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PERSPECTIVE

GETTING PRINCIPAL MENTORING RIGHT:
Lessons from the Field

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This report was produced as part of The Wallace Foundation's commitment to develop and share ideas and instructive lessons in the areas in which we are engaged: strengthening education leadership to improve student achievement; enhancing out-of-school learning opportunities; and building appreciation and demand for the arts. The report was produced by Jody Spiro, Ed.D., Senior Education Officer; Mary C. Mattis, Ph.D., Senior Research and Evaluation Officer; and Lee D. Mitgang, Director of Editorial Services, who wrote the report.

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PREFACE AND SUMMARY OF HIGHLIGHTS

This report had its origins when staff at The Wallace Foundation, which has been working since 2000 to improve school leadership, became intrigued by the recent spread of mentoring for new school leaders during their first years on the job. Roughly half of the nation's states have now adopted mentoring requirements for new principals—a striking turnabout considering how rare acceptance of or funding for such mentoring was prior to 2000. The trend has been most apparent among the 22 states, and districts within those states, that have participated in Wallace's education leadership initiative. But it also includes a significant number of states and districts that are not Wallace grantees.

Why have so many states and districts lately turned to principal mentoring? What can be learned from their early experiences? What are the verifiable benefits to new principals and to those whose lives these novice leaders affect? What are the difficulties and challenges? Most of all, what should the core goal of principal mentoring be? And given that goal, what might we say about what "quality mentoring" looks like?

To find answers, we reviewed existing literature on mentoring both in the education field and in other professions. We also interviewed leading experts on mentoring, both as it relates to school leaders and other educators and to those entering other fields and occupations.

The core of our research consisted of site visits in 2006 to two districts that are participants in Wallace's education leadership initiative—New York City (with a specific focus on the NYC Leadership Academy) and the Jefferson County, KY Public Schools. These sites were selected for a closer look not so much because they have successfully addressed every challenge in providing effective mentoring—they haven't—but because each, in very distinct ways, has put considerable effort into creating well-functioning systems that seek to make mentoring an important means of preparing new school leaders to drive improvements in teaching and learning. We believe that their experiences to date yield instructive and broadly relevant insights for many other states and districts in identifying the benefits, the common pitfalls and possible policy responses.

What, then, can be said about this trend toward mentoring for beginning principals?

On the one hand, it almost certainly reflects a growing and welcome, if belated, national recognition that the ongoing training and preparation of school leaders matters a great deal—enough to invest more thought, energy and money in it—if states and districts are to meet the nation's high-minded goal of universal student success. Repeatedly, we heard that the days of "sink or swim" for new principals must end if they are to stand any reasonable chance of succeeding in their increasingly tough jobs.

That's the good news.

Our research also led us to conclude, however, that many if not most existing mentoring programs are falling well short of their potential. Too often, existing state and district-level programs result in "buddy systems" or check-list exercises that don't do nearly enough to help prepare principals to become knowledgeable and courageous leaders of better teaching and learning in their schools.

Among the common symptoms:

- Vague or unclear goals
- Insufficient focus on instructional leadership and/or overemphasis on managerial role
- Weak or non-existent training for mentors
- Insufficient mentoring time or duration to provide enough sustained support to prepare new school leaders for their multifaceted job challenges
- Lack of meaningful data to assess benefits or build a credible case for sustained support
- Underfunding that contributes to all of these shortcomings.

In identifying these common problems, we are not suggesting that the mentoring currently being provided to novice principals is a failed or wasted exercise. To the contrary, our research found that both mentors and protégés tend to be very satisfied with the experience. Still, while there may be truth in the proposition that "some mentoring is better than none," this report will argue that these common shortcomings, if unaddressed, will seriously limit the good that mentoring accomplishes. As a result, we worry that it will be significantly harder to make the case for sustaining mentoring programs or for funding them at adequate levels in the face of competing education budgetary priorities.

We suggest, in short, that this welcome trend toward mentoring of principals should take an important next step by embracing a larger vision—beyond a buddy system that merely helps new principals adapt to a flawed system, to one whose core goal is to help prepare a new generation of principals willing and able to challenge the status quo and lift the quality of teaching and learning in every school.

To that end, we propose the following "quality guidelines" for states and districts that are considering adopting new mentoring programs, or improving existing ones:

- High-quality training for mentors should be a requirement and should be provided by any state or district with mentoring.
- States or districts that require mentoring should gather meaningful information about its efficacy: especially, how mentoring is or is not contributing to the development of *leadership behaviors and dispositions* that are needed to change the culture of schools toward improved teaching and learning.
- To adequately support new principals as they develop from novices to self-assured leaders of change, mentoring should be provided for at least a year, and ideally two or more years.
- State and local funding for principal mentoring should be sufficient to provide quality training, stipends commensurate with the importance and time requirements of the task, and a lengthy enough period of mentoring to provide new principals a meaningful professional induction.
- Above all, the primary goal of mentoring should be clear and unambiguous: to provide new principals with the knowledge, skills and courage to become leaders of change who put teaching and learning first in their schools.

