Supporting School System Leaders

The State of Effective Training Programs
for School Superintendents

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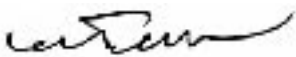
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PREFACE

In May 2002, a dozen superintendents who were leading school districts participating in The Wallace Foundation's education leadership initiative attended the first of five residencies organized by the Center for Public Leadership at Harvard's John F. Kennedy School of Government. These leaders, with Wallace's continuing support, would develop a powerful learning and support network, working with one another and with faculty from the Kennedy School and Harvard's Graduate School of Education on the enormous political, institutional, social and cultural challenges facing superintendents in providing quality education for all students in their districts.

As one of the consultants and faculty members involved in that three-year Superintendent Leadership Program, I was struck with the powerful ways that the resulting learning network supported the superintendents in their critical work on behalf of children. For me, and for Wallace, the experience eventually prompted a larger question: How well do we as a country support school system leaders who have some of the most important jobs in our society?

At Wallace's request and with their additional support, I conducted a modest survey in 2004 of some two dozen programs offered around the country, exploring who offers them, how they are organized and funded, what theoretical approaches undergird them, and what evaluations are being done on their impacts. This scan included programs offered by superintendent membership organizations, other (non-superintendent) non-profits, universities, foundations, and for-profit companies. Although the research was not designed to be exhaustive, it did provide a good cross section of what is available, from which providers, and for what purposes. A summary and analysis of the findings has been previously published by the Kennedy School.[1] What follows is the complete report – including detailed "snapshots" of each program in the survey.

In conducting this research, I have been inspired by the hard work and good ideas of the dozens of people who gave generously of their time to describe the programs they offer to superintendents. I have come to deepen my appreciation of the challenges of leading school districts, as well as my conviction that we, as a country, need to take the best approaches described in this report and provide more and better training and support to school superintendents to equip them to be the leaders of learning that we need.

My thanks to The Wallace Foundation for supporting this research and for its continued commitment to the leadership development of superintendents and other school leaders. I remain solely responsible for any errors and omissions.

Cambridge, Massachusetts   January, 2006

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[1] Teitel, Lee (2005) *Supporting School System Leaders: The State of Effective Training Programs for School Superintendents* in Working Papers Center for Public Leadership, Kennedy School of Government, Harvard University. Pps. 66-78.

INTRODUCTION

The leadership challenges faced by urban superintendents have been well documented, along with the critical nature of their leadership to sustaining school and school district improvement. (McCabe-Cabron and other, 2005; Williams, 2004; Thomas, 2001; Goodman and Zimmerman, 2000; Peterson, 1999) Also documented are the university-based programs that prepare individuals to be school superintendents (Levine, 2005; McCarthy 1999; National Commission on Excellence in Educational Administration, 1988).

The current report explores what is available to superintendents after they assume their positions: what the landscape of sustained executive training and support options available for sitting school system leaders looks like. It describes about two dozen programs offered around the country – who offers them, how they are organized and funded, what (if any) theoretical approaches undergird them, and what (if any) evaluations are done on their impacts. The report describes programs offered by superintendent membership organizations, other (non-superintendent) nonprofits, universities, foundations and for-profit companies.

The report is divided into two parts. Part I starts with a brief description of the methodology and the programs surveyed and then looks at some of the broader questions about the nature of the executive programs available, exploring common attributes across programs, as well as design choices programs make about format, funding, focus, theories of action and coaching. This section of the paper concludes by stepping back to look at these programs as part of a "system" – what our country offers for the executive education and support of sitting school superinten-

dents. It examines funding and scaling-up issues, capacity building at the districts and at the sponsoring organizations, and what assessments can be made of the impacts of these programs.

The second part provides snapshots of each program, including the individual programmatic descriptions and the summary responses to the guiding questions of the study.

PART 1

SAMPLING METHODOLOGY AND INCLUDED PROGRAMS

The research, conducted between June and September 2004, used a "snowball" referral technique, starting with 12 urban superintendents in the Superintendent Leadership Program underway at Harvard, and funded by the Wallace Foundation. The superintendents were asked to identify other long-term executive training programs that provided more than one-shot workshops, but that were sustained for a year or more.

They generated a list of about a dozen programs and organizations, which were researched on the web and through follow-up interviews. Each interview ended with a request for leads on other programs that existed for sustained work with sitting superintendents. This generated another dozen or so leads that were followed up in similar fashion. These referrals drew on a range of potential providers and organizers of such training – superintendent associations, other nonprofits, universities, foundations and for-profit companies. Note that this research survey is largely based on self-report data and materials published by the organization, except in rare occasions (noted in the paper) when third-party evaluations were completed and available.

Questions
Respondents for each program were asked:

1. How is your program organized, delivered and funded? (e.g. How long has it been in operation? How many times does it meet? For how many superintendents?)

2. Where is its intellectual and practical focus – how would you summarize its central approach or key theory of change?

3. How does the executive training you offer move into the district – how is it linked to district, school and classroom improvement?

4. How are you evaluating the impact of your executive program?

Data Sources/Evidence
The snowball sampling technique described above has led to a wide-ranging set of data sources, which, while it is not exhaustive or inclusive of every program for sitting superintendents in the country, is certainly representative of the range of programs available. These are summarized below, organized by sponsoring sector.

Not surprisingly, superintendent membership organizations such as the American Association of School Administrators and its state affiliates are important providers. For example, the New Superintendent Academy (New Jersey Association of School Administrators) offers six one-day seminars over the year, planned around issues pertaining to the first-year superintendents' experience. Project Leadership (Washington Association of School Administrators) offers a statewide in-service cohort program with a four-year cycle of learning for superintendents, organized as part of its state biannual conferences. The Western States Benchmarking Consortium is an unusual group of super-

intendents formed specifically for the professional development and focused learning of its member districts, with a particular focus on searching for ways to use and implement greater and more meaningful accountability in the districts.

Other nonprofits that do not exclusively serve superintendents offer programs that draw them in for sustained training and support. For example, the Aspen Institute, which has a broader global mission around leadership, dialogue and inquiry, has set up the Urban Superintendents Network to bring together nontraditional superintendents (coming from the corporate world or other sectors), seasoned superintendents who have come through more traditional educational systems, and some outside resources – retired superintendents, researchers or corporate thinkers. As part of its larger efforts to promote school change at a deep level, the Connecticut Center for School Change, a small not-for-profit based in Hartford, offers a Superintendents' Network for a dozen superintendents that developed a practice of conducting "walk-throughs" in each others' districts, as part of an overall strategy of large-scale instructional improvement.

WestEd is a federally funded regional education lab whose staff helps to facilitate the Executive Leadership Center for California Superintendents, originally a grant-funded collaboration with the California Department of Education, but more recently funded by the superintendents as part of their state association dues. The Council of Great City Schools also offers programs specific to superintendents as part of a larger educational and urban-focused agenda. Some nonprofits such as the Center for Creative Leadership customize existing leadership programs for superintendents; others, such as the Institute for Educational Leadership, offer programs

that mix superintendents in with other school and community leaders.

Most university-based programs for superintendents are preparatory in nature (and fall outside the scope of this report). Many of those that serve existing superintendents, as expected, are based in the education schools of these universities, such as the New Superintendent Seminar Series at Teachers College, Columbia University, with a focus on year-long collaborative inquiry on leadership. Several other initiatives are broader collaborations that draw on other elements of the university, such as the School Study Councils at the University of Pennsylvania, where, for the last 40 years, area superintendents have had extraordinary access to the full range of Penn professors.

The University of Pittsburgh has a program that is unusual in its close programmatic and intellectual ties to the regional foundation-supported Western Pennsylvania School Superintendent Forum. Similarly, Harvard's Change Leadership Group, based at the Graduate School of Education, has significant support from the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation and has parallel approaches and close intellectual ties with a Gates-sponsored district change network in Washington state. Other programs – especially those set up more recently – represent some form of collaboration between education schools and other professional schools, such as Harvard's Wallace-funded collaboration between the Kennedy and Education Schools, or Harvard's Public Education Leadership Program and Stanford's Executive Program for Educational Leaders, both education/business school collaborations.

Several foundations have taken on the mission of sustaining and supporting superintendent development, sometimes locally, such as the Gates

Foundation, working with 10 districts and a diocese in Washington State, or BellSouth, working in 11 states in the southeast. In some cases, foundations such as Danforth have made major commitments, supporting a national initiative that engaged hundreds of superintendents over a decade and led to several regional offshoots, including the Western Pennsylvania School Superintendent Forum.

A few for-profit companies provide what might be considered sustained training and/or networking support for superintendents through their activities. The Educational Research Development Institute brings together groups of superintendents semi-annually to solicit their input into refining corporate products and services, creating focused networking and discussion opportunities for them. The District Management Council provides sophisticated management-consulting reports to contracting districts and, as part of its business model, brings superintendents together periodically to discuss the reports and their implications, in what amounts to sustained training and networking support.

CROSS-CUTTING THEMES: COMMON ATTRIBUTES, DESIGN CHOICES AND LINGERING QUESTIONS

Asking four basic questions about two dozen programs has yielded a rich data set about the state of executive education programs for sitting superintendents in this country. The data can be cross-cut on many different dimensions – types of program structures, funding formats, long-term sustainability, theories in action, evaluation approaches and so on.

What follows is a look at three broad areas: first, what I see as some common attributes of these programs for sitting superintendents. Next, I look

at choice points within them – reflecting trade-offs that programs make in sorting their priorities and adding up to a preliminary set of program design considerations. I conclude this section with design questions these programs still appear to be figuring out how to address.

Section 1: Common Attributes

Overall I have been impressed by how so many superintendents, busy as they are, are willing to take two to three days several times a year to participate in some sort of executive learning experience – that they even seem to "hunger" for it, in the words of some of the interviewees. The programs that appeared to have strong appeal for superintendents seemed to have had most, or all, of the following common features:

- A "safe space": an environment where superintendents could talk honestly about real issues that they face – to discuss their challenges and their learning without feeling constrained in talking openly or doing anything that they might see as compromising their authority.

- Peers and fellow participants whom they respect and can build relationships with – with whom and from whom they can learn. Primarily, of course, these have been fellow superintendents, but in some programs, participants have included non-superintendents as well, sometimes others from their districts or "outsiders" – business executives, academics, former superintendents.

- Personal learning about one's own leadership. Sometimes this has been explicit and the primary focus (as in programs sponsored by the Center for Creative Leadership); many times it is more of an implicit portion of the program.

- Practical and useful ideas that connect to their work in their districts. Whether the focus is on immediate technical skills or long-term adaptive growth, a key element has been connecting to, and having an impact on, the school district of the superintendent.

Section 2: Choice Points

In trying to achieve each of these attributes, superintendent executive programs make different choices about what is important – leading to a number of trade-offs that distinguish the programs and their priorities from one another. The choice points fall into three broad categories, with the middle category filled with the most choices:

- Who is participating in the program?

- What do they learn and how do they work together?

- How does the work done in the program connect to the district?

Each is elaborated below.

Who is Participating in the Program?

The first and most basic design question concerns composition. Who, if anyone else, should be included, besides superintendents?

Many of the programs described here – those of the superintendent associations, as well as others, such as the Connecticut Center for School Change, WestEd, Aspen, Columbia, and the Harvard Superintendent Leadership Program – are for superintendents and only superintendents. They are creating what Jane Tedder, director of the Connecticut program, calls the "rare opportunity" for a protected space for superintendents to be open with one another. These programs make a clear choice to provide a space for superintendents to support one another and learn from one another. Each of these has some non-superintendent participants as well – as organizers, faculty or facilitators – to provide input or to stimulate discussion, but their primary "client" is the superintendent. (More on how superintendents and non-superintendents work together in these settings is part of the next major heading.)

Some programs deliberately mix superintendents with leaders from other areas. The Center for Creative Leadership has a "Leadership at the Peak" program that brings together selected superintendents with corporate CEOs, college presidents and world political leaders, arguing that the benefits are enormous, especially for superintendents of large districts. The Educational Policy Fellows Program of the Institute for Educational Leadership mixes superintendents with legislators, college presidents and nonprofit and community leaders. Organizers of those programs would argue that the advantages of learning together outweigh the losses of the "safe space."

