At Teachers College, Columbia University the Board of Trustees and the entire faculty embrace a strong vision and mission dedicated to promoting equity and excellence in education and overcoming the gap in educational access and achievement between the most and least advantaged groups in this country. Our new Summer Principals Academy (SPA) places the highest premium on this renewal of spirit and commitment.

Among the several challenges confronting urban schools under No Child Left Behind is fostering the growth of a new generation of school leaders. Numerous studies have indicated that as many as half of the current school population of principals will be retiring within the next five years. Leadership for Learning: Reinventing the Principalship, a national report issued in October 2000 by the Task Force on the Principalship, states that 50 percent of superintendents report a shortage of qualified candidates nationally to fill principal positions. More than 40 percent of the current principals in the NYC public schools will be eligible to retire by 2006. For 2006 alone, New York City has estimated a demand for 200 new principals.

The demand in other urban systems is similar. Compounding these challenges is the lack of a professional career development ladder within education that systematically prepares teachers who aspire to leadership with the necessary preparation for the job. Furthermore, the existing Assistant Principal position is notorious for ill-preparing future principals. Colleges and universities have played their part in these dysfunctional leadership development dynamics as well, admitting large numbers of teachers into cafeteria-style master’s degree programs in education leadership with low academic expectations and little pre-screening for leadership aptitude. The ironic outcome is that school districts are flooded with teachers who have administrative certification, (largely because it’s an easy way to accumulate credits and advance along the salary schedule) but are either unwilling or unable to practice leadership.

The demand for a change in school leadership is also reflected in the huge turnover rates among new teachers. Poor leadership is a major contributing factor in a young teacher’s decision to leave a school (Ingersoll & Smith, 2003). These dual sources of instability interact in a negative spiral that undermine the most determined efforts by district leadership to create school cultures that are stable, possess highly qualified teachers and effective school principals—all significant predictors of high-performing schools. On standardized tests, African-American and Latino 17-year-old students have performed at the same level as 13-year old Caucasian students in English, mathematics and science (NCES, 2001). Yet we know that when these students are given the opportunities they deserve, they can and do achieve at the same levels as students in other areas. Over the past decade the principal’s role as instructional leader is increasingly recognized as the critical factor in improving student achievement. Principal leadership is significantly correlated with student achievement. A one standard deviation improvement in the leadership of a school is associated with a ten percent improvement in student achievement (Waters, Marzano, & McNulty, 2003).

Even outstanding efforts by organizations like Teach for America have largely failed to keep their academically able and idealistic recruits in schools. Our conclusion from a careful review of these trends was to pursue a new school leadership development paradigm.

The Summer Principals Academy is a cost-effective innovative program designed to answer the call for new, committed leadership in urban schools.1 We accomplish this in several respects:

Recruitment
We set ambitious goals for our founding cohort. First, we targeted teachers who have demonstrated high academic achievement as undergraduates and come from the most competitive colleges and universities in the United States. Second, we wanted idealistic teachers working in and committed to urban schools, but

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1 Currently, the full-tuition price of the program is roughly $32,000 for a 32-credit masters degree. As an educational initiative, this compares rather favorably with the $160,000 per principal cost of the New York City Leadership Academy.
very much on a fast-track to school leadership positions. We knew that for a cohort like what we wanted, the prospect of sitting in the trenches for another 7 to 10 years to get a shot at an AP position is highly unappealing. Finally, we wanted a cohort that reflected the diversity of the schools in which they would teach and lead. We were delighted with our founding cohort application pool of 110 candidates. Of these very talented teachers, we selected 45. They are roughly evenly divided by gender and over half are persons of color. Half are from the New York metropolitan region, while the rest are teaching in urban schools around the United States, including Atlanta, Miami, New Haven, and cities in Texas and California.

Curriculum
The curriculum is reflective of the principles embedded in the ELCC standards and, of course, New York State’s standards. However, we go beyond both to meet needs we believe are unaddressed in most school leadership preparation programs in the country. For example, principals do not, by and large, lead students directly. Rather they lead adults—teachers, support staff, and parents—who in turn bring to life teaching and the learning in highly effective schools. Leading adults requires different skills from leading children. One of the four pillars of our program (Figure 1) is adult learning and professional development. A national survey of over 3,000 principals (NASSP, 2001) revealed that 49.7 percent reported personnel decisions as their most important task. A survey of superintendents (Davis, 1998) revealed that the primary reason for the firing of principals was their failure to communicate in ways that sustained positive relationships with parents, teachers, students, and/or colleagues (p.65). The other three pillars of our program are K-12 Pedagogy, Leadership, and Management. Our curriculum is balanced in all four, and it seeks to ensure that knowledge skills, ethics, and the critical habits of mind practiced by effective leaders get sustained attention.