I. PRINCIPAL MENTORING: AN EMERGING NATIONAL TREND

The idea of providing novices entering any field or profession with a wise, experienced guide and role model dates to ancient times and has gained widespread acceptance in many walks of life: from law, medicine and nursing to business, engineering, architecture and library work. Within public education, mentoring for teachers began to spread in the early 1980s as part of efforts to reduce attrition and improve instructional quality. Some form of teacher mentoring is now required in at least 30 states[1], and research suggests that teachers who receive mentoring tend to be less likely to leave their assigned schools or the profession after their first year.[2]

By contrast, the notion that novice school principals should get similar help when they first assume their positions has only recently gained widespread credence or support in states and districts.[3] The reasons aren't hard to grasp. Compared with the more obvious rationale for investing in mentoring teachers, whose impact on children's learning is direct and readily grasped, the justification for public funding for principal mentoring is not as immediately transparent, given the less direct influence of school leaders on student success.[4]

There has also existed, both within the profession and the public, a long-standing "sink-or-swim" mindset toward principals:[5] "You're supposed to be a leader, so lead!" as one veteran principal characterized this prevalent attitude to us. A New York City principal who became a school leader some 15 years ago recently recalled her own initiation into the profession: "They thought, 'she's fine, leave her alone.' But I'm not sure I didn't need a sounding board, time to stop and reflect. I think that new principals are overwhelmed."

"There has been a sink-or-swim mindset toward principals."

Added to this "sink-or-swim" mentality are the complex practical, political and financial challenges awaiting any state or district thinking about providing principal mentoring: how to select prospective mentors; how to train them; how to establish appropriate criteria for matching mentors and new principals; how to provide mentors adequate compensation so that they have the incentives to put in the considerable time and thought that a good mentoring relationship requires; how to focus the subject-matter of mentoring so that it meets not only the individual needs of new principals but the goals and standards of districts or states; and not least, how to secure and sustain the funding to enable all of the above.

Another impediment to the spread of principal mentoring has been the scarcity of data about its efficacy—for example, evidence of its impact on retention of new principals or on student learning. Much of the existing information gathered by states or districts[6] has tended to be subjective and anecdotal, aimed primarily at gauging satisfaction levels of mentors and mentees and whether or not they felt particular development goals were met.[7] Such information is not without value. But for the most part, it doesn't specifically address whether mentoring is promoting the retention of promising new leaders or the specific behaviors that signal a willingness and ability to lead instructional improvement.

Notwithstanding these inhibiting factors, principal mentoring has been

rapidly gaining acceptance among states and urban districts since 2000. A number of districts have provided mentoring for years without any state mandates to do so.[8] But only a handful of states—notably Kentucky and West Virginia—required all new principals to undergo mentoring prior to 2000. By 2006, roughly half the nation's states had enacted such requirements.[9]

Along with those state-level actions, professional associations such as the National Association of Elementary School Principals and the National Association of Secondary School Principals have launched model programs to certify and train mentors, as have a number of state-level professional organizations representing school leaders.[10]

THE BENEFITS OF MENTORING

Benefits to mentees
- Guidance and support during initiation
- Increased self-confidence
- Encouragement to take risks to achieve goals
- Opportunities to discuss professional issues with a veteran
- Promotes networking

Benefits to organizations
- Promotes positive organizational climate
- Clarifies roles and expectations
- May increase satisfaction and retention rates
- Suggests commitment and loyalty to employees

Benefits to mentors
- Opportunities for professionals to strengthen their knowledge and improve communications, teaching and coaching skills
- Greater collegiality among new and veteran professionals
- Satisfaction gained from helping newcomers to a field
- Enhances professional reputation for commitment

Source: Summary of research on benefits of mentoring by Georgia Department of Technical & Adult Education, www.coe.uga.edu/chds/mentoring/benefits.htm

What accounts for this upsurge in principal mentoring? An analysis of the trend by Wallace Foundation staff suggests a variety of motivations.

In common with other fields, mentoring is almost universally seen as a potent mechanism to help new principals "get their sea-legs" in a fast-changing, complicated system—as Sandra J. Stein, CEO of the NYC Leadership Academy which has pioneered an intensive, systemwide mentoring program put it. The harsh truth is that the new school leader faces a dizzying array of tasks associated with managing a highly complex organization: from budgeting and busing to discipline, personnel and union matters and public relations.

An elementary school principal we met in the Bronx undoubtedly spoke for many when she told us: "No matter what preparation anyone has, being the principal is not the same. Nothing prepares you for the job."

The growing popularity of mentoring can also be reasonably taken as a sign of heightened appreciation and understanding by education policymakers and funders of the critical role school leaders can play in sparking improvements in learning. And by extension, it signals an acceptance of the idea that the professional development of new principals is a worthwhile public investment.

The spread of principal mentoring has also been catalyzed by the fear of looming principal shortages due to the anticipated retirement of as many as 40 percent of the current crop of school leaders.[11] The thought is that mentoring can help districts and states build a well-qualified pipeline of leaders.

For example, the Jefferson County, KY Public Schools, which includes Louisville, has sought to make mentoring a seamless part of its "grow-your-own leader" philosophy and offers a rich range of some two dozen pre-service and in-service professional development opportunities to both practicing and aspiring principals.

A handful of states, notably Kentucky, regard mentoring not only as a means to prepare and support new principals, but as a way to assess their first-year performance and inform the decision about whether they should be licensed and keep their school leadership jobs.

Intriguingly, a few places such as New York City with its recently-established NYC Leadership Academy appear to be striving for an expanded vision of mentoring. Like many other districts, they see mentoring as an important means to familiarize new principals with the workings and priorities of the system. But they also see it as a way to prepare new leaders not just to fit into the system, but to challenge and change it in the interests of putting the learning of all children first and foremost in their schools.