Some programs deliberately include other individuals from the superintendent's own district – members of leadership teams as well as other stakeholders – principals, teachers, union leaders, board members or community members. These programs, which include the Gates Foundation Washington State program, Harvard's Public Education Leadership Program and its Change Leadership Group, and Stanford's Executive Program for Educational Leaders, also have chosen to give lower priority to the creation of a "safe space." By bringing in more of the stakeholders, these programs give priority to being able to trigger deeper systemic change at the district level through engagement of a variety of stakeholders, with the possibilities of contributing to a stronger local change-support community.

In these settings, learning for the superintendents is, by design, woven into his or her district context.

For some programs, the question of "superintendent only" is not a clear either/or choice. Several programs such as Penn's Study Councils invite superintendents to bring a guest for a particular session. Others, such as the Washington Gates program, use a hybrid approach, with much of the focus on district leadership team meetings, but with some regular, separate breakout times for superintendents only. The Western Benchmarking group, while clearly set up for and focused on superintendents, makes strategic invitations to other district personnel, depending on the issue and focus. Harvard's Bob Schwartz, who helped set up the Public Education Leadership Program (which brings together large district teams, including the superintendent) and also serves as an advisor to the superintendent-only Aspen Institute, notes that the superintendents of five of the nine school districts involved in PELP are involved in the Aspen Institute, thus giving them the benefits (through two separate programs) of both approaches.

What Do They Learn and How Do They Work Together?
Three important, interrelated issues emerge under this broad heading. What is the content or focus of the learning? Who decides the focus – and what is the balance in shaping this between superintendent participants, on one hand, and the program planners and non-superintendent facilitators, experts and other participants on the other? Finally, how and when do these programs develop into real learning communities for the superintendents?

Content and Focus
A stereotyped expectation of what superintendents and non-superintendent

planners or facilitators would want as content in an executive workshop would assume the superintendents would opt for "nuts and bolts" sessions – "ideas they can use immediately"– and the others would focus more on the "big picture," change theory and long-range planning. To a limited extent these expectations play out among the programs surveyed here, with the state superintendent association programs in Washington and New Jersey most clearly tied to immediate factual knowledge ("What you need to know about No Child Left Behind"; "What can you do tomorrow to help raise test scores"), as opposed to the programs at Columbia (inquiry and reflection), Stanford (redesigning complex systems, curricular and instructional design) and Harvard's Superintendent Leadership Program (adaptive leadership, distinguishing between technical and adaptive change).

The nonprofits and foundations involved could be seen as falling somewhere in between – clearly driven and responsive to expressed superintendent needs and varying on the level of theoretical approach (no pre-set theory, just the powerful mix of people at Aspen Institute; a strong focus on superintendent walk-throughs in Connecticut, but one that was not pre-imposed but evolved).

But these distinctions serve only as a starting point. New Jersey Superintendent Association director Hank Cram looks forward to collaborating with superintendents on a planning team to develop programming that "does not just look at putting out fires" but also helps superintendents and principals work collaboratively and focus more on "systems thinking." The director of the Washington state association's program, Neal Powell, while noting that participants like workshops that are "focusing on the practical. . . things they can use" has designed

a program that delivers those workshops imbedded in a four-year cycle that includes personal growth and systems thinking. And Harvard's Superintendent Leadership Program, while framed around Ron Heifetz's adaptive leadership, has sessions that tightly focus on immediate superintendent needs. For example, last year the superintendents each brought a short case that included a difficult leadership conversation they needed to have in their district. Most of the two-day session focused on videotaped roleplays, peer feedback, and repeated practice for the interaction, which each superintendent vowed to have within a week of her or his return.

Another superintendent-formed and superintendent-led organization, the Western States Benchmarking Consortium, balances immediate needs with a far-ranging focus on developing and refining quality improvement systems in districts. The for-profit District Management Council focuses on supplying information that superintendents can use immediately, but at a highly sophisticated level, drawing on a range of management-consulting input.

Balancing Superintendent and Non-Superintendent Input
Most of the organizers and planners of these programs are not (and most were never) superintendents, and virtually all of them stress the importance of following the lead of the superintendents in selecting topics and designing shared experiences. Negotiating that balance has been an important factor in shaping these programs – how the non-superintendents add value by appropriately drawing on their "outsider status," their other experiences and their access to other ideas and information. For example, Penn's Study Councils director, Harris Sokoloff (who talks about how, as non-superintendent, when he was hired, he had to

establish his credibility with the Study Councils), is proud of how he can frame an immediate need expressed by the superintendents into a broader issue, bring in some non-traditional guest or speaker or reading, and do it all in a way the superintendents find useful. Mary Boehm, president of the BellSouth Foundation, praises the role played by Phil Schlecty (a non-superintendent) in providing a "strong intellectual edge, pushing the super-intendents to keep thinking about ways to deepen the engagement of all children in learning." By bringing theory in, he has "promoted a deeper level thinking for all of us."

Finding the balance between the perspectives of superintendents and non-superintendents not only affects the planning, but also more broadly, how participants work together. Since many of the programs include non-superintendents as critical friends, faculty or consultants, or quite delib-erately bring in CEO advisors from the corporate sector, the difference may affect the larger dynamics of how they all work together. Jane Tedder of the Connecticut Center for School Change notes how important it is that the superintendents not see themselves as "sitting at the feet of the experts." Laraine Roberts, who facilitates the WestEd program, notes how the su-perintendents "push back" on the guest speakers who come in to share their thinking. Developing norms of respect for the work of superinten-dents, coupled with the opportunities to learn from other people and other areas appears to be key.

Another aspect of how the participants work together relates to the nature and purpose of the relationships that develop among the superintendents and other participants. "Network-ing" is often praised as one of the big outcomes of these kinds of programs. What does this mean and what kinds of connections are programs trying

to make? Hunter Moorman of the Institute for Educational Leadership wonders how many of these programs have networking that is basically haphazard. When it is intentional, he asks, what guides it? Closely related questions are: to what extent is net-working focused on providing conge-nial support or on developing critical friends? How are norms of trust and of challenging one another developed, and by whom?

Developing a Superintendent Learn-ing Community
In many of the programs surveyed, there were strong signs of the devel-opment of a professional learning community among the participants, in which individuals shared their per-sonal practice, engaged in creative problem solving with one another and worked in an environment with common norms and values. Many of the design choices made by these programs contributed to this: devel-oping trust, respecting the expertise of the superintendents and utilizing their input to shape the programs. But probably the single most impor-tant aspect to building a professional learning community has been to put the work of the superintendents at the center of the program. This has taken a variety of forms, ranging from the use of personal cases for feedback and vid-eotaping in Harvard's Superintendent Leadership Program to the superinten-dent walk-throughs in Connecticut, in which a host superintendent defines a problem he or she is working on and the entire group spends the next half day at that district, observing and giving feedback in the context of the school district's instructional scale-up plans.

Other examples include what Tony Wagner calls "living cases" in the Gates-funded Washington state dis-tricts, the "Action Learning Labs" at WestEd, the rotating site visits at Western Benchmarking, the collab-

orative inquiry at Columbia and the use of carefully researched district cases at Harvard's Public Education Leadership Program. This strategy of putting real district work at the cen-ter, in whatever form, is probably the single most important choice point a program makes. As a strategy, it also has important implications for the next topic.

How does the work done in the program connect to the district?
The bottom line for any design for a superintendent executive program is its ability to have an impact on the district. There are a variety of dif-ferent strategies used; some certainly overlap.

All programs address the personal learning of individual superintendents in one way or another, but there are varying approaches to how specifi-cally this is learning in the context of district work. Some, such as the Center for Creative Leadership, spe-cifically focus on the individual and her or his leadership development, using a variety of leadership measures and feedback to help the individu-al's growth. Several programs work on helping superintendents develop leadership capacity in themselves and others. Harvard's Superintendent Leadership Program uses the phrase "Chief Leadership Development Of-ficer" as a way to focus on the im-portance of superintendents mod-eling leadership for staff and other stakeholders.

Beyond the personal learning and the push to model and bring it home, there have been a number of other specific follow-up strategies to help connect to the district.

In programs that are for superinten-dents only (with no other district staff), there are several mechanisms used to connect the work back to the district:

- Connections can be made through modeling or by the quality and impact of the superintendent decisions. Superintendents may use the approaches they experienced in their own programs to support the professional development of others. Readings from programs are often brought into district professional development. In the superintendent-only WestEd program, course materials developed over the year for use by the superintendents get a second use in summer district leadership institutes for deputies and principals.

- Some programs draw experience and work of the districts into the program by using superintendent-written cases (see paragraph on learning community above).

- Some pull the work of the district in physically by looking at district work, rotating meeting sites and actually looking at classroom or district processes (see paragraph on learning community above).

- Some use coaches as intermediaries to work "over the shoulder" of the superintendent to bring the ideas of the program to the district (and vice versa – in the Harvard Superintendent Leadership Program model, the coaches also bring the work of the districts into the planning and teaching process of the program).

Programs that use a district-team approach (where the participants include other district staff or stakeholders) have additional options for connecting the work back to the district:

- The team process at the workshop or program session can itself be an intervention – helping to change the way the key stakeholders in the district interact on the work.

- Impacts back at district will be multiplied by having eight to 10 individuals returning from the training, ready to try new approaches and behaviors, together and separately.

- Coaches may also be used here to connect the work of the program and district and also to facilitate the district team's interactions.

Section 3. Remaining Design Consideration Questions

In the choice points section, I have tried to summarize several of the key design considerations programs face. As I talked to program organizers about these design aspects, several questions emerged that they were continuing to wrestle with – without clear resolution, but important to name:

- For programs that use coaches, what are best strategies coaches can use to support the superintendents and their change efforts in the district while building capacity, in preparation for the coach to no longer be involved? In what models do the coaches end up taking on too much of the work?

- How much should be laid out ahead of time, and how much constructed with the program participants? How much should be emergent, how much superintendent-driven? How does the evolution of a program affect long-term partner roles?

- How should programs think about sustaining membership in a superintendent support network over time, when the turnover rate for superintendents is so high? If the program involves a district as well, who stays involved with the program if the superintendent leaves for a new job – the superintendent or the district, or both?

- In the programs that have developed strong professional communities of practice, how much of this is emergent in the group dynamics, and to what extent can these norms be designed into the program? (For example, Connecticut's Tedder wonders how much of the strong professional community spirit that has developed there is because the superintendents like and trust one another and how much evolved from their decision to do walk-throughs together.)

A LOOK AT THE EXECUTIVE SUPPORT "SYSTEM" FOR SUPERINTENDENTS

In this final section, I step back to look at the individual programs as part of a "system" – a system for the executive education and support of sitting school superintendents. It is a fragmented system, with different sectors providing different services and programs, often without much knowledge of what others are doing. Issues to explore here are the impacts of funding from varied providers and sponsors, the challenges of going to scale with a program once it is deemed successful, questions about building capacity (and what is being built), and concerns about evaluating impacts.

Range of Providers

The range of providers, including the important role of foundations, raises some questions about sponsorship and funding.

Sponsorship
- What is the impact of the type of sponsoring organization on focus and direction?

- What do superintendents do differently when they are running the show – as in the Western States Benchmarking Consortium?

- What are the dynamics of for-profit sponsored programs, and how are they different from the others?

- How are programs different when they are organized by funders who link the superintendent support network to other grants, such as the Gates program, or The Wallace Foundation in the Harvard Superintendent Leadership Program, or the Connecticut Center for School Reform? How does a program maximize connections between the superintendent program and the grant-making initiative, and how does that affect the superintendent program?

- A number of programs consciously tap into business and corporate expertise – Stanford's Executive Program for Educational Leaders, Harvard's Public Education Leadership Program, the for-profit District Management Council, Western Benchmarking, Aspen and BellSouth. All do it in somewhat different ways, with little to no coordination or even sometimes recognition that others are making similar connections.

Funding
- How much do these programs cost, and what are the funding patterns that seem to be sustainable? What financial commitments from districts are (and can be) expected? BellSouth's Boehm talks about the importance of the superintendents paying some portion of their travel as a way of "having some skin in the game." Others, including director Terry Orr of Columbia, found that there was a "price point" beyond which superintendents and districts were not willing to participate.

