THE AUTONOMY GAP

Barriers to Effective School Leadership

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Foreword by:
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A joint project of the
American Institutes for Research
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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

While the need for strong school leaders in American primary and secondary education is widely recognized, little effort has been made to determine whether today's principals actually possess the authority to exercise strong leadership. Simply stated, it is not clear that school leaders have the flexibility they need to get the results demanded by state and federal accountability systems. Are their hands tied—by government regulations, contract provisions, and district mandates? Are barriers to stronger leadership real or imagined—based on actual policy or existing mainly in the minds and culture of school principals, akin to urban myths? Insofar as there are real barriers, which of them do principals regard as the greatest impediments to effective leadership? Where do they come from? (Federal or state law? District policy? Union contracts? Elsewhere?) And what can be done to improve conditions so as to foster more effective leadership for U.S. K-12 schools?

Seeking some answers to these questions, we interviewed thirty-three elementary school principals from the public and charter school sectors of three states. (The sample is not nationally representative.)

Several findings were unsurprising:

- The "autonomy gap"—the difference between the amount of authority that district school principals think they need in order to be effective leaders and the amount they actually have—is greatest with regard to personnel decisions (i.e., the ability to discharge or transfer unsuitable teachers, hire teachers and staff, and determine the number and type of faculty and staff positions). These barriers are real, not imagined, and are born from state policies, district procedures, and collective bargaining agreements.

- This autonomy gap is smaller for principals in a nonunion right-to-work state, at least with respect to teacher hiring, transfer, and placement decisions.

- Charter school principals feel that they have greater autonomy with regard to key school functions than do district-operated public school principals.

But there were also some surprising findings:

- Despite the constraints they face, most public school principals feel that they have the ability to exercise effective leadership within the terms of their job as they see it. In general, they have come to accept their job as it is, and instead of trying to change the system, they learn to work the system. They see their role as "middle manager"—not CEO.

- Principals with greater longevity in their school districts come to feel a sense of de facto autonomy, as long-standing relationships allow them to bargain for greater authority and for school resources. These principals have honed their political and relationship-building skills over time.

- While principals in "managed instruction" districts—those that centrally prescribe curricula and instructional methods for their schools—described a lack of autonomy, several principals in a more decentralized district did, too. Although leaders of that district used rhetoric about empowering principals with greater autonomy, in practice union contract provisions severely limited their autonomy.

Instead of trying to change the system, district principals learn to work the system.

- Principals in a right-to-work state felt just as restricted as principals in unionized states in discharging ineffective teachers. Employment laws and due process requirements were equally challenging and time consuming in both types of states.

While it's regrettable that more than a few district principals have come to accept the constraints of their job as a given, they deserve empathy, not condemnation. The system caused the problem and until the system changes the ground rules and procedures, policy makers and education reformers are kidding themselves if they expect the majority of principals to do anything but adapt to the circumstances in which they find themselves.

FOREWORD

In 2003, the Thomas B. Fordham Institute teamed up with The Broad Foundation to publish *Better Leaders for America's Schools: A Manifesto*. This call to action envisioned a new role for the public school principal, one akin to that of a CEO. After all, under the then-new No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB), school leaders were being held ever more to account for raising the achievement of their pupils and the performance of their schools. In many states, principals who didn't get satisfactory results could even lose their jobs. This was as it should be, we argued, but in return for this heightened accountability, leaders should also gain functional authority over their schools. (The first law of management is that an executive's authority must be commensurate with his or her responsibility.)

The 2003 manifesto made other arguments, too, several of which ignited minor skirmishes. Our own trustee Diane Ravitch challenged our view that noneducators could be effective principals. Others took offense at our recommendation that education schools give up their exclusive franchise on training school leaders, or at our proposition that, contrary to conventional wisdom, principals need not be instructional leaders. (We argued that an assistant principal or teacher-leader could play this role.)

Yet almost nobody attacked our central conclusion: that in the NCLB-age, school leaders need to wield true authority over their personnel, their budgets, and key parts of their instructional programs if they are to be held accountable for results. (The one group that pushed back on this point was—predictably—the teacher unions. One of their staffers recently termed this reform strategy "principal worship.")

This agreement sparked our curiosity. Most disinterested analysts agree that principals *should* have authority over key functions of their schools; but to what extent, we wondered, do principals themselves feel that they *actually* possess it? And if they don't feel they possess it, why not? What gets in the way? Federal regulations, state rules, district mandates, union contract provisions, or something else? Or was their lack of authority an urban myth that had no foundation at all?

To be sure, others had surveyed school leaders on similar issues. In 2001, for example, Public Agenda published *Trying to Stay Head of the Game: Superintendents and Principals Talk about School Leadership*. Both groups of administrators told researchers that they needed greater autonomy to "reward good teachers and fire ineffective ones" and voiced approval of giving leaders "far more autonomy. . . while holding them accountable for results."

But nobody, to our knowledge, had sat down face-to-face with a decent-sized population of principals for extended interviews so as to understand more clearly what barriers they confront and where these obstacles come from.

Our colleagues at The Broad Foundation were curious about these questions, too. They have funded sundry innovations in the world of school leadership, especially nontraditional preparation programs (e.g., The Broad Center for aspiring superintendents, New Leaders for New Schools, and local initiatives like the New York City Leadership Academy). So we eagerly teamed up with them again to explore these important questions. We looked for a project leader who understood the challenges that principals face and also had solid research credentials. That search led us to Steven Adamowski.

In the NCLB age, school leaders need to wield true authority over their personnel, their budgets, and key parts of their instructional programs if they are to be held accountable for results.

At the time, Steven was fresh off his superintendency in Cincinnati, where he had pursued a number of promising reforms. Chief among them was decentralizing key leadership functions, putting principals in charge of their budgets, and vouchsafing them greater authority over staffing decisions. (Other important Adamowski initiatives in the Queen City were weighted student funding and district-sponsored charter schools.) He had sympathy, then, for our key arguments in *Better Leaders for America's Schools*. In fact, he was one of the first educators to sign that manifesto.

After leaving Cincinnati, Dr. Adamowski joined the academic world at St. Louis University and the American Institutes for Research (AIR), one of the nation's foremost analytic firms, where he led several research and consulting projects. With financial resources from Broad, AIR, and the William E. Simon Foundation, we launched the current study with Steven at the helm. (We thank all three funders for their generosity—and their patience. We also appreciate the hard work and perseverance of Steven's team at AIR, especially coauthors Susan Bowles Therriault and Anthony P. Cavanna, as well as Chrys Marcus, Diane Steinberg, Richard Spero, and Michelle Perry.)

With input from Fordham and Broad, Steven and his team identified thirty public school district principals and three charter school principals located in three states. They interviewed each principal in depth and compiled and analyzed the results. (The principals and their superintendents deserve our sincere appreciation for their time and involvement. We can't name them, however, because we promised anonymity as a condition of their participation.) Thanks to the research team's careful and conscientious work (including final drafting done by Steven even after he assumed his demanding current job as Hartford's superintendent), we now have clearer answers to the questions that tantalized us several years ago.

Despite having their hands tied over critical decisions, most district principals interviewed for this study appear content with the meager authority they possess.

Some of those answers are no surprise. Principals working in the traditional public education system indeed describe a lack of authority over functions that they themselves regard as critical to raising student achievement, especially school staffing. Steven terms this distance between the authority they need and the authority they have the autonomy gap. Charter school principals have more room to operate, and district school leaders in a right-to-work state enjoy more autonomy in most personnel matters than their counterparts in collective-bargaining states. These findings are in line with previous research—and with common sense. They're also sufficiently disturbing from the standpoint of serious school reform.

But Adamowski and company also gleaned some new insights that seem to us even more disturbing. Despite having their hands tied over critical decisions, most district principals interviewed for this study appear content with the meager authority they possess. They don't aspire to be chief executives of their schools; rather, they seem to accept their roles as middle managers. They would like to have more control over personnel (especially hiring, firing, and transferring teachers), but they don't demand it. They don't expect it. They don't quit over it. They have learned to work the system, not change the system. They seek to do the best they can as managers, not revolutionaries.

Apple founder and cultural icon Steve Jobs recently asked, "What kind of person could you get to run a small business if you told them that when they came in, they couldn't get rid of people that they thought weren't any good?" His answer: most public school principals.

Should we be depressed and abandon hope for principals who yearn to be hard-charging executives, marshalling all of their schools' resources to increase student achievement and knocking down all barriers in their way? Not yet. Rather, we think we're seeing a version of the classic chicken-egg paradox. Which comes first: greater authority for principals or principals who demand greater authority? Absent real autonomy in key areas (again: personnel, budget, instruction), we suspect that principals who once yearned to be dynamic executives and change agents "selected out" of the system in frustration, perhaps to run a charter school or enter a completely different field. Those principals who remained—dedicated men and women who worked their way up through the system, often over many years—have come to accept the system's parameters.

Which comes first: greater authority for principals or principals who demand greater authority?

Note the dichotomy between the district school and charter sectors. Strong principals of district schools become excellent middle managers (or what Adamowski terms level-one leaders), while charter school principals are more akin to CEOs (and demonstrate level-two leadership). That being so, the nontraditional leadership development programs highlighted in our 2003 manifesto and supported by The Broad Foundation and other funders might better focus their efforts on staffing charter schools. These seem to be the environments where break-the-mold leaders are most apt to succeed. And, in fact, that's the direction that New Leaders for New Schools, for example, appears to be headed, with its sharpened focus on placing principals in high-achieving charter schools.

We're mindful, too, that more and more reform-minded districts now embrace managed instruction, under which key curricular and instructional decisions are made centrally. In those settings, the principal's job is to ensure teacher fidelity to, and successful implementation of, the mandated program. The jury is out as to how well this reform strategy will serve children. It's fairly clear, however, that in such districts the principal's role as "instructional leader" is further diminished.

Of course, there's another way. If districts want to tap the energy and experience of effective leaders in education and beyond—and draw talented new individuals into school leadership roles—they could embrace a decentralized approach, in essence treating every district school like a charter school. This idea goes back at least fifteen years to Paul Hill's concept of "contract schools" and district "portfolios," but it recently gained attention from the *New* Commission on the Skills of the American Workforce, which includes two former secretaries of education and a host of respected scholars and educators. Under this approach, school boards and central offices oversee general district policy, but each school is managed independently and held to account for its results. (England has followed essentially this strategy in recent years with considerable success.)

