



National College for
School Leadership

Innovation in Headteacher Induction

Case Study 3: The Academy for New Principals The Principals' Center, Georgia State University

By Carol Z McGrevin

Spring 2004

**Case study research carried out for the
National College for School Leadership**

by

Dick Weindling, CREATE Consultants, London

Contents

Background information	3
Strategic aims	7
Programme structure and design	8
Learning outcomes and impact	12
Additional information and references	17
Commentary by Bruce Barnett	18
Commentary by Kent Peterson	21

Background information

What is the Academy?

The Academy is a support and mentoring program for new principals; it is a network of principals (novice and experienced) who are focused on creating schools that foster outstanding teaching and increased student learning. In addition, the program is a vehicle to recognize outstanding principals for their expertise and their ability to utilize and transfer their “craft knowledge” about creating schools that work for all children to those just beginning the journey of leadership.

The Academy for New Principals is an innovative professional support and development program of The Principals' Center, which is housed at Georgia State University (GSU). The Principals' Center is a joint effort between the University, local school districts and other agencies to provide cutting-edge professional development for school leaders. The center was founded at GSU in 1984 as part of the National Network of Principals' Centers, created by Roland Barth, at Harvard University. The mission of the Principals' Center is to provide practicing and aspiring school leaders with quality learning and networking opportunities designed to develop their capacity to create schools that work for all children.

The Academy, a collaborative effort between North Georgia College and State University and Berry College, is a model program that combines the university's cutting edge research and academic knowledge with distinguished principals' knowledge of effective practice to support new principals through their first two years of service. The program offers collaborative group support and individual mentoring. The focus of the Academy is on the practitioner. The programs are designed by principals for principals and facilitated by the university partners. The Academy is governed by an Advisory Board consisting of representatives from the three partner institutions, and representatives from the new principals and the fellows (experienced principals).

The Academy does not offer school administrators a script to follow or a one-size-fits-all approach to school leadership and management. Because we recognize that the needs of school administrators vary according to their training and experience as well as the

local cultural, socio-economic and environmental contexts of their schools and school systems. However, although school leaders may face unique, context-specific challenges, there is a common framework regarding the purpose of leadership and the central role that principals play in creating and supporting the learning environments of their schools. This conceptual framework includes the following guiding beliefs:

- **Effective school leaders benefit from on-going support and training.** The role of the principal is demanding and often very lonely. Ongoing support and professional development activities offer new school leaders the opportunity to learn from one another in a mutually respectful environment.

- **Effective school leaders are the crucial change agents in their schools.** School reform cannot occur without the leadership and guidance of the principal and other school administrators. School administrators are often unable, in isolation, to keep abreast of the most cutting edge research and thinking in the area of school reform. The structure of the Academy allows for continuous development of the skills and knowledge principals need to initiate and support change at the school level.

- **Effective school leaders set the stage for producing strong learning communities.** Learning communities require on-going care and feeding in order to continue to grow. Learning communities are dynamic rather than static systems. School leaders must also be afforded the opportunity to continue to grow professionally, so that they have the capacity to lead the learning community.

- **Effective school leaders support teacher professionalism.** Being an effective change agent and the leader of a dynamic learning community requires school leaders to support and encourage teacher professionalism. Teacher professionalism, in turn, leads to improved learning environments for all children.

Why was the Academy developed?

The program was developed in response to two identified needs. In the State of Georgia there has been a significant increase in the demand for persons to fill school principal positions, due to: an increase in student population in the State (many of whom are non English speaking children) and to the large number of persons currently holding those positions that have reached retirement age. As superintendents of schools were seeking candidates for those increasingly vacant positions, they realized that qualified candidates were not in abundance. Qualified persons were not seeking the position due to the perceived stress and demands of the job often related to the newly established state and national accountability measures. Those who were interested in the principalship, did not necessarily have the instructional leadership expertise needed. Once a qualified person was hired for the role, Superintendents and Boards wanted to insure that they would stay in that position and be able to act as the school's change agent to provide the necessary leadership to improve student learning for all.

What is the rationale/research behind the Academy?