- What is the long-term funding picture? A focus on leadership in

education is very "hot" now. Is it a fad? How will it be sustained? Most of these programs have significant grant support. How much can this work be budgeted as part of the way districts operate?

Scaling-Up Challenges
Several of the programs have faced pressure to expand, in part due to a reputation for success, but tight inter-personal networks that have developed in a professional learning community may get fragmented by major or recurrent expansion.

- What are the best strategies for scaling up successful programs? Superintendents and districts clamor to join the Western Benchmarking group; the Connecticut group seeks to double in size, yet the superintendents in it don't want to be broken up or to expand their numbers.

Western Benchmarking has not taken on new members but has worked with other groups of districts and the American Association of School Administrators to promote the development of comparable networks, raising some interesting questions about how to balance the transfer of a model and a set of ideas against local needs and conditions. In Connecticut, Tedder sees the need to double – in part so the group is not seen as exclusive, in part to meet the needs of other superintendents and districts. She worries about balancing stability and change. If a small but tight community of superintendents is working well together, how much does a program try to keep them intact, even as it aims to scale up and serve more people?

Where is the Capacity-Building?
If the current "boom" in programs for sitting superintendents is to have any lasting effect (sustainable beyond any future reductions of interest and funding), capacity must be built. If

capacity is being built by the "system," where is it? What is the lasting part? Is it in the superintendents? In the districts? In the promising partnerships? In the sponsoring organizations? In the approaches programs are using?

- Foundations and nonprofits play a key role in many of these programs, which are often run by knowledgeable, committed individuals who have become very actively involved in the seminars and programs and are very passionate about their value. To what extent is their passion, commitment and knowledge shared by boards and directors of foundations or nonprofits? If most of the capacity-building and commitment is in the program directors, but there is not a larger ownership, funding is less likely to be sustained as foundation or nonprofit priorities shift. This is especially important given the paucity of impact evaluation data (see below).

- Self-organizing and self-funding groups such as the Western States Benchmarking Consortium represent a new approach outside of the traditional sectors, with considerable potential to add capacity in the "system." To what extent can this model be spread to other networks and sustained over time?

- Since universities are deeply rooted institutions with long connections to school leadership (at least on the preparation side), how has their involvement in these executive programs increased their capacity? Particularly interesting to explore are the collaborations between education schools and other professional schools:
  - What are the short- and long-term implications of partnerships between schools of educa-

tion and schools of government and/or business?

– What kind of impacts will these collaborations have?

– What kinds of capacity can be built at these partnering units within each university (where, in many cases, professional schools do not routinely collaborate with one another, and where, often, no real infrastructure to support such partnerships exists)?

– Universities also are the primary arenas for the preparation of superintendents (though not the only, as programs such as the Broad Foundation's illustrates). To what extent are the ideas, lessons, approaches and partnerships that are being developed in the executive programs influencing the preparation model? The clearest example is at the University of Pittsburgh, where the guidelines for the (pre-service) doctoral program requirements specifically reference the Western Pennsylvania Superintendent's Forum. There is considerable faculty crossover at Harvard, where many of the Education School professors involved in the Urban Superintendent Program (pre-service) work with Business School colleagues in the Public Education Leadership Program. To what extent will that collaboration and the ideas and approaches used in it influence the preparation of future superintendents?

• Is capacity being built in the programmatic approaches being used, either in the structure of the program or in individual elements within it?

– Danforth's 10-year commitment of substantial funds for the Superintendents Forum has ended, but the model goes on. Using the same format, but drawing on local funding sources (after initial seed money from Danforth), several Forums continue. The Superintendent's Handbook (McCabe-Cabron and others, 2005) captures many of the ideas developed in the Danforth Forum in a way that helps replication and adds value to other networks and programs.

– Specific strategies that form the heart of the professional learning community can represent another form of capacity-building. For instance, the notion of superintendent walk-throughs, as developed in Connecticut, may spread and become more common and acceptable practice; the use of detailed district cases, as used by the Gates network and several others, may become a centerpiece of other support networks. Each of these, and similar efforts to focus the core of the work on instruction and processes within the district, may have long-lasting effects if spread and supported elsewhere.

Implications for Evaluation

Formal evaluations of these programs that go beyond the satisfaction of the members are rare to nonexistent. Almost everyone interviewed responded to the question about evaluation with some variant on "we are just getting to that." My original plan was to include a substantial section of this report detailing the evaluation approaches in place, but I did not have enough data to report. Much of this work is in the early stages, and the task of ascribing impacts on district processes or on teaching or learning to any of the interventions offered in these programs is methodologically daunting. Nonetheless, the formative needs of programs to know what is working and what is not for internal tuning, the summative needs of funders and other policymakers to assess impacts, and the needs of the "system" to assess successful approaches and spread their use elsewhere make the need for evaluation paramount.

Part of this is a matter of perspective. If the "clients" are the superintendents, then satisfaction levels might be seen as sufficient measures. Positive responses on surveys, testimonials to their learning, continued attendance and involvement by superintendents are all important markers. If the clients are the students at the district, then the superintendent's involvement in a program is just a small part of a major change that has to get documented in far more complex ways. A chain of events needs to be documented, starting with the superintendent's involvement in a program, moving toward impacts on district processes and on teaching approaches, and ending with improvements in student learning.

The Western States Benchmarking Consortium tracks (anecdotally) dozens of "strategic initiatives of individual member districts that have been influenced by practices of others in the consortium." Several programs have been using outside evaluators to document some parts of this chain. The Connecticut Center for School Change has started an examination first of how superintendents talk differently about teaching and learning in their districts and is moving to a compilation of data on changes brought about at district level as a result of the program. Perhaps furthest along in this "chain" are the data coming from Gates in Washington, documenting changes in classroom practices in the participating districts. In addition to an independent evaluation of the coaching model in place and the content of the districts' meetings, the program has been using multiple classroom observations (using a standardized rubric) over time to track changes in teaching in the schools.

CONCLUSION TO PART I

I consider this very much a work in progress – a modest study offering a series of snapshots into an area of great importance for the future of American public education. I hope for several useful outcomes for this research. I hope it sparks interest in follow-up looks at the data set collected, as well as more thorough investigations into this issue and its implications.

When I was conducting the interviews, I was struck with a strong sense of passion for the work and its importance. Most of the people I interviewed were working closely with the superintendents and saw this work as critical to school and district improvements. For many of the people I interviewed, I also got a sense of isolation. They were building or coordinating their particular program for superintendents without, in many cases, having a strong sense of who else was doing what and how they were doing it. My hope is that the compendium of descriptions in this report helps them (as well as funders, policymakers and other educators) to see this important work in context.

For superintendents, I hope the report provides a map of the terrain of opportunities for personal professional development. For any associations, foundations, funders, for-profit companies or universities interested or engaged in superintendent executive leadership training, my hope is the research provides:

- context for their efforts by reporting on what other approaches are being used

- an opportunity to see parallel as well as different strategies and approaches

- opportunities for greater impacts through increased coherence and collaboration

- ideas and challenges for evaluation and capacity-building

For all of us who see the value and the challenges of the superintendent's job, I hope this research provokes some deeper investigations and broader conclusions and questions. The intellectual focus and models of support for existing superintendents that emerge from looking across a variety of programs can provide important evidence of directions needed for pre-service preparation of superintendents. The findings also can contribute to the larger conversation about the challenges of leading school districts and strategies for supporting superintendents in that work.

Finally, the new and innovative collaboration models that are emerging – particularly the roles of superintendent-run organizations such as Western Benchmarking and the innovative work of foundations, nonprofits and now some for-profits, as well as the collaborations between schools of education and other professional schools, represent some important potential in the development of our society's capacity to support superintendents. I look forward to feedback and further discussion on ways of supporting those who have what many consider to be the toughest job in the country.

I welcome reader response; please contact me at Lee_Teitel@Harvard.edu.

PART II

SNAPSHOTS OF SUSTAINED PROGRAMS FOR EXECUTIVE EDUCATION OF SUPERINTENDENTS

The following brief summaries of programs are organized into five categories, based on what appeared to be the principal home or host to the program: superintendent membership organizations, other (non-superintendent) nonprofits, universities, foundations and for-profits. Note that some of these overlapped – a university-based program might be largely or entirely sponsored by a foundation, and so on.

NATIONAL, STATE AND REGIONAL SUPERINTENDENT MEMBERSHIP ORGANIZATIONS

American Association of School Administrators

According to Judy Seltz, the associate executive director, the American Association of School Administrators holds a number of meetings and conferences for superintendents throughout the year (and their state affiliates have dozens more). AASA has an annual conference – the National Conference on Education – that is its primary professional-development vehicle for superintendents. In addition, it does a number of seminars and smaller conferences each year on governance issues (e.g. Policy Governance); team leadership; Summer Institute for Rural and Suburban School System Leaders, Women Administrator's Conference, etc. This year it produced several web seminars as well. In addition to working closely with state affiliates on providing high-quality superintendent professional development, AASA staff members have been very involved with the Western State Benchmarking Consortium and have held "awareness and interest" sessions with other districts to encourage the formation of other similar consortia.

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A number of the state affiliates offer programs for new or continuing superintendents within their states. No attempt was made to survey all of them beyond the two that follow, which were noted in the original referral list of the Wallace/Harvard superintendents:

(New) Superintendent Academy, New Jersey Association of School Administrators

The new superintendent academy in New Jersey offers six one-day seminars over the year, planned around issues pertaining to the first-year superintendents' experience. Topics vary from year to year and are tied to skills directly related to the way things are done in New Jersey, with the series ending with a panel of successful superintendents. According to the director of professional development, Hank Cram, the focus is "more practical than intellectual" and networking is a powerful part of the series. The sessions serve about 30 new superintendents a year, at a cost in the $75 to $100 range per session. Costs are defrayed somewhat by sponsoring vendors who will pay for lunch in exchange for sharing their products and services with the new superintendents. Superintendents may attend all or some of the sessions. Evaluation is chiefly a survey instrument at the end of each session, asking about how practical and useful the information at the session was.

For ongoing superintendents, NJASA uses a similar format with a series of eight sessions, offering workshops on No Child Left Behind, technology, etc. Cram also notes that, "As a result of the state's involvement with the Wallace Foundation and SAELP I and II, New Jersey now has a professional-development requirement for all school leaders that will require that school administrators develop 'Professional Growth Plans' based on the ISLLC Standards, developed with a peer review committee and, in the case of superintendents, certified by our association. The implementation process for the new code is being developed by our association in conjunction with the NJ DOE, NJPSA and with technical assistance from Joe Murphy and Dennis Sparks. I am sure it will drive the design of our future staff development

offerings ...We are offering for the first time this summer a leadership institute for chief school administrators and are planning to hold an institute next summer with the state principals association which will focus on collaborative leadership teams."

Cram looks forward to collaborating with superintendents on a planning team to develop programming that "does not just look at putting out fires" but that also helps superintendents and principals work collaboratively and focus more on "systems thinking."

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> www.njasa.net/professional_development/new_supt/new_supt.htm

Project Leadership, Washington Association of School Administrators

Neal Powell, the director of Project Leadership, describes a statewide in-service cohort program with a four-year cycle of learning for superintendents. There are two three-day conferences with a variety of workshops (held in the fall and spring) with two to three regional meetings inbetween (adding up to an additional six contact hours). Each of the participants (who formerly were only superintendents, but now include other district leaders) develops a personal goal sheet and learning plan, and then selects from among the workshops offered at the conferences. For those wishing to complete the four-year cycle, there is a focus for each year, with the first year focusing on personal learning, lifestyle, organizational and time management, and professional presentations. Year two focuses on managing conflict and problem solving, managing change and teambuilding. The third year addresses group styles, public relations and decision making; the fourth, organizational culture and development and issues awareness. Participants take these modules along with others that are offered at the semi-annual conferences, which Powell describes as "focusing on the practical." He observes that the participants "like the nuts-and-bolts programs – things they can use. They feel that their university courses provided the theory; now they want what is usable. For example, we don't focus on what the philosophy is in D.C., but what can you do tomorrow to help raise test scores."

The program started in the early 1980s, serving mostly superintendents, but since then has expanded to include other central office personnel, as well as principals. Powell notes many current superintendents enrolled while they were principals. The annual fee is in the $300 to $350 range and includes the two state conferences, the regional sessions inbetween and a certificate of completion. About 75 to 100 participants typically enroll in the first year; not all choose to complete the entire cycle. Session evaluations are done by participants, and there have been occasional program evaluations. Powell also notes that the goal forms filled out and updated by each participant could be a good source of data on the program's effectiveness.