Some U.S. districts are edging in this direction. New York City and Las Vegas, for example, have established "empowerment zones" in which principals enjoy much greater autonomy than in other districts.

It's genuinely hard for school districts to transition from command-and-control to autonomy-in-return-for-accountability.

Dallas is pushing this way, too, and is helping to train current leaders to make the transition. Such developments are promising. But the present study also provides a cautionary tale about this approach. Six of our principals worked in a western district that claims to follow this decentralized model. And, in fact, they had some additional authority over their schools' instructional programs. Yet they complained that their actual powers were quite limited by the teacher union contract and by state mandates regarding instructional time allocations. Their experience of "autonomy" was more rhetoric than reality. Other decentralizing districts will also need to wrestle with these barriers.

It's genuinely hard for school districts to transition from command-and-control to autonomy-in-return-for-accountability. Such a shift means doing battle with meddlesome states, powerful unions, and central-office fiefdoms. It means paying principals more and micromanaging them less. But if leadership is as important a factor in school success as research indicates and as just about everyone acknowledges, and if great leaders demand (and need) true authority, taking this difficult step is worth the effort. It's the best way to close the autonomy gap—and thus a key to closing the achievement gap as well.

—Chester E. Finn, Jr., and Michael J. Petrilli, March 2007

I. INTRODUCTION

Over the past two decades, and especially since the passage of the No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB) in 2001, federal and state policies have placed individual schools—and their leaders—at the center of education reform efforts. The mantra of "accountability for results" puts a premium on effective school leaders who are expected to marshal their schools' instructional, human, and financial resources toward the goal of raising student achievement. And understandably so: a quarter century of research confirms that the two most important school-linked variables in boosting achievement are teacher quality and principal leadership.[i]

While increasing attention has been paid to developing strong school leaders—through improving training, recruiting a broader pool of applicants, offering alternative pathways to certification, expanding mentoring programs, and providing incentives for high performance—little scrutiny has been given to whether principals actually possess the authority they need to exercise strong leadership. Do school leaders genuinely have the power that they need to get the results demanded of them by state and federal accountability systems? Or are their hands tied by government regulations, contract provisions, due process requirements, and district mandates?

Are the barriers to stronger leadership that principals face real or imagined? Do such impediments actually stem from policy, or are principals manifesting a form of "learned helplessness"? Insofar as there are, in fact, real policy barriers, which ones most seriously impede effective leadership, and where do they come from? (Federal or state law? District policy? Union contracts? Elsewhere?) How might conditions be improved to encourage more effective school leadership?

These are the questions this investigation sought to answer by seeking the perspective of principals from the public and charter school sectors of three states.

II. METHODOLOGY

We asked traditional district school principals in three states about barriers that they face—including procedures, regulations, laws, conventions, court orders, union contracts, professional norms, marketplace issues, resources, etc. In multiple ways, we sought to identify those conditions that interfered with their ability to raise student achievement in their schools. In addition, for comparison purposes we asked the same questions of a small number of charter school principals in the same locales.[ii]

Data Collection

Data were collected using a variety of methods. We began with principal interviews and surveys, and then proceeded to a "backward-mapping" and verification process that examined documents such as union contracts, state laws, state regulations, and district policies to better understand the sources of constraints identified by principals.

Interview Protocol

The research team conducted a literature review on effective school leadership and the potential barriers that principals encounter.[iii] Based on that review, a semistructured interview protocol was developed, including a combination of open-ended and structured interview questions; background information on the principal and on the school; and several Likert-scale surveys measuring principals' general attitudes about school leadership as well as their perceptions about their ability to be effective leaders, any barriers to leadership they face, and the skills they need to exercise effective leadership. The proposed protocol was reviewed and approved by the AIR Institutional Research Review Board. The interview protocol is included as an appendix.

The interview protocol was then field tested with five principals in a New Jersey school district. Information gathered during the field test was used to refine the protocol. Then, four interview teams, comprised of an interviewer and a note taker, attended full-day training to review and practice administration of the protocol prior to conducting the interviews.

Interviews

Interviews were conducted in spring 2006. Each lasted approximately one hour and was conducted at the principal's school. Each principal was given an informed consent form assuring participants that their answers would be treated confidentially and that the findings would be reported pseudonymously by district and state.

Participant Selection

Thirty-three elementary principals from five urban areas in three states were interviewed. The choice of districts was affected by their willingness to cooperate with such a study. Two districts were located in a western state, two in a midwestern state, and one in a southeastern state. Four of the five districts were located in unionized states, one in a right-to-work state. At least six public school principals and one charter school principal were interviewed in each state (see table 1).

Within each district, superintendents were asked to provide the research teams with access to principals from two high-performing schools, two average-performing schools, and two low-performing schools as determined by state assessment results (see table 2). The principals were to have at least three years of experience.[iv]

Charter school leaders were selected by surveying schools in these areas and selecting elementary-level principals willing to participate. The research team then determined the performance status of the charter schools.

With such a small and purposefully selected sample, this study cannot claim to provide representative data on U.S. principals as a whole or those in the two sectors. Still, our in-depth conversations with the principals we did interview provide important new context for and insight about the constraints that these leaders do and do not face.

TABLE 1

Interview Participants

	Western State	Midwestern State	Southeastern State	TOTAL
District-operated public school principals	12	12	6	30
Charter school principals	1	1	1	3

TABLE 2

Public Schools by Performance Status

School status	District-operated schools	Public charter schools	All public schools
High-performing	6	1	7
Average	18	2	20
Low-performing	6	0	6

Profile of Principals

The principals who were interviewed ranged from 25 to 65 years of age. Charter school principals were younger and less experienced, ranging from 25 to 44 years of age, while most public school principals were 45 to 64.

The principals' levels of experience varied among the two school types in a similar manner. District school principals were the most experienced, with an average of 10.5 years as school leaders; charter principals had an average of 5 years of experience. All principals had previous teaching experience, although the amount varied widely, with district school heads having an average of 12.4 years of teaching experience, followed by charter school principals with 5.7 years.

School Profiles

As table 3 shows, the principals' schools varied significantly in size and demographics, although their average per-pupil expenditures were within approximately $1,600 of one another.[v] The district-operated schools served significantly higher percentages of low-income students, while the charter schools served proportionately more special-education students. The charter schools had the lowest teacher-to-student ratio as well as the fewest experienced teachers, as table 4 shows. Both types had similar rates of teacher turnover.

TABLE 3

School Factors by Type

	Enrollment	Average number of students per grade	Average percentage students w/free/ reduced lunch	Average percentage of special education students	Average percentage of students w/limited English	Per-pupil expenditure
District-operated	482	70	74	15	25	$6,871
Charter	162	21	43	33	0	$5,593

TABLE 4

Teacher Factors by School Type

	Average number of students per grade	Average number of teachers per grade	Average teacher's years of experience	Percentage novice teachers	Average number of teacher dismissals (2004-05)	Percentage annual teacher turnover
District-operated	15.7	4.5	14.2	10.5	0.8	12.3
Charter	11.0	1.9	3.9	20.5	0.7	11.4

Document Collection

Union contracts, state laws and regulations, and district regulations and policies were gathered and used to improve the validity and reliability of the information provided by the principals. These documents were also used to determine the sources of the constraints that principals identified.

Analysis

Data from the principal interviews were analyzed and summarized. Based on the expectation that differences in laws and regulations among states would influence principals' perception of barriers, data from district schools were reported and analyzed by state. (Reports on each of the three states are available in an online appendix at www.edexcellence.net.)

The interview data were also analyzed across both types of schools. (A special report on the charter school principals is also available online.) Researchers then backward-mapped these perceived barriers to their sources to identify the formal and informal constraints noted in the interviews.

III. GENERAL FINDINGS

In this study, we sought to determine principals' perceptions of their ability to influence the various functions of their schools; those functions that principals perceive as most important in meeting school performance goals and accountability demands; and those areas where principals' lack of control constituted a serious barrier to effective leadership in raising student achievement.

Not surprisingly, the data we gathered differed by district, state, and principal. Yet some commonalities are noteworthy.

The Autonomy Gap

When asked about their ability to exercise effective leadership, most principals in the sample were optimistic, with more than 90 percent of them saying they enjoyed strong or moderately strong leadership capacity. Despite this sense of personal empowerment, however, when this question was framed around their ability to raise student achievement within the terms and limits of their positions, the picture darkened, at least for principals of district-operated schools. Three-fifths of them felt somewhat constrained in their ability to raise achievement, compared to only one-third of our small sample of charter school principals.

Principals were then asked to rank twenty-one school-level functions by their importance in determining a principal's effectiveness in boosting student achievement. Separately, they were asked to rank each of the same functions according to how much autonomy they actually possessed in that area. The results are summarized in tables 5 and 6 below.

TABLE 5

District-Operated Public School Principals: Perceived Importance of Function to Effectiveness vs. Perceived Degree of Autonomy (Percentages)