II. GETTING MENTORING RIGHT: QUALITY GUIDELINES

As encouraging as this national trend is, we also conclude that much of the mentoring now in place falls well short of its potential to benefit the principals themselves, and the districts and the children who are affected by these leaders. Knowing how to help novice principals develop a vision of leadership for change implies a level and kind of mentor training that is, as yet, not the norm among existing state or district programs. Gene Bottoms, senior vice president of the Southern Regional Education Board[12] and an authority on mentoring, put it bluntly: "A lot of the current mentoring is just providing a favor to principals. It is not really a serious effort."

Ellen Moir, executive director of the New Teacher Center at the University of California, Santa Cruz that has developed an innovative and influential model of principal mentoring, (*see textbox, p. 12)*, echoed that view: "I don't think our profession knows what ambitious mentoring looks like. And because we don't know what it looks like, we give it lip service. We think that anyone can be a mentor and we don't train seriously for it. And we don't hold mentors accountable."

IMPROVING MENTORING: QUALITY GUIDELINES

Our research led us to identify several areas where current programs are commonly falling short. That assessment, in turn, suggested a number of "quality guidelines" that might be useful to states and districts in identifying and addressing shortcomings and strengthening their programs so that they are likelier to be sustained and better serve the ends of leadership for learning.

> ***Guideline one: High-quality training for mentors should be a requirement and should be provided by any state or district with mentoring.***

An effective mentoring relationship should start with a serious commitment to training mentors in the skills and knowledge necessary to support new principals as they enter the profession. The mere fact that a person has been a successful principal is no guarantee that he or she will be a successful mentor. Necessary skills include an understanding of goal setting, active listening and conflict management. High-quality training for mentors also prepares them to provide and receive feedback that encourages self-reflection, is not judgmental, does not simply provide a new principal with "war stories" or "right answers," and aims at moving new principals from dependence to independence.

Much of the training offered today—where it is offered at all—does not deal effectively with these essential mentoring skills and approaches. Nearly half of the states that require mentoring make no specific provision for training. In other places, training is minimal and often focuses more on compliance issues than on how to establish a successful mentoring relationship tied both to identifying and addressing individual needs and realizing standards that support learning goals.

Mentoring expert Susan Villani writes that inadequate training can lead to the creation of mere "buddies" who "…offer help as they think of it, may listen and help problem-solve, and may introduce and support the new principal in the community. However, buddies don't make a commitment to systematically support and challenge new principals to reflect on their practice. Buddies may be well-intentioned colleagues but have little idea how to coach a new principal. So while it's always good to have a buddy, that is insufficient support for someone beginning, or even continuing in, a principalship."[13]

Guideline two: States or districts that require mentoring should gather meaningful information about its efficacy: especially, how mentoring is or is not contributing to the development of leadership behaviors that are needed to change the culture of schools toward improved teaching and learning.

Some states and districts have made a start at gathering information about mentoring. Most often this consists of surveys of mentors and new principals about their satisfaction or dissatisfaction with the experience. Most reveal high levels of satisfaction among those who receive mentoring. However, few if any states or districts have gathered data that would allow for a rigorous, credible assessment of whether the behavior of leaders actually changed as a result of the mentoring in ways that enable them to drive improved teaching and learning.

One reason for the lack of such data is cost, according to state officials we interviewed. Gene Wilhoit, former Education Commissioner of Kentucky,[14] told us that his state is just beginning to take steps to gather data on mentoring: "We've done some general following of the individuals, follow-up interviews with mentors and mentees. In terms of tracking the behaviors, the desired behaviors into practices, we've not done that at all. That's a very labor intensive, expensive proposition."

Despite the costs and challenges of gathering meaningful data, however, the case for maintaining mentoring or obtaining more adequate funding may well depend on the willingness of states and districts to document convincingly the efficacy of mentoring in developing principals whose behavior aligns with state and local standards and results in tangible improvements in teaching and learning in their schools.

"They thought, 'she's fine, leave her alone.' But I'm not sure I didn't need a sounding board, time to stop and reflect. I think that new principals are overwhelmed."

Guideline three: Mentoring should be provided for at least a year, and ideally two or more years, in order to give new leaders the necessary support as they develop from novices to self-assured leaders of change.

Research on mentoring in all fields is replete with references to developmental stages that a good mentor should be aware of so that he or she can serve as a guide as the new leader passes through them. Villani cites a body of research that posits five such stages for new principals: "survival," that is, the "shock" of beginning leadership; "control," in which the new leader typically needs help in getting on top of the job and setting priorities; "stability," in which the basic routines of the job become second nature and are mastered; "educational leadership," in which the primary focus becomes curriculum and instruction; and "professional actualization," when the new leader feels internal confirmation and self-confidence and has developed a personal vision.[15]

In short, it is hard to imagine most school leaders successfully going through even the initial stages of this developmental continuum within the year or less of mentoring that states or districts typically provide. This also falls well short of the minimum of two years of sustained, coherent mentoring that researchers on mentoring for any profession largely agree are needed in order to guide the novice through the developmental stages that characterize a successful mentor-protégé relationship.

Guideline four: State and local funding for principal mentoring should be sufficient to provide quality training, stipends commensurate with the importance and time requirements of the task, and a lengthy enough period of mentoring to allow new principals a meaningful professional induction.