> For more information, contact:
> Neal Powell retired at the end of June 2004.
> He is replaced as director by **Mack Armstrong**.
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> Ph: 360-943-5717
> Toll Free: 1-800-859-9272
> www.wasa-oly.org/profdeve/projlead.htm

Western States Benchmarking Consortium

One unusual group of superintendents that has formed specifically for the professional development and focused learning of its member districts – cutting across state lines – is the Western States Benchmarking Consortium.

According to the consortium's web site, under the heading of "A Search for More Meaningful Accountability," the origin of this group was as follows:

> In the mid-1990s, a small group of superintendents and other key executives from a handful of large high-performing Western U.S. school districts met and decided to join forces in their efforts toward improvement in learning for all students. From its inception, this central focus on improving student learning has been the "glue" which has bonded member districts. Consortium district leaders meet periodically to engage in dialogue about "best practices" and strategies for improvement and to share learning from various members' experiences. Active membership of the Western States Benchmarking Consortium now includes seven school districts committed to continuous improvement in learning for all students. The Consortium also works in a strong partnership with the American Association of School Administrators.

According to Tom Olson, the "coordinator" of the group for the last six years, a conversation between two Washington State superintendents at a state meeting led to the creation of the association. The superintendents were hearing from their business partners about their searches for best practices in the business world and wondering about how to support comparable efforts in their districts. They decided not to look for "kindred spirits" within their state, fearing that their new association would get "ground down in the state process, leading mostly to catharsis and shared discussions about 'what the state is doing to us.'" Instead they looked for members from other similar districts ranging as far south as Texas – in general, fast-growing districts on the immediate outskirts of large cities, all with major high-tech business partners. All seven, according to Olson, are "high performing, but not satisfied," who "see the future of education at stake" in addressing the challenges of achieving systemic improvement at both district and school levels.

The association meets three times a year, hosted by one of the districts, with a strong theme of sharing best practices. Early on, the consortium had no fixed template on how to do that. Recognizing that the dialogue and common learning would be richer with a common perspective , the group authorized the development of a set of progress "benchmarks" as systems move from "pockets" of change to systemic, world-class performance. They assigned senior-level staff to work teams in "student learning," "capacity development," "community connections" and "data-driven decision making." Olson, with more than 20 years as an executive in two different regional educational laboratories, was employed to facilitate and coordinate this work. Olson describes himself as a "coordinator," not an "executive director," noting that the superintendents remain actively involved in creating policy, directing the association and attending the sessions. (According to Olson, "they rarely delegate someone to attend in their absence, but come to most meetings and call it the best professional development they have had.") Five to six people from each district attend, including curriculum and assessment personnel along with data/technical, public information and human resource staff. A particular issue, such as a focus on secondary-school concerns, might bring principals to a particular session. Host districts are asked to highlight a major best practice (e.g., one district's renewed strategic plan on literacy development, including the examination of data across all ability groupings).

The association holds one meeting a year with the AASA, using it to bring together its core team to reflect on progress and to conduct an annual strategic renewal session. Olson has observed that as each district has gotten closer to meeting its benchmarks, the organization has been more willing to take public stands on issues beyond the consortium, for instance on the reauthorization of IDEA and NCLB. The association has quite consciously decided not to take additional new members, although WSBC has been quite willing and enthusiastic about encouraging other districts around the country to form their own regional associations for similar purposes. Members of the consortium, working closely with AASA, have provided direct support to other organizations trying to replicate a similar model.

Annual costs are approximately $3,000 a year for membership, plus the costs of travel to the rotating host site. The "coordinator" is a part-time position at roughly one-third time. The consortium does not seek outside grants.

The consortium does not have current formal mechanisms in place to assess the influence of participation on the districts. "At this point we have a lot of anecdotes," says Olson. "Districts face issues and constantly call in help from the other

districts." Olson has identified at least 25 different strategic initiatives of individual member districts that have been influenced by practices in others in the consortium. "They make progress," Olson continues, "but there's no formal evaluation in place. The Board of Directors has been moving forward to establish some mechanisms to determine the extent to which participation is adding value to their individual strategic efforts."

> For more information, contact:
> Western States
> www.wsbenchmark.org/home.htm
> Tom Olson has retired as coordinator.
> He is replaced by **Lindsay Gunn**.
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OTHER NONPROFITS (NON-SUPERINTENDENT)

Some of these, such as the Aspen Institute, the Connecticut Center for School Change or the Council of Great City Schools, offer programs specific to superintendents as part of a larger agenda; some, such as Center for Creative Leadership, customize existing programs for superintendents; and others, such as the Institute for Educational Leadership, offer programs that mix superintendents with other school and community leaders.

Urban Superintendents Network, Aspen Institute Program on Education

The Aspen Institute is an international nonprofit organization dedicated to informed dialogue and inquiry on issues of global concern. Founded in 1950, it has pursued its mission of fostering enlightened leadership through seminars, policy studies and fellowship programs.

The Institute has organized an Urban Superintendents Network, in which about a dozen superintendents engaged in district reform efforts meet twice a year to review progress on reform efforts and to learn from one another how specific initiatives are moving forward or where they may be stuck. The members of the network provide substantive on-going support for one another. The network – whose membership is by invitation – also draws on a distinguished set of "advisors" from universities and public and private sectors. At a recent meeting, for instance, the focus was on recruiting, developing and retaining a high-quality workforce, reviewing some recent work on pay-for-performance plans in the Denver, Colorado, school district, and examining methods that corporate managers use to achieve these goals. The advisors included former management consultants who have worked with both the corporate and education communities on these issues.

According to director Nancy Pelz-Paget, an important aspect of the Aspen Urban Superintendents Network is the mingling of three sets of people: nontraditional superintendents (coming from the corporate world or other sectors, for instance), seasoned superintendents who have come through more traditional educational systems, and some outside resources – critical friends who are excellent retired superintendents, researchers or corporate thinkers who offer perspective, analysis and feedback to the superintendents. The resource participants represent a particular area of expertise, such as an overview of how human resource departments can be organized to provide more support and direction for building effective career ladders within the profession that match school system goals. The program draws upon a few long-term "advisors" who provide continuity and ongoing perspectives on trends in reform. The group is deliberately kept small, and the agenda is driven by the superintendents. The semiannual meetings start on Thursdays, usually with a site visit, and run until Saturday. Participants received focused background readings, often including case studies, in advance of the meetings, and there are no presentations – only dialogue among participants.

Pelz-Paget says that there is no specific pre-existing theory or approach that underlies the Institute's work. Rather the key is the mix of individuals and the deep discussions that are engendered. Indeed, she notes, "the superintendents value the most that we at Aspen do not have a specific agenda. We are not selling something, and there is no 'flavor of the month' of this year's reform." She comments on the high level of trust, mutual respect and ownership of the sessions by the superintendents and says that the "informal but focused exchanges have been key. They have been especially helpful for those superintendents who are coming from outside of education, but the 'rub-off' has been important both ways – those who have been in traditional school systems forever benefit from having the perspectives and experiences of those from other

sectors (corporate and government). Likewise, the non-traditional superintendents benefit from the rich and deep education experience of those who have been at the helm of districts for many years."

Pelz-Paget acknowledges the complexity of the kind of work the superintendents are trying to do. She notes that there is often a tension between the framework that the research community needs to make sense of district initiatives and the needs of district leaders to have timely and substantive feedback that informs the instructional agenda.

The Aspen program does not have a formal evaluation process. Rather it seeks and gets informal feedback from the members of the network on how the network experience has helped in formulating new initiatives or making current ones more effective. The responses also include what support from other members of the network they have received, for example, assistance in planning for collective-bargaining agreements that match achievement goals. Individual districts are undergoing reviews of their own reform and restructuring initiatives, and the program builds on this work to inform other districts. The program receives major funding from the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation and the William and Flora Hewlett Foundation, with additional support from the Eli Broad Foundation and The Wallace Foundation. Aspen also organizes a network for chief state schools officers, which creates the potential for some useful back-and-forth between the two groups on policy issues.

Connecticut Center for School Change

As part of its larger efforts to promote school change at a deep level, the Connecticut Center for School Change, a small not-for-profit based in Hartford, offers a Superintendents' Network for a dozen superintendents. It includes a reflective, clinical seminar series and serves as a confidential professional forum in which district leaders can sort out difficult instructional challenges together.

When it was started several years ago, there was no direct correlation between the invited superintendents and the districts in which the center was making grants, but that is a connection that Jane Tedder, Education Program Officer, is now committed to making. As she puts it, "if we want to practice what we preach, we need to align these elements of our work." The center is committed to long-term grant-making (at least four years) and, in general, takes the long view of the importance of superintendent development and systems alignment. Shaped by its commitment to systems theory and to continuous improvement, the center is working with network superintendents whose districts receive CCSC grants to ensure that learning from network sessions gets applied to systemic efforts to improve instruction and student performance.

The network itself started with a group of superintendents interested in working with Harvard professor Richard Elmore. CCSC Executive Director Andrew Lachman arranged for the group to meet regularly with Elmore starting in September 2001. During the first year of monthly conversations, Elmore repeatedly suggested the superintendents get out into classrooms. After some initial resistance, one superintendent volunteered her district for a "walk-through." When it was conducted, according to Tedder, "the superintendents were excited and surprised at what they saw." The walk-through has become a central feature for the network. Shifting the emphasis to classroom observations in each district has had several dramatic effects on the direction of the network. Tedder notes that superintendents "needed to learn to talk to one another in ways that were different from usual superintendent conversation; specifically, they needed to learn to interrelate to each other around discussions of instruction, rather than over war stories. They also had to develop skills of observation at the classroom level – for chief executives who might not be so in tune with instruction."

Elmore compares the walk-throughs to the medical rounds model, noting that it is a "highly disciplined activity: we have specific protocols for observation and discussion, we periodically read and analyze transcripts of our discussions in order to improve on our focus and discipline in discussions, we evaluate each others' practice in the group and in the school and

district settings." He also points out that the walk-throughs are a critical part of an overall strategy of large-scale instructional improvement that the superintendents commit themselves to in order to join the network. As he puts it, "the network is about the practice of large-scale improvement, *not* just about getting superintendents to visit schools and classrooms. The classroom and school visits are explicitly focused on a problem related to the district's overall strategy that presents in a specific school. So we are interested not just in analysis of instructional practice in schools, but in the relationship between the problem that presents in the school and the district's overall strategy. The on-site debriefings and the off-site reflective sessions are focused on how to move the strategy forward as well as on what we saw in classrooms."

Furthermore, a critical element is to have this professional practice of superintendents "mirrored and modeled in their work with staff in their districts," according to Elmore. When requested, he will visit the districts to accompany instructional support staff and superintendents on rounds "to reinforce the idea that we expect to see the practice at work in their strategies."

Lachman, Tedder, Elmore and the superintendents themselves are very excited about the network model that has evolved. The 12 superintendents in this initial cohort are a diverse group. They come from all parts of the state; their districts vary in size, wealth and student demographics but collectively instruct more than 57,000 students. Half of the members are female and two are African American. They convene one day a month in meetings that alternate between site visits and reflective sessions.

At the end of each reflection meeting, a superintendent will set up the next month's site visit by identifying the instructional/system issue on which he or she wishes to focus. The superintendent provides a one-page issue statement as well as oral information and, as the visit approaches, works with the school principal to choose classrooms to visit. During the visit the superintendents observe in cohorts of four, visiting up to five classrooms and staying for 20 to 25 minutes in each. The numbers of classrooms are limited so the visitors can have some common experiences to form a basis for their debriefing and discussion. Depending on the nature of the issue to be addressed, they may also meet with teams of staff members. In the reflective session the following month back at the center, participants talk together about what they saw and how the experience raised questions regarding their own district practice. They end by preparing for the next school visit.

