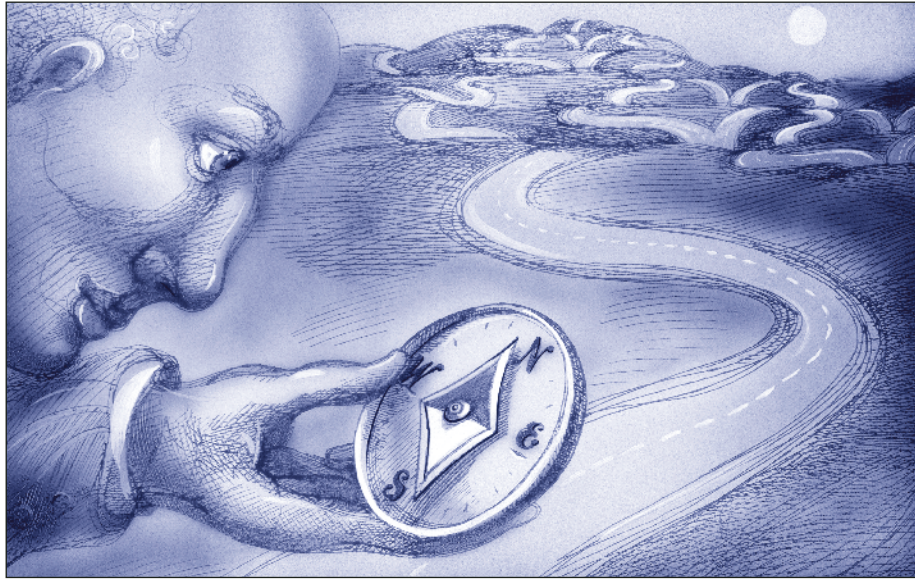


# Superintendents and Principals: Charting the Paths to School Improvement



## IN THE LAST DECADE,

state and national standards-based reforms have focused public attention on student learning and achievement with an unprecedented intensity. These reforms have increased pressure on the state's public schools and on the people who run them.

Principals and superintendents have long had to balance supporting student learning as instructional leaders, managing the operations of their institutions, and maintaining productive relationships with their local, state, and federal stakeholders. Today's administrators are also expected to oversee the transformation of their schools and districts into learning organizations that continuously assess their own progress in raising student achievement. This requires effective leaders at the school and district levels who can respond to state standards and the needs of their communities, articulate clear goals, and provide the tools to meet them.

This report focuses on the work of California school principals and district superintendents. It explores the basic responsibilities of these leaders and considers the different forms that these responsibilities might take depending on where in California they work. The report provides a broad profile of California's

principals and superintendents, the credentialing requirements for their work, and how they receive training and professional development to do this work well.

Many important facets of school district leadership are outside the scope of this report, such as the roles of school boards, district and county office staff, and business officers, as well as the instructional leadership responsibilities that teachers often assume in schools and at the district level. Although this report draws attention to the vital importance of strong, well-prepared school administrators—and the challenges these professionals face in California—it does not cover the full breadth or depth of this important issue.

## Superintendents and principals are crucial to school reform efforts

Administrators in California perform many functions besides leading a school or district. They provide technical support to schools, head business offices, lead the personnel division, develop and support instruction

and curriculum, provide data analyses, organize professional development, support Special Education assessment and programs, make sure schools are clean and well-maintained, handle alternative and bilingual education,

manage categorical funds, and coordinate school safety programs—to name a few.

However, this report focuses more specifically on the professionals who are at the head of schools and districts—the ones who develop the vision, set the tone, and, in the end, are held responsible for improving student achievement and responding to the needs of their community.

## Superintendents serve as the chief executives for local schools

School district superintendents serve as the chief executive officers for the schools in their communities. Their role involves a high level of responsibility and complexities that vary depending on the size, location, and type of district, and the community that they serve.

Superintendents provide a crucial link between the community and the district's schools. They are the only employee directly hired by the elected school board and are responsible for making recommendations to the board and executing board decisions.

They must balance the desires of the community, taxpayers, parents, and staff while keeping foremost in their minds the goal of providing a quality education to every student in their district. They are expected to resolve differences among their constituencies and inspire their staff to implement school board decisions and improve student learning. As the chief spokespersons for their districts, they often find themselves in the center of many conflicts and controversies.

### Superintendents have to balance their roles as managers and leaders

As managers, superintendents oversee their district's implementation of policies and laws established by state and national agencies, the judiciary, and local boards. They must ensure that their districts use state and federal funds

appropriately and meet reporting requirements and deadlines. They are ultimately responsible for the educational programs and schools in their district. That includes activities such as feeding students, transporting them to and from schools, and providing clean, safe environments conducive to teaching and learning. Every aspect of educating a student—from creating alternative learning programs to maintaining accurate transcripts, from providing services for disabled students to recruiting teachers and principals—falls under their purview. Superintendents must also develop and balance budgets and handle personnel issues, including union contract negotiations and evaluating many school and district administrative staff.

In their role as leaders, superintendents must also be aware of their district's place within the larger community. To do this effectively, superintendents typically have to be active in community affairs. Superintendents often rely on the community for support—sometimes financial—for their reforms. In most districts, superintendents have led efforts to raise funds through local bond measures, parcel taxes, parent organizations, or grants from foundations.

In this era of academic accountability, superintendents in many districts also assume the role of instructional leaders, moving the district forward in its efforts to improve student academic achievement. Research increasingly shows that effective school districts are those that establish an instructional and curricular focus, ensure consistency among their schools, and monitor implementation of their approach. As the head of the district, the superintendent must be a convincing advocate for this district vision, building support from staff, community, and board. Effective superintendents hold themselves and their district's schools accountable for continuous improvement. After overseeing the implementation of any changes, the superintendent leads efforts to monitor progress and make any adjustments needed to achieve the district's goals. "Handling focused change over time has become the superintendent's and district office staff's highest priority," says

Richard Bray, superintendent of Tustin Unified School District.

Finding time to be an effective leader and also fulfilling management responsibilities can be difficult, says retired Superintendent Kelvin Lee. "There is a tension between leadership (long-term progress toward a vision) and management, which is day-to-day operations," he says. "Leadership—sustaining progress—is much more difficult. But before schools can get better results on the AYP or API [student achievement measures], a lot of basic things have to be dealt with effectively—bus routes, facilities, contract negotiations."

### Principals are both school leaders and middle managers

As the head of a school, a principal—like a superintendent—often works as both a manager and a leader. The principal is the school's face to the community, the person who handles issues and problems with parents and neighbors while building community support for the school. Principals attend student events, meet regularly with parents, and typically participate in local community affairs. They often need to develop parent and community support—including financial—for special projects or initiatives.

However, most principals must work within the systems set up by their districts. As managers, they might not hire their teachers and other staff, but they almost always evaluate them. They also are responsible for the safety of their students and for disciplining students fairly. They are expected to satisfy state, federal, and district regulations. They also oversee the maintenance of large public facilities, making sure that needed repairs are completed and that the school grounds are clean and safe. In addition, they need to make sure they manage site personnel consistent with labor contract provisions.

As leaders, principals are responsible for setting high academic standards and improving student achievement at their school. They are instructional leaders whose success or failure is highly visible when the state ranks schools based on student performance each

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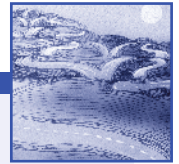
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## Carl Cohn believes district and school reform must be both top-down and bottom-up

Long Beach Unified School District (LBUSD) was the 2003 winner of the Broad Prize for Urban Education and a finalist again in 2007. The 2003 award was based on improvements in test scores through 2002 when Carl Cohn led the 90,000-student district, the third largest in California.

Cohn will be retiring on Dec. 31 from his current position as superintendent of San Diego Unified School District, the second largest district in the state. Cohn's background as a high school teacher, counselor, attendance director, and regional administrator prepared him for assuming the superintendency of LBUSD in 1992. He discusses his approach to district leadership.

### Superintendents need to build trust by listening well

Cohn, an EdSource board member, says schools are more like families than factories and building trust is essential.

Trusting that most people throughout the organization want to do the right thing "is a core resource of school reform," he adds.

Cohn says superintendents can build that trust by being good listeners who check their egos at the door. When he took over as superintendent in Long Beach, Cohn began holding quarterly retreats with the school board to discuss the challenges facing the district. The result was a board focused on raising standards.