Reliable, comparable data on the true cost of mentoring programs are difficult to come by. Existing per-participant cost figures in states or districts may or may not factor in, for example, the cost of mentor training, various administrative costs including meetings, transportation and staff salaries and benefits, and calculations of the value of the time spent by both mentor and protégé. Regardless of such varia-

tions, it is safe to say that funding for principal mentoring tends to be modest with relatively few exceptions. State-level appropriations for mentoring typically are well under $1 million per year. Weak funding contributes to inadequate mentor training, insufficient duration of mentoring, and the modest stipends that characterize many programs, thus compounding the difficulties in recruiting well-qualified mentors.

The stipend levels for mentors in states that require mentoring are a telling symptom of these tight budgets. Stipends generally range from less than $500 to about $1,500—hardly a lavish incentive for attracting sitting principals to spend a minimum of 50 hours of contact time with new principals, and many more hours getting trained, filling in forms and performing other duties.[16]

Along with funding, time is the other key resource for quality mentoring that is often in short supply. Especially in programs that rely on active principals as mentors rather than retired school leaders, mentoring needs to be structured with flexible scheduling so that there is enough sustained time and availability to form an effective mentor-protégé relationship.

MENTORING FOR CHANGE: THE CRITICAL GUIDELINE

If there is a single crucial quality guideline that emerges from our research and site visits, it is this:

> ***Guideline five: The primary goal of mentoring should be unambiguously focused on fostering new school leaders who:***
>
> - ***Put learning first in their time and attention and know how to rally their entire school communities around that goal;***
> - ***See when fundamental change in the status quo is needed in order to make better teaching and learning happen; and***
> - ***Have the courage to keep the needs of all children front and center and not shrink from confronting opposition to change when necessary.***

Encouragingly, the mentoring provided in many states and districts is framed around helping new principals meet statewide leadership standards and state and district learning goals. In practice, however, it is far from clear that the mentoring most new principals are receiving is focused primarily on instructional improvement or on preparing new leaders to drive the necessary organizational changes to lift teaching and learning. "Mentoring for change" means helping new principals develop the knowledge, skills and commitment to challenge the status quo where needed in order to promote a more equitable and effective learning environment.

These five quality guidelines should not be read as a comprehensive or formulaic "how to" for effective mentoring. Instead, we believe they offer useful parameters for any state or district as they consider how to take mentoring the next crucial step so that it fosters leaders of change who are willing and able to reshape the status quo to better serve the interests of teaching and learning.

In the following section, we describe and analyze mentoring programs for new principals in New York City through its Leadership Academy, and in the Jefferson County, KY Public Schools. Both districts have placed unusual emphasis on the professional development of new and existing school leaders. And each decided, on its own, to make mentoring a key part of its comprehensive leadership improvement strategies.[17]

"No matter what preparation anyone has, being the principal is not the same. Nothing prepares you for the job."

During our visits to these sites, we spent time in elementary and secondary schools, interviewed new principals, their mentors, teachers in their schools, and district leaders. We also talked with state education leaders in Kentucky, where a statewide system of mentoring has heavily influenced the local mentoring system developed in Jefferson County. (New York State does not yet have a statewide requirement for principal mentoring).

These sites were selected for a closer look not so much as exemplars of "best practices," but because they offer instructive lessons about how two very different districts with distinct circumstances, philosophies and histories developed mentoring systems exhibiting considerable strengths as well as many of the problems and challenges that other states and districts are grappling with.

III. LESSONS FROM THE FIELD

MENTORING IN NEW YORK CITY: DEVELOPING LEADERS OF CHANGE

The context: a changing of the guard

In common with many urban districts, New York City has faced a dilemma: the anticipated retirement of a large percentage of its principals within a few years—in this case, some two-thirds of its 1,400 principals. With those veteran principals would depart decades of leadership experience. To the Mayor and the Schools Chancellor, their imminent departure was not just a challenge. It was also a rare opening to prepare a new generation of principals willing and able to lead dramatic instructional improvements and shake up an often-resistant system. This need for a new cadre of bold school leaders was further underscored in the summer of 2006 when nearly one in four of the city's schools became "Empowerment Schools." In exchange for unprecedented authority over budgeting, scheduling and hiring, principals in these schools sign performance agreements setting forth school improvement goals and holding them accountable for results.

The key vehicle for recruiting and preparing leaders equal to the challenge of turning around the city's lowest-performing schools has been the NYC Leadership Academy. Launched in January 2003 with private funding (including from The Wallace Foundation) and with the strong backing of city and school system leaders, the Academy represented a systemwide strategy for recruiting, preparing and supporting school principals, especially for the city's hardest-to-staff schools. This systemwide strategy was in keeping with the historic reorganization of the school system underway at the time that abolished the central school board and placed key aspects of governance under the control of the Mayor and Schools Chancellor.

"We're not mentoring for the status quo."

The Academy provides intensive pre-service training to a highly select number of principal candidates. It also provides in-service mentoring to virtually all of the city's new sitting principals through its principal support programs.[18] By fall 2006, the Academy had graduated and placed some 165 principals, or about 11 percent of all the city's principals. And it had provided a full year of mentoring to more than 800 first-year principals throughout the city.

The costs for the Academy's mentoring programs are almost certainly among the highest of any urban district: ranging from about $5,500 to $7,500 per new principal. The single biggest reason for these exceptional levels is the compensation costs of the Academy's mentors—or coaches as they are now called[19]—who are full-time Academy employees. Each coach carries a caseload of 11 to 15 new principals.[20] The coaches are, almost without exception, former city principals or principal supervisors.