In an attempt to design a program that would support these new principals, the research on leadership development and socialization proved insightful. The strength of the theory is on the two-way interaction between the new leader and the school situation (with each trying to change and influence the other). During the first several months to a year, the new principal is engaged in "sense-making"-developing a cognitive map or mental model of the organization. This is an intense learning period. As time goes on, the principal engages in a period of deeper learning and diagnosis. During the second year, the principal engages in changing and reshaping the school. During the same time, however, the school's culture and community are engaged in socializing the principal about "how things are done around here. Resistance to change is evident, but the community normally provides the new leader with a "honeymoon" period. It is during the initial encounter and accommodation period that principals have the opportunity to establish themselves as the accepted leader rather than *just* the appointed leader of the school.

School leaders do not emerge from training programs fully prepared and completely effective. Their development is a more involved and incremental

process, beginning as early as their own schooling and extending through their first years on the job as leaders. Becoming a school leader is an ongoing process of socialization. (Duke, 1987)

Having competent experienced principals to consult with, to seek guidance from and to learn from provides new principals with a support system that allows them to move through the various stages of initial learning faster and with more confidence. With increased self-confidence and knowledge, new principals should be able to establish themselves as “the leader” of the school and will be in the position to effect positive changes in the school’s culture and its ability to positively impact student learning.

Strategic aims

The goals of the Academy are to help principals create schools that embrace conditions which support teacher success and student learning by:

- Providing coaching and consultation by distinguished principals (called Fellows) to first and second year principals focusing on their critical role as instructional leader
- Providing new principals with a forum to ask questions, seek advice and to learn from the expertise of the Fellows and from the experiences of other new principals
- Helping to socialize new principals to the actions and strategies (role) of being a change agent within their school
- Supporting the ability of new principals to recreate their schools into a professional learning community
- Creating a professional network of Fellows, who will have the capacity to coach new principals and principals of low performing schools to enable them to create schools that foster outstanding teaching and increased student learning
- Establishing an ongoing learning community among new and experienced principals throughout the State, one that can reduce the isolation of principals and provide them with a network to tap into for new ideas and general professional and emotional support

Program structure and design

The program runs for two years. Cluster groups of principals of similar schools (but across district lines) meet once every month for several hours to exchange knowledge, ask questions and share information. The cluster groups are comprised of three to five new principals and one distinguished principal (called a Fellow). The Fellow serves as a mentor, coach, consultant, critic and friend. They are paid \$2,000 per year for their support work.

All new principals in the greater metro Atlanta area are invited to become members of the Academy (there are about 650 schools in the area). Principals who have recently moved to the Atlanta area, or principals who have moved to a high need school have also requested membership and the program has accommodated them.

Three times a year, the entire Academy (K-12) attend an interactive session with a nationally recognized educator or expert in a field that impacts schools and student learning. Examples of one year's consultants are: George Thompson, President of the Center for Leadership in School Reform, Pedro Noguera, Professor at Harvard University, with an expertise in working successfully with children in poverty and Michael Fullan, at the University of Ontario, internationally known expert on change. In 2001-2002, Dr. Richard DuFour, superintendent of schools in Illinois and Ms. Rebecca Burnett, principal of an elementary school in Virginia, met four times with the group and worked with them on understanding the design principles of schools as a professional learning community and on implementation strategies for their schools.

During the summer, Academy members participate in a two-day retreat that focuses on identifying individual leadership strengths and on developing themselves as reflective practitioners. Throughout the year all Academy members are urged to stay in contact with each other and provide the support and encouragement needed to be successful. The Academy currently is limited to 40 participants per year, although there are plans to implement the model statewide, which would increase the number of principals significantly.

Program process and program content

The main component of the Academy is the cluster meetings, which occur monthly. Each Fellow is responsible for the focus and content of these sessions. Cluster meetings can be free flowing with the opening stem of conversation being: with what do you need help, or they can be more focused on a specific topic such as: managing personal time, understanding your school's culture, using performance data to make instructional decisions, student achievement and assessment, developing an effective leadership team, etc. Many of the topics discussed have been identified from the work on the principal's role conducted by the International Beginning Principals Study (e.g. Barnett et al, 2001), and Hoachlander (2001), as well as the work experience of the Fellows. The new principals can also suggest topics that are of interest to them. In addition, Fellows often share forms, schedules or other artifacts that would be of help to the new principals.