	Perceived importance to effectiveness as a school leader				How much autonomy the principal currently has			
Function	1 VERY IMPORTANT	2 SOMEWHAT IMPORTANT	3 NOT SO IMPORTANT	4 NOT AT ALL IMPORTANT	1 GREAT DEAL OF AUTONOMY	2 SOME AUTONOMY	3 NOT SO MUCH AUTONOMY	4 NO AUTONOMY
1. Determining number/type of faculty & staff	76.67%	16.67%	6.67%	0.00%	6.67%	23.33%	30.00%	40.00%
2. Allocating resources	70.00%	30.00%	0.00%	0.00%	23.33%	46.67%	23.33%	6.67%
3. Hiring	100.00%	0.00%	0.00%	0.00%	26.67%	30.00%	33.33%	10.00%
4. Teacher pay or bonuses	10.00%	40.00%	36.67%	6.67%	0.00%	0.00%	3.33%	96.67%
5. Assigning teachers	96.67%	3.33%	0.00%	0.00%	26.67%	56.67%	13.33%	3.33%
6. Transferring unsuitable teachers	90.00%	3.33%	0.00%	3.33%	6.67%	16.67%	33.33%	40.00%
7. Discharging unsuitable teachers	96.67%	0.00%	0.00%	0.00%	6.67%	30.00%	33.33%	30.00%
8. Assigning noninstructional duties	43.33%	36.67%	16.67%	3.33%	40.00%	36.67%	16.67%	6.67%
9. Teacher and student schedules	56.67%	30.00%	10.00%	0.00%	53.33%	40.00%	3.33%	3.33%
10. Controlling school calendar	23.33%	56.67%	20.00%	0.00%	16.67%	16.67%	26.67%	40.00%
11. Allocating time for instruction	80.00%	16.67%	3.33%	0.00%	30.00%	36.67%	20.00%	13.33%
12. Determining extracurricular activities	40.00%	43.33%	16.67%	0.00%	36.67%	43.33%	10.00%	10.00%
13. Program adoption decisions	53.33%	36.67%	10.00%	0.00%	6.67%	43.33%	23.33%	26.67%
14. Curriculum pacing and sequencing	40.00%	40.00%	16.67%	0.00%	13.33%	20.00%	43.33%	23.33%
15. Methods and materials	60.00%	33.33%	6.67%	0.00%	16.67%	40.00%	36.67%	6.67%
16. Student discipline policies/procedures	76.67%	23.33%	0.00%	0.00%	30.00%	46.67%	16.67%	6.67%
17. Controlling student dress	33.33%	33.33%	26.67%	6.67%	43.33%	43.33%	13.33%	0.00%
18. Parental involvement requirements	40.00%	46.67%	10.00%	3.33%	20.00%	30.00%	13.33%	36.67%
19. Time spent on instructional vs. operational issues	86.67%	13.33%	0.00%	0.00%	33.33%	40.00%	23.33%	3.33%
20. Controlling the school facility	63.33%	30.00%	6.67%	0.00%	50.00%	46.67%	3.33%	0.00%
21. Engaging in private fundraising	13.33%	33.33%	46.67%	6.67%	40.00%	46.67%	6.67%	6.67%

TABLE 6

Charter School Principals: Perceived Importance of Function to Effectiveness vs. Perceived Degree of Autonomy (Percentages)

	Perceived importance to effectiveness as a school leader				How much autonomy the principal currently has			
Function	1 VERY IMPORTANT	2 SOMEWHAT IMPORTANT	3 NOT SO IMPORTANT	4 NOT AT ALL IMPORTANT	1 GREAT DEAL OF AUTONOMY	2 SOME AUTONOMY	3 NOT SO MUCH AUTONOMY	4 NO AUTONOMY
1. Determining number/ type of faculty & staff	100.00%	0.00%	0.00%	0.00%	66.67%	33.33%	0.00%	0.00%
2. Allocating resources	66.67%	33.33%	0.00%	0.00%	66.67%	33.33%	0.00%	0.00%
3. Hiring	100.00%	0.00%	0.00%	0.00%	66.67%	33.33%	0.00%	0.00%
4. Teacher pay or bonuses	33.33%	66.67%	0.00%	0.00%	33.33%	33.33%	0.00%	33.33%
5. Assigning teachers	100.00%	0.00%	0.00%	0.00%	66.67%	33.33%	0.00%	0.00%
6. Transferring unsuitable teachers	100.00%	0.00%	0.00%	0.00%	66.67%	33.33%	0.00%	0.00%
7. Discharging unsuitable teachers	100.00%	0.00%	0.00%	0.00%	66.67%	33.33%	0.00%	0.00%
8. Assigning noninstructional duties	0.00%	100.00%	0.00%	0.00%	100.00%	0.00%	0.00%	0.00%
9. Teacher and student schedules	0.00%	100.00%	0.00%	0.00%	66.67%	33.33%	0.00%	0.00%
10. Controlling school calendar	33.33%	66.67%	0.00%	0.00%	66.67%	33.33%	0.00%	0.00%
11. Allocating time for instruction	66.67%	33.33%	0.00%	0.00%	66.67%	0.00%	0.00%	33.33%
12. Determining extracurricular activities	0.00%	33.33%	66.67%	0.00%	66.67%	0.00%	33.33%	0.00%
13. Program adoption decisions	0.00%	100.00%	0.00%	0.00%	33.33%	66.67%	0.00%	0.00%
14. Curriculum pacing and sequencing	33.33%	33.33%	33.33%	0.00%	66.67%	33.33%	0.00%	0.00%
15. Methods and materials	33.33%	66.67%	0.00%	0.00%	66.67%	33.33%	0.00%	0.00%
16. Student discipline policies/procedures	66.67%	33.33%	0.00%	0.00%	0.00%	100.00%	0.00%	0.00%
17. Controlling student dress	0.00%	33.33%	33.33%	33.33%	33.33%	66.67%	0.00%	0.00%
18. Parental involvement requirements	0.00%	66.67%	33.33%	0.00%	0.00%	100.00%	0.00%	0.00%
19. Time spent on instructional vs. operational issues	33.33%	33.33%	33.33%	0.00%	66.67%	0.00%	33.33%	0.00%
20. Controlling the school facility	33.33%	33.33%	33.33%	0.00%	33.33%	0.00%	66.67%	0.00%
21. Engaging in private fundraising	33.33%	66.67%	0.00%	0.00%	33.33%	66.67%	0.00%	0.00%

There was remarkable agreement among all principals across both sectors regarding the functions that contribute the most to effectiveness as a school leader. The top seven were

1. determining the number and type of faculty/staff positions;
2. hiring faculty and staff;
3. assigning faculty and staff;
4. transferring and/or discharging unsuitable faculty and staff;
5. allocating resources;
6. allocating time for instruction; and
7. determining student discipline policies/procedures

However, as shown in table 7, the principals reported stark differences in terms of how much autonomy they actually had in these areas. Two of three charter school principals felt they had a great deal of autonomy in most of these areas. Meanwhile, fewer than a third of district-operated public school principals reported having a great deal of autonomy in any of them.

TABLE 7

Principals Reporting "Great Deal of Autonomy" in Key Areas (Percentages)

Key Functions	District-Operated (n=30) Public School Principals	Charter School Principals (n=3)
Determining the number and type of faculty/staff positions	6.67	66.67
Hiring faculty and staff	26.67	66.67
Assigning faculty and staff	26.67	66.67
Transferring and/or discharging unsuitable faculty and staff	6.67	66.67
Allocating resources	23.33	66.67
Allocating time for instruction	30.00	66.67
Determining student discipline policies/procedures	30.00	0

The autonomy gap—the difference between the autonomy that district-operated public school principals think they need to be effective leaders and the amount that they believe they actually have—is evident in table 8.

TABLE 8

The Autonomy Gap for District School Principals

Function	Percentage calling function "very" or "somewhat" important to effective school leadership	Percentage reporting a "great deal" or "some" autonomy in area	The Autonomy Gap: Difference between importance of function and perceived autonomy (percentage)
Transferring unsuitable teachers or support staff	93.33%	23.33%	***70.00%***
Determining the number and type of faculty and staff positions within your budget	93.33%	30.00%	***63.33%***
Discharging unsuitable teachers or support staff	96.67%	36.67%	***60.00%***
Determining teacher pay or bonuses	50.00%	0.00%	***50.00%***
Controlling key features of the school calendar	80.00%	33.33%	***46.67%***
Pacing and sequencing decisions about curriculum	80.00%	33.33%	***46.67%***
Hiring teachers and support staff	100.00%	56.67%	***43.33%***
Making program adoption decisions	90.00%	50.00%	***40.00%***
Determining methods and materials	93.33%	56.67%	***36.67%***
Setting parental involvement requirements	86.67%	50.00%	***36.67%***
Allocating resources for materials, textbooks, maintenance, equipment, etc.	100.00%	70.00%	***30.00%***
Allocating time for instruction	96.67%	66.67%	***30.00%***
Determining how much time you spend on instructional vs. operational issues	100.00%	73.33%	***26.67%***
Determining student discipline policies/procedures	100.00%	76.67%	***23.33%***
Assigning teachers and support staff	100.00%	83.33%	***16.67%***
Assigning noninstructional duties to teachers and support staff	80.00%	76.67%	***3.33%***
Determining extracurricular activities	83.33%	80.00%	***3.33%***
Controlling the school facility	93.33%	96.67%	***-3.33%***
Determining teacher and student schedules	86.67%	93.33%	***-6.67%***
Controlling student dress	66.67%	86.67%	***-20.00%***
Engaging in private fundraising	46.67%	86.67%	***-40.00%***

Critical Barriers to Raising Achievement

As the data in table 8 make clear, **staffing emerges as the area with the largest autonomy gap** for district-operated public school principals—i.e., discharging unsuitable teachers, transferring unsuitable teachers, hiring teachers and staff, and determining the number and type of faculty and staff positions. These principals identified union contracts, state laws, and district policies as the sources of their weak authority with regard to personnel. Four of the five districts studied prescribed each school's number and type of staff via a "standard-staffing formula." Only one district distributed resources according to a "weighted, student-based" formula (allocating dollars on a per-pupil basis). In nearly all cases, principals reported that hiring decisions were hampered by contract agreements between the district and its teacher union, which gave preference to teachers with systemwide seniority.

Principals feel, generally, that they are stuck with unsuitable teachers, given tenure laws and the time-consuming due process required to dismiss poor performers.

The principals feel, for the most part, that they are stuck with unsuitable teachers, given tenure laws and the extensive, time-consuming due process required to dismiss a poorly performing teacher. According to our document review, moreover, teacher tenure laws appear to be as strong in the right–to-work state environment as in those states that support collective bargaining for teachers. In both, dismissal efforts initiated by a principal are subject to extensive legal evaluation and require support from the school district. Under these conditions, most principals consider dismissal impractical. Said one, "You take who you are assigned and do the best that you can with them."

Principals' **lack of authority over instructional time** is another key constraint, attributable primarily to state policy. Schools are required to provide a minimum number of instructional minutes per year depending on the grade level, and most schools aim for this bare minimum. Additionally, there is an overlay of specific curricular requirements in subjects unrelated to school accountability measures, such as health education and physical education.

Principals view these requirements, combined with contract-imposed caps on the amount of time that teachers may work, as problems that limit their capacity to respond to the specific instructional needs of students, particularly in core academic areas. For example, several of the principals wanted to institute before- and after-school academic programs but were severely limited in their ability to do so by funding and contractual issues.

Finally, district policies often take many instructional leadership decisions out of principals' hands, such as selection of instructional materials and curriculum pacing and sequencing. In most of the five districts that followed a managed instruction philosophy, such decisions were made centrally through a curriculum and instruction department. The instructional leadership role of the principal was narrowly defined around ensuring teacher fidelity to the district-set curriculum.