Even more than cost, however, what sets the Academy apart from many other principal induction and training programs is that it sees itself as a vehicle not so much to help new principals fit in to the system, but to change it. As Academy CEO Sandra Stein puts it, "we're not mentoring for the status quo." The Academy's goal has been to develop and support a new breed of leaders who are prepared to act boldly to

turn around schools where student achievement has stagnated.

Still, this guiding principle has required the Academy to strike a tricky balance. It makes little sense to expect the Academy's graduates, many of whom have little or no prior experience in formal school leadership positions, to plunge Evel Knievel-like into "change mode" without first gaining a solid understanding of the goals, culture and street-level realities of the city's fast-changing school system. Thus, the Academy's mentoring seeks to marry two goals: providing new principals with the knowledge and skills for "transformational leadership," while also providing the necessary support from a knowledgeable and experienced coach who can help them acclimate quickly to their new roles and to the system in which they will be working.

Shimon Waronker exemplifies this new breed of transformational leader and the challenges they face as principals. A Chilean immigrant and former Army intelligence officer, Waronker's prior educational experience when he enrolled in the Academy was as a Spanish teacher at a Brooklyn middle school and as an assistant principal at a parochial school. In 2004, he became principal of a violence-plagued middle school in the Bronx. With his Academy pre-service training and with the guidance of his coach, he has made considerable progress in both fitting into his new situation and beginning the process of turning this school around. His strategy, developed with his coach, centered on building a strong spirit of collaboration and ownership among his teachers, including the novel approach of providing them with individual budgets for their classroom needs. The result: under Waronker's leadership, the school has been taken off the city's "impact list" of the most problem-plagued schools.

Gathering facts, making corrections

The Academy has also distinguished itself through a devotion to fact-finding and analysis, self-reflectiveness about the program's efficacy, and openness to taking corrective action based on data. Currently, the Academy collects participant feedback on a bi-annual basis to determine principal perceptions of their coach's impact on different areas of leadership, coaching approach and aspects of the coaching relationship. In addition, the Academy has engaged an independent evaluator to conduct a three-year evaluation of its programs.

Feedback obtained after the Academy's first year of mentoring turned up significant challenges: a need to improve the quality of support, align it more closely with citywide and local initiatives, and allow for more accountability and consistent oversight of the mentoring. These findings helped lead to a number of significant revisions in the Academy's mentoring programs:

- *Selection of coaches*: When it began mentoring in 2004-05, the Academy used both active and retired principals to mentor the city's nearly 400 new principals. In the summer of 2005, it stopped using sitting principals as mentors and shifted instead to recently retired principals who were hired as fully salaried employees of the Academy. The thinking was that retirees could spend more time and attention on their new principals and be less distracted than sitting principals.

- *Mentor training*: The preparation Academy coaches receive is far more intensive, sophisticated, sustained and instructionally focused than most other programs in the country. It begins with the conviction that the mere fact that a principal is experienced and "successful" in his or her own school is no guarantee that he or she has the aptitude or skills to be a good mentor. The Academy's training includes a three-day session, plus several additional sessions per year to gather coaches to assess what is or isn't working and to provide an opportunity to feed in new knowledge. According to Stein, this redesign of the Academy's training was also influenced by the "blended coaching" model developed at the New Teacher Center at the University of California, Santa Cruz *(see text box, p. 12).*

The fact that a principal is experienced and successful is no guarantee that he or she will be a good mentor.

The training reinforces a cardinal rule: mentors should avoid direct-

ing the actions of novice principals but facilitate their learning through reflective questions. As Stein put it, the goal is to move new principals from "dependence to independence." Except in dire situations, mentors are taught to resist the urge to tell new principals the "right" answer to a given situation. "I learned from my professional development not to jump in, but to ask probing questions," one Academy coach told us.

As a continuing part of their training, coaches are also periodically observed in action with their protégés by Academy staff and given feedback to improve their performance. They also design and facilitate regular workshops attended by their novice principals.

- *Improving coaches' effectiveness and accountability*: In response to a finding after its first year in operation that there was "vast inconsistency in mentor performance and accountability," the Academy began to track and evaluate the performance of its coaches and brief them regularly on changes in citywide goals and policies so that they are not "out of touch" despite their non-active status. In addition, the choice of coaches is now reviewed with local school officials to ensure that those selected are knowledgeable and have credibility in that local context.

- *More flexibility to meet individual needs*: Unlike the original model at the Academy that required a set number of hours or days that coaches were contractually obligated to spend with each new principal, the new model allows for a more flexible approach depending on the individual development needs of the principal.

Linking training and job realities

At the heart of the Academy's approach has been the creation of a seamless continuum of professional development for the city's school leaders. Aspiring principals who go through both the Academy's intensive pre-service leadership training and subsequent mentoring have an advantage in this respect over new principals who got their pre-service training elsewhere. Still, the overall goal for all principals mentored throughout the city by the Academy, regardless of where they received their pre-service training, has been to ensure that first-year support is tailored not only to the relative preparation of each new principal but also the realities each will face on the job.

