers; staff development, curriculum development and other central office support; the mix of professionals at the building site; and authority to carry over resources from fiscal year to fiscal year.

Hartman's (1988) qualitative analysis of the behaviors and process of site participants in the resource allocation process at four high school sites is especially important in considering the knowledge and training required for site leaders. No rational process was adhered to in allocating resources at the high schools sites; of particular importance was the lack of consideration for linking resource allocation practices to improving student outcomes. Principals in the field recognize the discrepancy between what they are doing and what they should be doing. Finally, LaCost and Grady (1992) found that principals desired to be engaged more fully in the decisions and management of resources than they actually were.

### The Study

A qualitative analysis was done for a set of responses to an open-ended question that was distributed to a random sample of principals and superintendents in a mid-plains state. Respondents were asked to provide both their years of administrative experience in their current roles and size of site managed so that profiles of each group might be offered.

### Sample and Data Collection

Samples of principal and superintendent populations were drawn from the state education agency's current public school directory. Each public school in the 278 districts in a mid-plains state that maintained both elementary and secondary schools was coded. A sample of 50 principals and a sample of 30 superintendents were selected through the use of a random number table. An original and one follow-up mailing elicited 31 principal responses (62%) and 18 superintendent responses (60%).

### Instrument

The researchers identified themselves as professors in the educational administration department of the state's land grant university and requested that respondents first read a definition

of resource allocation, and second, respond to a question about their perceptions of preparatory experiences for principals. The definition provided to respondents was:

**Resource Allocation:** A process that focuses on a set of resources, i.e., human, fiscal, material and physical, that can be identified, located, allocated, assessed and adjusted to reach the specific outcomes to meet the goals/mission of the organization.

The question asked of respondents was:

Given the above definition, what specific preparatory experiences should be provided for students to prepare them to effectively allocate resources as principals?

### Results

We first provide a profile of the respondents and then provide an analysis of the responses. Principals were predominantly male (74%) and approximately 42% had 6 or less years of administrative experience, although the range was from 3 or less years to over 20 years. A fourth of the principals administered school sites of 200 or less students; the majority of the principals (61%) administered somewhat larger schools (with student populations of between 201 and 500 students), and 13% (n=4) presided over schools with enrollments of more than 500 students.

Superintendents responding to the inquiry were in districts ranging from less than 50 students to over 500 students. Over half the superintendents (56%) reported 9 years or less experience in the superintendent's role, although the respondent group varied from 3 years or less experience to more than 20 years experience. Eleven percent of the superintendents administered districts having only one school that housed the entire student body in grades K-12.

### Response analysis

Overall, the sets of responses from the two samples provided a similar conceptualization about the responsibility of administrator preparation programs. The responses, to varying degrees, can be sorted into three dimensions: (a) the knowledge base or content of the preparation training, (b) the acquisition of skills in preparation training, and (c) the format for provision of the preparation training. A breakdown of responses, by respondent group, addressing these three general dimensions is provided in Table 1.

**Table 1.** Three dimensions of principal preparation programs defined by responses from superintendents and principals, by number and by percent.

DIMENSION	PRINCIPALS	SUPERINTENDENTS
	Total Number=31	Total Number=18
Knowledge Base	20 (65%)	12 (67%)
Skills	11 (35%)	12 (67%)
Presentation Format		
• Courses	10 (32%)	0 (0%)
• Seminars	1 (3%)	0 (0%)
• Simulations	7 (22%)	8 (44%)
• On-Site	9 (29%)	6 (33%)
Opportunities		

Totals exceed 100% due to multiple responses from subjects

Both principals (65%) and superintendents (67%) referenced specific content or knowledge areas of which principals should be apprised. Superintendents (67%) were more inclined to emphasize skills than were principals (35%). The support for a strong experiential training program was reflected in the suggestions from both respondent groups. Principals' suggestions were clustered into recommendations for courses (32%),

on-site opportunities (29%) and specific experiences (22%) in distinct administrative tasks. Superintendents, on the other hand, focused on recommendations for experiences (44%) and on-site opportunities (33%).