Key Leadership Skills

We also explored principals' views of the leadership skills needed to meet accountability standards. As table 9 shows, over forty percent of district school principals felt they needed more training than they had in

1. managing and analyzing data;
2. communicating effectively (externally);
3. making data-driven decisions;
4. building a community of learners;
5. developing a teacher/staff performance accountability system;
6. building a community of support;
7. evaluating classroom teachers;
8. evaluating curriculum; and
9. designing curriculum.

Charter school principals felt they needed more training in communicating externally, developing and conveying a vision, and resolving conflicts.

TABLE 9

District-Operated School Principals' Beliefs about School Leadership Skills

Skills	Percentage of principals calling this skill VERY IMPORTANT to effective school leadership	Of principals calling the skill very important, percentage indicating they need MORE TRAINING in this area
Build community of support	100.0%	43.3%
Communicate effectively (internally)	100.0%	36.7%
Promote collegiality through collaboration	100.0%	33.3%
Make decisions	100.0%	23.3%
Persevere in challenging situations	100.0%	16.7%
Evaluate classroom teachers	96.7%	41.4%
Manage teachers and staff	96.7%	31.0%
Resolve conflicts	93.3%	25.0%
Manage and analyze data	90.0%	63.0%
Communicate effectively (externally)	90.0%	51.9%
Make data-driven decisions	90.0%	48.1%
Build a community of learners	90.0%	44.4%
Develop and communicate a vision	90.0%	33.3%
Function in an environment of cultural differences	90.0%	25.9%
Develop a teacher/staff performance accountability system	76.7%	47.8%
Take risks	73.3%	22.7%
Manage business and financial administration	70.0%	33.3%
Evaluate curriculum	50.0%	40.0%
Experiment	46.7%	14.3%
Design curriculum	13.3%	75.0%

IV. THE PUBLIC SCHOOL PRINCIPALSHIP: THREE STATES, THREE EXPERIENCES

District school principals face many common challenges to being effective school leaders. Yet how these challenges manifest themselves differs depending on the state and local context. This is not surprising. For better or worse, public school principals are best viewed as middle managers in a much larger system of public education. They do not have the luxury of acting like CEOs, boldly leading their schools in new directions. Rather, their primary role is to buffer their schools and staffs from external pressures while meeting the demands placed upon them by district, state, and federal policies. In such an environment, many of the principals interviewed for this study indicated, successful functioning means understanding the system, knowing the right people, and recognizing when rules need to be bent to accommodate the needs of students. As the system differs from state to state (and district to district), so do principals' experiences.

Western State

Principals from both districts in the western state identified the ability to listen, communicate, and work within the confines of the existing system as essential to effective school leadership. They perceived their responsibility as filtering information and sheltering teachers and staff from the ever-changing environment that surrounds their schools so that classroom instructors could focus on teaching students. This made the principals pivotal players in interpreting district, state, and federal policy and in discerning how these policies might affect their schools. In a sense, principals saw one of the school leader's most important roles as that of a gatekeeper determining which people, programs, and interventions would be allowed to influence the school.

Nearly all the principals interviewed felt that they had the ability to lead their schools, even as they described many common challenges to exercising effective leadership. Additionally, interviewers sensed that the principals (all with more than four years of experience in their positions) have accepted and acclimated to the culture in which they must function. They therefore accept the challenges and constraints that come with their position and do not (in most cases) consider it their responsibility or within their capacity to change the system.

Few of these principals began as teachers in their present districts, meaning that there were not many district veterans (principals who had been in the same district for twenty or more years). The principals who *were* veterans tended to feel a greater de facto sense of autonomy because they understood the district and community and had formed long-term professional relationships there.

How much experience principals had in their current positions also influenced how much autonomy they thought they possessed in particular areas. Staffing issues, though a challenge, were seen as more manageable by principals with more experience. They explained that they knew how to work the system to get what they wanted. Transferring or discharging unsuitable staff, however, was still a challenge. Principals who decided to pursue that process felt that they had to sacrifice time that would have been better spent on other priorities. Most experienced principals developed informal strategies to manage staffing issues. For example, by pulling some strings they interviewed qualified teacher candidates before other school principals could, and they sat on district personnel committees to gain an "inside-track" on teachers looking for transfers.

How much autonomy a principal feels he possesses is related to the number of years in his position. The longer his tenure, the more autonomy he feels he has.

Managed Instruction vs. Decentralization in the Western State

Along with the commonalities that these principals experience, there are some key differences. The two districts we examined in the western state use alternative "theories of action." District 1 uses managed instruction, which entails centralized instructional decision making with the expectation that principals will ensure their teachers' fidelity to the districtwide curriculum. Staffing, professional development, and other services are centrally managed to serve the district's unified approach to raising student achievement.

Principals in District 1 all noted their lack of control over curriculum and pacing/sequencing. Although some of them wanted a greater say in what instructional programs were adopted, generally they understood their role within the district's overall mission. Their toughest staffing challenge was attempting to persuade veteran teachers to follow the mandated curriculum. When principals were unable to gain the cooperation of these teachers, transferring and discharging them proved difficult because of state law, union contracts, and district procedures.

District 2, on the other hand, relies on a decentralized, "performance empowerment" theory of action and gives principals greater freedom to decide just *how* students will meet standards. In theory, the district simply sets goals and holds schools accountable for meeting them. When these goals are not being met, the district intervenes. Understandably, principals of higher-performing

schools felt that they had more autonomy than those of lower-performing schools. At the same time, the latter principals felt that district interventions placed more demands on them for reports and updates, which took even more time away from their ability to provide instructional leadership in boosting pupil achievement. This was a common frustration among these principals.

Moreover, all the principals in District 2 indicated that the increase in autonomy under performance empowerment was more rhetorical than real. They cited two major reasons. First, recent school consolidation (due to declining enrollment) led to a surplus of veteran teachers with priority for placement in available positions within remaining schools. Principals felt that this hindered their ability to engage candidates of the highest quality who best fit the needs of the position and school. Second, the union contract's limits on teachers' work day, combined with state policies governing instructional minutes, greatly limited the principals' ability to use extended time as a tool to improve student achievement. (District 1 principals spoke less than those in District 2 about the state mandate on instructional minutes, probably because their district had such a strong influence over curricular and instructional decisions that the school

Despite the barriers principals face, those interviewed in the western state believed they are capable of leading effectively.

principals did not have to think about this issue. The district had already managed it.)
Yet even as they identified many barriers to the exercise of effective school leadership, most western-state principals in this study made clear their belief that they are capable of being effective leaders. They understand their job and its limitations and try to carry out their responsibilities as well as they can.

Midwestern State

The principals in our two midwestern-state districts had a lot in common. All highlighted their lack of control over staffing and budgets, along with union contracts, as key impediments to school leadership. Also, because both districts followed a centralized, managed instruction approach, their authority over instructional programs was quite limited. Still, like those in the western group, midwestern principals felt that they were effective leaders nonetheless.

Years of experience made some difference. Veterans were slightly more likely to feel that they had authority over staffing issues than were principals with less experience in the district. As in the West, principals of more successful schools also felt that they had greater autonomy.

The biggest challenges that all the midwestern principals faced involved staffing. Principals reported that union contracts and district human resources policies and procedures made hiring the ideal candidate and transferring or discharging teachers (and other staff) nearly impossible. Seniority-based transfer rights forced principals to fill vacant positions with less than ideal candidates. Transferring unsuitable teachers and staff, principals said, while easier than

The biggest challenge that the principals interviewed in the midwest reported involved staffing.

discharging them, was still extremely difficult. Although most principals agreed that it was possible, the transfer process, as shaped by the union contract and district policy, consumed an inordinate amount of principals' limited time and forced them to make sacrifices in other areas for which they are responsible. Hence principals either accepted the staff they were given or found ways to encourage unsuitable individuals to leave. The more experienced principals had honed these strategies over time.

Principals from both districts felt powerless to respond to stiffening competition from charter schools, which they blamed for loss of students and revenue. They experienced frustration and a bit of envy as they watched charters, freer from constraints of union rules and district policies, extend their school days, fulfilling a need of working parents.

They also found it hard to predict how many students (and dollars) they would lose to charters every year, which wreaked havoc on their budget planning. And they complained about budgetary instability caused by NCLB. When their schools were labeled "in need of improvement," they received extra funds for extended school hours and tutoring. But when they began to make "adequate yearly progress," the funds went away. This Catch-22 was a point of great frustration.

Ultimately, these principals felt that the constraints imposed by union contracts, district human resources policies, and competition from charter schools presented serious barriers to raising student achievement. Despite all this, however, many felt that they had some ability to exercise leadership; this was true especially for leaders of higher-achieving schools. Experience, along with knowing how to work the system and knowing the right people in the district office, all contribute to a de facto autonomy based more on relationships than on authority.

Southeastern State

The southeastern state is a right-to-work state, meaning that teachers and school staff are not allowed to bargain collectively for salaries, benefits, and work rules. Instead, salaries and terms of employment for public school employees are set at the state level and periodically adjusted by the legislature. Districts may supplement salary levels to the extent they can afford to do so. A number of work rules, including the hours in a teacher's work week, are also set by the legislature. The teacher tenure law is comparable to that of the collective-bargaining states.

Principals' ability to make appropriate changes and decisions within their schools is greatly affected by the influence and effectiveness of the superintendents they report to.

One of the primary challenges perceived by southeastern principals arises from their district's use of managed instruction. This approach limits school leaders' ability to choose curricula, select textbooks and other instructional materials, and make program adoption decisions in areas such as primary reading. Many principals noted, however, that if they had the appropriate data to support an alternate decision in any of these areas, the superintendent was willing to accommodate deviation from the district's instructional model.

Another challenge most principals identified was the district's organization into several regions with "constituent superintendents," an added bureaucratic layer that created delays in decision making. The influence and effectiveness of the constituent superintendents to whom they report, the principals said, affected their ability to make appropriate changes and decisions within their schools. Working under an ineffective or inefficient constituent superintendent was identified as a major barrier to effective school leadership.

Principals had various responses to a recent initiative centralizing a number of school operations, such as custodial and food services, in order to allow principals to spend more time on instructional leadership within their schools. Some principals viewed this change as a hindrance, because they remained responsible for the entire school yet no longer had the power to supervise all of its staff. Others saw it as an opportunity to focus on instructional issues.