Under the model, the Academy builds a strong connection between coach-

BLENDED COACHING: AN INNOVATIVE APPROACH TO TRAINING MENTORS

The NYC Leadership Academy draws heavily on the "blended coaching" model developed at the University of California, Santa Cruz's New Teacher Center. The program has trained over 3,500 leadership coaches in states including California, Alaska and Arizona, and in urban districts including Los Angeles, San Diego, Baltimore, Chicago, Seattle and Springfield, IL. These coaches are trained to provide professional support to both new and experienced school leaders, with particular emphasis on how they can enhance student achievement.

As explained by the program's executive director, Ellen Moir, blended coaching emphasizes the development of an eclectic set of skills that prepares the mentor to support both the professional and personal development of new leaders so that they can improve instruction, first and foremost, but also contend effectively with all aspects of the job. Put another way, says Moir, blended coaching centers on developing new leaders' "ways of doing" (for example, how to plan agendas for a parent meeting, or scheduling weekly time for classroom observations); and "ways of being" (for example, embracing and using parent involvement, or learning to use the principal's authority to uphold high standards and support professional staff growth).[21]

A recent review of the Center's New Administrator Program that examined 27 first- and second-year principals who received coaching found promising results. New principals gave the program high marks (9.6 on a scale of 1-10), said they had ample opportunities for reflective conversation connected to instructional leadership, and 91 percent of those who received coaching in 1998-9 and 1999-2000 were still in administration in 2001.

Strong, M., Barrett, A., & Bloom, G., "Supporting the New Principal: Managerial and Instructional Leadership in a Principal Induction Program." Paper presented at the Annual Meeting of the American Educational Research Association, Chicago, April 24, 2003.

ing and the ongoing professional development new principals receive once they are on the job through regularly scheduled workshops. Coaches provide input to planning these workshops based on their experience with their protégés and the common needs and issues that arise.

A key recent development was the addition in 2006 of a second or third year of coaching for new principals.[22] The first year of mentoring will continue to address the new principal's immediate needs. Thereafter, in the second and third years, there will be targeted skills development based on the individual needs of new principals. The prospect of additional mentoring has been generally welcomed by new principals who feel that their ability to act as effective leaders of instruction can't be expected to happen after just a single year on the job. As one new elementary school principal with an Academy coach put it: "The first year was just 'getting to know.' For me, next year the real work is going to start. I'm going to want as much support as anyone can give me."

Summary and implications

New York City's approach to mentoring, using the Academy as its main vehicle, is exceptional in scope and ambition. It is perhaps likelier that states, more than most single districts, would face similar challenges of training upwards of 200 new principals per year that would make such a centralized structure cost effective. But while the Academy's high levels of funding for principal mentoring undoubtedly have made it easier to develop and apply innovative approaches to training, collect data to document efficacy and, most recently, expand mentoring beyond the first year on the job, it would be a mistake for others in the field to dismiss the lessons emerging from the Academy.

Several such lessons seem particularly relevant to other states and districts, regardless of their resources:

- The Academy's leadership has consistently demonstrated a self-reflective disposition about its strengths and shortcomings.
- It has invested in gathering the necessary data to pinpoint and verify areas in need of improvement and has acted promptly on the findings.
- It has taken seriously the imperative of high-quality mentor training as a backbone for its program;
- It has recognized that new principals greatly benefit from more than a single year of mentoring; and
- It has been open to effective approaches developed by others in the field, particularly the blended coaching model.

It's also worth noting that the strong backing from both city and school system leaders has proven to be at least as valuable an asset to the Academy as money. The fact that the Academy has been consistently touted by the Mayor and Schools Chancellor as a key element in their school reform agenda and has had their blessing to test new ideas and challenge the status quo has been indispensable in allowing it to adopt bold, flexible and innovative approaches to principal training and mentoring so that it can become an engine of change throughout the school system.

While much of the funding to date has been from private sources, the city has recently begun covering the salary and benefit costs of the aspiring principals enrolled in the Academy's pre-service training program. The city's increased financial commitment is a critical step in establishing and sustaining the importance of leadership in improving the school system. It is also worth noting that the Academy model of mentoring has enjoyed considerable support from the city's business community, including the Partnership for New York City, a consortium of local businesses leaders, which has committed to continuing its financial support through 2008.

The business community could be an important untapped resource for seeding mentoring of school leaders.

This may suggest a further lesson: that the business community, which is fully aware of the benefits of mentoring in its own organizations and is often vocal in its concerns about the quality of education in America, could be an important untapped resource for seeding mentoring of school leaders where it doesn't yet exist—or enhancing its quality where it already does.

SUPPLYING THE QUESTIONS, NOT THE ANSWERS

Some of the most effective coaching involves providing new principals with well-aimed questions that lead to self-reflection and inquiry. Such a relationship contrasts sharply with supplying a new school leader with "right answers" or approaches that may have worked for the mentor but which can stunt the development of the new principal as an independent decisionmaker and catalyst of change on behalf of kids.

"Part of the training we have to do with coaches is train them not to be uncomfortable with watching someone flounder when you know you could do that something right within 12 seconds," says Sandra Stein, chief executive of the NYC Leadership Academy.

Lois Weisswasser, a recently-retired elementary principal trained as a coach by the Academy, explains that "I have learned how not to jump in with answers but rather to ask probing and clarifying questions. Sometimes I give examples of things that worked for me but I really try not to do that."

As Ellen Moir, executive director of the New Teacher Center at the University of California, Santa Cruz put it: "The coach should be a learner and push principals to be learners."