Within each of the three general dimensions, dissimilarities between principals' and superintendents' responses were noted. Overall, the two groups differed in the magnitude of complexity and integration of content and process. Responses from principals, although more copious, tended to be more specific and less integrative than were the responses from the superintendents. The two groups seemed to demonstrate diversity in the skills dimension. Superintendents emphasized the acquisition of skills that integrated knowledge and expertise across content areas (e.g., long-range planning, decision responsibilities, communication skills) whereas principals mentioned competencies related to specific tasks (e.g., calculating, devising, building budgets). In the presentation format dimension, no superintendent suggested courses or seminars, although two did endorse "class projects" as a possible format or experience.

In presenting the results of our analysis, we first define the dimension delineated by the two sets of superintendent and principal comments. We then present cogent examples from the two sets of respondents. For the knowledge base and skills dimensions, comments from both sets of respondents are grouped under the four subcategories outlined in Table 1: coursework, seminars, simulations and on-site opportunities.

#### *Content or Knowledge Base*

The dimension of preparation program content is defined as the knowledge base required of principals when they enter administrative practice.

#### *Principals*

Principal respondents specifically recommended discrete content about commonly accepted resource allocation areas such as school finance, budget and the budget process. In addition, they recommended content requirements that were more broadly related to allocating resources such as personnel issues, political impact, community philosophies, and school boards' policy development. Examples follow:

*Budgets and budget process:* Providing and expanding knowledge of the budget and the budgetary system was advocated. One of the more integrative principals suggested that several budget models be offered to candidates and requested that at least one emphasize that principals

"start with a mission/philosophy/beliefs, develop objectives for student/staff, then . . . implement the objectives and tie in the budget as a means to support the plan and accomplish the objectives."

Specific budgetary suggestions included teaching about "how school finance works," the "origin of receipts," how to budget dollars for . . . specific areas," the "contracting costs for employee services," a "variety of budgetary procedures," and ". . . the budgeting/scheduling for buildings and grounds maintenance."

Another principal, lobbying for specific content, suggested that resource allocation information

"useful to the first-time principal might include: inservice budgeting for teaching staff and ancillary staff; planning for aides and contracted employees (music accompanists); [and] budgeting for co-curricular programs, assemblies, special projects, [and] summer school."

Support for broadened thinking about scarce resources was reflected in one principal's observation that, to be effective, principals must recognize that ". . . supply (of resources) is limited

and priorities must be established." Another principal challenged us to remember that "(b) budgeting courses are okay, but incorporate . . . alternate ways of getting resources. Right now that information is gathered informally among principals."

Several comments reflected a real concern for the budgetary knowledge base of the novice, or beginning, principal. For example, one principal suggested that resource allocation programs fashion content that would aid in reducing "spring-time stress that goes with preparing the 'first budget.'" Apparently, at least one of the those principals with only a few years' experience is still anxious about knowledge related to the budgetary process. A comment from a three-year principal is illustrative:

"I do not believe most principals have the fiscal background to develop entire budgets for their buildings without formal training from the central office staff. Because (after three years here) this superintendent discussed many of the options and facts concerning the budget, I would feel more comfortable having more input in setting budgets."

*Personnel:* Respondents indicated that programs should (a) provide a knowledge base with "special emphasis on staff," (b) consider "department chair involvement in the process," (c) impact "teacher empowerment," (d) and include "participatory management." One principal, for example, indicated that "administrators need much information for budgeting for staff development (and it is) usually an afterthought (in preparation programs)."

#### *Superintendents*

Superintendents advocated a knowledge base of program planning; personnel management, evaluation and accountability; management of curriculum review processes; long range and strategic planning; political nature and influence of resource allocation; general business procedures; accountability for expenditure of funds; and facilities management. One superintendent, being quite specific in making recommendations, urged that the program include

"general knowledge regarding (the state's) accounting system and code system . . . and the (state) laws as applied to various aspects of resource allocation, i.e., personnel, required education programs, bidding, etc."