Staffing was a challenge for these principals but less so than for leaders in other states. Most principals felt they had an appropriate level of control and influence over such matters as assigning staff noninstructional duties and determining staff assignments. But a state-mandated teacher-student ratio required them to place a certain number of classroom teachers at each grade level, making it hard to concentrate teachers in the areas of greatest need within the school. It also limited their budgetary discretion, since salaries are such a large part of any school's budget.

District school principals focus on communicating and on building community, accepting their existing environment while finding ways to work around and within its inherent challenges and barriers.

Importantly, southeastern principals felt that they had control over which district teachers came to work in their schools[vi]—a critical difference from collective-bargaining states. Yet the state tenure law still made discharging anyone a long and arduous process; it could take a principal from 1.5 to 2 years to remove an employee. Still, principals reported that, if they carefully followed district requirements, the current superintendent, who makes final decisions on terminating employees, generally supported them. This arrangement moderated the feeling among principals that discharging staff was a barrier to school leadership. Again, this is an important difference from the experience of principals in the western and midwestern states, albeit one that hinges at least in part on the particular individual occupying the superintendent's chair.

Analysis

District school principals, for the most part, feel that they are able to function effectively as school leaders. Most have a clear sense of what it takes to be an effective school leader. They focus on communicating and on building community, accepting their existing environment while finding ways to work around and within its inherent challenges and barriers.

To be sure, the unique context of each principal's situation influences his or her approach to such challenges. In the Midwest, for instance, nearly all principals interviewed had worked their way up through local teaching ranks. Through years of service to the school district they had gained a de facto sense of autonomy, a result not of actual authority but of knowing the right people and believing that they could get things done while working within the system. Experienced principals in other states described a similar sense. In states with collective bargaining, the union contract made staffing changes difficult. However, even in the right-to-work state, discharging staff entailed a long and arduous, if eventually more productive, process.

The experience of charter school principals differs significantly from district school principals. Of those charter leaders interviewed, most felt they had a "great deal" of autonomy in almost all areas essential to raising achievement.

Still, it's striking how little true authority these principals enjoy in key areas. Their budgets are essentially handed to them, or at least strictly regulated from above. In most cases, the curriculum is determined for their schools, and they have little control over who works there. These limitations force principals to be creative within a relatively narrow range of freedom—in other words, to become skilled at the art of middle management. Nor are these limitations the stuff of urban myth. Our backward-mapping analysis demonstrated that these barriers are all too real.

The experience of charter school principals is starkly different. As described earlier, two of our three charter principals felt that they had a "great deal" of autonomy in almost all the areas essential to raising achievement. (The one exception was in setting student discipline policies, where they all reported having "some" autonomy.) Because they are not bound by union contracts or district policies, they have a relatively free hand in hiring the best person for the job, discharging unsuitable staff, assigning teachers where they are most needed, and otherwise exerting strong school leadership. It's as if district-operated public school principals and charter school principals inhabit different worlds.

V. CONCLUSIONS

What lessons can we draw from our in-depth interviews with principals across three states? Four findings leap out:

1. District school principals learn to work the system, not fight the system.
2. District school principals view themselves as middle managers, not chief executives.
3. State policy and district leadership can help close the autonomy gap.
4. Most district principals believe that they are effective leaders even though their true authority over key elements of their schools' instructional programs is strikingly limited.

Let's consider each one in turn.

Working, Not Fighting, the System

When we began this research, we expected public school principals to identify some constraints on their leadership that were real and some that were imagined. We surmised that they would rail equally against both.

What we found was in many ways the opposite. The key barriers identified by principals are very real—state and local policies, union contracts, and so forth. Yet rather than decrying these constraints and issuing clarion calls to "tear down the walls," we found that district principals in general accepted these limits as immutable realities associated with their jobs. Instead of battling them, principals developed tactics to work with, through, or around them. The tactics differed depending upon the principal and the local context, but the common denominator was developing positive working relationships inside and outside the school building. In other words, knowing the right people and knowing how to work the system.

Why is there such tolerance for the system as it exists? We hypothesize that these veteran principals, having come up through the ranks of public education as it is, cannot readily imagine a different system. Moreover, they were elevated to the principalship in part because they functioned well within the system. True mavericks would have "self-selected" out. (Indeed, this is how many public school educators become charter school principals.) As practiced system-workers, these principals know how to bend a rule without breaking it, allowing them to be effective, at least by their own lights, within the system as it stands.

Principals as Middle Managers

Squeezed between federal, state, and district policies, procedures, and contractual obligations on one side, and classroom teachers (and other school staff members) on the other, the district principals whom we interviewed see themselves as middle managers, not as CEOs or necessarily even instructional leaders. They find themselves balancing the challenge of maintaining a school climate that is conducive to teaching and learning with the need to accommodate the outside pressures, reporting requirements, and demands of the district and state. Indeed, many principals commented that they feel responsible for buffering their staff from external demands and policies so as to maximize the potential of their schools' learning environments.

Veteran district principals, having come up through the ranks of public education, cannot readily imagine a different system.

As is the case for middle managers in all large organizations, strong relationships and informal networks are critical to principals' success. By working the system and knowing the right people, they can bargain for additional resources; spur action on staff transfers, hiring, and (sometimes) dismissals; and gain additional flexibility from the central office. Positive relationships throughout the district, moreover, bring a de facto sense of autonomy to school leaders and give them the power of persuasion necessary to control and lead their schools.

With more districts embracing managed instruction as their education reform strategy, the image of principal as a true instructional leader (much less a chief executive) seems increasingly far-fetched. The principals we interviewed do their best to carry out district mandates and navigate the system. As far as we could tell, they are quite satisfied to play this role. They aspire to be effective functionaries, not revolutionaries.

The Importance of State Policy and District Leadership

Predictably, differences among district principals arose from the various contexts in which they were working; the autonomy gap varies from state to state and district to district. Consider the process for dismissing unqualified or ineffective teachers, unanimously considered long and arduous by public school principals in every state. In most cases, principals decided to seek an alternative route because the time away from other duties did not make the process worthwhile.

This is understandable. Principals stated that in many instances, even after following all the procedures for dismissing a faculty member, they still could not be certain that the teacher would be removed from their school. Time spent away from their primary duties, in other words, would not end in the desired outcome. In the western and midwestern states, nearly all the principals expressed this belief. In the southeastern right-to-work state, however, principals under similar constraints could at least expect that the drawn-out process, if followed correctly, would result in the removal of the teacher. These principals explained that their superintendent would support their decision as long as they provided all the necessary documentation.

A key lesson for superintendents: if you want your principals to fully exercise leadership, they need to know that you support them 100 percent.

At first blush, this example seems to simply buttress the conventional wisdom: principals in right-to-work states have more autonomy, especially over staffing decisions, than those in union states. And state policy certainly matters. But the example also indicates the importance of district leadership. The southeastern-state principals felt that their superintendent would back up their decision to remove a teacher, while the western- and midwestern-state principals were not so sure. This is a key lesson for superintendents in every state: if you want your principals to fully exercise leadership, they need to know that you support them 100 percent. Otherwise, you are likely to lose talented principals who demand authority (and not just responsibility) along with accountability.

Defining Leadership Down?

One of this study's most striking (and seemingly contradictory) findings is that the same district-operated public school principals who report having their hands tied over key functions also express satisfaction at their ability to lead their schools. (They do seek additional training, but they don't demand additional flexibility.) While these administrators might very well be effective leaders (or middle managers, as explained above), it's also possible that they themselves have a constrained vision of leadership.

It's instructive to examine the distinction between first-order and second-order change as it has emerged from research on education leadership. This distinction is depicted in Figure A.

FIGURE A

Characteristics of First- and Second-Order Change

First-Order Change	Second-Order Change
An extension of the past	A break with the past
Within existing paradigms	Outside of existing paradigms
Consistent with prevailing values and norms	Conflicted with prevailing values and norms
Focused	Emergent
Bounded	Unbounded
Incremental	Complex
Linear	Nonlinear
Marginal	A disturbance to every element of the system
Implemented with existing knowledge and skills	Requires new knowledge and skills to implement
Problem and solution oriented	Neither problem nor solution oriented

Source: J. Waters, R. Marzano, and B. McNulty, *Balanced Leadership: What 30 Years of Research Tells Us About the Effect of Leadership on Student Achievement* (Aurora, CO: Mid-Continent Research for Education and Learning, 2003), p. 7.

First-order change fits the style of the district school principals who participated in this study. They have learned to function within the existing culture, norms, and boundaries of the public education system as it is. Relationships, communication, and focus are essential to a principal effecting first-order change and were often mentioned in the interviews with these leaders. Second-order change, on the other hand, was most visible among charter school principals, who are creating alternatives outside the traditional system. In other words, the sort of change a principal engages in is aligned with the constraints under which he or she operates.

While education reformers understandably yearn for district school principals to push for second-order change and thereby transform the system (e.g., fighting teachers unions over troublesome contract provisions or pushing back hard against ill-conceived district or state policies), under today's ground rules that yearning is destined to remain unfulfilled. Middle managers aren't revolutionaries—and revolutionaries, even true entrepreneurs, don't last long as middle managers. Moreover, recruiting nontraditional candidates from other fields is not likely to change the situation so long as those newcomers face the constraints identified here. Aside from a few extraordinary individuals, either they won't take the principal's job at all or they will quickly exit in frustration (perhaps to run a charter school). If they last, they're likely to adapt to the culture—and become a "first-order change" leader.

A better strategy, at least for traditional public education, may be to help principals become expert middle managers, while taking modest but specific steps to close the autonomy gap. This means helping new leaders build the informal networks and relationships that are so critical to their success. And it means working to create additional flexibility for these principals, especially in staffing and budgeting. But those are tasks for state policymakers and district leaders. At the school level, unless the environment changes, the principal will accomplish more by working the system, not changing it.

ENDNOTES

i *Examples of research linking teacher quality to student achievement include:*
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ii We also interviewed three private school principals but found the data from this tiny sample to be particularly unreliable, so we chose not to include it here.

iii ***Studies considered include:***
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iv One principal had less than three years of experience as a principal, but had several years of experience as an administrator.

v Per-pupil expenditures are based on each principal's self-reported figure for the 2005-2006 academic year.

vi Southeastern principals did feel constrained in hiring teachers because the district pay scale was limited to the state mandated minimum, while surrounding districts were able to supplement salaries with local funds, thus drawing qualified candidates away from their district.

