RESEARCH UTILIZATION BRIEFS:
SELECTING LEADERSHIP FOR TOMORROW'S SCHOOLS

In recent years, significant attention has been directed to using research-based innovation and best practice in university-based leadership preparation programs to prepare leaders who can effectively improve schools (Browne-Ferrigno & Muth, in press; Darling-Hammond, LaPointe, Meyerson, Orr, & Cohen, 2007; Davis, Darling-Hammond, LaPointe, & Meyerson, 2005; Jackson & Kelly, 2002; Orr, 2006; Southern Regional Educational Board, 2005). Until recently, however, little empirical evidence has been available to guide the preparation of educational leaders. This situation has changed. A growing body of evidence indicates that certain program features are more likely to yield better graduate outcomes (Darling-Hammond et. al., 2007; Davis et. al., 2005; Jackson & Kelly, 2002). Of these essential program elements, careful recruitment and selection of leadership for tomorrow's schools is key.

A research project led by Linda Darling-Hammond from Stanford University and commissioned by the Wallace Foundation, confirmed that programs need to be more selective in recruiting and selecting promising leadership candidates. The report, *Preparing School Leaders for a Changing World* (Darling-Hammond et al., 2007), profiles case studies of preservice and district-based in-service "exemplary" principal training programs. In each program, processes were developed to actively recruit and select talented potential principals, with district partners playing a key role in such processes. In some programs, like San Diego's Educational Leadership Development Academy, candidates must be nominated by their districts even to be considered for admission.

With regard to recruitment, the Stanford team found that a large percentage of exemplary programs' graduates had been referred or recommended to their programs by districts (63% vs. 32%). Moreover, district recommendations were typically based on internal screening and identification processes that complemented the criteria of their university partners.

The criteria most commonly used included evidence of effective teaching, strong leadership, and commitment to educational change. Additionally, most of the programs looked for educators with a track record of coaching other teachers and working in high-need settings and who had an explicit goal of expanding the racial/ethnic, cultural, and gender diversity of the principal pool.

Exemplary programs Darling-Hammond et al. (2007) studied also employed rigorous selection processes. Rather than basing their selection decisions on traditional sources, such as reference letters, essays, and Graduate Record Examination (GRE) scores, exemplary programs used multiple sources of evidence designed to assess future leadership potential. The process used by the Bank Street program is one example. In this program, raters narrow the pool by reviewing reference letters from the candidates' principal and teaching colleagues, to ascertain candidates' teaching and leadership abilities, and an essay prepared by candidates that reflects on their commitments to education. Those remaining are invited to a group interview, during which participants work collaboratively to solve a realistic problem of practice. Applicants are observed, filmed, and rated by teams that include a district representative. Assessment criteria include applicants' abilities to discuss appropriate content, communicate ideas clearly, work cooperatively, influence group opinion, and facilitate task completion. In the final stage of the process, the district superintendent and deputy superintendent review the videos and decide who will be selected.

Another benefit of district involvement in recruitment and selection processes is the district's willingness to invest in candidate leadership development. The Stanford team found that two thirds of candidates referred by districts had some of their program costs paid by the districts, as compared to a third of the national sample.

Conclusions

The Stanford team found statistically significant differences between graduates of exemplary leader preparation programs and those from more typical programs. Darling-Hammond et al. (2007) concluded that candidate recruitment and selection are important factors in the design of principal preparation programs. These program features not only affect the kind of individuals who enter a program, but also determine to a great extent what the program can build on, what kind of curriculum can be effective, and what kind of leader can emerge.

Implications for Preparation

The findings of the Stanford study point to several implications for program designers and leaders.

1. First, recruitment and selection (as opposed to candidate self-selection) are essential qualities of program design, not incidental activities. Thus, serious consideration should be invested in understanding the kind of candidates programs intend to attract and how to attract them. Typically, desired candidates will be excellent teachers with strong instructional backgrounds and leadership abilities.
2. Recruitment should involve proactive outreach to desired candidates.
3. Selection should include the review of a variety of data sources collected from a variety of sources, including candidate participation in performance assessments.
4. Working with district partners in the recruitment and selection of program candidates is key to identifying high-quality candidates and to developing district support.
5. Finally, all recruitment and selection processes should reflect a program's definition of effective leadership and be aligned with professional standards for school leadership.

References

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