In addition to the Cluster meetings, the Academy as a whole meets three to four times per school year. Here a more structured approach is taken to the learning. All of the sessions have a focus on the role of the principal as the instructional leader. The content for each session is dependent on the expert working with the group, but the overall theme is *"building professional learning communities: practices and implications."* All of the sessions, regardless of the session leader, incorporate presentation, dialog between session leader (national expert) and participants, conversation among participants around potential application of theory or idea presented, and reflective writing.

During the summer retreat, the main focus is on the individual as a leader. The content has varied each year depending on input from the Advisory Board and suggestions from the new principals. Leadership self-assessments, such as the 'Myers-Briggs Inventory', have been used to generate personal improvement plans. Individual leadership profiles are developed, case studies are used to generate discussion around leadership strategies, decision-making and problem-solving strategies are presented and practiced. Throughout all of the activities of the Academy, reflective journal writing and critical friend feedback strategies are incorporated when applicable.

Learning culture and program principles

The Academy itself reflects the overall curriculum theme of a Professional Learning Community. The program recognizes and respects the time demands of all the participants whether first year or experienced. We also believe that Academy members become close professional colleagues – a community of principals. Therefore, the work of the Academy, although structured, is conducted in a friendly, informal, yet professional manner. Much of the work of the Academy presents itself as a paradox. For example, the culture of the Academy is focused yet flexible, serious yet lighthearted in approach, opportunistic – looking for a variety of ways to meet the individual needs of our participants, which often are unpredictable, to a consistent fidelity to the overall theme.

We also recognize and respect the knowledge that all of our participants bring to “the table.” We believe that our newly appointed principals are well prepared for the role, have a strong expertise in instruction and learning, and are passionate about their work. What they need is the craft knowledge that our experienced principals have, the support to be a courageous leader, to think out of the box and to take risks. They also need another set of eyes, to help them work their way through the trees and at the same not lose sight of the forest. They need someone to challenge their thinking to become focused in their attempt to bring about the needed changes within their school. Our Fellows, outside consultants as well as their neophyte colleagues provide that for them

At the conclusion of each year, we take the time to celebrate successes. The Principals’ Center hosts a recognition evening for all new principals at a gala event held at the Carter Presidential Library. Dignitaries from within and without education are invited to meet and celebrate the role of the principal and the courage and effort our new principals (as well as our experienced Fellows), have demonstrated over the course of the academic year. We intentionally keep the evening “first class” to properly celebrate learning and courage.

Lastly, we honor the need for continuous learning for everyone. We present our entire Academy members with a door-knob sign, which we encourage them to put on their door when they are away from their building working with the Academy. The sign reads “Gone Learning”, which informs others that they are continuous learners, modeling the way.

Training the fellows

Principals who are excellent in the role of leading a school that works for all students and adults usually have the expertise to relate well with others – which is a key quality for a Fellow. However, we realize that working with teachers is somewhat different than mentoring, coaching and supporting a new principal. We therefore conducted training sessions for the persons who fill the role of the Fellow. We hired an outside consulting group whose main business is to train people in various fields to be mentors and coaches. Their work was the basis of our training and then periodically throughout the year, we send materials, articles, books, etc, to the Fellows to continuously upgrade their skills. In addition, we encourage Fellows to collaborate with each other around their mentor role. At the summer retreat we also provide time for Fellows to talk with each other about strategies that work. The Fellows wanted time together to better understand their roles and improve their mentoring skills.