APPENDIX: FINAL INTERVIEW PROTOCOL

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Notes to Interviewer

The following is the *Interview Protocol*. Upon completion of the interview, you should have the following completed handouts and interviewer worksheets:

Handouts:

- (1.) Principal Questionnaire: *To be completed by the Principal during section III.B of the Interview Protocol.*
- (7.) Principal Information: *To be completed by the Principal at the end of the interview.*
- (8.) School Information: *To be completed by the Principal before leaving the school. In all instances where data are available, please collect information from the current academic year (2005–2006). If this information is not available, please get the latest information and indicate which academic year. The Principal and/or her/his designee should help you complete this form.*

Interviewer Worksheets:

- (3.) Barriers Worksheet: *To be completed by the interviewer and note taker during section III.C of the Interview Protocol.*
- (5.) Effective Leadership Skills Worksheet: *To be completed by interviewer and note taker during section IV.C–D of the Interview Protocol.*
- Interview Notebook: *To be used and completed by the note taker for data collection during the interview.*

PRINCIPAL INTERVIEW PROTOCOL

I. Introduction of Study

Interviewer to Principal:

A. INTRODUCTION:

We are conducting a study on school leadership which, as you probably know, is considered by experts to be one of the most critical factors related to school success. Here is an information sheet on the study that you should keep for your records.

Note: Interviewer to give the Principal the (1.) Information for Interview Participants Handout.

B. STUDY DESCRIPTION:

The study is being conducted to help us better understand how school leadership works in practice. We are interviewing a number of Principals (approximately 45) in three states to collect their opinions on school leadership. At the conclusion of this study, we will summarize our findings in a report that will be released publicly in May 2006. If you like, we can send you a copy of the final report.

C. INTERVIEWEE'S ROLE:

To help us better understand this issue, I'd like to ask you what your opinions are about the leadership role that Principals perform. Specifically, I'd like to ask about some of the barriers you, as a Principal, face in exercising effective leadership. If you don't have an opinion about a question or would prefer not to answer a particular question, just tell me, and we'll move on.

D. CONFIDENTIALITY:

I should also mention that all of your answers during this interview session will be treated confidentially. We will delete any information from your answers that could identify you individually. In our report, our findings will be presented in the aggregate, so we might say something like, "Half of Principals agree that X is a serious issue." Your school and other individually defining characteristics will be confidential.

E. COMMENCING THE INTERVIEW:

I'd like to start off by asking you some questions and then, when we've finished our discussion, have you complete an information form about you and your school.

II. General Attitudes About School Leadership

A. BRIEF DESCRIPTION OF PRINCIPALSHIP:

If you could use one or two words to describe what it's like to be a school leader, what you would you say? Why is that?

B. KEY RESPONSIBILITIES:

What do you see as the key responsibilities of a school leader?

C. LEADERSHIP STYLE:

How would you describe your leadership style or approach? How would teachers in your school describe your leadership style?

D. VISION:

Do you have a vision for your school?

1. What is your vision?
2. What is your over-arching approach to achieving your vision?

E. EXTERNAL EXPECTATIONS:

Can you explain the expectations your district, board or authorizer has for you and your school?

1. Are these expectations consistent with your vision?
2. To what extent are you able to meet these expectations?

F. STUDENT ACHIEVEMENT:

Now I am interested specifically in student achievement and your perceptions, as a school leader, about your ability to meet student achievement expectations of your own and as determined by legislation or entities external to the school.

1. To what extent do you, as a Principal, have the authority to do what is necessary to ensure that your school meets the expectations for student achievement set out by NCLB?
2. To what extent do you, as a Principal, have the authority to do what is necessary to ensure that your school meets other external expectations for student achievement that are:
   a. Set out by your state's accountability measures?
   b. *PRIVATE SCHOOLS:* Set out by your Board? What are these measures?
3. What is your instructional vision for improving student achievement?
4. As the leader of your school, what are the key elements of your plan of action for improving student achievement?
5. In your opinion, do you feel you have the right amount of autonomy to make decisions about how to raise student achievement in your school? Please explain.
   a. As the Principal, are there areas in which you would ideally like to have more autonomy in order to improve student achievement levels?

b. Do you believe that you have a sufficient amount of autonomy to do what is necessary to improve student achievement?

c. Do you feel your actions in this area are constrained by forces outside your realm of control? In general, what are these constraints?

III. Ability to Exercise Effective Leadership

A. PRINCIPAL AUTONOMY:

Now, I am going to give you a survey, which I would like you to complete. In the survey you will find three sections. The first section of the survey begins with two general questions, and the remaining section covers particular functions that, in your opinion, may or may not contribute to effective school leadership. Upon completing each section, I will explain the upcoming section.

Note: Interviewer to give the Principal the (2.)Principal Questionnaire Handout.

1. The first section asks you to generally rate your perceptions of your autonomy as a leader and the degree of constraint you feel within your position as Principal. Could you please complete the first section?

   Note: Stop and wait for Principal to complete the first section, then give directions for section 2.

2. In section 2, you are asked to rate how important you feel autonomy over a particular function is to being an effective leader.

   Note: Stop and wait for Principal to complete the second section, then give directions for section 3.

3. In section 3, the final section, you are asked to rate the level of autonomy you currently have in the same functional areas identified in section 2.

   Note: Let the Principal use this section as a reference for B. BARRIERS TO LEADERSHIP. Be certain to collect the questionnaire at the end of the interview.

4. Now that you have completed the survey, I'd like to ask your opinion about each of the functional areas listed in sections 2 and 3. You can hold onto the survey to use as a reference as I go through each function, and I will collect the survey at the end of the interview.

B. BARRIERS TO LEADERSHIP:

Now I'd like to talk to you about how each one of these functions is actually carried out in your school.

Note: Use the (3.) Barriers Interviewer Worksheet for data collection. The interviewer and the note taker should both complete this worksheet during the questioning. Ask all of question 1 for each function (e.g., "Who or what determines how this function is carried out?" Wait for the Principal's answer. Ask, "What is your role as Principal?" Wait for the Principal's answer and then ask, "Would you describe your role as limited?" Ask the same set of questions for the next function.).

1. Who or what determines how the following functions are carried out? As Principal, what is your role in this process? Would you describe this role as limited?

Functions

From (3.) Barriers Interviewer Worksheet

1. Determining the number and type of faculty and staff positions within your budget
2. Allocating resources for materials, textbooks, maintenance, equipment, etc.
3. Hiring teachers and support staff
4. Determining teacher pay or bonuses
5. Assigning teachers and support staff
6. Transferring unsuitable teachers or support staff
7. Discharging unsuitable teachers or support staff
8. Assigning non-instructional duties to teachers and support staff
9. Determining teacher and student schedules
10. Controlling key features of the school calendar
11. Allocating time for instruction
12. Determining extra-curricular activities
13. Making program adoption decisions
14. Pacing and sequencing decisions about curriculum
15. Determining methods and materials
16. Determining student discipline policies/procedures
17. Controlling student dress
18. Setting parental involvement requirements
19. Determining how much time you spend on instructional vs. operational issues
20. Controlling the school facility
21. Engaging in private fund raising
22. Other

2. Based on our discussion of these functions, you have identified a few areas in which you have a limited role. I am going to revisit each one of these areas to see if you believe it is a serious barrier to your effectiveness as a school leader. I am also interested in the source or sources of the serious barriers you identify. Here is a list of sources of barriers to help you identify as many as possible. Please know that the sources of barriers do not necessarily need to be limited to this list.

   Note: List the areas the Principal identified as having a limited role in. Next, give the Principal the (4.) Possible Sources of Serious Barriers Handout to use as you discuss the area(s) she/he identifies as a "serious barrier(s)."

a. Based on our conversation, you identified **(list the "limited role" functions one at a time)** as an area in which you have described having a limited role. Do you believe this is a *serious barrier* to your ability to exercise effective school leadership?
Note: Record barriers identified by the Principal on the (3.) Barriers Interviewer Worksheet.

b. If it is a serious barrier, what are the sources of this barrier? You can refer to the list of *Possible Sources of Barriers. Note: Detail is very important in this section. Identify sources with as much specificity as possible regarding the nature and origin of the constraint. Also, please ask for explanations if something is not clear.*

Possible Sources of Barriers

From (4.) Possible Sources of Barriers Handout

1. District (public schools)/Diocesan (Catholic schools) policy or rules
2. District/school culture or norms
3. School Board
4. State laws or regulations
5. Federal laws or regulations (including NCLB, IDEA, etc.)
6. Union contracts and the collective bargaining process
7. Parental pressure
8. Teacher or staff pressure
9. Alumni
10. School traditions
11. College expectations
12. Charter authorizers
13. Market competition
14. Other

3. Are there any additional barriers to effective leadership that exist in your environment?
4. In your opinion, what would you say is the most serious barrier to effective leadership that you experience? Please explain.

Reducing Barriers to Effective Leadership

A. OVERCOMING BARRIERS:

What strategies do you use to overcome the barriers you currently face as a school leader?

B. EXAMPLES OF SUCCESSFUL LEADERSHIP:

Are there any examples of successful leadership among other Principals that you can recall from any of your previous experiences in education?

1. In your opinion, what made these Principals successful?
2. How were they successful in overcoming barriers they faced?

C. EFFECTIVE LEADERSHIP SKILLS:

We have identified several skill areas that may or may not contribute to effective school leadership. To make this easier, we have a handout for you to follow along as we discuss each skill.

Note: Interviewer to give the (5.) Effective Leadership Skills Handout to the Principal

Effective Leadership Skills

From (6.) Effective Leadership Skills Interviewer Worksheet

1. Manage business and financial administration
2. Take risks
3. Make decisions
4. Persevere in challenging situations
5. Develop and communicate a vision
6. Experimentation
7. Function in an environment of cultural differences
8. Manage teachers and staff
9. Develop a teacher/staff performance accountability system
10. Communicate effectively (internally)
11. Promote collegiality through collaboration
12. Resolve conflicts
13. Design curriculum
14. Evaluate curriculum
15. Evaluate classroom teachers
16. Build a community of learners
17. Communicate effectively (externally)
18. Build a community of support
19. Manage and analyze data
20. Make data-driven decisions
21. Other

1. Because you may feel these skills have varying levels of importance to effective leadership, we have developed a scale from 1 to 4, with 1 meaning the skill is very important to effective school leadership; 2 meaning the skill is somewhat important to effective school leadership; 3 meaning the skill is not so important to effective school leadership; and 4 meaning the skill is not at all important to effective school leadership. As I read each of the individual skills, could you please identify the level of importance you believe the skill area is to being an effective school leader?