The network has finished its third year and has developed a culture that centers on discussion of practice. Documentation of the sessions has been done by a University of Connecticut professor – examining how and what is being talked about and looking at changes in patterns of discourse. The center staff is seeing strong evidence of learning by the superintendents about how instruction works in their own systems, and about how to talk and sustain conversations about instruction with others. They already know that most superintendents are using a version of the walk-through protocol to engage principals in their districts about how to improve instruction. This year the center is also adding an external evaluator who will hold candid interviews with superintendents on their satisfaction with the network and evidence of transfer of learning – specifically what they learned from participation in the network and how it has affected their practice.

The center, which wants to expand what it sees as a great initiative to serve more superintendents, faces something of a quandary on how to best scale up. The superintendents pay $1,000 to $3,000 for involvement over the year, although these fees cover only a portion of the costs. More importantly, Lachman and Tedder, along with the superintendents, feel that size is critical and to double (to serve 24) would change the nature of the group. The superintendents, according to Tedder, "didn't want to move backward. They said that it was just this year that they've gotten to a place where they can really talk." One urban superintendent commented the "colleagueship, the opportunity for growth, the direct application of what we learn as a group of superintendents to the work I do in my district has made this one of the strongest learning situations that I have ever been involved with." The trade-offs of starting a separate cohort vs. breaking up the current one and mixing in new people loom large. In Tedder's view, the situation brings attention to the question about whether this "network is so terrific because of the design framework that has evolved [classroom visits, etc.] or because it brings together 16 different people who like each other and have learned to talk with one another."

Despite the challenges of scaling up without damaging the present cohort, Lachman and Tedder remain committed. Tedder notes the strong interest from others to participate. "If we believe in the power of the network of helping a superintendent

see his or her own organization differently in promoting student learning, we have to respond to the demand. Also, we don't want this [current group] to be seen as a clique."

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The Council of Great City Schools

The Council of Great City Schools offers seminars for new urban school superintendents to help them launch their administrations. This is a day-and-a-half-long session that brings together a team of seasoned superintendents from large cities to help develop strategic plans, work with boards and "take of themselves."

"There is no overarching 'theory' to this," according to Michael Casserly, the director. "There is an overarching focus on boosting student performance, but the topics themselves range the waterfront. The topics are grounded in practical expertise more than theory."

Although there is no formal follow-up, new superintendents can request technical reviews and support in specific areas (e.g. procurement) and get that support from CGCS staff or experts in other districts. There is no cost to the superintendents either for the seminar or the follow-up support. Many superintendents go on to participate in other conferences sponsored by Great Cities, and there is considerable informal networking, but only occasionally is the group reconvened.

Casserly notes: "There are training programs for superintendents, but once they get into the job, the number of them willing or interested in training support is not very high. While superintendents strongly identify with this organization, it is still hard to schedule them and get a critical mass together in one room." Sometimes a really special issue will draw them together, such as the role of mayors in school districts.

Great Cities also offers seminars for boards and superintendents on governance issues (jointly with the Center for Reform of School Systems).

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Center for Creative Leadership

The Center for Creative Leadership (CCL) is a well-known international educational institution, delivering leadership development programs at campuses in Greensboro, North Carolina.; San Diego, California; Colorado Springs, Colorado; Brussels, Belgium; and Singapore for over 30 years. The center's approach is that self-knowledge is the single most important factor in the practice of leadership. Becoming more acutely aware of one's strengths and weaknesses creates cognitive dissonance, leading to behavioral and attitudinal change. As a result, rather than teaching how to manage or analyze or strategize, CCL helps leaders "learn how to learn" from their colleagues, from their organizational and competitive contexts and, most importantly, from their own experience. Because individuals rarely have the opportunity to receive extensive feedback in the workplace – to understand how others perceive and receive them and their leadership – center programs provide leaders with the time, tools and environment needed to gain a comprehensive, accurate view of themselves and to set personal development goals and begin working toward them.

The center's extensive use of assessment and honest, productive feedback is frequently cited as the most valuable part of their programs.

Most of the center's leadership-development programs are built around a developmental model identifying three key elements of behavioral and attitudinal change: assessment (data about current perceptions, changed perceptions), challenge (opportunities to challenge mental models and leadership styles) and support (opportunities to talk with a trained professional when instituting new leadership behaviors in the workplace doesn't have the intended outcome). CCL provides leaders with opportunities for assessment, challenge and support in a safe, confidential environment designed to encourage candor, self-examination and experimentation with new behaviors vital to development. Participants are pushed to explore their strengths and identify their development needs in special activities, breakout sessions and simulations that replicate real-world challenges without the real-world consequences for failure. In CCL's view, this leads to creative exploration, insight and experiential learning that helps executives and managers revitalize and refocus their organizations.

Fifteen years ago, CCL created customized leadership development programs for school superintendents. The programs use the same fundamental developmental model of programs for other senior executives and focus heavily on relational leadership development. The faculty use of a variety of feedback mechanisms – descriptive assessments of interpersonal needs (e.g., FIRO) and personality (e.g. Myers-Briggs) and 360 assessments (e.g. The Campbell Leadership Index, The Campbell Organizational Survey, Benchmarks) which allow the superintendents to receive feedback from their board and their school administrators on how they are perceived relative to research-based descriptors of effective leadership. An intense three-hour session with a highly trained executive coach helps the superintendent develop a plan of action for maximizing personal strengths and addressing any weaknesses. As a result of CCL's experience working with CEOs of Fortune 500 companies and political leaders, all program activities for superintendents are conducted in a highly confidential environment. Each program also provides opportunities for superintendents to discuss a key leadership challenge with fellow superintendents and with faculty who have experience in leading businesses as well as schools. CCL uses videotaping to allow superintendents to observe themselves as they work with other superintendents to solve an educational problem. CCL works with superintendents to move beyond an awareness of what needs to change to working on changing their behaviors back in their workplace. The CCL programs assist superintendents in setting up feedback loops back in the workplace, as a means of getting trusted data on how their constituents react to their leadership. Three months following the program, superintendents receive a request to again solicit feedback to determine if progress toward meeting their goals has been perceived by others. They also have the option of phone and online coaching.

CCL delivers these programs to superintendents in one of three venues:

- Superintendent-only three- or five-day residential programs are held at CCL campuses and at sites around the country chosen by superintendent associations. Programs usually enroll 25 to 30 superintendents in a class.
- CCL works with a superintendent and her or his intact executive or central office team to explore leadership issues specific to the district and team.
- Superintendents of larger districts are invited to CCL's "Leadership at the Peak" program in Colorado, which mixes superintendents with college presidents and very senior executives from Fortune 500 international corporations for a week-long session with eight to 12 participants. The intensely personal program is designed to address the leadership challenges faced by top leaders of organizations. Kathleen Ponder, who has worked for CCL as director of its Education Programs area for eight years, notes how stimulating this program is for large urban superintendents who share problems and solutions with CEOs of comparable or even larger enterprises. (The cost of $9,200 is frequently funded by local foundations or grants.)

CCL also offered a specially funded five-year leadership development initiative to a school district superintendent, his cabinet and board, 30 school principals and 15 school leadership teams. CCL and the Joseph Bryan Foundation invested more than $10 million to assist in reforming this school district. Extensive evaluations have revealed the beneficial impact of helping superintendents and their faculty and staff focus on the relational aspects of leadership. Ponder notes that "the most powerful interventions we've done for superintendents aligned relational leadership development activities with the current challenges and work of their school districts."

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Institute for Education Leadership (IEL)

The Educational Policy Fellows Program is a 10-month cohort program that has been offered, in one form or another, by IEL for 40 years. Although not a program exclusively for superintendents, the strong focus on issues of education and policy engages many superintendents, along with others involved in all aspects of education and education policy, including those in employment, economic development and corrections sectors, as well as professional associations and community-based organizations. Superintendents work with principals, program managers, directors of research and evaluation, college faculty and legislative staff.

Operating in 12 states, with about 200 participants a year (and more than 5,500 alumni), EPFP provides a broad conceptual framework at the national level, with considerable local variation by its state partners. EPFP is about leadership, policy and networking, and fellows are brought together for two annual national conferences and then meet for at least 60 contact hours inbetween (for example, one state program site might have 20 three-hour sessions between conferences). Tuition for the 10-month program (approximately $2,100) is generally paid by the employer.

In his annual letter to participants, Hunter Moorman, EPFP director, notes the three "complementary perspectives that inform much of the [leadership orientation] of the EPFP. The perspectives are transformational leadership, as originally framed by James MacGregor Burns, the use of power in political contexts to move a populace to a higher plane of public values; strategic leadership, the National Defense University's combination of vision and collaboration on a grand scale to achieve significant results in situations of volatility, uncertainty, complexity, and ambiguity; and adaptive leadership, based largely on a psychoanalytic perspective in the work of Ron Heifetz, in which the leader's challenge is to engage the people who are most directly concerned with complex public problems not only in solving the problems, but first in defining the problems." http://www.iel.org/programs/epfp/director.html (emphasis added).

Moorman notes that the program's policy perspective rests on three additional conceptual elements: (1) an appreciation of public policy problems in education and related fields as "wicked" (drawing on the work of Rittel and Webber, 1976), values-based, open to conflict among interest groups and situated in a volatile, uncertain, complex and ambiguous environment; (2) an emphasis on policy change as a disjointed, incremental, non-rational process conducted through the competition of (largely organized) interests in a field dominated by essentially conservative forces (government structure, business, media); and (3) the "power of public ideas" to introduce non-linear or radical change in an otherwise incremental, reactive system, framed around the work of Burns, Robert Reich, Karl Weick and others.

Moorman is aware that state-level "franchises" vary significantly in their understanding of and commitment to this theoretical framework. Some embrace and implement it, using a variety of approaches to promote the intellectual richness – book study groups, year-long projects focused on an issue of state or local concern, etc. Other franchisees are more topically focused or primarily use their sessions to bring in local or name speakers. He notes that all the groups provide "exceptional networking" and advocates for a thoughtful framework for networking. He encourages affiliates to "make networking an intentional experience, not just a flow-through."

Evaluations are done at the two national meetings, and some at program levels within states. Moorman notes that plans are in place for field-testing a deeper evaluation process to assess long-term impacts, taking into account the "complexity of open-systems research."

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WestEd

The Executive Leadership Center for California Superintendents (ELC) has been a viable professional-development option for superintendents in California for the last 15 years. Initiated in 1990 by a grant from the California Department of Education (CDE), the program has grown to become a nationally recognized model of professional development for superintendents.

As initially conceived, ELC was operated through a partnership among CDE, the California School Leadership Academy (CSLA) and the Association of California School Administrators (ACSA) in which CDE provided the funding, CSLA developed the curriculum and materials and ACSA managed the logistics of implementing the program in the field. In June 2000, California's governor vetoed the funding for both CSLA and ELC. For six months the future of ELC looked bleak and superintendents were dismayed that their most valuable source of professional growth was disappearing. Not willing to allow this to happen, ELC leaders proposed that they increase their ACSA dues in order to secure the funding needed to continue the program. The proposal won approval, and the ELC continues more strongly than ever because it "belongs" to the superintendents.

In January 2001, ACSA leaders asked WestEd staff to take on the ELC developmental work that had been done previously by CSLA. For 30 years, WestEd has been a federal Regional Educational Laboratory (WREL) and has offered a variety of "services that enable schools and organizations to thrive," including assessments, professional and organizational development, school and district improvement literacy and mathematics. For the last three years, WestEd has developed the ELC curriculum through a contract with ACSA.

According to Laraine Roberts of WestEd, who coordinates ELC, the program is "of, by and for" superintendents. They set the agenda and determine seminar topics. There are two ELC seminars a year, one two-day session in January just before the California Superintendents Symposium and one three-day institute in July when superintendents' time frees up a bit. The planning for each seminar begins six months before it is offered. A group of approximately 10 superintendents meets with Roberts to develop the topic and plan the activities. Each seminar topic grows out of the issues and concerns about student learning that superintendents are experiencing in their districts. Roberts asserts that the most important theory of action is that superintendents run the program. Superintendents design and plan the program, and they facilitate the seminar as well. For each seminar, several superintendents volunteer to lead the seminar and facilitate the activities. Roberts suggests that this may be the most powerful element in the structure of the program because it truly makes it "superintendent to superintendent." The superintendents are developing a community of practice.