"The superintendent gets the credit, but the school board as a collective was a driving force for reform and change in Long Beach," Cohn says. "It was a united school board with a powerful collective sense of purpose."

Building a collaborative approach to change is important, he says. "I determine the agenda by listening and inviting people to participate. It's not top-down reform. It's bottom-up and top-down. We hold what's sacred at the top while building capacity from the bottom for schools to improve. It's a more subtle, complicated dance."

### District offices can play a key role in reform efforts

The district office is an essential element in school reform, and office staff need to view parents and teachers in the same way a successful business sees its clients and customers, Cohn says.

In large urban districts, the superintendent must "set up structures that give primacy to teaching and learning," he says. "You can approach this in a number of ways, but the results need to reflect that you are doing it."

In Long Beach, Cohn resurrected the office of curriculum and instruction, which supports schools by helping them use assessments and data intelligently. Cohn also promoted a common teaching approach (*Essential Elements of Effective Instruction* by Madeline C. Hunter), hired instructional coaches, and encouraged local colleges and universities to redesign the preparation of new teachers. In addition, the district created an induction program for new teachers and summer curriculum institutes for all teachers and principals. Within this common framework, schools can develop their own approaches to learning based on their local situation and their data.

In San Diego, Cohn continued that focus. His director of curriculum and instruction held a series of retreats with teachers and principals about how the schools could accelerate gains while reflecting progress made in the past. The district's four curriculum leaders also work with individual schools on professional development. "We offer support centrally, but it is driven by the needs of the schools," he says.

Cohn brought up another way the district can help focus the system on raising student achievement. He expects district staff to do the paperwork required to keep schools in compliance under federal and state accountability programs. Sometimes "district office staff want to inflict the paperwork on the schools," Cohn says. "Part of my job is to say 'no.' The schools are too busy. They can't close the achievement gap if they devolve into handmaidens for Sacramento and Washington."

year. To do this successfully, principals are increasingly expected to be familiar with best practices and understand how to use data to inform instruction. But the principal is also in some ways a middle manager—in charge of ensuring that teachers and support staff implement district policies. For example, if a district chooses a new instructional approach, principals need to address any concerns their teachers may have and provide professional development opportunities to meet their needs. Principals also must advocate for their school within the district infrastructure.

Many experts say that the most effective principals are those who can create learning

environments that are supportive, professional, and collaborative. "A principal should be a person who teachers know can teach, who can lead and inspire others, and who can create leaders among teachers," says Milly Powell, who currently coaches principals for San Jose Unified School District. (See the box on page 4.)

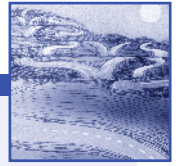
### California administrators, in particular, face difficult challenges

Many research studies show that effective leadership at both the district and school level is central to supporting student learning. To be effective, superintendents and principals, in particular, need to have both

the capability and the time to lead as well as manage. California administrators, as a whole, have students who are more disadvantaged than in most other states. They also work under a school finance system that requires more paperwork and allows less flexibility in how funds are used than is the case in many other states. At the same time, the ratio of students to administrators in California is one of the highest in the nation.

### As a whole, California administrators have more students who need more help

Students who lack fluency in English or who come from low-income families generally



## A Day in the Life of an Elementary School Principal

Most parents and community members have a better sense of the complex juggling act that principals must perform than the role of any other administrator. In many ways, the principal is the face of both the school and the district. Parents see the principal handling unruly children, meeting with the PTA or School Site Council, hosting an open house, or attending an athletic event. But it is unlikely that most know everything that a principal is expected to do.

“If you are manager of a site, everything falls to you,” says Milly Powell, a retired elementary school teacher and principal who currently works as a principal coach for San Jose Unified School District. Being a site manager includes making sure that graffiti is removed from the walls and that the toilets are unclogged as well as supervising teachers and responding to the needs of a diverse student body.

But principals need to be more than managers, Powell says. They must be “educational leaders who can empower teachers to see the vision and come up with the solutions.” Although vision is key, other qualities are needed as well. The first two that come to Powell’s mind are “a sense of humor” and “perseverance.”

When she worked as a principal, Powell would come early each day to be available if teachers had problems they needed to share with her before school. She would greet students, lead the pledge of allegiance, and spend time talking with any parents who were there. She would then spend about two hours walking through classrooms to observe the teachers and patrolling the school site to see if there were problems that the school custodian or district grounds staff needed to resolve. She might also be invited to watch something special a class had prepared. If a student had been disruptive on the bus or during recess, she would pull him from class and discuss the issue “right there” because she believes that responding immediately is important. At times, a highly disruptive student could occupy most of her day.

Back in her office, she would return phone calls to parents and e-mails from the district or perhaps attend a district meeting. At lunchtime and before and immediately after school, she would be out in the yard helping to supervise the

children, training yard duty staff, or directing traffic if parents were blocking the roads or otherwise creating hazardous conditions while dropping off or picking up their children. In the afternoon, she would meet with her office staff and do required paperwork. Or she might conduct a classified staff or teacher evaluation. If a child’s teacher and she had determined that a student needed special help, she would assemble a team from the district for a meeting to set up an individual education program (IEP) for that student or get other expert help.

After school, she also might meet individually with teachers to review assessment data for their students and help them come up with new ways to reach students who were not excelling. “I would help them identify strengths and weaknesses, where to go, how to do it.” She might attend grade-level meetings, school leadership team meetings, staff development, or meetings with the after-school program staff. She might participate in technology training offered to her school by the district. Many evenings would involve meetings with parents or events in which students performed. She would also visit the homes of students who had unexcused absences from school.

Powell used quiet times on the weekends to catch up on educational research, write school improvement plans or grant applications (e.g., for a school garden or an after-school homework center), and review assessment data broken down by classroom, by subgroup of students, or by individual students. If her district needed new facilities, she would spend weekends going door-to-door to support a school bond election.

Despite its demands, Powell says she thoroughly enjoyed her job. “I liked having an impact on children in a number of ways—not just academically, but socially and emotionally,” Powell says.

She also appreciated the positive culture developed at her school. “Teachers wanted to do what is best for their students,” she says. “They were on a quest for more knowledge about how to implement best practices. Everyone was positive. Their attitude was, ‘Give us the problem and we’ll solve it.’”

require more help to succeed academically. California has a higher percentage of English learners than any other state and ranks 13th in the number of students living in poverty, based on 2005–06 National Center for Education Statistics (NCES) data.

### High-poverty districts may face greater management challenges because of a lack of flexibility in funds

About a third of California’s school funding comes from categorical aid for special programs or groups of students. In part

because categorical aid is often used to strengthen the academic safety net for English learners and low-income students, schools and districts with large numbers of students from disadvantaged backgrounds often have a higher percentage of funds from categorical aid. Stanford University researchers in one study—*District Dollars: Painting a Picture of Revenues and Expenditures in California’s School Districts*—show that high-poverty districts generally receive a larger portion of their total funding through categorical aid.

These funds are typically accompanied by spending restrictions and reporting requirements that put extra demands on school district administrators. Syracuse University researchers in another study—*Understanding the Incentives in California’s Education Finance System*—found that handling the paperwork involved with categorical funding “places additional constraints and responsibilities on school districts.” In addition, they found that higher proportions of categorical aid lowered district efficiency related to student performance.

**figure 1** Overall, California has one of the highest students-per-administrator ratios in the nation

Administrative Staffing Ratios for the Five Most Populous States and the Nation as a Whole, 2005–06			
State	Total Students	Total Administrators*	Ratio of Students per Administrator
California	6,437,202	23,461	274
Florida	2,675,024	9,891	270
New York	2,815,581	14,007	201
Illinois	2,111,706	11,623	182
<b>U.S.</b>	<b>49,113,474</b>	<b>282,087</b>	<b>174</b>
Texas	4,525,394	41,375	109

\*Total administrators include district and county office of education superintendents, deputies, assistant superintendents, and others with districtwide responsibilities (such as business managers, administrative assistants, and professional instructional support staff), and instructional coordinators and supervisors at the district or subdistrict level; at the school level, it includes principals, assistant principals, and people who supervise school operations, assign duties to staff members, supervise and maintain the records of the school, coordinate school instructional activities with the district or county office, and serve as department chairpersons.

