

PREL BRIEFING PAPER

September 1999



PACIFIC RESOURCES FOR EDUCATION AND LEARNING

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Professional Development for School Leaders: A Hawai'i Model

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Research and experience both dictate that meaningful and focused professional development at the various stages of a school administrator's career may well hold the keys to the successful implementation of standards-based reform in the Pacific region. Impact assessments conducted by Claremont Graduate University suggest that one of the most important functions a school administrator can perform is to effectively reduce uncertainty about standards and their implementation strategies. Teachers and other stakeholders must be able to "make sense" of both routine and reform-related tasks when implementing standards-based reform. A high level of certainty among teachers and others in the school community tends to have a "...robust and positive effect on student learning" (Rosenholtz, 1991).

Strong links between effective professional development for educational administrators and successful standards-based school reform are well established in academic literature (Jacobson, 1998; Rosenholtz, 1991; Webb, 1987). Recent evaluative studies conducted by Claremont Graduate University's Center for Educational Studies in the Los Angeles Unified School District and other districts (Matsui & Appel, 1997; Matsui, 1998) also point to the vital roles that site administrators play in standards-based reform.

A current trend in Pacific education is an increase in the number of school administrators slated for retirement. In the State of Hawai'i, approximately 478 out of 750 Educational Officers are projected to retire over the next five years (approximately 64 percent of the workforce), threatening to leave a major shortfall of school administrators. Although some may view this situation as a crisis, many have characterized it as an opportunity to re-conceptualize the way in which the state can develop future school leaders. Without a doubt, a transformation of this magnitude requires new ideas about what constitutes effective leadership training. Effective school leaders can impact the lives of Pacific children well into the next millennium.

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Building the capacity among current and prospective school administrators through the three signature phases of leadership—pre-service, induction, and renewal—can provide a school leader with the skills to navigate through the uncharted waters of the future. Appropriate and consistent professional development will help leaders stimulate local school communities into action, thereby enabling students to meet achievement objectives embedded in standards.

Where Do We Start?

As is the case with any journey, there must be a beginning. Those venturing into new territory are often assisted by guides and maps that describe the climate and conditions they may encounter along the way. It was in this spirit that the Hawai‘i Superintendent invited the Hawai‘i School Leadership Academy (HSLA) to play a fundamental role in transforming the way in which prospective educational leaders in Hawai‘i are introduced to and inducted into administrative roles. HSLA was also asked to assist in the redesign of professional renewal strategies for current administrators.

To engage Hawai‘i’s many constituencies in this endeavor, HSLA added other stakeholders to its Advisory Committee and organized a Task Force for Leadership Development. The Task Force included a diverse assemblage of practicing school administrators; representatives from the Hawai‘i State Department of Education, the University of Hawai‘i at Mānoa, and other educational organizations; and key stakeholders from the business community and from unions that represent educators.

For the purpose of this briefing paper, the Task Force’s general findings are organized into three categories: (1) knowledge, skills, and abilities required for transformational leadership; (2) structures, strategies, and required resources to re-equip educational officers in the State of Hawai‘i; and (3) criteria for quality leadership and measuring the effectiveness of Educational Officers.

1. Knowledge, Skills, and Abilities Required for Transformational Leadership

The Task Force first focused its efforts on identifying the knowledge, skills, and abilities that are essential to the effectiveness of a transformational leader. The members found that relatively basic skills, such as problem solving, communication, role modeling, and critical thinking, were very important. Following is a description of these skills.

- A leader must be able to build collaborative relationships and consensus among diverse stakeholder groups, and to facilitate individual and group problem solving.
- Openness to diverse viewpoints, perspectives, and voices is necessary.
- A leader communicates honestly and effectively with diverse constituencies, including teachers, parents, students, staff, and community members.
- A transformational leader serves as a change agent, mentor, and coach for stakeholders within the school community; builds capacity; and empowers others.
- As a respected member of the community, a leader should demonstrate a strong personal commitment to the school community’s vision, a caring and respect for members of the school community, and the ability to manage with the heart as well as the head.
- The abilities to reflect and think critically and systematically, and to acquire content and contextual knowledge, are necessary in order to manage problems and implement solutions.

- Self-awareness and a capacity to deal with the emotional aspects of leadership are important during the challenges of implementing reform.
- A leader must have the ability to gather and analyze data that will inform decisions related to student achievement.
- A leader must be able to access and manage short- and long-term resources in order to ensure that the school/district vision/mission is achieved.