ELC has never relied on big-name speakers for its seminar content. Superintendents report that they can get that kind of interaction anywhere. Roberts says, "They didn't want speakers; they want kernels of ideas they could apply to their work. Rather than listen to a formal presentation, the superintendents wanted more time with each set of ideas and with each other. They wanted cross-fertilization of ideas and multiple voices of application. Often we will spend time engaging around some nugget that matters, like 10 pages of Collins' *Good to Great,* and then take those ideas and learn how they apply in each superintendent's district."

The other major approach used in the institute is an "action learning lab model" in which a superintendent tells of a problematic situation tied to the larger theme of their readings. The group then uses a small-group consultation protocol to help the case presenter and to learn from it.

Roberts describes how this approach has flowed into the districts of the participating superintendents: "Most districts no longer have speakers in; they model ideas around how they experienced them in the seminar." The material used in the summer institutes, for instance, will then be used in back-to-school administrative retreats for principals.

She notes that there is no formal evaluation of this effort – "we are barely funded to do what we do."

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UNIVERSITY-BASED PROGRAMS

Note that many more universities offer preparation programs for the superintendency; the focus here is on specific programs for existing superintendents. And while some programs, as expected, are based in the education schools of these universities, a few are broader collaborations that draw on other elements of the university or other professional schools, such as those in government or business.

Columbia University

Last year, Teachers College started a new superintendent program aimed at those early in their roles. According to its website:

> *To meet the challenges of their new leadership, new superintendents are invited to join a series to explore leading. Vision, Democracy and Diversity, Learning, Improvement and Leading Leaders and develop strategies for individual and district success. This yearlong Seminar provides a forum for new superintendents to develop their leadership through lively group discussions, mentoring, collaborative inquiry, hands-on activities and district research. During the sessions, participants work with colleagues, experienced superintendents and experts in the educational field. The Seminar will focus on leadership and the challenges of vision building, democracy and diversity, school improvement, and developing leadership in others. It is limited to 15 to 18 superintendents with zero to two years of experience. The Seminar will meet in five Friday-Saturday sessions and for a week in July.*

The seminar was first run in 2002-03 and designed after considerable research by its lead faculty member, Terry Orr, including extensive focus groups with superintendents about challenges facing new superintendents, the nature of their professional preparation and the paucity (and importance) of good superintendent professional development. In her research, Orr found that although superintendents wanted effective, useful professional development, they doubted whether such a program was possible. "In their view, the challenges were too idiosyncratic and traditional approaches – like formal leadership preparation programs – could not lend themselves well to learning the complex and dynamic role of the superintendency." (Orr, 2004, p. 27)

The strongly reflective approach used in the program is framed by three theoretical approaches – transformational leadership theory, professional and organizational socialization and superintendent role development, and adult learning and leadership development, including experiential learning, communities of practice and reflective practice. The structure for each weekend includes collaborative inquiry discussion on a problem of practice, exploration of leadership issues and con-

nections to culture, context, leadership development of others, and networking and reflection. The summer week focused on leadership learning and added examples of best practices, with presenters from other organizations. The sessions were facilitated by Orr, several graduate students and two experienced superintendents.

When asked about the theoretical approach to the seminar series, Orr notes the different approaches various organizations bring to professional development for school leaders: "It is a matter of perspective. Do superintendents need factual information to do the job, or is it about perspective about thinking about the job and yourself? At Teachers College, we focus on the work. We honor what they bring. We provide a safe space for them to talk, away from their districts, where there is always pushback and noise. We bring in experts but see them as the center of the learning. We work with them to stake out the course they would take, even if it is unpopular."

The first cycle of the program was conceived as a pilot and funded by Merrill Lynch. It drew six superintendents who paid $2,000, in all but one case financially supported by their boards. At the end of the first year, the pilot was extended into a second at the request of the superintendents, with a stronger focus on writing, deeper look at mental models, and more work on organizational defensiveness and adaptive leadership.

The program was evaluated using an action-research approach, with methodology and findings summarized in Orr's 2004 paper. Key questions centered on the program components and design elements that worked best for the new superintendents and the impacts the program had on participants and their districts. Findings indicated three types of impacts: "replicating new ideas and practices in their own districts taken directly from the seminar sessions; establishing goal direction for their district, and their board work; and strengthening their leadership." (Orr 2004, 25)

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Harvard University

There have been three separate programs for superintendents associated with Harvard, not including the well-regarded Urban Superintendent Program – not counted here since it is a preparatory program, although some of its faculty members are involved in these Harvard-based initiatives. One is the Change Leadership Group, which developed from work with coaches on deep school change. The other two are pairings between the Graduate School of Education and two other professional schools – the Business School, in a collaboration known as the Public Education Leadership Program, and the Kennedy School of Government, in the Superintendent's Leadership Program, funded by The Wallace Foundation.

Change Leadership Group
The Change Leadership Group at the Harvard Graduate School of Education focuses on systemic solutions, with a mission (according to its web site) to: 1) continuously develop new knowledge about what is needed to initiate and sustain deep systemic changes in K-12 public education that result in improved learning for all students; 2) sponsor programs that strengthen the capacities of educational leaders and change coaches to implement systemic change; and 3) disseminate key learnings from this work to diverse professional audiences.

Co-directed by Tony Wagner and Harvard faculty member Robert Kegan, the CLG has developed and implemented a clearly articulated theory of action with several key tenets:

- Developing the competencies of education leaders at every level to lead change processes aimed at improving learning for all students
- Providing educational leaders with access to the same quality "coaching" from which private sector leaders benefit – a form of coaching that does not offer "expert answers," but rather helps leaders to clarify the most important issues and questions; identify common pitfalls,

potential bottlenecks and opportunities for change; and take effective action to engage groups in a collaborative search for the best solutions and most effective change strategies

- Generating, applying and disseminating new knowledge about change leadership though ongoing action research with our clients and other organizations who share our goals

According to Annie Howell, a doctoral fellow with long-time involvement with the CLG, there are four ways that the CLG has been working with districts over the past few years:

1. Three-Day Learning Labs
2. Change Leadership Group Program
3. Beta Sites
4. New, more intense relationships being developed with sites known as "District Leadership Sites"

Each is described briefly below by Howell:

In the three-day learning labs, district teams and individuals from across the country come to Cambridge (although CLG staff is now starting to travel to their districts) for a three-day program in which they get to wrestle with their district issues by using the CLG change theories. There have been approximately six three-day labs over the past five years.

The Change Leadership Program started in 2002 as a two-year program (two one-week sessions a year for two years) with 10 district teams. Superintendents and other key change leaders in the district attended the Change Leadership Program for these weeks to learn and practice the CLG change theory by working on cases of their own practice with one another. Individuals from teams also had the opportunity to receive coaching and to practice their coaching skills together. (Superintendents usually came for half the time during these weeks, and the other change leaders from the district, such as assistant superintendents, curriculum directors and principals, stayed for the entire week.) Other benefits included districts "bonding" by exchanging problems of practice and supporting one another's progress on these problems by using Change Leadership Group's change theories.

Simultaneously, the CLG engaged in "beta site" work in two districts: West Clermont, Ohio (where the CLG has been part of their change efforts for five years), and Grand Rapids, Michigan (where the CLG is starting its third year of work). These beta sites were initially planned as mutually beneficial relationships to "get it right in a couple of places" and then to spread the idea to other districts. The beta-site relationship has since transformed in Grand Rapids into a more intense coaching relationship called District Leadership Sites, in which a small team of CLG staff is hired to directly coach the leadership teams, including the superintendent of schools, around issues of focus, collaboration and engagement. CLG staff intend for these relationships to be about building the capacity of these leadership teams as change leaders of the district rather than having CLG staff remain as the "expert" consultants to the district themselves (employing the "teach a man to fish vs. fish for him" philosophy). Also in this pool of District Leadership Sites are the Houston School Districts and Gloucester School District, with whom CLG started work this year and hopes to continue work over a multi-year relationship. The cost for this work varies depending on the size of the district and CLG's relationship with it. On average, however, CLG staff meet with the district for six two-day visits, with intermediate phone calls to plan and debrief these meetings.

According to co-director Tony Wagner, the plan of "getting it right in a couple of places" and then spreading the ideas to others is working well. He describes some promising successes, with several districts having "gone beyond being beta sites – they are really doing it, with positive early indicators of classroom practice changes." The next challenge of infiltrating the district (going beyond the involvement and commitment of the leadership team) is underway. Key strategies, according to Wagner, include composing teams at the building level that include principals and their immediate supervisors (who are otherwise often left out of school reform initiatives); having a variety of accountability processes in place; and using what he calls "living case studies," in which real communities of practice develop as superintendents and district teams tackle problems that they are still trying to solve. Wagner notes the long-term nature of this work – that it took some time to develop the trust and the

community of practice for school leaders to share real, live dilemmas that they hadn't yet solved, to go beyond the safer initial "show and tell."

The CLG was started with a grant five years ago from the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation.

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Public Education Leadership Program
This collaboration between the business and education schools at Harvard is, according to the PELP web site, "creating new knowledge that draws on the strengths and different perspectives of each school." The program was developed over two years of planning, pulling in faculty from both schools, as well as engaging groups of educators, leading to identification of nine districts that participated in the first PELP weeklong retreat in July 2004. The program began with a set of general management topics selected through interaction with participating districts and other public school leaders, addressing strategic alignment, executing strategy, human capital management, and design of resource allocation and accountability systems. These business-management approaches have been supplemented with skills that Richard Elmore of Harvard's Graduate School of Education (and PELP faculty member) describes on the web site as skills critical to "enabling fundamental, scalable improvement – helping schools educate students to their optimum potential." Included in these are:

- Leading and sustaining organizational change
- Aligning the strategy, structures and systems of an organization around its core mission (which in the case of public education is improved educational outcomes for students)
- Ensuring consistent, quality teaching within and across schools

The kick-off week in July was an excellent one, according to HGSE faculty member and PELP co-chair Bob Schwartz. "All the superintendents came with their teams, and all but one stayed the entire week. That sent a powerful signal that this was important." Each team had eight to nine district people and a Harvard faculty member as facilitator. The teams moved in a fairly structured way though a "workbook" that laid out a clear and specific action plan. Districts were asked to begin by articulating clear objectives, defining strategies and action steps to help them get to the future, desired state. They were asked to diagnose their current state (on the dimensions they were pursuing), to analyze the gaps between status quo and target state, and to plan specifically for execution and follow-up.

At the heart of the action-planning sequence was a conceptual design graphic that puts the interaction among teachers, students and content at the instructional core and addresses how scale-up and improvement strategies need to align culture, structure, systems and capacity. The graphic places these action steps in the larger context in which the work needs to be done – within the district's external environment, including governing boards, unions and associations, policymakers, communities and intermediary organizations.

A critical part of the PELP work has been the development and use of case studies, illustrating some of the challenges in the districts and providing a focus for many of the learning activities over the summer session. Cases developed for the project about participating school districts have been interwoven with business cases as part of the overall flow of the sessions.

In addition to the week-long summer session with full teams, PELP also convened the superintendents last January and will probably bring them back again this winter. "A critical element," according to Schwartz, "is to main-

tain the co-ownership and co-development of this with the districts. This is a partnership – not only between the education school and the business school, but with the districts."

Funding for PELP has been provided by the Harvard Business School class of 1963; districts have been asked to fund-raise to pay $30,000 to $40,000 for their participation.

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Superintendent Leadership Program
A collaboration of the Kennedy School of Government and the Harvard Graduate School of Education, the SLP brings together a dozen urban superintendents who are recipients of five-year Leadership for Educational Achievement in Districts grants from The Wallace Foundation.

The program is organized as a series of two day-long workshops, meeting roughly every three months for the last two years. Meetings are held at Harvard's Kennedy School of Government and draw on several of its faculty members, along with faculty from the Graduate School of Education.

The key theoretical perspective for the program draws from a model of leadership developed by the Kennedy School's Ronald Heifetz and his colleagues. As summarized in a KSG web link (http://www.ksg.harvard.edu/press/press%20releases/2002/superintendents_cpl_010802.htm) announcing the grant, "those ideas … suggest that is not enough for school leaders to rest on technical expertise or past practices to meet the educational challenges demanded of them. The Superintendents Leadership Program is based instead on the idea that leaders need to create a system-wide shift in focus within their districts to bring about more widespread public commitments, new ways of looking at both familiar and unfamiliar situations within a school system, and new strategies and skills for generating consistent, measurable improvement in school performance."