DATA: NCES COMMON CORE OF DATA 2005–06

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**figure 2** In 2005–06, 41% of all districts had fewer than 1,000 students, but they represented only about 2% of the state's students

District Size	2005–06		
	Number of Districts*	% of All Districts*	% of All Students*
1 to 499 students	295	30%	1%
500 to 999	109	11%	1%
1,000 to 14,999	466	48%	37%
15,000 to 49,999	98	10%	39%
50,000 or more	10	1%	22%
<b>Total</b>	<b>978</b>	<b>100%</b>	<b>100%</b>

\*Does not include county offices of education and state special school districts or the students enrolled in schools run by those entities.

DATA: CALIFORNIA DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION (CDE)

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### California has fewer administrators per student to meet these challenges

Despite the difficult challenges superintendents and principals face in California, administrators in this state are typically responsible for much larger numbers of students than their counterparts elsewhere in the United States. The most recent data (2005–06) from NCES put the ratio of total students to administrators in California at 274 to 1, which is 100 students per administrator more than the national average.

California ranks 49th out of the 50 states and the District of Columbia; only Arizona and Nevada have higher ratios. (“Total administrators” includes district and county office of education administrators, school administrators, and instructional coordinators.)

As Figure I shows, the ratio differs dramatically among the five most populous states, with California having the largest ratio, followed closely by Florida. Notably, in Texas there are less than half as many students per administrator as in California

and Florida. Texas has the 8th-lowest students-per-administrator ratio.

### California education leaders face widely different challenges based on local conditions

Although school and district leaders across the state wrestle with similar questions, their options and answers can be very different depending on their location. California's 978 school districts reflect this reality in several ways. For one, they range dramatically in size from a mere five students to 727,319 students.

Figure 2 shows the percentage of students in districts of various sizes. Most students are in districts that range from enrollments of 1,000 to 49,999. The state's 10 largest districts, however, educate 22% of public school students.

District configurations also vary, a situation rarely found in other states. In 2005–06, California had 561 elementary districts (kindergarten through eighth grade), 88 high school districts, and 329 unified districts (kindergarten through 12th grade).

In general, the superintendent of an elementary school district is likely to head a substantially smaller organization than superintendents of unified and high school districts. The statewide median enrollments for the three types of districts are as follows:

- elementary: 602;
- unified: 5,297, and
- high: 3,768.

(The median is the middle value. Half the values fall above the median and half fall below.)

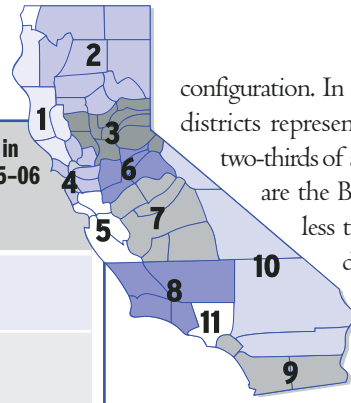
The number of students, schools, and staff members in a district obviously affect a superintendent's administrative challenges. Type of district—elementary, unified, or high school—can also make a difference. For example, elementary school district superintendents manage a curriculum-adoption process centered on state-adopted instructional materials, such as textbooks. But the state does not adopt materials for high school grades; instead, high school districts undertake curriculum adoptions using state frameworks only for guidance.

Another way to look at California school districts is by region. The California County

figure 3 | CCSESA divides the state into 11 regions along county lines

California County Superintendents Educational Services Association (CCSESA) Region (Constituent Counties)	Approximate Total School District Enrollment* in 2005–06	Total Districts in Region in 2005–06
<b>1. North Coast</b> (Del Norte, Humboldt, Mendocino, Lake, Sonoma)	117,759	92
<b>2. Northeastern</b> (Siskiyou, Modoc, Trinity, Shasta, Lassen, Tehama, Plumas, Butte, Glenn)	96,573	119
<b>3. Capital Service Region</b> (Colusa, Yolo, Sutter, Yuba, Sierra, Nevada, Placer, El Dorado, Sacramento, Alpine)	409,015	86
<b>4. Bay</b> (Marin, Napa, Solano, Contra Costa, Alameda, San Francisco, San Mateo)	637,691	90
<b>5. South Bay</b> (Santa Clara, Santa Cruz, San Benito, Monterey)	369,845	78
<b>6. Delta Sierra</b> (Amador, San Joaquin, Calaveras, Tuolumne, Stanislaus)	256,877	58
<b>7. Central Valley</b> (Merced, Mariposa, Madera, Fresno, Kings, Tulare)	393,837	125
<b>8. Costa Del Sur</b> (San Luis Obispo, Kern, Santa Barbara, Ventura)	410,855	100
<b>9. Southern</b> (Orange, San Diego, Imperial)	1,002,340	85
<b>10. RIMS</b> (Riverside, Inyo, Mono, San Bernardino)	809,878	65
<b>11. Los Angeles</b>	1,695,159	80

\*Enrollment data, based on California Basic Educational Data System (CBEDS), include elementary, unified, and high school district enrollments only. They do not include county offices of education, state special schools, state-authorized charter schools, and California Youth Authority districts.



configuration. In most regions, elementary districts represent between one-half and two-thirds of all districts. The exceptions are the Bay region, where slightly less than half are elementary districts, and more notably, the RIMS and L.A. County regions, where the majority of districts are unified.

Clearly, where superintendents work in California offers some clues as to the type and size of their districts and, to some extent, their administrative challenges. However, there are always exceptions. In the largely urban Bay region (#4), for example, is the rural La Honda/Pescadero Unified School District, comprising two elementary schools, one high school, and one continuation high school. This district serves 397 students, who live on the farms or in the coastal hills of San Mateo County, an otherwise densely populated county. At the other extreme, in the vast, predominantly agricultural Central Valley region (#7), Fresno Unified School District is the fourth-largest district in the state, educating more than 79,000 students in its I04 schools.

### *Student poverty affects the major measure of success for administrators*

Increasingly, schools administrators' success is measured by the academic achievement of their students. State testing data show that student poverty is highly correlated with lower student achievement. So understanding the distribution of poverty in California districts shows how the challenges related to student learning vary across the state and within counties. Variations in ethnicity, parent education level, and English learner status each add further complexity that school leaders know they cannot ignore. It is only for the sake of clarity and brevity that they are not considered in detail here.

Measuring student poverty in schools is somewhat difficult in California. The best data available come from counts of students receiving free/reduced-priced meals, but the data have limitations. For example, it appears that low-income high school

DATA: CALIFORNIA DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION (CDE)