MENTORING IN JEFFERSON COUNTY, KY: BALANCING SUPPORT WITH ACCOUNTABILITY

The context: Kentucky's statewide mentoring system

Much of the flexibility enjoyed by the NYC Leadership Academy has been made possible by the fact that New York State has not yet adopted regulations dictating how districts statewide shape their local mentoring programs.[23] In contrast, the recent history of mentoring in the Jefferson County Public Schools provides an instructive example of how a strong statewide system of mentoring regulations can determine the degree to which districts are able to develop and sustain different approaches tailored to their local needs or customs. And as one of the nation's oldest statewide mentoring programs for principals, dating back to 1985, it is one of the best available sources of lessons about the long-term challenges of establishing and sustaining quality mentoring amid competing educational and budgetary priorities. It also offers a look at what can happen when a state designs its mentoring to perform two hard-to-reconcile functions: providing experienced, confidential and empathetic support to fledgling principals, while also arriving at a judgment about whether or not a new principal should be permanently licensed and continue in his or her job.

The historic backdrop for mentoring in Kentucky and its districts is the 1990 Kentucky Education Reform Act (KERA). The law was a stunning response to an equally stunning 1989 state court ruling that declared Kentucky's schools "inequitable, inadequate, and unconstitutional." The ruling prompted an exhaustive reconsideration of how schools throughout the state should be funded and governed, and how schools and everyone connected with them should be made more accountable. Indeed, KERA is generally cited as an early milestone in the national "standards movement" that has been a dominant theme of school improvement efforts to this day.

Even before the passage of KERA, however, Kentucky lawmakers were ahead of the rest of the country in foreseeing, and acting upon, the dangers of inadequate school leadership. In 1985, then-Governor Martha Lane Collins successfully pressed for adoption of The Kentucky Principal Internship Program (KPIP), a comprehensive system of principal induction that established one of the nation's first statewide mentoring requirements. The program as it has evolved is designed to ensure that new principals throughout Kentucky become familiar with the state's leadership standards and demonstrate their ability to adhere to them in practice. The state handbook laying out the rules and procedures of KPIP makes clear the tough expectations:

> "The changing nature of the position demands that greater attention needs to be given to the preparation program which trains school administrators. Administrators should be required to demonstrate their competency and ability to assume the responsibility."[24]

The handbook goes on to say that the purpose of KPIP is "to provide continuing licensure/certification only upon the intern's demonstration of ability to meet the administrator standards adopted by the Kentucky Education Professional Standards Board."

The mentoring process is carried out by a three-member Principal Intern Committee consisting of the mentor

(most often a sitting principal in the new principal's district); a district designee named by the superintendent; and an "administrator-educator" who may be a university faculty member or a retired principal who is hired by the university to serve in this role. The composition of this committee is designed to provide the new principal with a balance of on-the-ground guidance in the customs and goals of the district, knowledge of the state standards, and access to state-of-the-art school leadership knowledge. Committee members are required to observe the principal intern in his or her school a minimum of three times and the mentor must spend at least 50 hours outside of the scheduled school day with the new principal. The committee also reviews a portfolio consisting of selected examples of work by each new principal related to the state's administrator standards.

In contrast to New York City's system that relies heavily on retirees, mentors in Kentucky are, for the most part, active principals with at least five years of administrative experience. They must complete approximately 12 hours of mandatory training, but state officials acknowledge that training is a persistent weakness. As one state official with responsibility for mentoring told us, the training provided by the state pays some attention to best practice and leadership, but "…a majority of training is on just the legalities, the compliance issues that you have to address. The training is really more on how to do the paperwork, how it is all set up, how the visits are held, those kinds of things."

State leaders also indicated continuing difficulty in recruiting principals willing and able to act as mentors. Mentors we met sometimes pointed to the intrinsic rewards of helping younger colleagues into the profession. But they also said that the obligations of mentoring, as currently structured, are onerous for many sitting principals. Mentors are expected to spend at least 50 contact hours with new principals, fill out numerous forms, schedule committee meetings, and be available for advice beyond the minimum hours. The problems are compounded by the fact that mentoring and its obligations are compressed into a single year, and state officials believe the yearly stipend set by the state—though recently raised from $1,000 to $1,400—is an inadequate incentive to attract enough high-quality principals to become mentors.

The absence of data makes it difficult to answer questions about mentoring's efficacy.

"I worry a lot about the quality of the mentors," former Commissioner Wilhoit told us. "The intent was for the mentors to be selected based on expertise and proven practice. The harsh reality is we have to recruit mentors from time to time. The compensation system is not as great as it should be, and it requires training and commitment, and of course, the additional responsibility of bringing someone along."

The most distinctive characteristic of mentoring in Kentucky compared with most other states is that the program is directly linked to the decision on whether or not a new principal is granted a permanent license and remains in his or her job after the first year.[25] New school leaders are provisionally licensed during their first year in service. During mentoring, the new principal's job performance and demonstrated ability to adhere to state administrator standards are assessed by the Principal Intern Committee, which includes the mentor. The committee collaborates with the intern to develop a "professional growth plan" which is then supported by the school and the intern's central office supervisor/evaluator. The committee eventually makes a recommendation about whether or not the new principal gets fully licensed and continues on the job. The final decision on licensure is made by the state Professional Standards Board.