2. Structures, Strategies, and Required Resources to Re-Equip Educational Officers

After identifying some critical skills and abilities that could be attributed to transformational leaders, the Task Force elaborated upon the structures, strategies, and resources it believed are necessary to retool leadership development programs. The following points emerged from the analysis:

- The formation of “true” partnerships with businesses, institutions of higher education, professional associations, and other agencies plays an important role in ensuring the successful implementation of standards-based reform.
- Time is a valuable commodity that must be utilized efficiently and effectively. Bureaucratic “red tape” redundancy and “nuts and bolts” meetings for Educational Officers are detrimental and contribute to “information overload” for principals. As such, the purposes and structures of principals’ meetings should be revisited and revised. Opportunities to share information among a network of peers may also reduce redundancy and wasted time.
- There is a need for greater clarity around the many roles, responsibilities, and accountability structures required of Educational Officers. Evaluations of Educational Officers should incorporate indicators that will paint a broad portrait of their performance and should include feedback from a variety of stakeholders so that the officers have a clear conception of what is expected of them as leaders of the school community.
- Reducing ambiguity around standards-based reform and linking it to current practices will facilitate the eventual success of standards-based reform efforts.
- The professional image of the school leader must be enhanced to bolster recruitment efforts. The creation of incentives to attract qualified candidates to the field of educational administration is essential.
- School leaders should strive to convert their organizational missions from out-dated objectives to standards-based goals.
- Professional development and leadership opportunities should be extended to current and prospective school leaders at all levels: pre-service, induction, and renewal. Leadership development should encourage entrepreneurship and should enable the school leader to interact with all members of the learning community—teachers, students, parents, and others.

3. Criteria for Quality Leadership Performance and for Measuring Effectiveness

Some of the criteria identified by the Task Force are associated directly with the skills, knowledge, and tools needed for developing transformational leaders. Along with the following, the abilities to integrate parts into a whole and to see the “big picture” (to engage in systems thinking) represent a

consequential criterion for training. Commonly identified criteria for quality leadership performance include the following:

- Leaders must build a vision that incorporates the perspectives of diverse stakeholders.
- Through effective communication and collaboration, stakeholders in the school community—including students—must be engaged and involved in reform efforts. Stakeholders should be motivated to achieve standards-based reform, and support should be provided to help make sense of reform efforts.
- Professional development training should enable educational leaders to become lifelong learners and should emphasize reflection, leadership skills, sensitivity to diversity, and the ability to link research theory to effective practice. Support systems—including an online clearinghouse—can help leaders move from training to actual practice and encourage them to take risks.
- The climate created by leaders should reflect an open and honest learning community, centered on students, which will promote and enable change to occur.
- Leaders need to work collaboratively to establish accountability structures, indicator systems, and feedback processes, which can inform curricular decisions and motivate continuous improvement.
- School leaders must possess a broad-based set of skills based on the recommendations of the Task Force. These include the abilities to effectively communicate with stakeholders, appropriately allocate human and fiscal resources, develop the capabilities of others, build community, collaborate with others, engage in lifelong learning, and serve as a change agent.
- The content of training programs should include a keen and thorough understanding of organizational culture, structure, and standards-based reform. Programs should include awareness of the local culture and new research, technologies, and assessment methods in order to make informed decisions in a standards-based environment.
- Finally, training should help current and prospective educational administrators consider the implications of their work in the “big picture.” Assessment systems implemented to hold school leaders accountable for their performance must be comprehensive, incorporating multiple points of data and the perspectives of diverse constituencies, including peers, superiors, subordinates, and members of local communities. They must also serve as a meaningful feedback system for administrators.

Conclusion

As the academic literature and the experiences of practitioners across the nation attest, focused professional development training for Educational Officers takes reform ideas into practice using well-informed organizational cultures and comprehensive support systems. Educational Officers are front-line actors in the implementation of education policy, and their critical role in the development of standards-based restructuring efforts cannot be understated.

An investment in the development of educational leaders can result in tangible dividends that include higher levels of student achievement and leaders who are able to utilize existing resources more

effectively and who have the capacity to generate renewable sources of support from local communities.

Good schools can be attributed—at least in part—to good leaders. Thus, in order to create lasting and sustainable change, reform efforts should consider the conclusions of the Task Force for Leadership Development when addressing the training of school leaders.

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