Figure 1: Teachers College SPA Curriculum Map
Instruction
Instruction is delivered over two summers in two intensive 6-week sessions, five full days per week. Additionally, students complete a school-based action research project and a 450 hour internship. We have approximately 45-50 students in each cohort and co-instructors for every class. The classes are highly student-centric: we provide short lectures 30-45 minutes and even these are broken up with short activities so that students can internalize the concepts. Lectures are integrated with case studies, role playing, simulations, or various sharing activities that allow for practice and reflection.

Communication Skills
The Summer Principals Academy works very hard on building the communication skills of its aspiring school leaders. We do so in three important ways. First, we form them into cohort teams of five in which they do most of their work. Second, during the first summer students take an intensive program of skill development in conflict resolution and mediation. During the second summer, they take a similar program of study along with skill development in team-building. Third, every student, upon entry to the program, takes the Hay Group 360 degree emotional intelligence survey. The Hay Group then provides us with both a large group profile of the five core emotional competencies and an individual profile for each student. All of the faculty and staff who wished to take it were encouraged to do so to familiarize all with the instrument as well as model the practices we preach. We believe that leaders who do not have high levels of self awareness and related areas of emotional intelligence that we address in our program of studies do not belong in leadership positions in schools. Two highly qualified members of our faculty who are certified in training with EQ follow up with students on EQ skill development throughout the year. Each member of our faculty has a doctorate and most courses have at least one regular member from the Teachers College faculty.

Internship
Both New York State and the ELCC standards require an internship and we embraced the requirement as an opportunity to leverage our students’ learning experiences. Since our program is unique in that it is both intensive and allows teachers to stay in the classroom, it is very important to us that our students have the written support of their building principals for their internship. We conduct a briefing session at the beginning of the program so that our aspiring principals and their sponsoring principals understand what is expected of them. We have 5 projects required for the internship. Two are selected by the sponsoring principal and three are requirements of the program. Students develop a detailed memorandum of agreement that incorporates the program requirements. They then discuss the agreement with their supervising principal and receive direction with regard to how it will be implemented in their respective schools. The completed MOA must be signed by the student, the sponsoring principal and the Academy Director. Each intern has an experienced coach (typically a retired or working principal) who serves as a critical friend, mentor and advocate for the intern at the school. Coaches make three site visits per year in addition to numerous phone calls and emails. They are highly dedicated to the success of the interns and we are very proud of their work.

Technology
All of our classrooms are wi-fi enabled and all students are required to come with laptops wi-fi ready. We are heavy technology users, with web-based class materials, readings, assignments, syllabi and evaluation systems. We use the new open-source discussion board Moodle, and we are experimenting with Macromedia’s Breeze for our distance learning action-research course.

Measures of Accomplishment
Unlike most graduate programs, we evaluate every single class with short on-line, computer-scored evaluations. Our leadership team and the co-instructors have that feedback within 30 minutes of the end of class. That feedback is important in making adjustments to lectures, activities, and team-building exercises the following day. End-of-week evaluations provide a broader brushstroke of how things are going and end-of-course summative evaluations provide useful feedback for the overall effectiveness of the curriculum.

In addition, we conduct a number of in-house action research projects, both with student dissertations and our own evaluation efforts to better understand the strengths and weaknesses of the program. These efforts have already led to an important round of program improvements, and
Teachers College Summer Principals Academy
As seen in EDUCATION WEEK’S Quality Counts 2006 Viewpoints

we expect to make more as we finish our first year in the summer of 2006.

We also maintain electronic portfolios of student work that include at least five critical selections of the work of each along with resumes and other useful documents. These are available for use in each student’s subsequent job search with prospective employers. Our first cohort will graduate in autumn, 2006. Most will be eligible for a New York State administrative certificate enabling them to compete for principal positions. About half of our students are from other states and will pursue licenses from their respective states.

Given these accomplishments, we have a very strong conviction that SPA graduates will have an impact on the profession and urban schools far exceeding their numbers and all will bring new energy, commitment and leadership skills to all levels of leadership within urban schools.

For more information on Teachers College Summer Principals Academy please call 212-678-3726 or visit http://www.tc.edu/summerprincipal

BIBLIOGRAPHY