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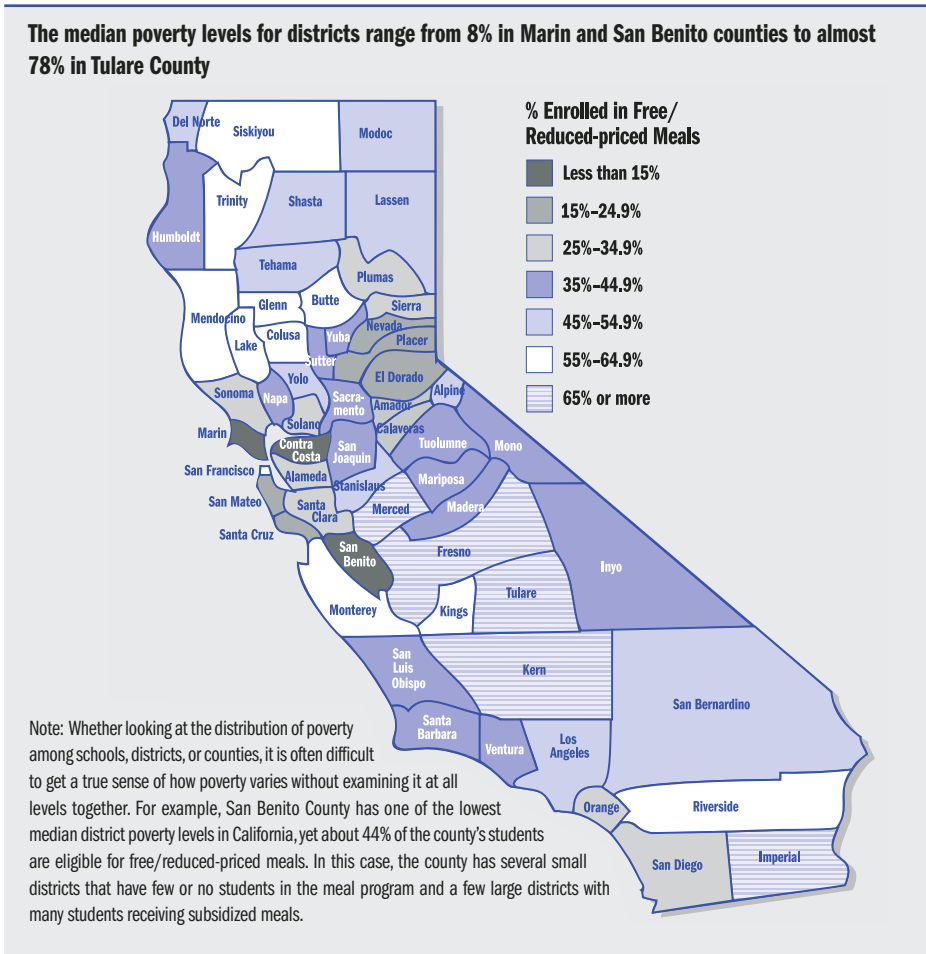
Superintendents Educational Services Association (CCSESA) divides the state and its 58 counties into 11 regions along county lines. This regional division provides a framework for highlighting the contrasts that exist across California's vast geography. Some of those regions are large in area and contain several sparsely populated counties. At the other extreme, one region consists of only one densely populated county—Los Angeles. Most, but not all, regions have considerable internal variation, with both rural and urban areas. Figure 3 shows the 11 regions, their constituent counties,

and the total school enrollment and number of districts in each region.

The variation among these regions is dramatic, reflecting in large part the contrast between California's rural and urban areas. For example, in 2005–06, the median elementary district in Los Angeles County had 5,374 students, which is nearly 40 times as many students as the 141 students in the median elementary district in the Northeastern region.

The 11 regions also vary somewhat in the commonality of each type of district

**figure 4** Districts in some Central Valley counties and Imperial County have the highest median poverty levels in 2006



DATA: CALIFORNIA DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION (CDE)

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students are underrepresented in subsidized meals programs, so figures for high school districts and high schools are likely to understate the level of poverty in those institutions. In the median elementary district, 45% of students participate in the meal program, according to the state's 2006 Academic Performance Index (API) data files. Yet in the median high school district, 30% of students claimed subsidized meals.

Even with this caveat about the data, however, Figure 4 shows the great variation in student poverty, as measured by the median district, among the state's 58 counties. Figure 4 also points out the substantially higher median level of poverty in districts in the Central Valley counties and Imperial County.

### District and school leaders fall into three categories: superintendent, superintendent/principal, and principal

State education data in this varied, complex state separate school and district leaders into three categories: superintendent, superintendent/principal, and principal. The superintendent is in charge of a school district, and the principal leads a school. Superintendent/principals are often found in small districts with a few—perhaps just one or two—schools. These individuals generally act as principal of a school and as district superintendent. This group also includes the heads of some charter schools and some who work as assistant superintendent/principal.

The most recent California Basic Educational Data System (CBEDS) information is

### The available data about administrators have limitations

No one disputes that the vast majority of California's district and school leaders first worked as teachers. Estimates from people in the field go as high as 95%. However, state data show that only 81% of superintendents, 83% of superintendent/principals, and 86% of principals report that they hold teaching credentials. Those numbers do not ring true for principals and superintendent/principals, in particular, because state law requires all school principals who oversee six or more certificated staff to have an administrative credential. The prerequisite for an administrative credential is a teaching or pupil services credential.

This sort of discrepancy reveals one of the problems with how the state collects data on administrators. The data are based on the Professional Assignment Information Form (PAIF) that teachers and administrators fill out each year. The form also asks for demographic data, such as gender, ethnicity, education, years in the district, and years in education. The state makes this data available through the California Basic Educational Data System (CBEDS). The form can be confusing, it relies on self-reporting, and it is geared toward meeting federal No Child Left Behind (NCLB) reporting requirements for teachers. (NCLB requires districts to show that their teachers are "highly qualified," which is determined by their teaching credentials.) In fact, instructions on how to fill out the PAIF say that information about administrative credentials should *not* be listed.

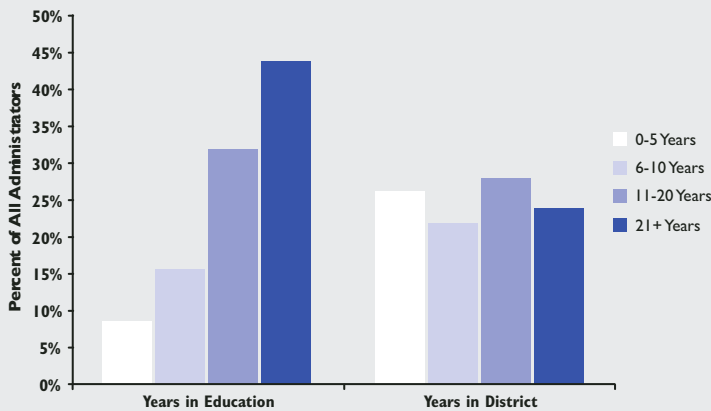
The data also indicate some ambiguity between the role of superintendent and superintendent/principal. Some individuals with dual roles check the superintendent/principal box, but others list themselves as superintendents and indicate that they spend some of their time as a principal. In this report, the latter are included in the superintendent group.

Another problem with the PAIF is missing data. A number of small districts—which altogether enrolled about 90,000 of the state's 6.3 million students—did not submit data on administrators for the PAIF.

## California's administrators are typically well educated and experienced

Available data about school and district administrators come from the Professional Assignment Information Form (PAIF) that administrators and teachers fill out each year for the California Department of Education. Geared toward teachers rather than administrators, the data have limitations. (See the box on page 7.) However, the 2006–07 data show that California's administrators are generally well educated, with 77% holding a master's degree or higher, including 7% with a doctorate. They have spent many years working in education and in their districts. (See below.)

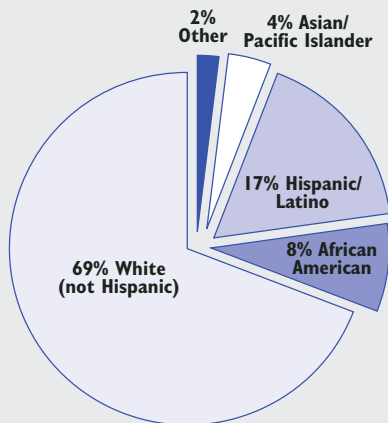
### Most California administrators have experience in education and in their districts



About three-quarters of California's administrators have spent 11 or more years working in education, and about half have spent that much time in the same district.

The data also give information on gender and ethnicity. The majority (58%) of administrators are female, compared with 72% of the state's teachers. More than two-thirds (69%) are white, compared with 72% of teachers. Teacher and administrator ethnicity are similar, with one exception. Almost 5% of California's teachers are African American compared with 8% of the state's administrators.

### More than two-thirds of California's administrators are white



Note: The category of "other" includes Filipino, Native American/Alaska Native, and multiple/no response.

for 2006–07. The data include 689 superintendents, 312 superintendent/principals, and 8,197 principals. The following descriptions are based on these three categories. Most of these leaders first worked as teachers, based on their reports that they have teaching credentials.

### California superintendents are likely to be experienced, well educated, male, and white

The 689 superintendents included in the PAIF data do very different jobs and face varied challenges. Some superintendents lead a section of Los Angeles Unified School District (LAUSD), which, by itself, serves more than 11% of the state's students. Others are in charge of rural districts with few schools. Some superintendents work in high-wealth districts with few, if any, students from low-income families, and others lead districts whose students are almost entirely from low-income families. Still others head districts that include both high-wealth and low-income neighborhoods, often requiring them to balance the needs of students from different economic, educational, and ethnic backgrounds. (See the box on page 13 about Gilroy Unified School District.)