2. On a scale from 1 to 4 with 1 being very important; 2 being somewhat important; 3 being not so important; and 4 being not at all important; how would you rate the following skills by level of importance for Principals to be effective school leaders?
Note: Discuss each skill and its importance to being an effective leader. Use the (6.) Effective Leadership Skills Interviewer Worksheet to probe and collect data. The interviewer and the note taker should both complete this worksheet during this portion of the interview.

D. TRAINING NEEDS:

Now I am interested in the areas that you have identified as very important. In which of these areas do you feel you need better or additional training?
Note: Revisit the areas identified as "Very Important" and check the skills in which the Principal believes she/he needs more training in the "Training" column on the (6.) Effective Leadership Skills Interviewer Worksheet. Collect the Principal's (5.) Effective Leadership Skills Handout.

Conclusion of Interview

A. CONCLUSION OF INTERVIEW:

That is my final question as well as the conclusion of the interview.

B. COMPLETION OF FINAL DOCUMENTATION:

Now, could you please complete the following two forms? The first is designed to collect your personal information. The latter is to collect information on your school. If there is any information you do not have readily available, would it be possible for me to get the information from someone else prior to leaving the school?
Note: Give the (7.) Principal Information Handout and the (8.) School Information Handout to the Principal. The Principal should complete all of the (7.) Principal Information Handout and should complete as much as possible of the (8.) School Information Handout. Be sure to have the Principal answer questions III. Parental Involvement and IV.G. Union Grievances in the (8.) School Information Handout. Any information that she/he is unable to complete should be sought from the school secretary or the person whom the Principal designates prior to leaving the school.

C. THANK YOU FOR PARTICIPATING:

Thank you again for participating in this study. As a token of our gratitude, we have a gift certificate for you. If you have any questions about the study, please feel free to contact us. My contact information is on my business card and there is contact information for the principal investigator of the project on the information sheet I gave to you at the beginning of the interview.

1. INFORMATION FOR INTERVIEW PARTICIPANTS HANDOUT

Title of the Study: Can School Leaders Lead?

Principal Investigator: Dr. Steven Adamowski

Contact Information: American Institutes for Research
1000 Thomas Jefferson Street, Washington, DC 20007
Phone: 202-403-5829
E-mail: sadamowski@air.org

Introduction

The Thomas B. Fordham Institute and the American Institutes for Research are conducting a study on school leadership, which, as you probably know, is considered by experts to be one of the most critical factors related to school success. As a school Principal, your insights on the topic of leadership and your personal experiences are the means by which we hope to gain understanding of how Principals, like yourself, lead schools, what barriers they face, where those barriers come from, and how they might be eliminated.

Study Description

To help us better understand how school leadership works in practice, we are interviewing a number of Principals in three states to collect their opinions on school leadership. You play an important role in this study. As a Principal, we are interested in what your opinions are about the leadership role that Principals perform. Specifically, we are concerned with the barriers you face in exercising effective leadership. At the conclusion of this study, we will summarize our findings in a report which will be released publicly in May 2006. If you like, we can send you a copy of the final report.

Confidentiality

All of your answers during this interview session will be treated confidentially. We will delete any information from your answers that could identify you individually. In our report, our findings will be presented in the aggregate, so we might say something like, "Half of the Principals agree that X is a serious issue." Your school and other individually defining characteristics will be kept confidential.

Thank you for your participation in this study.

2. PRINCIPAL QUESTIONNAIRE HANDOUT

I. General Questions about Autonomy and Effective Leadership

A. If you had to describe how much your actions to raise student achievement are constrained by outside forces, on a scale of 1–4, what would you rate it? *(Circle your answer.)*

1 - your actions are **not at all** constrained

2 - your actions are **not very** constrained

3 - your actions are **somewhat** constrained

4 - your actions are **very** constrained

B. Please rate your overall ability to exercise effective leadership currently. *(Circle your answer.)*

1 - you have a **strong ability to** exercise effective leadership

2 - you have **somewhat of an ability to** exercise effective leadership

3 - you are **somewhat unable to** exercise effective leadership

4 - you are **strongly unable to** exercise effective leadership

-For Office Use Only-

School:_____ Interviewer: _____

City/State: _____ Date/Time: _____

II. PERCEIVED IMPORTANCE OF AUTONOMY IN KEY AREAS

Please rate each area in terms of how important you think each is to your ability as a Principal to successfully lead your school. Please circle one of the four options below each question (1 is very important; 2 is somewhat important; 3 is not so important; and 4 is not at all important).

A. QUESTION: In your opinion, how important is it to your effectiveness as a school leader to be able to:	Very important	Somewhat important	Not so important	Not at all important
1. Determine the number and type of faculty and staff positions within your budget?	**1**	**2**	**3**	**4**
2. Allocate resources (e.g., materials, textbooks, maintenance, equipment, etc.)?	**1**	**2**	**3**	**4**
3. Hire teachers and support staff?	**1**	**2**	**3**	**4**
4. Determine teacher pay and/or bonuses on a case by case basis?	**1**	**2**	**3**	**4**
5. Assign/reassign teachers and support staff?	**1**	**2**	**3**	**4**
6. Transfer unsuitable teachers or support staff?	**1**	**2**	**3**	**4**
7. Discharge unsuitable teachers or support staff?	**1**	**2**	**3**	**4**
8. Assign non-instructional duties to teachers and support staff?	**1**	**2**	**3**	**4**
9. Determine teacher and student schedules?	**1**	**2**	**3**	**4**
10. Control key features of the school calendar?	**1**	**2**	**3**	**4**
11. Allocate time for instruction?	**1**	**2**	**3**	**4**
12. Determine which extra-curricular activities your school offers?	**1**	**2**	**3**	**4**
13. Make program adoption decisions?	**1**	**2**	**3**	**4**
14. Have control over curriculum pacing and sequencing decisions?	**1**	**2**	**3**	**4**
15. Have some control over methods and materials?	**1**	**2**	**3**	**4**
16. Determine student discipline policies/procedures?	**1**	**2**	**3**	**4**
17. Control student dress choices?	**1**	**2**	**3**	**4**
18. Set parental involvement requirements for your school?	**1**	**2**	**3**	**4**
19. Determine how much time you spend on instructional vs. operational issues?	**1**	**2**	**3**	**4**
20. Oversee the school facility (e.g., having a key to the building, supervising the custodian, etc.)?	**1**	**2**	**3**	**4**
21. Engage in private fund-raising for your school?	**1**	**2**	**3**	**4**

III. PERCEIVED AUTONOMY IN KEY AREAS

Please rate each area in terms of how much autonomy you currently have in each area to make important decisions. Please circle one of the four options below each question (1 is a great deal of autonomy; 2 is some autonomy; 3 is not too much autonomy; and 4 is no autonomy).

B. QUESTION: In your opinion, how much autonomy do you currently have to:	Great deal of autonomy	Some autonomy	Not too much autonomy	No autonomy
22. Determine the number and type of faculty and staff positions within your budget?	**1**	**2**	**3**	**4**
23. Allocate resources (e.g., materials, textbooks, maintenance, equipment, etc.)?	**1**	**2**	**3**	**4**
24. Hire teachers and support staff?	**1**	**2**	**3**	**4**
25. Determine teacher pay and/or bonuses on a case-by-case basis?	**1**	**2**	**3**	**4**
26. Assign/reassign teachers and support staff?	**1**	**2**	**3**	**4**
27. Transfer unsuitable teachers or support staff?	**1**	**2**	**3**	**4**
28. Discharge unsuitable teachers or support staff?	**1**	**2**	**3**	**4**
29. Assign non-instructional duties to teachers and support staff?	**1**	**2**	**3**	**4**
30. Determine teacher and student schedules?	**1**	**2**	**3**	**4**
31. Control key features of the school calendar?	**1**	**2**	**3**	**4**
32. Allocate time for instruction?	**1**	**2**	**3**	**4**
33. Determine which extra-curricular activities your school offers?	**1**	**2**	**3**	**4**
34. Make program adoption decisions?	**1**	**2**	**3**	**4**
35. Make decisions about curriculum pacing and sequence?	**1**	**2**	**3**	**4**
36. Make decisions regarding methods and materials?	**1**	**2**	**3**	**4**
37. Determine student discipline policies/procedures?	**1**	**2**	**3**	**4**
38. Control student dress choices?	**1**	**2**	**3**	**4**
39. Set parental involvement requirements for your school?	**1**	**2**	**3**	**4**
40. Determine how much time you spend on instructional vs. operational issues?	**1**	**2**	**3**	**4**
41. Oversee the school facility (e.g., having a key to the building, supervising the custodian, etc.)?	**1**	**2**	**3**	**4**
42. Engage in private fund-raising for your school?	**1**	**2**	**3**	**4**

3. BARRIERS INTERVIEWER WORKSHEET

3. barriers interviewer worksheet

(Corresponds with Interview Protocol III.B.1–4)

A. Probing Questions:

1. Who or what determines how this function is carried out? As Principal, what is your role in this process? *Note: List functions and use corresponding columns to collect data on the Principal's role and how each function is carried out.*
2. Based on our discussion of these functions, you have identified a few areas in which you have a limited role. I am going to revisit each one of these areas to see if you believe it is a serious barrier to your effectiveness as a school leader. I am also interested in the source or sources of the serious barriers you identify. Here is a list of sources of barriers to help you identify as many as possible. Please know that the sources of barriers do not necessarily need to be limited to this list. *Note: List the areas the Principal identified as having a limited role in. Next, give the Principal the (4.) Possible Sources of Serious Barriers Handout to use as you discuss the area(s) she/he identifies as a "serious barrier(s)."*
   a. Based on our conversation you identified **(list the "limited role" functions one at a time)** as an area in which you have described having a limited role. Do you believe this is a *serious barrier* to your ability to exercise effective school leadership? *Note: Record barriers identified by the Principal on the (3.) Barriers Interviewer Worksheet.*
   b. If it is a serious barrier, what are the sources of this barrier? You can refer to the list of *Possible Sources of Barriers. Note: Detail is very important in this section. Identify sources with as much specificity as possible regarding the nature and origin of the constraint. Also, please ask for explanations if something is not clear.*
3. Are there any additional barriers to effective leadership that exist in your environment? *Note: Use Functions 22 and 23 ("other") to record additional barriers not listed.*
4. In your opinion, what would you say is the most serious barrier to effective leadership that you experience? *Note: Indicate which barrier the Principal identifies with an asterix (*).*