Learning outcomes and impact

In June 2002, two external program evaluators (Gowan & Stucke, 2002) were hired to assess the impact the Academy was having on the participants. The assessment consisted of a survey of all Academy participants and a series of focus groups conducted at the Summer Institute in June 2002. Highlights from the evaluation report are given in the following section:

In the focus groups, participants discussed the impact of the Principal's Academy in terms of a) professional growth through individual and collaborative activities and b) the building of a supportive educational community. The principals reported that participation in the Academy activities fostered a "professional attitude" and provided opportunities to think about the "big picture" in a more systematic way. These opportunities provided a foundation for further professional development. Through discussions and activities with other principals, participants were able to link leadership theory with the everyday practice of leadership at the building level. Participants attribute the link between leadership theory and practice to the links between the university and the K-12 systems. In particular, the participants were interested in the opportunity to hear speakers who were on the "cutting edge of school reform."

Another aspect of the collaborative impact of building a supportive educational community is referred to in discussions of cross-district interactions. While specific schools and their communities varied, the participants learned from the "shared experiences" of other principals. As one participant related, *As a principal, it is isolating and this [contact and cluster meetings] helps*. Participants also reported that the cross-district activities allowed them to discuss problems they might not feel comfortable discussing within the district. Within district competition between principals is perceived as being quite a problem. The participants discussed how they are competing for improving the quality of their schools and that by sharing ideas within the district; they may be "overshadowed" [have their ideas stolen] by other principals and thus not be given credit for their ideas. In addition to concerns about competition, one participant expressed concerns about how others in her district perceived her ideas. She said that the Principal's Center allows principals to collaborate without worrying about how they

are perceived: *Sometimes you don't want to share because others may say, 'here she goes again'.*

Further evidence that a supportive, educational community has evolved as a result of participation in the Principal's Academy is echoed through the words of the Fellows as they describe the unique experience of mentoring new principals.

"The sharing and being able to talk to others."

"The unique opportunity to see the growth of new principals from different districts and to establish friendships."

"Maybe not knowledge but skills [are what's learned]. It has helped bring things together. Taking things they know and expanding."

Success in mentoring the community of new principals was described by the Fellows in terms of confidence building. Growth in self-confidence is seen in how the new leaders handle situations and share ideas. One Fellow said that she could see a difference in the mentees from the first day and that after participation in the program, "new principals know that they have skills." In addition to the benefits for the new principals, the Fellows described what was professionally rewarding for them personally. These experiences included the opportunities to work with someone outside of their district. This was especially attractive because it provided experienced principals with expanding horizons, opportunities to see how it is done elsewhere, to see similarities and differences. It also provided the experienced Fellows the opportunity to see a new principal "grow into the job."

Professional growth for the individual principals was achieved through individual activities provided by the Academy. The activities have enhanced personal growth of the principals in ways that no other aspects of their jobs allowed them to do. The participants particularly emphasized the lack of time they have to reflect on a daily basis unless they are asked to do it as a part of a structured program like the Academy. Many of the participants agreed that the journaling activity has helped them focus and reflect more.

“It helps you to see just how busy you are and [journaling helps you] become more in-tune with yourself and the community you are serving.”

“Journaling allows us to sit back and really reflect.”

In addition to journaling, participants acknowledged that useful aspects of the cluster meetings and institutes were the identification of strengths, weaknesses, and leadership potential. Once these areas were self-identified the principals could then realize their potential for growth. One participant said: “People are not always willing to provide feedback, but since I now know my strengths and weaknesses, I can ask for feedback [from my staff].” Another principal concurs with these comments by adding: “They [participants in summer institute] did a lot today that will help with personal growth...being aware of strength and weaknesses.”

The participants recognized leadership potential on a personal level and also with the Fellows. Leadership was fostered via small groups at cluster meetings through the sharing sessions with faculty leadership teams. Networking also helped younger principals feel more comfortable when they had mentors available to assist them when dealing with problems or engaging in topics of interest.

Summary of findings

In the evaluation, we sought to answer three questions. We were interested in the ways in which the Academy promotes professional growth and development for new principals and for the Fellows, which activities are most useful to the new principals and the Fellows, and what specific initiatives and activities might encourage other new school leaders to enjoy the Academy in the future.

1. How does the Academy promote professional growth and development for new principals and for the Fellows?

Professional Growth: A significant number of participants report being more or much more proficient in the areas of understanding the roles of being a principal. They also report that they have developed a better understanding of their role in establishing a

professional learning community. They report slightly less confidence implementing their leadership roles within their schools.