Despite serving in diverse roles, California's superintendents tend to have many similarities based on 2006–07 data:

- They are most likely to be male (71%) and white (84%). Of the 105 nonwhite superintendents, about two-thirds are Hispanic/Latino.
- The vast majority (92%) hold a master's degree or above, including 39% with a doctorate. However, nonwhite superintendents are more likely to have attained at least that level of education (97% versus 92%).
- A strong majority (82%) of superintendents have been working in education for at least 20 years. A small percentage (4%) has been in education for two years or less.
- The median for years worked in their current district is seven. However, the 203 female superintendents appear to be somewhat less mobile than their male counterparts. They are more likely to have been in their district for more than 20 years (24% versus 18%).
- Data about the length of superintendent tenure are not available from the PAIF. However, based on data collected by EdSource over several years, 39% of California school districts had the same superintendent from 2001–02 to 2005–06, and another 46% had only one leadership change in that time. In other words, 85% of school districts in the state had relative stability at the top during that period.



*Who and what is a superintendent/principal?*

Not all school districts have superintendents. Smaller districts may be led by superintendent/principals. This group faces different challenges from superintendents of larger districts, and their backgrounds differ somewhat as well. (See the profile of retired Superintendent Kelvin Lee on page 10, who once held the post of superintendent/principal/teacher.)

A superintendent/principal generally heads both a district and a school. However, the data on this group are particularly unclear and a bit confounding. For example, it is not surprising to see that about two-thirds of the education leaders in the rural—and therefore less populated—counties of Glenn, Lassen, and Sutter are superintendent/principals. These districts have too few students to support a full-time superintendent and a full-time principal. However, highly urban counties are just as likely as rural areas to have superintendent/principals. In all, 51 of California’s 58 counties have at least one superintendent/principal. Some of these individuals head charter schools, lead a section of a large school district, or work as both assistant superintendents and principals.

Scattered throughout the state, California’s 312 superintendent/principals have the following characteristics, based on 2006–07 data:

- They are most likely to be male, though compared with superintendents, a higher percentage (38%) are female.
- They are likely to be white, with a smaller percentage (13%) of nonwhite individuals compared to superintendents.
- They are well educated, with 83% having a master’s degree or higher.
- The 39 nonwhite superintendent/principals have somewhat less experience in their districts and in the education profession than their white counterparts.

*California’s principals are more diverse than superintendents and are also more likely to be female*

Like district leaders, California’s 8,197 school leaders are predominantly white. But much more diversity exists in the principal’s office. Principals are about twice as

**Administrator ethnicity aligns somewhat with student and staff backgrounds**

About 71% of certificated school and district staff, including administrators, are white compared with a student body that is nearly half (48%) Hispanic/Latino and 30% white. A detailed look at the data, however, reveals that the leaders of schools and districts work with certificated staff and in communities that are more likely to reflect their own ethnicity.

The tables below illustrate this point for superintendents and district certificated staff and for superintendents and students. As the tables show, white superintendents lead certificated district staff that are predominantly white (87%) and head districts in which white students are, on average, the largest ethnic group (48%). Similarly, Latino superintendents lead districts in which Latino students are, on average, the largest ethnic group (65%). And although their certificated district staff are still predominantly white, the percentage of Latino staff (28%) is much higher than the state average. In fact, the average percentage of Latino certificated district staff is more than twice as high in Latino-led districts as in districts led by superintendents of any other ethnicity.

A similar pattern emerges for African American superintendents. (See below.) However, for districts headed by Asian/Pacific Islander superintendents, the pattern is still apparent but less strong. In those districts, the largest percentage of certificated district staff is white (69%), followed by Latino (12%), and then Asian/Pacific Islander (9%). However, the 9% in districts headed by Asian/Pacific Islanders is a higher average percentage than in districts headed by superintendents of any other ethnicity.

The tables below show the distribution by ethnicity of superintendents, certificated district staff, and the students that they serve. Essentially the same pattern emerges for superintendent/principals and, at the school level, for principals and the teachers and other certificated staff in their schools.

**Superintendents and certificated district staff tend to work in communities that reflect their ethnicities**

	Superintendent Ethnicity				
Student Ethnicity	African American	Asian/Pacific Islander	Hispanic/Latino	White	State Total
Percent African American	<b>12%</b>	9%	5%	5%	8%
Percent Asian/Pacific Islander	6%	<b>16%</b>	5%	6%	9%
Percent Hispanic/Latino	55%	40%	<b>65%</b>	36%	48%
Percent White	22%	29%	21%	<b>48%</b>	30%

	Superintendent Ethnicity				
District Certificated Staff Ethnicity	African American	Asian/Pacific Islander	Hispanic/Latino	White	State Total
Percent African American	<b>26%</b>	5%	4%	1%	5%
Percent Asian/Pacific Islander	3%	<b>9%</b>	3%	2%	5%
Percent Hispanic/Latino	10%	12%	<b>28%</b>	7%	15%
Percent White	60%	69%	63%	<b>87%</b>	72%

Note: The percentages of either students or staff do not add up to 100% because data for Filipino, Native American/Alaska Native, and multiple/no response are not included due to the small number of superintendents from those ethnicities.



## This superintendent/principal grew with the job

Kelvin Lee has a good grasp of the somewhat nebulous term of “superintendent/principal.” The retired superintendent of Dry Creek Joint Elementary School District—which has seven elementary schools and two middle schools that serve about 7,400 students—began his career in 1977 as superintendent/principal/teacher of the district when it had one K–8 school and 153 students.

“Half a day I was in the classroom, and half as site administrator,” recalls Lee, who is also an EdSource board member. “Once or twice a month, I acted as superintendent and ran school board meetings.”

In addition to running board meetings, as superintendent Lee had to ensure that the Placer County district was in compliance with all laws and regulations from the state and federal governments. In addition, he was in charge of the budget and personnel, including negotiations with employee unions. (Even though he had a teaching assignment, Lee was “on the other side of the bargaining table” as the district’s only administrator.) He was also the ceremonial head of the district and represented Dry Creek at county and state functions. He was spokesman for the board and attended community events in that capacity.

“The advantage of a small district is immediacy,” Lee says. “You can make quick decisions. I could be nimble in responding to the needs of the community, staff, and students. In large districts, many decisions must follow the chain of command because a decision may become the operational procedure for all the schools and everyone associated with the district. Decisions can take a lot longer.”

### Growth and standards-based reforms have an impact

In his 29-year tenure at Dry Creek, Lee oversaw one of the fastest growing districts in the state. He characterizes this growth as “explosive—geometric, not linear.” As the district grew, so did the difficulty of his position as superintendent.

The growth meant he was managing increasingly complicated work environments but at the same time ensuring that each student, parent, and employee felt valued and respected. He also had to rally community support for a bond election to build state-of-the-art facilities for the growing district.

“You need to have a high-quality work environment to match the high expectations for performance,” Lee says. “You need well-managed, well-run, and well-designed facilities.”

When California embraced standards-based reforms, Lee says the effect was positive in Dry Creek. The reforms “increased the dialogue between educators and the community,” he says. “They made us focus on an overall district curricular strategy as opposed to a school-by-school approach.”

To be effective, the reforms required cooperation between district and school staff, and everyone had to focus on the overall goal of raising student achievement throughout the district. “I needed agreement across the district that adequacy doesn’t mean equity; the district may have to spend more in one place,” Lee explains. “Once that conversation occurred, everyone agreed and supported each other. A rising tide lifts all boats.” The district celebrated every year because all schools demonstrated improvement, Lee says. During his tenure, each school was named a California Distinguished School.

“Because the district was mid-sized, we were able to have uniformity in the core curriculum that was based on the standards developed through community meetings with teachers, parents, staff, and community leaders,” Lee says. This uniformity in approach also made it possible to do staff development on a district level. “But the individual sites could supplement that core based on the needs of their communities,” he adds. “We had resources for that.”

### Superintendents need to have integrity

To implement such districtwide changes and keep the superintendent’s job for 29 years requires hard work and a lot of luck, says Lee, who entered the superintendent/principal’s role with no administrative experience. “You can’t control the enrollment, the state budget, or who is on the school board.” The fact that the superintendent serves at the pleasure of the board “remains in the back of every superintendent’s mind,” he says.

Personal integrity is also “very, very important—your reputation and perception as an honest person,” Lee emphasizes. “Keeping your word is everything.”

likely as superintendents to be nonwhite (29%), and the majority—almost 60%—are women, according to 2006–07 data. Principals also tend to have been employed by their district longer; but they have spent less time working in education, with 54% having worked 20 or more years in the field.