To help do that, the SLP addresses specific skills – helping superintendents distinguish between technical problems (that may well be difficult, but that their districts already have the skills to address) and adaptive challenges (issues that create value conflicts, require major and deep changes in behaviors by personnel, and require them and their districts to invent solutions). Another skill is developing the ability to "go to the balcony" – to have the superintendents learn to gain some distance and perspective on the interactions in and around their districts, to see the values and interests they and other stakeholders represent. Superintendents learn to distinguish between leadership and authority and to explore the limits and possibilities of their authority as they face adaptive challenges inside and outside their districts.

The program has several mechanisms for connecting those theories to practice in the superintendents' districts. For the first year of the network, each superintendent was matched with a Harvard faculty member who served as a consultant, visiting the district six times over the year. Consultants provide coaching, follow-up on the ideas that were discussed at the sessions, and feedback to the superintendents. They also report back to monthly consultant meetings to problem-solve challenges being faced in the districts and to help plan future sessions to address those needs. One of the superintendents involved reflects on the role of the coaches as "intermediaries, bridging the boundaries between the Kennedy School and the districts. Their connectedness helped reduce the resistance of the superintendents and inform the Heifetz team of the real-world problems we faced." (Lytle, 2004)

The program uses an iterative and collaborative planning process that engages the superintendents in reflecting on each two-day session and in planning content and focus for the next. An important teaching approach is the

use of superintendent-prepared case studies that are discussed in large-group format (all 12 superintendents) or in smaller subsets. "The superintendents consult to one another," according to Linda Kaboolian, the Kennedy School faculty member who coordinates the effort, "and that has made it much more connected to practice. The program moves into the district through the superintendent – if his or her leadership capacity increases, the potential for changes at the small group, organizational and systems level increases."

In reflecting on the program, Heifetz notes the power of the connection made among the superintendents – "the excitement that was unleashed when they discovered each other. They knew one another, but they hadn't had these kinds of collaborative conversations where they were helping each other figure out, 'What's the next leadership move I should make? How should I have this conversation with this person?' They got very nitty-gritty, very tactical. They delighted in teaching each other. They wanted more of it." Heifetz also notes how "liberating" it was for the superintendents to use a framework that acknowledged their technical expertise in so many areas and helped them focus on their responses to the more deep-seated adaptive challenges they face. (Newcomb 2004) One of the superintendents comments, "This is the first time I've developed enough trust in the faculty, the group, and the process to really admit to the challenges I face and my own uncertainties, and because I'm able to do that, I'm gaining more from this experience than any I've ever been involved in."(Lytle, 2004)

Although a formal assessment of the program has not been done, one significant informal evaluation has already taken place, and it came from the superintendents themselves. When the program started, several were resistant to spending so many days out of their districts (16 days at Harvard in the first year and a half). In the beginning, a few superintendents clearly came because The Wallace Foundation required it in order for their districts to be eligible for substantial district improvement grants. But when the required sessions at Harvard ended, the superintendents enthusiastically and unanimously lobbied successfully with the funder to continue the program.

The Superintendent Leadership Program has been funded by The Wallace Foundation as part of a larger effort to align leadership development, instruction and policy contexts at classroom, school, district and state levels.

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University of Pennsylvania
There are two programs at Penn noted here. The Penn Center for Educational Leadership (PCEL) has been recently created with the goal of "Building Regional Leadership Capacity to Support Student Learning and Development." With partnerships that include mid-Atlantic districts as well as a number of Penn-based professional development and research organizations, such as the Penn Literacy Network and the Consortium for Policy Research in Education, the center currently offers area superintendents (and any others they care to bring) a monthly luncheon seminar. It is designed, in the words of director John DeFlaminis, to "expose them to the best researchers we can provide." Usually the series taps researchers within Penn but will also draw from outside as needed. The superintendents pay only for the cost of the lunch ($25 per session) and topics vary.

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School Study Councils

Dating back more than 60 years, the Center for School Study Councils of the University of Pennsylvania Graduate School of Education has worked to improve the quality of education in school districts by serving as a catalyst for school district superintendents to take a proactive leadership role and to facilitate their professional development. For the price of an annual membership fee ranging from $1,600 to $2,700 (depending on district size), superintendents get access to monthly meetings of the study council, which draws on Penn and other educational experts, technical assistance for various district improvement efforts and access to faculty (and others in the database) as consultants. They get to participate (for the cost of travel) in an annual trip to visit other innovative settings and, as director Harris Sokoloff puts it, "see people they couldn't see any other way."

Although 53 districts are involved, they are deliberately divided into smaller study councils, so any meeting or workshop is kept in the 15- to 25- participant range, with a maximum of 30. Sokoloff describes this as a key part of the approach – small sessions in a workshop, not lecture, format. He also makes clear that the agenda is "not about the nuts and bolts of being a superintendent. My job is to provide them with opportunities to learn things that they wouldn't learn in other venues, and to promote their thinking." A key strategy is to bring in experts from other fields in what may not immediately seem obvious connections. For example, when the superintendents requested information on the characteristics of new teachers, Sokoloff brought in a psychologist to talk about how people think about work – whether they see it as a job, a career or a calling. Sokoloff describes the resulting session in glowing terms, with many cross-disciplinary connections being made. Each year he interviews all the superintendents on what to focus on for next year, inviting them to think about what, outside of education, seems relevant for them, as well as what they liked and didn't like about their jobs, and about the study councils.

There are no formal mechanisms for seeing how and if the superintendents' work affects their districts. They are always welcome to bring a guest – a deputy, principal, board member, teacher – and about half of them do. According to Sokoloff, the major assessment of the success of the councils (beyond the one-on-one conversations between the director and the superintendents) is their willingness to continue to come, pay and support the councils.

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University of Pittsburgh

The Superintendent's Academy at Pitt is a preparation program closely affiliated with the Western Pennsylvania Superintendent's Forum, which is described in more detail below under foundation-sponsored networks. The close connection to the academic-preparation program is noteworthy, both because of the involvement of many of the Pitt leadership and faculty in the forum, and the cross-referencing to the forum for individual students interested in preparing for superintendency at Pitt. Specifically, according to its web site, "Learning experiences for the [preparation and doctoral-granting] program are organized around leadership issues as identified through the Forum for Western Pennsylvania School Superintendents and the Advisory Committee."

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ACADEMY

Stanford

In a collaboration that is similar to one of Harvard's in bringing together a school of education and a business school, Stanford is offering the Executive Program for Educational Leaders (EPEL). This is a program that is not solely for superintendents, but rather for school leadership teams from diverse urban, suburban or rural school districts with more than 10,000 students who are or will be engaged in school redesign activities at the district or school level.

EPEL recently finished its second offering of a week-long residential program. The first year had 63 participants, representing 10 to 12 districts. Although no formal follow-up over the year was planned, there was considerable involvement at other conferences on related topics.

Through grants from Goldman Sachs Foundation, participant costs (estimated at $5,000 per person) were reduced to $1,000 for the team leader, $750 for the second team member and $500 for each additional team member up to a total of six team members

The program is guided by a philosophy that makes strong connections between business-management approaches and educational approaches. The language in its web site captures this:

> In the effort to fundamentally change America's public schools to meet the demands of the
> 21st century, educational leaders must be equipped with knowledge, skills and experiences that
> draw upon research and proven effective practices. They require expertise that goes well beyond
> the administrative maintenance of the traditional school system. Such leaders must identify and
> implement strategies for creating coherent and powerful instructional programs that are based
> on a deep understanding of learning and teaching.

> The Executive Program for Educational Leaders (EPEL) is a one-week academy designed to
> further the professional development of educator teams – superintendents, principals, teachers and
> other school leaders – who work in school systems serving diverse student populations and who
> are engaged in the important task of transforming their schools for better learning and teaching.
> Using a learning model that is collaborative, integrative and experiential, school district teams will
> explore the core issues surrounding school redesign and effective management of high-performing
> organizations with their colleagues and Stanford faculty.

Session topics at EPEL include:
- Redesigning Complex Systems
- Essential Features of a High-Performing School
- Effective Governance and Decision-Making
- Leading Strategic Change
- Curricular and Instructional Design

Materials describing EPEL suggest that expected outcomes for participants include:
- Deeper knowledge of the principles of school redesign and aspects of high-performing organizations
- Extensive interaction and exchange of ideas with leading faculty from Stanford's Graduate School of Business and the School of Education
- A team-created action plan for addressing key organizational and strategic challenges specific to your school/district
- A strong network of relationships with a diverse array of other educational leaders

- Greater appreciation of management strategies for leveraging quality
- Improved ability to evaluate the rigor and relevance of new educational and management concepts

The program, according to Mo-Yun Lei Fong of the Stanford Educational Leadership Institute, brought together deliberately mixed district teams. She notes that one of the key ideas of the institute is that leadership does not happen in isolation. Districts were encouraged to field teams that included principals, union leaders and board members. Three-fourths of them included the superintendent or assistant superintendent. Another key idea grows out of the business and education school collaboration. She notes the importance of merging business-school practices about running efficient and high-performing organizations and education-school notions of tying structure and organization to instruction. She felt that the business-school side "really pushed the thinking of the educators – to think about organizational development and business management."

Impacts have been assessed through staff follow-up at mid-year conferences and through telephone conversations with team leaders, asking what they have implemented from the summer and what issues they continue to struggle with.

The Executive Program for Educational Leadership has links with several other area and Stanford-based organizations, including (from the website):

Center for Social Innovation
The mission of the Center for Social Innovation (CSI) is to promote a more innovative, effective and efficient social sector in the United States and around the world by drawing on the cutting-edge knowledge and research of Stanford University faculty. CSI activities are based on the premise that building the capabilities of nonprofit managers is an essential component of improving the social sector.

Stanford Educational Leadership Institute
The Stanford Educational Leadership Institute (SELI) is a partnership among the Stanford University School of Education (SUSE), the Center for Social Innovation (CSI) at the Stanford Graduate School of Business and The Goldman Sachs Foundation. The Institute seeks to provide current and upcoming educational leaders support, proven resources and tools to transform the education system. SELI collaborates with the California School Redesign Network in developing a broader knowledge base about school design, teaching and learning, curriculum and assessment and professional development.

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FOUNDATIONS

This section describes programs that are sponsored primarily by a foundation, as opposed to programs that are described elsewhere because they are affiliated with another entity, such as a university. Two foundations are referred to in passing in this section, even though they do not currently provide executive training for sitting superintendents. One is the Broad Foundation, which has made a serious commitment to the preparation of superintendents. At the moment, its plans for existing superintendent programs are limited to alumni follow-up and services for graduates, although they may grow. The other is the Danforth Foundation. For almost a decade, Danforth supported a highly regarded and influential national network for sitting superintendents. Although Danforth phased out the funding, its network is described below, linked to one of its (continuing) spinoffs, the Western Pennsylvania School Superintendent Network.

BellSouth Foundation, in collaboration with the (Schlecty) Center for Leadership in School Reform: Superintendents Leadership Network

Since 1997 the BellSouth Foundation has worked in a close collaboration with the Center for Leadership in School Reform (renamed the Schlecty Center for Leadership in School Reform during summer 2004) in developing and supporting a network of superintendents in the southeast region. According to its president, Mary Boehm, the foundation decided to focus on leadership after it saw how important sustained involvement of principals, superintendents, and policymakers were on its educational grantmaking efforts. In developing its superintendent network, the foundation invited what it saw as the "best and brightest" district leaders in the BellSouth region. Some 73 superintendents have participated since the network was started in 1997, with 32 currently active members, nine affiliates and 32 alumni. Active members commit to attend three two-and-a-half-day meetings a year. Meeting sites rotate throughout the southeast region.

Each convening includes some connection to the particular community that is chosen as the meeting site – capturing, as Boehm puts it, "the best of what is happening in the city." For example, for the 50th anniversary of Brown v. Board of Education, Charlotte, North Carolina, was the venue honoring the history of civil-rights work in that city and the district's role in legal challenges that ultimately lead to the Brown decision. Throughout all the sessions, there is a consistent focus on the inclusion of business, medical and industry leaders and ideas as ways to help the "superintendents think about leadership out of their school frameworks."

