



## **Building School District Leadership Capacity**

By  
John R. Crews

### **Introduction**

The 1998 NAESP/NASSP report, *Is There a Shortage of Qualified Candidates for Openings in the Principalship: An Exploratory Study* describes factors that contribute to a worsening crisis in our nation's schools. Traditionally, the vast majority of school principals have come from the teaching ranks. However, in increasing numbers, teachers who are qualified candidates are not seeking principals' positions. The most frequently cited reasons for this lack of interest were: increasing public expectations to improve student achievement, growing time demands, low salaries, and inadequate resources. According to the report, 50% of the superintendents who have filled at least one principalship during the 1997-98 school year said that there was a shortage of qualified candidates. Furthermore, *Reinventing the Principalship* (2000), references U.S. Labor Department statistics that indicate that the "need for school administrators will increase by 10% to 20% in the next five years." Although this problem is affecting many schools nationally, it is particularly serious in larger urban districts. In addition to the shortage problem, future school principals will be assuming increasingly more

complex and demanding jobs. A May 2000 ASCD Education Update entitled, *The Contemporary Principal*, describes the new wave of principals as visionary leaders who are data driven and goal oriented and who possess the human relations skills needed to energize all members of the school community to work together toward the common mission of success for all students.

### **School District/University Partnership**

A partnership between the Elizabeth Public Schools and Fairleigh Dickinson University's School of Education is designed to address the shortage of candidates who possess the necessary knowledge and skills to be effective school leaders. Supported by resources and technical assistance from the Mid-Atlantic Deans and Superintendents Network (MDSN), a project sponsored by the Laboratory for Student Success (LSS) at Temple University, a number of initiatives will be implemented in Fall 2001 that will begin the process of building the P-12 district's leadership capacity. The Elizabeth School District is a microcosm of urban school districts nationally in respect to the school leadership shortage. Located in Union County, New Jersey, several miles south of Newark, the

district has 18 elementary schools, six middle schools, and one high school. The total student population projected for the 2001-02 school year is 20,421. Currently, 21 of the district's principals and assistant principals are between the ages of 50-55 and 11 are over 56 years of age. Obviously, dramatic changes will take place in school leadership in the district over the next several years.

### **Master of Arts (MA) in Educational Leadership**

Beginning in Fall 2001, FDU's MA in Educational Leadership Program, which was developed in affiliation with the New Jersey Principals' and Supervisors' Association (NJPSA), will be offered on-site in the Elizabeth Public Schools for interested staff. This two-year, 36-credit program, which includes a 12-credit field-based internship under a mentor principal during the second year, leads to New Jersey Principals' Certification. The completion of an action research project is also required of all participants. Faculty from the University's School of Education will teach courses, as well as train selected district administrators to serve as adjunct professors. The emphasis of the program is to develop future principals who have the knowledge and skills necessary to serve as

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instructional leaders for their schools. The design and curriculum is based upon the concept that all constituents of the school community are responsible for improving student achievement and must contribute to the development of a shared vision for their school. Approximately 40 district staff members have expressed the intent to enroll in the fall program. A mentor training component will be developed by the University and NJPSA in order to prepare selected district principals to lead the internship phase of the program which will begin in Fall 2002. Also, the Elizabeth School District, as part of a state initiative, has required that each of its schools implement one of the approved comprehensive school reform programs (see table). These programs will serve as the focus of the action research component of the MA program. The Mid-Atlantic Regional Technology in Education Consortium (MAR\*TEC) will provide technical assistance in designing the evaluation models.

### Administrative Leadership Training Programs

Administrators and principals in the Elizabeth Public Schools will be encouraged to participate in the New Jersey Exemplary Leadership Institutes for Technology in Education (NJ ELITE) training. This initiative is the result of a partnership among NJPSA, the New Jersey Association of School Administrators (NJASA), and the New Jersey Department of Education (NJDOE).

| CSR MODEL   | ELEMENTARY SCHOOLS | MIDDLE SCHOOLS | ELIZABETH HS HOUSES |
|---|--------------------|----------------|---------------------|
| Accelerated Schools   | 1                  |                |                     |
| Comer   | 4                  |                |                     |
| Community for Learning  | 9                  | 6              |                     |
| Paideia   |                    |                | 5*                  |
| Success for All   | 4                  |                |                     |
| <b>TOTALS</b>   | 18                 | 6              | 5*                  |
| * Elizabeth High School is organized into five administrative houses. |                    |                |                     |

The goal is to provide school administrators “with leadership development focused on whole-systems change and technology integration. The training will help school leaders gain knowledge and skills for effective infusion of technology into the learning environment.” (NJ ELITE, 2001, Goals section, ¶ 1). The NJ ELITE program includes prerequisite three-day core training sessions, as well as seven separate institutes which explore the seven dimensions of progress in educational technology that address learners, learning environments, professional competency, system capacity, community connections, technology capacity, and accountability. Ongoing activities include showcases, videoconferences, web-based programs, online support, mentoring opportunities, and periodic seminars. Additionally, a representative of FDU will serve on a committee at the Institute for Educational Leadership in Washington D.C. to assist in the development of E-LEAD, a web-site resource for school leaders. Training in the use of this website will be available for the Elizabeth School District leadership, as well as other districts that are members of FDU’s Professional Development Consortium.

Also available for the district principals will be the Principal Leadership Forum: Achieving Student Success in Schools, which is a series of six full-day workshops sponsored by the Advanced Study Institute of

LSS. The Forum includes directed readings, analysis, the application of knowledge to task-specific skills, guest speakers, panel discussions, and work groups. Practitioners experienced in initiating and maintaining innovative school-based improvement programs will serve as discussion leaders. The Fall

2001 training will be held on the FDU Florham-Madison Campus from October through December.

### Conclusion

This comprehensive approach to systemic change in the Elizabeth Public Schools holds much promise for building the district’s leadership capacity and should serve to prepare the district to significantly improve student achievement and meet the challenges of the new decade. Not only does this partnership address the impending shortage of qualified school leaders, it also provides high quality professional development through NJPSA, NJASA, NJDOE, and LSS for the current district and school level leadership. Furthermore, the action research conducted by the students enrolled in the MA in Educational Leadership Program at FDU should provide an abundance of high quality data to be used for the evaluation of the various comprehensive school reform programs being implemented in the district.

### References

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