Mentoring: Participants report that having a Fellow as a mentor provides them much needed support as they begin their jobs as new school leaders. They regret, however, that their work does not allow them sufficient time to take full advantage of the many advantages of the mentor relationship.

Affirmation: Participants report that one of the most valuable aspects of the Academy is the self-confidence that they developed as a result of their participation. They report having a new sense of expertise that is recognized and valued by their colleagues. They also report the positive aspects of recognizing the expertise of the Fellows. They especially stressed the benefits of the cluster meetings. Participants reported not feeling so isolated, feeling free to discuss their problems in a supportive and professional environment. They valued the recognition they received in these monthly meetings.

Networking: Participants place a high value on the networking opportunities the Academy offers them. They value the opportunities they have to make connections with colleagues within and across school districts. These connections allow participants to learn from a wider range of colleagues, to see different perspectives on their problems and to have access to a wider range of possible actions.

Communication: Participants also valued the opportunities afforded them to share with their colleagues in a non-competitive situation. Participants report being able to discuss issues openly, without fear of retribution or of having their good ideas “stolen” from them. Participants are especially vocal about the high levels of competition among school administrators and the extra stress that competition places on them.

2. Activities that were of most use to new principals and to the Fellows

Cluster Meeting: The cluster meetings were identified as most useful by both the new principals and the Fellows. These cluster meetings allowed for frequent contact of peers in a collaborative and supportive environment. Participants suggested that the cluster meeting structures and scheduling [time and location] need more flexibility. Cluster

meetings could be presented as a “package” for a year with participants selecting, which 4 or 6 they wanted to attend.

Collaboration between schools and universities: The program should continue on the “corporate style level” that reflects an emphasis on a quality program with meetings held away from their schools. Participants expressed enthusiasm such as, “I’m glad to see the university is interested in this project. It is a wonderful marriage between the schools and the university.” “I hope it continues.”

Guest speakers: Participants also reported that they benefited from the guest speakers. The guest speakers allowed participants to keep up with the latest in research and policy at the national and state level.

Journaling activities: The journaling activities allowed participants to become reflective practitioners who were aware of their strengths and weaknesses in a personal and non-threatening way.

3. Specific initiatives and activities that might encourage other new school leaders to enjoy the Academy in the future

Marketing: Participants agreed that participation in the Academy would be beneficial to all new principals as well as to those seasoned administrators. They suggested that the program should be better advertised. As one participant noted, “New principals don’t understand about the Principal’s Center. There has not been a good job of educating others about it, especially the supervisors of the new principals.”

Role of the superintendents: Participants also specifically mentioned that they wanted more involvement and support from their district superintendents. Superintendents should promote participation and reward those who do participate.

Additional information and references

The Academy has its own password protected website, where members can post questions, read updated pertinent information and keep abreast of what is happening with other members. In addition, we have established a picture directory of all members, which allows members from different years to find each other. The Principals' Center website is: www.principalscenter.org

Barnett, B, Hall, G Matthews, R, McGrevin, C, Van Den Berg, D, & Vanderberghe, L, 2001, "The Professional Induction of Beginning Principals: A Multi-national Study." Symposium, American Educational Research Association Annual Meeting. Seattle: Washington

Duke, D, 1987, *School Leadership and Instructional Improvement*, New York, Random House

Gowen, S, Stucke, A, 2002 "The Evaluation of the Academy for New Principals," Atlanta: Georgia State University

Hoachlander, G, Alt, M, & Beltranena, R, 2001, *Leading School Improvement: What Research Says*, Atlanta, Georgia: Southern Regional Education Board

Commentary

by Bruce Barnett

The Academy for New Principals (ANP), developed at the Georgia State University Principals' Center, is a collaborative effort between the university and local school districts. The ANP provides a support structure for novice principals during their first two years on the job and incorporates a multi-faceted delivery system. Critical features underlying the program are identified as well as areas for future improvement.