-For Office Use Only-

School:_____ Interviewer: _____

City/State: _____ Date/Time: _____

Function	Who/What Role	Principal Role	Limited Barrier	Serious *(Specific)*	Source of Barrier
1. Determining the number and type of faculty and staff positions within your budget			❑	❑	
2. Allocating resources for materials, textbooks, maintenance, equipment, etc.			❑	❑	
3. Hiring teachers and support staff			❑	❑	
4. Determining teacher pay or bonuses			❑	❑	
5. Assigning teachers and support staff			❑	❑	
6. Transferring unsuitable teachers or support staff			❑	❑	
7. Discharging unsuitable teachers or support staff			❑	❑	
8. Assigning non-instructional duties to teachers and support staff			❑	❑	
9. Determining teacher and student schedules			❑	❑	
10. Controlling key features of the school calendar			❑	❑	
11. Allocating time for instruction			❑	❑	
12. Determining extra-curricular activities			❑	❑	
13. Making program adoption decisions			❑	❑	
14. Pacing and sequencing decisions about curriculum			❑	❑	
15. Determining methods and materials			❑	❑	
16. Determining student discipline policies/procedures			❑	❑	
17. Controlling student dress			❑	❑	
18. Setting parental involvement requirements			❑	❑	
19. Determining how much time you spend on instructional vs. operational issues			❑	❑	
20. Controlling the school facility			❑	❑	
21. Engaging in private fundraising			❑	❑	
22. Other			❑	❑	
23. Other			❑	❑	

4. POSSIBLE SOURCES OF SERIOUS BARRIERS HANDOUT

(4.) Possible Sources of Serious Barriers Handout

- District (public schools)/Diocesan (Catholic schools) policy or rules
- District/school culture or norms
- School Board
- State law or regulation
- Federal law or regulation (including NCLB, IDEA, etc.)
- Union contract and the collective bargaining process
- Parental pressure
- Teacher or staff pressure
- Alumni
- School traditions
- College expectations
- Charter authorizer
- Market competition
- Other:

5. EFFECTIVE LEADERSHIP SKILLS HANDOUT

(5.) Effective Leadership Skills Handout

Please rate each area in terms of how important you think each skill is to being an effective leader. As we discuss each skill, please circle or indicate to me which one of the four options reflects your opinion about the skill area (1 is very important; 2 is somewhat important; 3 is not so important; and 4 is not at all important).

SKILLS	1 Very important	2 Somewhat important	3 Not so important	4 Not at all important
1. Manage business and financial administration				
2. Take risks				
3. Make decisions				
4. Persevere in challenging situations				
5. Develop and communicate a vision	**1**	**2**	**3**	**4**
6. Experimentation	**1**	**2**	**3**	**4**
7. Function in an environment of cultural differences	**1**	**2**	**3**	**4**
8. Manage teachers and staff	**1**	**2**	**3**	**4**
9. Develop a teacher/staff performance accountability system	**1**	**2**	**3**	**4**
10. Communicate effectively (internally)	**1**	**2**	**3**	**4**
11. Promote collegiality through collaboration	**1**	**2**	**3**	**4**
12. Resolve conflicts	**1**	**2**	**3**	**4**
13. Design curriculum	**1**	**2**	**3**	**4**
14. Evaluate curriculum	**1**	**2**	**3**	**4**
15. Evaluate classroom teachers	**1**	**2**	**3**	**4**
16. Build a community of learners	**1**	**2**	**3**	**4**
17. Communicate effectively (externally)	**1**	**2**	**3**	**4**
18. Build a community of support	**1**	**2**	**3**	**4**
19. Manage and analyze data	**1**	**2**	**3**	**4**
20. Make data-driven decisions	**1**	**2**	**3**	**4**
21. Other	**1**	**2**	**3**	**4**
22. Other	**1**	**2**	**3**	**4**
-For Office Use Only-				
School:_____Interviewer: _____				
City/State: _____Date/Time: _____				

6. EFFECTIVE LEADERSHIP SKILLS INTERVIEWER WORKSHEET

(6.) Effective Leadership Skills Interviewer Worksheet

(Corresponds with Interview Protocol IV.C)

A. EFFECTIVE LEADERSHIP SKILLS:

We have identified several skill areas that may or may not contribute to effective school leadership. To make this easier, we have a handout for you to follow along as we discuss each skill.

Note: Interviewer to give the (5.) Effective Leadership Skills Handout to the Principal

1. Because you may feel these skills have varying levels of importance to effective leadership, we have developed a scale from 1 to 4, with 1 meaning the skill is very important to effective school leadership; 2 meaning the skill is somewhat important to effective school leadership; 3 meaning the skill is not so important to effective school leadership; and 4 meaning the skill is not at all important to effective school leadership. As I read each of the individual skills, could you please identify the level of importance you believe the skill area is to being an effective school leader?
2. On a scale from 1 to 4 with 1 being very important; 2 being somewhat important; 3 being not so important; and 4 being not at all important; how would you rate the following skills by level of importance for Principals to be effective school leaders?

   Note: Discuss each skill and its importance to being an effective leader. Use the (6.) Effective Leadership Skills Interviewer Worksheet to probe and collect data. The interviewer and the note taker should both complete this worksheet during this portion of the interview.

B. TRAINING NEEDS:

Now I am interested in the areas that you have identified as very important. In which of these areas do you feel you need better or additional training?

Note: Revisit the areas identified as "Very Important" and check the skills in which the Principal believes she/he needs more training in the "Training" column on the (6.) Effective Leadership Skills Interviewer Worksheet. Collect the Principal's (5.) Effective Leadership Skills Handout.

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School:_____ Interviewer: _____

City/State: _____ Date/Time: _____

SKILLS	Very important	Somewhat important	Not so important	Not at all important	Training	Comments
1. Manage business and financial administration	1	2	3	4	❑	
2. Take risks	1	2	3	4	❑	
3. Make decisions	1	2	3	4	❑	
4. Persevere in challenging situations	1	2	3	4	❑	
5. Develop and communicate a vision	1	2	3	4	❑	
6. Experimentation	1	2	3	4	❑	
7. Function in an environment of cultural differences	1	2	3	4	❑	
8. Manage teachers and staff	1	2	3	4	❑	
9. Develop a teacher/staff performance accountability system	1	2	3	4	❑	
10. Communicate effectively (internally)	1	2	3	4	❑	
11. Promote collegiality through collaboration	1	2	3	4	❑	
12. Resolve conflicts	1	2	3	4	❑	
13. Design curriculum	1	2	3	4	❑	
14. Evaluate curriculum	1	2	3	4	❑	
15. Evaluate classroom teachers	1	2	3	4	❑	
16. Build a community of learners	1	2	3	4	❑	
17. Communicate effectively (externally)	1	2	3	4	❑	
18. Build a community of support	1	2	3	4	❑	
19. Manage and analyze data	1	2	3	4	❑	
20. Make data-driven decisions	1	2	3	4	❑	
21. Other:	1	2	3	4	❑	
22. Other:	1	2	3	4	❑	

7. PRINCIPAL INFORMATION HANDOUT

I. Personal Characteristics

A. Race:

- ❑ Asian
- ❑ American Indian or Alaskan Indian or Alaska Native
- ❑ Black or African American
- ❑ White
- ❑ Native Hawaiian or other Pacific Islander
- ❑ Other (please print):

B. Ethnicity:

- ❑ Hispanic Origin
- ❑ Not of Hispanic Origin

C. Gender:

- ❑ Male
- ❑ Female

D. Age:

- ❑ 25–34
- ❑ 35–44
- ❑ 45–54
- ❑ 55–64
- ❑ 65–74
- ❑ 75 or older

II. Years of Experience

A. As Principal:

Total:_____In current school:_____In current district: _____

B. As a school administrator:

Total:_____In current school:_____In current district: _____

C. As a teacher/counselor/other:

Total:_____In current school:_____In current district: _____

D. Other experience:_____

III. Qualifications

A. Degrees held:

- ❑ Master's degree
- ❑ Specialist degree
- ❑ Ph.D./Ed.D.

B. Administrative certifications: _____

_____

_____

-For Office Use Only-

School:_____Interviewer: _____

City/State: _____Date/Time: _____

8. SCHOOL INFORMATION HANDOUT

Note: Please provide data for the 2005–2006 academic year, unless otherwise instructed. If current information is not available, please provide the latest available data and indicate the academic year the data are from.

I. Student Information

A. Total student enrollment:

B. Grades served:

C. % Free and reduced-price lunch:

D. % Special education:

E. % Limited English proficient:

F. Budget/expenditure per student:

II. School Performance Data

A. NCLB Status:

❑ Met AYP Requirements
❑ Needs Improvement (Year 1—School Choice)
❑ Needs Improvement (Year 2—Supplemental Services)
❑ Corrective Action
❑ Restructuring (Planning Year)

B. Current school status in state accountability system (if applicable): _____

_____

_____

_____

C. Current school status in district accountability/intervention framework (if applicable):

_____

_____

_____

III. Parental Involvement

- ❑ Excellent
- ❑ Above Average
- ❑ Average
- ❑ Below Average
- ❑ Poor

IV. Teacher Data

A. Total number of teachers:

B. Years of experience (average):

C. Number of teachers with advanced degrees (graduate or above):

D. Number of novice teachers (1–3 years):

E. Previous year (2004–2005) turnover of teachers:

F. Previous year (2004–2005) teacher dismissals:

G. Number of union grievances in the 2004–2005 Academic Year:

V. Staffing Data

A. Classroom teacher/student ratio: _

B. Specialists:

Specialist Type(s)	# FTE	Specialist Type(s)	# FTE

C. Support staff:

Specialist Type(s)	# FTE	Specialist Type(s)	# FTE

D. Administration (in addition to Principal):

Specialist Type(s)	# FTE	Specialist Type(s)	# FTE

-For Office Use Only-

School:_____Interviewer: _____

City/State: _____Date/Time: _____

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