California’s principals are generally well educated, with little difference based on gender or ethnicity. Altogether, 87% of the

state’s principals have a master’s degree or higher, including 6% who hold doctorates. Asian/Pacific Islander (9%) and African American (8%) principals are slightly more likely to have a doctorate than their white and Latino counterparts.

### The data show differences based on gender

As a group, female principals have been in their districts longer than their male counterparts (a median of 14 years versus 11 years).

And 57% of female principals have been working in education 20 or more years compared with 51% of male principals.

There is also a relationship between the gender of the principal and the level of the school that they lead. Elementary schools are more likely to have a female principal (69%). Middle schools have similar numbers of male (52%) and female (48%) principals. More men (61%) than women lead high schools.

## To be effective, school and district leaders need appropriate preparation and ongoing support

Improving the capacity of principals and superintendents to lead and manage their organizations effectively is important for the success of California's standards-based reforms. The key challenge is how to connect the best research knowledge—in such areas as instruction, assessment, and organizational management—to the diverse local settings that California expects its principals and superintendents to serve.

California has developed a two-tier system through which school principals become credentialed to do this important work. A diverse network of postsecondary institutions, organizations, and partnerships provide training and ongoing professional development for the credential under the overall supervision of the California Commission on Teacher Credentialing (CTC). Professional development for California superintendents, on the other hand, receives less attention at the state level.

### *California offers a two-tier pathway to become a school principal*

Credentialing for school principals in California is overseen by the CTC. First, aspiring principals must have educational experience. They must possess a valid credential as a teacher, specialist (such as in reading or math), or pupil services provider (such as a counselor, social worker, or psychologist) and have completed three successful, full-time years in that role. They must also pass the California Basic Educational Skills Test (CBEST), which is required for teaching and most other credentials.

Next, aspiring principals must complete the Preliminary Administrative Services Credential. This is the first tier of a two-tier professional preparation and development process. The preliminary credential authorizes them to secure initial employment, begin work as an administrator, and continue in that capacity for five years while completing the requirements for a full professional credential.

## Typical Questions from the School Leaders Licensure Assessment

Candidates can qualify for California's preliminary administrative credential by passing a six-hour essay test. However, ETS is currently in the process of changing the examination. The sample questions summarized below come from the existing exam.

Some essay questions ask candidates to evaluate a principal's actions. In one example, an elementary school principal excuses a child from participating in music practice for the annual holiday concert because the child's parent asked that the child not be required to sing any Christmas songs. Candidates must discuss whether they agree with the decision, provide reasons, and demonstrate their understanding of how the case relates to the national standards of administrative practice established by the Interstate School Leaders Licensure Consortium (ISLLC).

Other essay questions ask candidates to place themselves within a complex scenario. In one example, candidates take on the role of a new principal at a highly regarded school in a growing community. Using an array of supporting documents—including a list of key facts about the school's organization and local context, sample student achievement data, and the school's existing improvement plan—candidates must evaluate the school's challenges. They must also consider the strengths and weaknesses of the school's plan and explain how they would "implement the plan and elicit community support." Successful essays offer "a well-developed analysis that synthesizes important information from the case components and demonstrates a clear understanding and application of the underlying standards."

Aspiring principals have more than one option for acquiring a preliminary credential. They can complete several CTC-accredited programs or internships, often offered through a local college or university. The CTC expects these programs to blend knowledge with practice and to make instructional leadership a priority.

Alternatively, aspiring principals may take the School Leaders Licensure Assessment, a standardized test offered by the Educational Testing Service (ETS). This essay test presents candidates with hypothetical cases of administrative practice and evaluates the depth and rigor of candidates' responses. (See the box above.)

Aspiring principals who fulfill the CTC requirements may apply for a Certificate of Eligibility for the Preliminary Administrative Services Credential. They may then exchange this certificate for the preliminary credential after they are appointed to an administrative position. The CTC issues this certificate because candidates may not find administrative work immediately, and the preliminary credential is good for only five years. In this way, the five-year "clock" for completion of the requirements for the Professional Administrative Credential starts

ticking only after the candidate secures an administrative position and the preliminary credential has been issued.

New principals must acquire the second-tier Professional Administrative Credential within five years of securing an administrative position and must also have worked as an administrator for at least two years to be eligible. The professional level credential is intended to provide new principals with a deeper grounding in administrative knowledge and practice. It should also be tailored to the leadership development needs of the individual and must be renewed every five years.

New principals have several options for completing the requirements for the professional credential, which are offered by a diverse range of postsecondary and private providers, including professional associations. New principals may receive further preparation in a CTC-accredited program or a State Board of Education–approved Principal Training Program (discussed on pages 12–13). Principals may also forgo coursework by demonstrating mastery of fieldwork performance standards. This option requires principals to show that they have reached a level of administrative competence that

merits recommendation for the credential. For example, principals might demonstrate their competence, in part, through a university-based seminar, in which they use professional portfolios to document, reflect on, and present their practice.

### *The CTC has adopted standards to illuminate the broad goals of administrators' professional preparation*

The CTC has adopted six standards to guide the credentialing of its school principals: the California Professional Standards for Educational Leaders (CPSEL). The CPSEL—which were developed independently by leaders in California's school administrator community—were adapted from the national *Standards for School Leaders*, a model established in the mid-1990s by the Interstate School Leaders Licensure Consortium (ISLLC). In 2002, the CTC adopted an action plan to revise its preparation standards for administrators “in line with the CPSEL.” As a result, all credentialing programs for California principals must align their curricula with the CPSEL to receive CTC accreditation.

The CPSEL describe important aspects of administrative practice that should be included in CTC-accredited programs for principals. They lay out a complex leadership and management role that is consistent with the demands of standards-based reform. Administrative credentialing programs are expected to help principals develop expertise in the following areas:

- foster and communicate a “vision of learning” and help translate it into attainable goals;
- promote a “school culture and instructional program” that is oriented toward continuous improvement in student learning and the professional growth of staff;
- provide what is necessary for a “safe, efficient, and effective learning environment;”
- respond to the diverse “interests and needs” of families and other stakeholders in the local community;
- serve as ethical models of “reflective practice and continuous growth;” and
- attune themselves to the “political, social, economic, legal, and cultural” contexts of their work.

The CPSEL provide a broad framework for thinking about the purposes of preparation and credentialing for school principals in the standards-based environment. Supporting student achievement is at the center of this vision. The goal is for principals to be able to interpret research and community needs, establish attainable instructional goals, and provide the resources and environment necessary to reach these goals. The assessment and continuous improvement of school performance are also central to this vision. Assessment data in particular provide a shared basis for teachers and principals to discuss the effectiveness of their instructional programs, consider in what areas they need to improve and how to adapt, and report their progress to the public.

These standards do not mean the same thing in all places or at all times. What it means to respond to the “political, social, legal, and cultural” contexts of a school and the “interests and needs” of local stakeholders, for example, varies greatly depending on where principals work and whom they serve. Context matters.

### *Professional development of principals should reflect research and be relevant to local practice*

The CTC expects that credentialing programs will prepare principals to meet certain broad standards of professional practice and will bridge relevant research in such areas as learning and assessment with the demands of local practice. Meanwhile, recent educational research sheds light on different approaches that districts and others can take to help principals put knowledge and standards to work effectively after they are on the job.

### *Bridging research-based knowledge and standards with local practice is a key challenge of professional development*

Helping principals meet the many and changing demands of their work is a challenge in a diverse state like California. The state must ensure that professional development programs are accountable for meeting common standards of quality and rigor and also allow for local variation that is sensitive to the unique needs of the schools in which principals work.

Recent research on effective professional development for school leaders helps illuminate the challenge, but it also has important limitations. The Stanford Educational Leadership Institute's (SELI) 2005 report, *School Leadership Study: Developing Successful Principals*, cautions that most research on the effectiveness of principal development programs consists of self-reported feedback from program participants regarding how well prepared they feel for their work as a consequence of their training. There is little empirical research on how effective these participants actually are in their subsequent work.