Another superintendent declared that "training in comprehensive school finance at the local and state level" would encourage and promote the principal's "allocating existing resources *within* (original emphasis) a given budget." Another superintendent's statements supported observations by principals by stating that "they (principals) should at least know how school finances work—where receipts come from . . ." Yet another called for knowledge of the "budgeting process—school wide."

Perhaps the comments of one superintendent summarize the expectations of the entire respondent group:

"There must be a full understanding of the entire operation of the school, e.g., fiscal, personnel, managerial, before input can be sought/given for the input needed in the decision process. With this knowledge readily accessible to the individual, a more "educated" response can and will be provided."

#### *Skills*

The skills dimension is defined as areas of demonstrated expertise in action that are required of effective principals entering the field. The dimension includes skills in calculation, apportionment, allocation and management.

### Principals

Twelve principals made specific recommendations for skills acquisition and their responses were focused on skills needed in meeting specific problems of practice. Several emphasized skill and training in working with the budget and fiscal management issues. One principal suggested that candidates develop skills in "cooperative purchasing," "facilities management," and "calculation skills associated with fringe benefits." Another suggested that training be offered to principals so that they might be skilled in the "spring-ordering process."

A few of the principals did recognize the need to link resource allocation to administrative areas other than fiscal areas. For example, one principal specifically recommended that "interviewing skills" be offered; another advocated "curriculum development skills." One principal that focused on fiscal issues did suggest that skills in "committee building" would be an asset. Another principal invoked a rational approach by suggesting that programs provide an "exercise forcing students to assign value (emphasis in original) to human, fiscal, material or physical resources. . . ."

### Superintendents

Superintendents reported that principals entering the field today should be skilled in prioritizing, assessing, judging, and decision-making; should be adept at administering the budget, should demonstrate computer and calculation competency, and should be experts in handling human relations.

One superintendent called for skills in "human relations — (claiming that they were) very important in dealing with staff. The superintendent also asserted that skills in motivation techniques and decision-making were critical preparatory experiences for allocating resources effectively. Another superintendent appealed for integrated skill development and requested that principals be prepared to make "philosophical and discretionary judgments based upon the "value" of a particular service, or portions thereof, versus its cost."

One superintendent responded that principals needed skills in "how to find levies . . ." and in understanding "the taxpayer view, tax available, . . . and that a budget needs to be made realistically—not (made) just to inflate (sic) unrealistically (emphasis in original)." In the same vein, another superintendent indicated a need for skills in budgeting "money for their specific areas" while another called for "understanding of financial limitations."

### Format for Program Provision

Both principals and superintendents were strong advocates of experiential learning, although they recognized the difficulty in provision. One sympathetic superintendent responded:

"Resources are always scarce and competition for them is always keen. So there must be experience in relationship with faculty and other people of the school in establishing the mission and practices of the program to be financed . . . these experiences are difficult to provide in the usual academic setting."

Nonetheless, a significant share of the comments suggested formats and methods for instruction. The responses fell into four categories: coursework, seminars, simulations, and provision of on-site opportunities. Principals were more likely to offer suggestions for coursework or seminars. Superintendents advocated on-site opportunities for learning about resource allocation. One respondent succinctly advocated preparation programs that allowed for "fac(ing) issues." The following represents suggestions offered in the four categories.

**Coursework:** Principals were strong advocates for coursework. One suggested that the preparation format should ". . .

offer practical application computer programs for keeping track of the budget process." Another advocated "courses in plant planning and operation," while yet another called on us to offer the traditional "school business class."

No superintendent suggested specific courses, although the responses were peppered with inferences to offer experiences in a somewhat structured setting, such as a class. One superintendent, for example, suggested a "resource allocation term project."