Key features

The ANP has been in operation for almost 20 years, serving novice and experienced principals (Fellows) in the greater Atlanta, Georgia metropolitan area. Strengths of the program include: (1) recognizing that novices need support beyond their first year, (2) incorporating a variety of large and small group learning opportunities, and (3) providing training and support for Fellows.

Longer support for novices

Most induction programs incorporating mentors tend to end after the first year, leaving novices to fend for themselves in the second year on the job. A unique and extremely valuable aspect of ANP is that Fellows work with their cluster of new principals for two years, recognizing the emerging developmental needs of beginning principals. During the first year, Fellows assist them in "learning the ropes" of the school system and making sense of the complexities of the new role. As newcomers become more comfortable and confident, Fellows provide guidance and feedback as new principals make changes during their second year. This progression of assistance acknowledges research on beginning principals and their differing professional needs in the first two years in the position.

Comprehensive activities

Beginning principals and Fellows participate in a mixture of individual and large group learning activities. Monthly cluster meetings of 3-5 beginning principals and a Fellow provide a non-competitive learning environment for exchanging ideas and information. These meetings are rated as the most effective component of the ANP because participants are permitted to take risks without fear of retribution from colleagues. In

addition, the cohort of principals and Fellows congregate several times during the year in interactive sessions and a summer retreat. The interactive sessions expose participants to recognized experts on critical aspects of schooling and leadership, such as working with children in poverty, implementing change, and building professional learning communities. The two-day summer retreat provides additional opportunities for beginning principals to explore the personal dimensions of leadership using profiles, case studies, reflective journals, and critical friend protocols.

Besides modeling what a productive professional development collaboration between universities and school districts entails, ANP members find great value in their participation. Fellows find great value in seeing others grow professionally as well as expanding their own knowledge of programs and practices operating outside their district. Professional isolation is reduced, self-confidence improves, and cross-fertilization of ideas is stimulated by having participants from various districts. Because the program lasts for two years, new principals tend to report higher-order learning outcomes, including being able to see the “big picture” and building learning communities.

Fellow training and support

A critical role in the success of the ANP is the involvement of the Fellows over a two-year period. Despite the Fellows' substantial time commitments, Academy organizers realize the importance of devoting additional time for guiding and supporting them. Prior to their involvement, Fellows engage in a training session. Fellows are afforded additional support throughout their involvement by receiving resource materials and collaborating with their peers during summer retreats.

Suggested improvements

The ANP is assisting novice principals to make sense of the confusion and demands of the principalship. As the program further develops, the role of Fellows might be communicated and expanded and the program may need to be marketed more aggressively.

Fellow selection and involvement

Feedback from new principals who have had a particularly effective mentoring experience can shape the selection and training of future cadres of Fellows. Mentors who are deemed to possess effective mentoring skills can train subsequent groups of their peers. To

expand the personal nature of the mentoring relationship, Fellows and their assigned principals might make site visits to one another's schools to observe and provide feedback. These visits might be done individually or the entire cluster of principals might visit a school for part of the day to stimulate discussion at the monthly meetings.

Marketing

Some ANP members wonder if other principals and superintendents are aware of the array of programs offered by the Principals' Center, suggesting the ANP is one of the "best kept secrets" for professional development in the Atlanta area. To raise awareness of the ANP, staff could mount a more aggressive marketing campaign. They might attend principals meetings within local districts, distribute written materials via the mail and electronically, and communicate directly with district superintendents and/or directors of professional development. In addition, past and current members would be an effective group to use to advertise the success of the program. Also, a yearly celebration, bringing together members and invited guests from their districts, would not only publicly acknowledge members' accomplishments, but also expand awareness of the program throughout the educational community.

Commentary

by Kent Peterson

The Academy for New Principals at the Principals' Center, Georgia State University, provides a wide-ranging set of learning experiences over two years for new principals. The program employs a number of approaches to the training of new school principals that are thoughtful and effective.

The program has developed working relations with several organizations. While collaborations with universities sometimes are unsuccessful, the Academy developed a collaborative effort with three different institutions. Unlike those with single universities, which can be quite useful but narrow, a multiple institution consortium increases the diversity of opinions, the range of faculty available, and the philosophical and research orientations of colleagues.

