



## Factors Affecting School Leadership: A Closer Look at the Perspectives of Current School Leaders from Four Louisiana School Districts

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### Rationale for the Study

The scarcity of well-prepared educational leaders is an issue often discussed across the country (Hammond, Muffs & Sciascia, 2001; McCrieght, 2001). However, at least one study (Roza, 2003) found that, in spite of pervasive conversations about a widespread shortage of principals, shortages may be more of a perception than a major concern. The greater issue may be the need for a new kind of leader – one who understands the unique challenges of educating the new generation student in an age of accountability. This type of leader does not rely solely on a managerial skill set. He or she must be a visionary, collaborative leader. However, this type of leadership can only exist if it is supported.

The purpose of this study was to gather data from four school districts (Caddo, Lafayette, Rapides and the Recovery School District) that spoke to the working conditions of educational leaders. This entails variables such as ongoing support (from districts, universities, and the state legislature), motivational factors which lead teachers into educational leadership certification programs, and what factors play a part in remaining in, or leaving the principalship. The goal of this Wallace study is to determine the working conditions in Louisiana schools that can be used to influence district and state policies for the ultimate improvement of student achievement.

### Research Questions

1. *What encourages, discourages and motivates individuals to pursue educational leadership certification to attain principal/central office positions?*

Motivate/Encourages:

- 104 respondents: Desire to have a larger impact on student success.
- The potential for higher earnings was found to be significant.
- The desire for power/prestige associated with a leadership/administrative position was significant based on location where primary duties were performed.

Discourages:

- 68 respondents: School board politics
- Maintaining a balance between work and personal life was significant based upon years of service and ethnicity, as well as school board politics.
- The accountability demands placed on school leaders based on parish surveyed was significant (e.g., Caddo rated this higher than the RSD).

2. *What continued support do new leaders need after participating in the Louisiana Educational Leader Induction Program?*

- 92 respondents – More opportunities for networking with other school leaders to share experiences.
- Participants who were somewhat satisfied rated this need higher than those who were very satisfied with their jobs.



## LOUISIANA EDUCATIONAL LEADERS NETWORK

The goal of the Louisiana Educational Leadership Network, funded by the Wallace Foundation, is to develop, test and share useful approaches for improving the training of education leaders and the conditions that support their ability to significantly lift student achievement across entire state and districts, especially in high-needs schools.

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- ♦ Those with less experience needed more support with time management than those with more than 10 years of experience.

### 3. *What motivates effective leaders to remain within the profession and what motivates effective leaders to work in the most challenging schools?*

Remain in the profession:

- ♦ 111 respondents – Personal belief in the value of the work performed
- ♦ Women are significantly more motivated to remain in the profession than are men based upon a personal belief in the value of the work performed.
- ♦ In addition, respondents from some parishes identified “stepping stone for career progression” and “decent salaries with potential for higher earnings” as factors.

Work in challenging schools:

- ♦ 109 respondents – Dedication to the student population the school serves.
- ♦ The only significant finding was for “dedication to the students” and this occurred in schools which receive a higher percentage of free/reduced lunch.
- ♦ Nearing significance was the “challenge of improving academic performance.” Participants who possessed the redesigned Education Leader certification rated this higher than those with the old certification.

### 4. *What additional conditions can universities, districts, and the state address to help educational leaders in improving student achievement?*

Universities:

- ♦ 96 respondents: Provide professional development on utilizing data to drive decision-making.
- ♦ Participants possessing newer certification rated the factor providing specific professional development opportunities in curriculum and development higher than those with the old certification types did.
- ♦ Participants possessing the older certification rate the factor providing professional development opportunities on utilizing data to drive decision-making higher than participants possessing licensure from the redesigned certification structure.

Districts:

- ♦ 105 respondents: Lessening demands on school leader’s time that detract from the primary focus of their leadership position.
- ♦ Providing more financial support for targeted academic programs was significant. New certification types rated this higher than those of the old, as did African Americans over Caucasians.

State:

- ♦ 109 respondents: Removing superfluous and unnecessary reporting requirements.
- ♦ Overwhelmingly, accountability and equity were the broad issues mentioned. Specific concerns listed included high student mobility rates, “at-risk” school funding, and flexibility of options for non-college bound students.
- ♦ Removing superfluous and unnecessary reporting requirements was significant.
- ♦ Close to significant was providing a more equitable system for funding education in LA. Those with high poverty schools rated this highly as did those who were somewhat dissatisfied with their jobs.

## Implications for State and District Policy Formation

Although not separated into an individual section, implications for policy study can be drawn upon a full read of the study.

*The complete research report can be found at [www.leadlouisiana.net](http://www.leadlouisiana.net).*