One theme that rings consistently throughout the existing research, however, is that professional development should combine grounding in up-to-date research with examples of how principals use this knowledge to solve problems in their local settings. According to the SELI report, this research suggests that effective principal development programs provide access to current research in such areas as instruction and organizational development. These programs also use methods such as internships, mentoring, and cohort peer groups to help administrators learn how and when to use this knowledge. This research also emphasizes collaboration between providers and local districts so that training is tailored to local challenges.

### *The state's role in meeting this challenge has changed over time*

From the mid-1980s until funding was eliminated in 2003, the state supported principal development through the California School Leadership Academy (CSLA). Funded by the California Department of Education through legislative action, CSLA was operated by central and regional staff located in county offices of education. During its long tenure, CSLA employed such methods as action research, problem-based learning, and school leadership teams in which principals and teachers worked together to solve instructional problems. The goal was to help principals face leadership challenges in more informed ways.

More recently, California has invested in the ongoing development of principals and vice

principals through the Principal Training Program, which also qualifies as preparation for the preliminary credential. The Principal Training Program was authorized in 2001 under Assembly Bill (AB) 75 and reauthorized in 2006 under AB 430. The program subsidizes local educational agencies to hire an administrative training provider approved by the State Board of Education. After a state grant is approved, the school district or county office of education is reimbursed \$3,000 per school administrator trained, but it must match the grant with \$1,000 of its own money. Approved providers must align their programs with state accountability standards and curricula.

The Principal Training Program is organized into three modules: (1) Leadership and Support of Student Instructional Programs; (2) Leadership and Management for Instructional Improvement; and (3) Instructional Technology to Improve Pupil Performance. The training must be for at least 80 hours, followed by at least 80 hours of intensive individualized support and professional development. Principals have up to two years from the date of the grant to complete the follow-up work. From 2003–04 through 2007–08, the state appropriated \$5 million in state funds plus almost \$1.6 million in federal funds each year for the program.

### Many different providers prepare and support California principals

Many different institutions and partnerships provide preparation and subsequent professional development to California principals. These providers include colleges and universities, districts, for-profit companies, and professional organizations, such as the Association of California School Administrators (ACSA). Aspects of the former CSLA, which is now scaled down, reside in WestEd's Leadership Initiative.

Although the CTC allows for flexibility and local variation in how these providers do their work, these programs must meet common standards of quality to be accredited. Absent accreditation, the programs do not enable participants to qualify for either the preliminary or professional credential. Providers must,

### Meeting academic expectations presents complex challenges to district leaders

Consider one California school district's effort to align its curriculum with state standards and to cultivate ongoing discussion about assessment data and teaching. These goals seem straightforward. But, as *Education Week* chronicled in its 2005 profile of Gilroy Unified School District and the leadership efforts of its superintendent, they raise a host of difficult questions.

Gilroy Unified, which serves students from both the agricultural and technology sectors, faced a challenge in 2000. *Education Week* noted that half its schools failed to meet their targets on the Academic Performance Index (API). Meanwhile, half its students came from low-income areas of the district and about a third were English learners. Faced with a wide diversity of curricula across the district, new superintendent Edwin Diaz (currently superintendent of Pasadena Unified School District) moved toward a unified curriculum based on state standards, with the teaching of English as a particular priority.

The superintendent directed most teachers to attend a common professional development program in literacy instruction. The district hired new literacy facilitators for each school, who provided feedback to teachers and coordinated opportunities for them to visit each other's classrooms. The role of the administrator with respect to the classroom was also redefined. When they visited classrooms, they paid particular attention to how well teaching aligned with the new policy.

All Gilroy schools met their state improvement goals by 2003. As *Education Week* reported, however, this performance did not hold up across the board a year later. The district needed to adjust, and this involved some difficult questions. For instance, although "few within the district dispute that the efforts prompted teachers to employ the same practices," some teachers were concerned about whether they had sufficient autonomy and flexibility in their work. The district looked for a path that would address these concerns and also ensure that Gilroy's schools maintained a coherent curriculum and met their state improvement goals.

By the time of *Education Week's* profile in 2005, a new practice was in place and the Gilroy district had made new gains in its teaching of English language arts. Each year, principals and staff used the site-planning process to draft a document that summarized "areas of greatest need and strategies for addressing them." Each school's planning document then served as a guide for teams of teachers to reflect on their school's assessment data, identify problems, and share practices that might help them achieve their goals. These changes to district policy were an effort to strike a new balance between the district's desire for curricular coherence in response to state standards and the need for local flexibility.

for instance, ensure that adequate resources and guidance are available to candidates and that all instructors and field supervisors are qualified and carefully selected. The common standards, published in the CTC's *Standards of Quality and Effectiveness for Administrative Services Credentials*, also offer providers a series of prompts to help guide reflection and program improvement. Even so, concern over how to ensure the quality and effectiveness of California's diverse principal development programs continues to stir debate.

For instance, one recent legislative proposal would have created a new data

system for assessing the effectiveness and outcomes of these programs. AB 1415 would also have required providers to engage in regular reporting and assessment to maintain their accreditation. Although funding for the system was not available—and the bill did not come up for a final vote—AB 1415 reflects ongoing concern about the quality of these programs.

### California stakeholders are looking at ways to improve school leadership capacity

California researchers, educators, and others are looking at how the state's school leadership

## One California district attempts to improve its instructional leadership capacity

A three-year grant of \$4.2 million by the Broad Foundation in 2002 enabled the Educational Leadership Development Academy (ELDA) to offer aspiring principals from the teaching corps of San Diego Unified School District practice-oriented coursework and advising through the University of San Diego. The coursework was offered along with yearlong administrative internships under the supervision of experienced principals. One goal of the program was to increase the school district's capacity for instructional leadership.

Providing a cohort of aspiring principals with paid internships for a yearlong period requires substantial financial resources. In the case of ELDA, much of this financial support came from external sources, such as the Los Angeles-based Broad Foundation. Such funds provide select districts with powerful opportunities. But they also raise important questions. Can these programs be sustained over the long term? To what extent can they be adapted to other places?

In 2005, ELDA replaced its yearlong internship with a two-year program that requires pre-service credential candidates to spend 20 days per year with principal mentors during school vacation periods. Meanwhile, another large California district is preparing to expand its principal training and recruitment programs. The Broad Foundation recently awarded Long Beach Unified School District \$2.7 million over three years to expand its efforts to support school leadership, including a new yearlong apprenticeship.

ELDA is an example of how one school district has attempted to improve its capacity for instructional leadership through the professional development of principals. The program—which depends on university-district partnership and substantial resources—would not be possible for every California district. But it does raise questions that any district might consider when trying to improve its capacity for administrative leadership and management. What methods might bridge research knowledge with local practice? What resources and partnerships might support this capacity? How should existing roles and responsibilities be redefined? California districts are challenged to answer these questions in workable ways that meet local needs and state standards. Finding funds to pay for such efforts is also problematic.

development programs might be made more soundly research-based and more rigorously practical. As Stanford University researchers Linda Darling-Hammond and Stelios Orphanos have noted, for instance, some criticize California's AB 430 Principal Training Program for "its brevity, its one-size-fits-all nature, and the fact that it generally does not include direct mentoring or coaching of principals." Their research provides a glimpse of how some California districts and other states have approached the problem of connecting knowledge with practice.

For example, Connecticut has tied the development of principals directly to instructional leadership and the evaluation of teaching. Over the last two decades, that state has refined and raised its standards for how its teachers receive their professional development, using such tools as portfolios

to evaluate teachers who are new to their profession. Connecticut's principals can receive credit for their professional development by participating in the evaluation of teachers under this system.

According to the researchers, California principals are "much less likely" than their counterparts in other states to "have access to mentoring and coaching in their work." States such as Kentucky, Georgia, and Delaware have made mentoring a central aspect of their efforts. Several states have also organized administrative leadership academies, sometimes inspired in part by California's previous efforts through CSLA.

California districts are grappling with how to bridge research and practice effectively in the preparation and development of their principals. The Educational Leadership Development Academy (ELDA), a

partnership between San Diego Unified School District and the University of San Diego, is one highly publicized example of how a California district moved to support its instructional leadership capacity. (See the box to the left that describes ELDA and the important issues that it raises.)

Other California stakeholders, meanwhile, have developed additional resources to help guide principals in their career growth. One example is the "Descriptions of Practice" (DOP) developed by CSLA at WestEd in 2003, in consultation with ACSA and groups of California administrators. The DOP describe how leaders at different stages of development connect the CPSEL with their everyday work.