**Seminars:** One principal actually mentioned that a seminar be offered as a format. Comments from other principals represented content that is often presented in a seminar design. For instance, one principal asked that the preparation format provide experts and provide for expert input into the learning process. Statements calling for "(t)ime with superintendents explaining the various processes (required in a year)," and request for "practitioners from schools of varying sizes . . . as guest speakers" were representative of seminar material requested by principals. No superintendent proposed a seminar or seminar activities.

**Simulations:** Both superintendents and principals requested that we offer realistic experiences to aspiring principals. One principal, for instance, asked that we "involve (potential principals) . . . in the total process." Another requested that we "give . . . first hand experience . . ." A third suggested that we allow for "decision-making responsibilities."

One superintendent suggested that principals needed "extensive problem-solving simulations in the area of resource allocation." This person lamented that "we are being challenged to come up with a new solution that will fulfill the need and yet be ever so cost effective."

Another superintendent, after proposing a role-playing simulation that required decisions about staff expenditures, inservice, and materials acquisitions, expressed sensitivity to the plight of the principal:

"I think all too often principals are left with the decision of making the programs fit into the budget—rather than planning a program and developing and proposing a budget to support the program."

The need for principals to have experience in linking the external and internal environments of the school system was expressed by another superintendent who said,

"They need to actually be involved in a process via practicum, or class simulation where they will face the issues both politically and educationally involved in allocating resources. They need to know how to assess current situations, curriculum, programs, extra-curricular etc. and base decisions on this process."

**On-site opportunities:** Both principals and superintendents encouraged increased school-site opportunities. Principals tended to segment their suggestions into practical and experiential opportunities. One principal, for example, said that candidates should "serve on material selection committees . . ." another recommended that a trainee "serve on faculty planning committees," and a third asked that we "include a one-year internship under an experienced administrator."

A superintendent told us that principals should engage "in the allocation of resources to a particular organization." The superintendent went on to suggest that "an internship beginning with the planning stages for a school year (summer months) . . ." would give "prospective principals the experience of assessing strengths of the various resources at his (sic) disposal and employing those strengths for maximum utilization and effectiveness." In the same vein, another suggested that principals involved in a practicum "face the issues [that are] both politically and educationally involved in allocating resources."

## Discussion

Our findings were clustered around three dimensions. Results suggest that the knowledge base about the resource allocation dimension, at least from the practicing superintendents' and principals' perceptions, ranged from specific information bites to proposals that integrated management and leadership content. The skills dimension ranged from suggestions for specific and solitary managerial tasks to suggestions for employing complex decision-making and integrative functions. The delivery methods dimension ranged from suggestions for one-shot simulations to requests for long-term involvement in natural settings.

The three dimensions suggested by this inquiry have implications for five stakeholders with responsibilities and perspectives about the career development of school-site leaders. These five stakeholders include (a) professors and field supervisors in university preparation programs, (b) professional administrative associations, (c) state departments that accredit and license practitioners, (d) local school districts that employ program graduates, and (e) other agencies interested in improving the quality of administrative leadership [The National Association for Secondary School Principals (NASSP), 1992]. The NASSP has issued a call for collaborative action among these five stakeholders so that consensus can precept competition among the participants.

Implications for each of the stakeholders interested in preparing principals follow.

The university administration preparation program is "the first and usually the most influential contact in administrator preparation" (NASSP, 1992, p. 21) for aspiring principals. In developing site-level resource allocation skills, such programs should:

1. evaluate current experimental administrative training models in terms of effectiveness in the field;
2. implement alternative site-base administration models; conduct multi-level assessments that includes feedback from school boards, superintendents, principals, teachers, students, parents, and community members;
3. develop and implement both short- and long-term experiential preparation experiences, including case studies, simulations, exposure to successful models, periodic clinical observations, and practice in the field;
4. monitor the knowledge and skills related to linking resources to organizational goals and missions;
5. link procurement and allocation of resources to goal setting and long range planning;
6. expand budgeting curriculum to include greater variation in type and length of budget development;