The Center for Leadership in School Reform has been a close partner since it responded to the original request for proposal. According to Boehm, the center has added considerable depth to the program and has provided a framework for grounding network conversations in the realities of school and keeping the focus on outcomes for students. "Phil Schlecty specifically has provided a strong intellectual edge, pushing the superintendents to keep thinking about ways to deepen the engagement of all children in learning," Boehm said. "He and the staff of the center have provided important elements of theory to the network and promoted a deeper level thinking for all of us."

Although the foundation funds the network, the convening of the meetings and the network participation of the Schlechty Center, the superintendents and their districts must cover the costs of their travel. As Boehm puts it, "we want them to have some skin in the game." When asked about how involvement in the network had impacted the superintendents' districts, Boehm referred to dozens of occasions in which superintendents have reported changed behaviors; she discussed the foundation's plans to do more systematic analyses of these changes, as well as to look at how the districts, using their own money, have done more intensive work with the Schlecty Center. She describes some other evidence of programmatic impacts over the years, including a study called "Inspiring Leadership" completed a few years ago that assessed the impact of the first several years of the network, and made suggestions – many of them since put into place – for improving it. In addition, a more recent publication, "Superintendents Leading Change," addresses some of the lessons coming out of the network and makes suggestions for how a network can help to build district capacity and in "informing the field through inquiry work." Specific recommendations in the booklet address the development of a common vision and the key aspect of the relationship superintendents have with their boards, other district leaders and principals.

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Gates Foundation /Washington State

This leadership and district change program is a by-invitation-only effort supported by the Gates Foundation for 10 public districts and one Catholic diocese in Washington State. Each of the participating districts has a district change team and a coach provided by the grant. Every other month all the district teams meet, all the coaches meet for a day, and all the superintendents meet for half a day. In addition, at least half of the district change teams include the superintendent. Working

with the set of "common characteristics for high-achievement districts" listed below, the initiative uses intensive coaching (four to six days per month) and tailored on-site professional development to move forward.

A common set of characteristics, according the program's web site, includes:
- a sharp focus on sustained professional development for instructional improvement and supervision
- strong, distributed leadership
- performance accountability
- effective use of technology
- shared values
- public engagement

Tony Wagner, one of the key architects of the initiative, describes how the efforts really started to "take off" when a theory of action evolved and was clearly articulated. Over time, this theory of action evolved into one that is captured by the following seven principles, which Wagner has summarized and elaborated in an article in *Ed Week* (http://www.edweek. org/ew/articles/2003/11/12/11wagner.h23.html).

These principles include:
- a sense of urgency and the transparent use of data
- a widely shared vision of good teaching
- a focus in all adult meetings on curriculum and instruction in ways that model good teaching
- having standards that are clear and having assessment that focuses on student work
- having supervision that is rigorous and focused on good instruction
- using professional development that is on-site, job-embedded and models best practices
- using data frequently for diagnostic purposes and scheduling time for this shared work

Recently, the district teams have also focused on developing educational "communities of practice" to encourage exploration of shared "problems of practice" and discussion of real case studies. A description of the idea and how it was used in a recent Gates district team meeting can be found in another recent Wagner *Ed Week* commentary: www.edweek.org/ew/articles/2004/10/27/09wagner.h24.html.

According to Wagner, evaluation has been conducted at several levels: on the content of the meetings, on the coaching and on the development of a community of practice at the network level. An independent evaluation done at the district level is underway, with plans not only to look at test score data, but also to take a systematic look at classroom observation data. Using a rubric for observation in more than 600 classrooms, evaluators will be able to track changes in classroom practices and approaches.

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Western Pennsylvania School Superintendents Forum (offshoot of the Danforth Foundation's Forum for the American Superintendent)
For a decade, beginning in 1992, the Danforth Foundation supported the Forum for the American Superintendent. Serving more than 200 superintendents (no more than 50 at a time), the forum provided a "safe harbor" for superintendents, with agendas determined by them and with representative cross-sections of superintendents involved – representing urban, rural

and suburban districts that had at least 50 percent of students "at risk." The forum's work was organized in two ways (according to its web site, http://www.orgs.muohio.edu/forumscp/FrmInitv.html):

> *The Forum is built around a two-part strategy. The first strategy focuses on semiannual, four-day retreats devoted to a single topic. These are plenary meetings involving all Forum members. The second strategy involves special initiatives focused on critical topics Forum members have identified. Members select eight to 10 "lead superintendents" to develop grassroots responses to problems in their school districts.*

> *To date, the Forum has mounted five initiatives. After the entire Forum membership approved the broad outline of an initiative, an Advisory Subcommittee of Forum members designed the effort and invited interested participants to apply for Foundation support.*

> *Each lead initiative superintendent selected is eligible to receive small grants for planning, technical assistance, development of action plans and travel to meetings associated with the initiative. At full Forum meetings, lead superintendents routinely discuss their progress and provide written reports, enabling all Forum members to share the lead superintendents' experiences and gain a deeper understanding of the issues.*

According to Dick Wallace, a former superintendent and now faculty member at Pitt, the Danforth forum was one of the most influential in the country and, he says, the "initiatives were the fuel that drove the reform." The initiatives, their times in operation, and their web sites are listed below:

Success for All Children Initiative (1994-1999) www.orgs.muohio.edu/forumscp/SuccAllC.html
Leadership Initiative (1995-2000) www.orgs.muohio.edu/forumscp/LeadInit.html
Public Engagement Initiative (1996-2001) www.orgs.muohio.edu/forumscp/PubEngIn.html
Principalship Initiative (1997-2002) www.orgs.muohio.edu/forumscp/PrinInit.html
Race and Class Initiative (1997-2002) www.orgs.muohio.edu/forumscp/RaceClas.html

> *Western Pennsylvania School Superintendents Forum*
> The Western Pennsylvania School Superintendents Forum is one of several regional spinoffs from the Danforth experience (others are in Missouri and Kansas), in which Danforth provided a framework and seed money and local funders are supporting an adaptation of the national model. The Western Pennsylvania group, which meets twice a year, also does some of its work using the "initiative" model. It has a close affiliation with Pitt and plays a part in determining some of the focus of the university's doctoral program in school leadership. For a fuller account of the history of the Western Pennsylvania Forum, as well as an assessment of the key learnings by its participating superintendents, see a recent dissertation by Michelle Miller (2004).

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FOR-PROFIT COMPANIES

Educational Research Development Institute
The Educational Research Development Institute was founded almost 19 years ago by Michael Kneale, a former school superintendent, for the express purpose of bringing sitting superintendents together to advise companies that provide products and services for schools. Some 80 corporations pay to have the focused input from panels drawn from among the 94

sitting superintendents who work with ERDI. According to its website, ERDI's "mission is to assist quality companies in more effectively meeting the needs of the K-12 education market by providing these companies with specific and productive interaction with a handpicked panel comprised of the finest leaders in American K-12 education."

Twice a year, timed to precede American Association of School Administrators' national conferences, ERDI convenes groups of superintendents who serve on five three-hour panels over two and a half days. Each panel focuses on a particular product or service – a line of textbooks, computer hardware or software, etc. Representatives of the companies who are selling or hoping to sell these products to schools come to listen. They do not come to deliver sales pitches; according to Kneale, founder and president, "that would totally miss the point." They come to learn from "those in district positions who will be held accountable for outcomes – the superintendents." Kneale cites numerous examples of how products and services have been refined to better meet the needs of schools, which was one of his primary purposes in establishing the organization.

In addition to these benefits for the corporations that fund ERDI, Kneale notes a significant set of benefits for the superintendents. As individuals who are often seen as "lightning rods" for dissatisfactions in the districts, superintendents who participate in the ERDI panels get an opportunity for their expertise to be recognized and for them to be respected and treated well (the two-and-a-half-day sessions are held in nice surroundings; there is a banquet during each session). Kneale notes that superintendents also receive a modest stipend (about $2,000 for four days), which he considers more symbolic than substantive. He also notes that they must use vacation days, or other days in which they are clearly not on their districts' payroll, to participate. Moreover, and particularly relevant to this report, he describes the "wonderful learning opportunity" for the superintendents and the powerful forms of networking that go on. Kneale stresses the learning that takes place from the interaction with members of the corporate world as well as from each other, providing examples of how superintendents find themselves more engaged in issues of instruction (in contrast to their usual focus on management) when they serve on panels for a book company, for instance. The contact with dozens of other "top-notch" superintendents from around the country in a repeated and sustained way adds another significant benefit, according to Kneale.

Evaluations are done at the end of each session by the superintendents and by the corporate representatives, mostly to ascertain the quality of the feedback offered by the superintendents and to verify that the corporate representatives were not using this is a sales opportunity.

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The District Management Council
The District Management Council (DMC) is a membership organization, started earlier this year, that provides public school superintendents from districts of various sizes with long-term strategic management advisory services for a fixed annual fee.

Members in DMC receive four essential components for the annual fee of $25,000 (year 2004 rate). First, DMC publishes two sophisticated management consulting reports ("Best Practices Report") on topics of strategic interest to the superintendents. The topics are chosen by the membership. DMC analyzes and disseminates the best management practices for improving student achievement, increasing operational effectiveness and reducing cost throughout the district. Second, following the release of each report, DMC strives to provide an efficient and effective forum for client members to learn from each other at Superintendents' Strategy Summits. This past summer, DMC released its first report, *Marshalling Resources: Aligning Financial Resources with Strategic Objectives*, which was accompanied by a two-day

conference that drew together superintendents from the 15 districts (including Houston ISD; San Francisco; Dallas ISD; Christina, Delaware; Milford, Connecticut; Boston) who were members at that point. The summits involve presentation of the findings and questions and discussion about them, as well as relevant teaching cases drawn from non-educational settings. Third, DMC provides Customized Executive Briefings on-site at school districts for the senior administrative team of each member. These are typically one-day presentations on the topics covered in each Best Practices Report. Finally, DMC provides unlimited access to call-in support to the membership on the topics covered in the reports.

According to Managing Director John J-H Kim, DMC's goal is to help districts operate more strategically: "Districts don't generally have access to the kind of analytics and strategic thinking that comparable managers in the private sector would." Kim added that he and his partners wanted to create "… a new type of professional-services firm that school districts haven't had access to." Kim notes that private-sector management consulting from top firms might typically only be available to a dozen or so large urban districts, which might have access to foundation support or the opportunity for the occasional pro bono service.

Evaluation takes the form of feedback from sessions, reaction to the topics and informal follow-up. Kim notes that since this is not fully-customized, fee-for-service consulting work, it is harder to track specific impacts and connections of the work on the districts. However, several districts have started implementing some of the management best practices shared in its recent report. Ultimately, he notes that the real evaluation of the use of the service will be in its continued membership growth. "If we fail to provide good value, our business model won't be successful," he said. "We are expanding using referrals, and we offer a money-back guarantee."

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THE FOLLOWING PROGRAMS ARE INCLUDED IN THIS STUDY:

National, State and Regional Superintendent Membership Organizations

American Association of School Administrators
(New) Superintendent Academy, New Jersey Association of School Administrators
Project Leadership, Washington Association of School Administrators
Western States Benchmarking Consortium

Other Nonprofits (Non-Superintendent)

Aspen Institute Program on Education – Urban Superintendents Network
Connecticut Center for School Change – Superintendents Network
The Council of Great City Schools
Center for Creative Leadership – Leadership at the Peak, and other programs
Institute for Education Leadership (IEL) – Educational Policy Fellows Program
WestEd – Executive Leadership Center for California Superintendents

University-Based Programs

Columbia University – New Superintendent Seminar Series
Harvard University
Change Leadership Group
Public Education Leadership Program
Superintendent Leadership Program
University of Pennsylvania – School Study Councils
University of Pittsburgh
Stanford University – Executive Program for Educational Leaders

Foundations

BellSouth Foundation – Superintendents Leadership Network
Gates Foundation/Washington State
Western Pennsylvania School Superintendents Forum

For-Profit Companies

The Educational Research Development Institute
The District Management Council

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The Wallace Foundation®

Supporting ideas.
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Our mission is to enable institutions to expand learning and enrichment opportunities for all people. We do this by supporting and sharing effective ideas and practices.

To achieve our mission, we have three objectives:
- Strengthen education leadership to improve student achievement
- Improve after–school learning opportunities
- Expand participation in arts and culture