## *Professional support and development for California superintendents receives less attention at the state level*

Superintendents are critically important to California's capacity for instructional leadership in the current standards-based environment. They articulate district goals and standards and marshal the resources needed to realize those goals. Professional development for this complex leadership role receives less state-level attention in California than does the development of principals, however.

Although California does not require its superintendents to hold a CTC-issued administrative credential, most California superintendents do because they have had other administrative roles in California schools. They are also highly educated. PAIF data reveal that the vast majority of California's superintendents hold master's degrees or higher, including 39% with doctoral degrees. The PAIF data do not tell us the subject areas in which these superintendents acquired their advanced degrees. According to a recent national survey by the American Association of School Administrators (AASA), however, the majority of doctoral degrees held by district superintendents nationally were acquired in educational administration or leadership programs, in part because these programs qualify degree recipients for certification in their states. (See the box on page 15.)

### Other states take different approaches to superintendent credentialing

California's Administrative Services Credential is required only for administrators who evaluate school site personnel, which means superintendents do not necessarily need to be credentialed. By contrast, many states require superintendent certification. A recent national study by the American Association of School Administrators (AASA) found that most states "offer separate certification for principals and superintendents" and only allow holders of the latter to "supervise and evaluate principals." In addition to the School Leaders Licensure Assessment (SLLA)—which aspiring California principals may take to qualify for a preliminary administrative credential—the Educational Testing Service (ETS) also offers a School Superintendent Assessment (SSA) that some states use in granting superintendent certifications.

As with principals, the state's formal role in developing California superintendents has changed over time. The state previously supported professional development for superintendents through CSLA. Beginning in the early 1990s, CSLA's Executive Leadership Center drew on the experience of superintendents to determine what district leadership challenges should be the focus of professional development and provided superintendents with opportunities to lead research-based discussions about these topics with their peers and outside experts.

The AASA study cites formal and informal mentoring and peer networks as an important aspect of how American superintendents are recruited and develop. California superintendents currently gain access to experts and peers in a variety of ways. Postsecondary institutions and professional organizations, such as ACSA, offer new and aspiring superintendents networking opportunities and expert instruction in the demands of district management and leadership. Other organizations, such as School Services of California, offer workshops in particular aspects of district administration, such as financial management.

Most California superintendents enter district leadership with experience in education. But school boards can also hire from outside the education sector. Although this option is less common, it requires a different approach to professional development. The Los Angeles-based Broad Foundation, through its Broad Academy, trains executives from outside the education sector to become superintendents in urban school districts

across the nation. The goal is to draw on the organizational expertise of the for-profit, nonprofit, and public sectors.

### California's capacity for effective school and district leadership is an important topic for policy discussion

The daily leadership and management challenges that face California's principals and superintendents are as multifaceted as the schools and districts that they serve. What would be necessary for California as a whole to have the administrative capacity to meet these demands effectively? The answer to that question may be elusive and complex, but California policymakers and educational leaders need to take the issue of administrative capacity seriously. As recent research has shown, strong superintendents and principals play a central role in improving student achievement.

California's standards-based reforms have changed what counts most as effective school and district leadership. California principals and superintendents are held accountable for how well their schools and districts learn from their own experience and make instructional adjustments that improve student achievement. School and district leaders do this while fulfilling their basic management responsibilities and working to meet the particular needs of their local communities. They do this under differing conditions, depending on such things as the level of resources a district receives, the extent to which those resources are provided for general or restricted purposes, the needs of students, and even the condition of the school buildings.

Thinking about school and district leadership in terms of California's capacity to respond effectively to its own standards-based reforms raises important questions. First, is California's capacity adequate in terms of the number of administrators that serve its students and communities? According to NCES data for 2005–06, California's ratio of 274 students per administrator is 57% higher than the national average. California ranks 49th in the nation on this measure. Is this a sign of the efficiency with which California administrators serve as instructional leaders, managers, and public figures? Or do California school and district leaders require more support in order to do this work effectively?

There is no simple answer to these questions nor is there a "silver bullet" for optimal administrative staffing. Much depends on local needs and conditions. Moreover, districts can organize their administrative staff very differently and still be highly effective—or ineffective. One district might assign extra staff to each school—including clerical support, English learner specialists, and teacher coaches—and run a lean district office. Another might choose to consolidate services centrally and relieve the school principal of specific responsibilities, such as federal reporting, budgeting, and facilities maintenance. Regardless, the overall question of adequate administrative staffing is central to any consideration of California's capacity for effective school and district leadership.

Second, the capacity of California's school and district leaders to do their work effectively depends on their preparation and development. Although recent educational research in this area has limitations, it does suggest that effective professional development programs make a difference by helping administrative leaders connect research-based knowledge to their local settings. The CTC's credentialing requirements for principals and the standards it uses to accredit providers also draw attention to this goal.

Building this capacity requires resources. Different approaches to professional development carry different price tags and require

## ● | To Learn More

To see the works cited in this report, go to [www.edsource.org/pub\\_abs\\_admin07.cfm](http://www.edsource.org/pub_abs_admin07.cfm). Some of the studies cited are from the *Getting Down to Facts* research project. In addition, this report was informed by briefs that were part of the Oct. 19, 2007 Education Policy Convening in Sacramento. For copies of those studies and briefs, go to:

[www.californiaschoolfinance.org](http://www.californiaschoolfinance.org)

More information on The Broad Foundation's Superintendent's Academy, mentioned in this report, is available at: [www.broadcenter.org](http://www.broadcenter.org)

For an in-depth look at the relationship between districts' fiscal health, state funding systems, and business office practices, including results from a survey of district business officers, see *Keeping California School Districts Fiscally Healthy: Current Practices and Ongoing Challenges*, available at: [www.edsource.org/pub\\_abs\\_bizstudysumm.cfm](http://www.edsource.org/pub_abs_bizstudysumm.cfm)

For more information on the updating process regarding the *Standards for School Leaders* (1996) developed by the Interstate School Leaders Licensure Consortium, go to the website of the Council of Chief State School Officers: [www.ccsso.org/projects/Interstate\\_Consortium\\_on\\_School\\_Leadership](http://www.ccsso.org/projects/Interstate_Consortium_on_School_Leadership)

different partnerships between districts and providers. The state subsidizes some professional development for principals through the AB 430 Principal Training Program. And a wide range of providers offer professional development services to districts, including development opportunities for superintendents. But as the example of San Diego Unified School District's effort to train aspiring principals to become instructional leaders shows, major expansions of a district's leadership capacity in response to local needs require resources that are beyond the reach of most districts using current funding alone.

Third, one important question that this report does not address directly is whether California has an adequate pipeline for sustaining its administrative leadership capacity as its current leaders age. This was the subject of a previous EdSource publication in 2001. That publication—*Help Wanted: Top Administrators to Lead California's Schools*—noted substantial anecdotal evidence that California districts were receiving far fewer quality applicants for open principal and superintendent positions.

Unclear or incomplete data make assessing California's administrative leadership needs difficult, however. The state's primary data collection form, the PAIF, is not tailored to collect data on administrators. In fact, it instructs that administrative credentials not be listed. Although the data do reveal important details about who runs California's districts and schools, they are not well suited to inform

educational policy on state administrative leadership capacity.

Interest in asking these key questions may be growing. For example, stakeholders from the California Department of Education, CSESAs' Curriculum and Instruction Steering Committee, ACSA, and WestEd have formed the Integrated Leadership Development Initiative (ILDI). This consortium is focusing its attention on how the state supports professional development over the course of educational leaders' careers. At an Oct. 19, 2007 convening on education policy, several organizations addressed related issues. Along with underscoring the need for stronger professional development, they discussed such topics as districts' capacity to improve instruction, ideas for reconfiguring the principal's role, and the development of networks to support communication among school leaders throughout the state.

Effective leadership is an important factor in ensuring that California's schools and districts have the instructional and assessment approaches, resources, and local responsiveness they need to improve student achievement in the state's standards-based environment. The capacity of California's school and district leadership is an important topic for policy discussion. Without this capacity, California cannot bridge the gap between its ambitious educational standards and the diverse needs of the communities and students its public schools serve. **|||**



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