In this program, principals are central to the design and planning of core elements. The conceptual framework and guiding beliefs of the Academy provide the flexibility it seeks. The four beliefs describe broad beliefs about training, the role of leaders in change and in the development of learning communities, and the importance of fostering teacher professionalism. Given the interest in flexibility and adaptability of the program, these four offer a useful foundation for encouraging the learning of new principals.

The cross-district set of participants seems a useful design feature of the program. Providing leadership development across districts as in this program is, ironically, both an advantage and a challenge. As the case describes, working with administrators from across several districts increases the networking, provides examples and ideas from different districts, and reduces the competition and potential loss of ones ideas to other principals. On the other hand, new principals need to learn the managerial requirements, formal and informal expectations, and local culture of their own districts. Learning these local contextual issues is lessened in cross-district sessions. It appears that the Academy has been able to balance these competing issues.

Some of the more unique aspects of this program are the attention to three key aspects of leadership: (1) the focus on socialization, (2) attention to sense-making, and (3) the development of mental models (Senge). These three organizing themes suggest that principals should enhance their leadership abilities by becoming more reflective of their own “mental models” and by developing a deep cognitive understanding of themselves. These seem powerful and important foci for the program. Personal reflection is made an explicit, valued process of learning to become a principal.

The Strategic Aims of the Academy lay out in more detail the specific goals of the training. These effectively combine learning expectations with the growth of important professional relationships. The Academy views the growth of professional social networks as a valued goal and uses a variety of approaches (the Academy, cluster meetings, sessions from nationally recognized experts, etc.) to build professional ties.

The structure of the program has both adequate length and regularity. The program lasts over two years, providing time to learn about the complete rhythms of the year and for members to develop strong professional relationships.

The two-day retreat is a useful way to initiate participants into the program, build interpersonal relationships, and provide opportunities for reflection and skill building. The content of the retreat uses a productive combination of approaches found effective with adult learners, such as case studies, discussion, feedback from colleagues, and personal reflection. Additionally, the retreat involves both attention to individual characteristics (the leadership profile) and school level issues (case studies). Similarly, the monthly meetings help maintain as well as build social and professional relationships. Attendance at Academy functions enhances these relationships.

One of the added features of the program is membership in the regional Academy and the three regularly scheduled interactive sessions with nationally recognized experts and educators. These additional sessions no doubt foster increased understanding of topics covered, but also reinforces the importance of looking outside the state for new knowledge and continued personal development.

All organizations develop cultural features and the Academy is no different. It does this through a number of ways. The specification of four core beliefs build shared understandings. The use of symbolic names for members (Fellows) can reinforce the sense of community. The celebration of core accomplishments and the membership in the Academy help build a professional community.

Recommendations

These recommendations are provided to suggest ways to refine, fine-tune and enhance existing qualities of the program. All programs are designed within fiscal, social, and contextual parameters. The ideas are provided as thoughts to consider as these programs move forward.

While it is always hard to find enough time to meet, it does appear that even several hours may not be enough time to delve into complex issues. The program could develop formal approaches to online and telephone coaching techniques. Additionally, the program might consider having Fellows formally meet their mentees in their buildings, engage in some shadowing, and have even more regularized mentoring sessions.

The program sends materials out to participants, but it might develop a more elaborate website with links to information related to the core features of the program. Many of the professional materials, suggested additional readings, and even short audio clips from the Academy could be made available for going back over ideas, topics, or skills initially addressed in the workshops thus reducing the cost of mailing materials.

The program may wish to specify the type of training the Fellows receive. The roles, including that of mentor, coach, consultant, critic and friend, require different constellations of skills. A formal training agenda might be published, as it could be useful to those interested in becoming Fellows and to participants who later might become Fellows.

The program could consider increased collaboration with districts to reduce the sense of competition among principals, to encourage more cross-district mentoring, and to increase the participation in the Academy.

Finally, one of the strengths of a program is the professional network that is built across districts and with the university. The program, in collaboration with districts and universities, might consider a broad-based alumni college that drew expertise from across all those organizations.