Professional associations are in the position to advocate and disseminate information about alternative strategies in resource allocation and site-management that will encourage an improved learning environment for students. Organizations should:

1. stimulate policy-making bodies to examine and restructure rules that prevent effective change at the district and site levels;
2. seek and promote federal and state fiscal support for experimenting with alternative models of administering schools;
3. aid in the dissemination of knowledge from the researchers to the practitioners;
4. streamline the existing communication network among members and the organization;

State departments have the potential to coordinate efforts to adhere to standards of quality while still providing adequate and appropriate resources to schools. Suggestions relevant to resource allocation responsibilities of the site-leader include:

1. analyze the concept of school-based funding and its potential for the particular state that the department serves;
2. encourage and fiscally support innovation and experimentation at the site level;
3. expand the use of categorical grants;
4. investigate the opportunities to waive regulations for specific periods of time for specific site experimentation;
5. collaborate with university and local district personnel in preparation and certification issues.

Local school districts set the climate for site leaders and determine the parameters of the resource allocation process. Suggestions for local districts supporting the development among principals for effective resource allocation procedures include:

1. develop and articulate rules and regulations affecting the amount or resources allotted and the accompanying procedures;
2. determine and articulate levels of support for site-management and site-budgeting;
3. develop clear and articulate policies regarding fund excesses that may occur (Cox, 1989);
4. consider allowing the carry over of funds from year to year to promote flexibility and efficiency (Guthrie, 1986).
5. expand the business manager's scope of responsibility to include serving as a liaison to sites;
6. provide adequate and compatible computer hardware and software systems (Cox, 1989);
7. commit to investing in human capital through training programs and periodic evaluation of staff;

Agencies or organizations, such as principal academies and assessment centers, provide support to the practitioners, are interested in maintaining quality, and increase their opportunities to enrich their basic learning (NASSP, 1992). Such agencies can contribute to the development of principals' resource allocation skills in the following ways:

1. support, monitor and maintain contact with novice principals;
2. craft programs that address allocation issues important to the beginning principal;
3. separate training programs by the experience level of the participants;
4. plan and institute cooperative programs with university programs, state department efforts and professional organizations.

## Summary and Conclusion

The past few years have produced a research-supported advocacy (a) for decentralized decision-making and greater principal responsibility for allocating resources at the site level, (b) for changes in preparation programs that prepare the principal more adequately, and (c) for changes calling for school-based collaborations between universities and K-12 schools. Thomson (1992) suggests that "a new starting point is required" in the development of preparation programs and that it "should begin with the work of principals in contemporary schools" (p. 6). School site leaders enjoy a proximity and familiarity with current processes; they receive suggestions and comments from teachers on the front line and from supervising administrators. These information sources, when shared with those responsible for the development of principal preparation programs, provide current and relevant information for the preparation efforts of the 1990s and beyond.

This inquiry sought suggestions from on-site leaders and their supervisors that would inform and reform efforts to provide expanded and innovative models for offering a knowledge and action base for preparing principals for resource allocation

responsibilities. We found that responses represented a wide scope of content and skills and that respondents provided a broad range of formats for presenting and exploring information with potential principals.

The data supplied in this study was restricted to the area of resource allocation experiences for aspiring principals. Principals perceived a need for concrete information and experiences that would assist in addressing specific problems of practice. Superintendents want principals to reason and to make decisions. The superintendents in this study not only emphasized the role of experience but offered examples of the type of setting that they considered conducive to providing principals with hands-on experiences. The data support the growing consensus that "stand and deliver" principal preparation programs should be challenged if principals are to be powerful agents in delivering effective and challenging programs to students in public schools. Further research efforts should include an assessment of the implementation and evaluation of coordinated preparation efforts between university preparation programs and practical experiences involving the school site.

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