In practice, the tie-in between mentoring and licensure is not necessarily as "high stakes" as it sounds. In the 20-year history of KPIP, we were told that "fewer than four" principals in the entire state have ever "failed" their mentorship and not received their license as a result. State officials we spoke with, however, interpret this very high "pass" rate not so much as a sign of the uniform excellence of Kentucky's new school leaders or the efficacy of the mentoring they receive, but more likely, as a symptom of a mentoring process that too often is more a compliance exercise than a meaningful quality screen.

While many mentors are undoubtedly conscientious in their tasks, said one official, "it's nothing more than filling out the paperwork so they jump the hoops to get the final certification."

In summary, Kentucky's decision to link mentoring and licensure has powerful pros and cons. In its favor, the mentor would seem to be an ideal informant and judge of a new principal's progress and suitability as a permanently licensed leader—arguably preferable to someone with only remote knowledge of that new principal. Yet this evaluative and informant role for mentors runs counter to much of the common wisdom that mentoring, to be effective, needs to be structured in ways that foster trust, openness, confidentiality and candor between mentor and protégé.[26]

Getting mentoring right will require fresh thinking—and probably won't be cheap.

Wilhoit acknowledged this dilemma: "The thought behind it is that (the mentor) is probably the most knowledgeable about the competencies of the person. The downside, obviously, is that some of the mentors and some of the candidates feel that they can't be forthright about deficits and needs, and fear that that might expose them to criticism."

Between 2002 and 2004, funding for KPIP's mentoring program was suspended, falling victim along with other state-level education spending to an economic downturn. KPIP was especially vulnerable, state officials told us, because of a failure by the state's education leadership to advocate vigorously enough to save it from the budgetary axe. Funding resumed in 2005 when the economy rebounded, aided this time by more energetic lobbying by superintendents and principals. But it was reenacted with many of its long-standing inadequacies intact, and state authorities now say there is "general consensus" that the program would benefit from a redesign.

Encouragingly, The Kentucky General Assembly in 2006 passed a resolution that created an Education Leadership Task Force charged with providing recommendations for such a redesign of principal preparation programs, including mentoring. Current proposals under consideration include lifting the quality of the training and paying closer attention to the qualifications of prospective mentors. The state currently budgets an estimated $630,000 for mentoring approximately 300 interns per year —or about $2,100 per principal.[27] The state Department of Education, in concert with other state and district education leaders, is also weighing a possible partnership with the Kentucky Leadership Academy to improve the training of mentors as part of an alternative certification proposal that would be district-sponsored and state-led with support from the business community. Mentors would be recommended by the participating districts based on evidence of successful leadership in improving student achievement. The recommendations would be used by the Academy to train mentors, who could be either retired or practicing administrators. The training will update the mentors on latest research, state initiatives and instructional resources and specific mentoring/coaching skills.[28]

Wilhoit and others in the state education department have also been pressing, so far unsuccessfully, to add state funding to extend the length of mentoring to two years. If enacted, the first year would be spent on providing the new principal with mentoring and support while postponing many of the more evaluative procedures until the second year in order to ease the pressures on both mentors and mentees. Few, however, predict the complete separation of mentoring from the licensure decision.

Wilhoit expressed the hope that at least some of these enhancements will be seriously considered in the next year or two. But the challenge of finding new resources makes it uncertain whether any will be enacted.[29] In addition, efforts at reform are occurring in the continued absence of hard evidence of the efficacy or benefits of mentoring under KPIP. The Department of Education, Education Professional Standards Board, and the Council on Postsecondary Education are working to design a data-based evaluation of the program.

A window of opportunity: Jefferson County's mentoring model

The suspension of KPIP from 2002-2004 opened a temporary window of opportunity that enabled the Jefferson County Public Schools to

"WE DON'T NEED A PRINCIPAL"

Principals often hear that they should be "instructional leaders" or "transformational leaders," not just building managers. But what kind of guidance can a mentor give when teachers bluntly tell a new school leader, as happened in one high-needs elementary school in Louisville, that "we don't need a principal"? In fact, a strong new voice on teaching and learning may be one of the last things some teachers want from a principal, especially when it threatens to change the way teaching and learning decisions have previously been made.

Acting on guidance from her mentor, this first-year elementary school principal soon realized that the key to changing the existing culture in her school in ways that would help children succeed was to break the monopoly on curricular decisionmaking held by a small clique of veteran teachers, and instead work to engage all teachers in the building in frequent, collaborative, more reflective conversations based on facts. The initial test facing this new school leader involved whether or not to adopt a science curriculum that was in use in most other schools in the district but had been rejected three times previously by this school's teachers.

The principal began by asking teachers their feelings about the current science program. She then turned the conversation to data and results: "I said, ok, if we've rejected it, on what grounds? What is the problem? Because we do need to research that."

The conversation revealed, for the first time, a surprising lack of knowledge among the teachers about the content of the new curriculum modules, as well as unfounded fears about logistics and how results would be assessed. Again with the advice of her mentor, a retired Louisville principal, she summoned leaders of the district's science department to her school to explain the new content to the teachers and address their other concerns.

"So then they had the knowledge," the principal said. "And they wanted to jump right in and vote for it. But I said, whoa, we're not going to make decisions like that anymore. Because they had in the past. I said, now you need to go back in your teams and decide if this would really work at your grade level."

Looking back on that crucial early encounter, one of the school's teachers summarized the ensuing culture change that has been taking root in her school: "She's focused all of us more on what's best for the students, not what's easier for me. It may be difficult but, you know, we'll get over it together."

craft a markedly different, less judgmental model of principal mentoring, which serves about a dozen new principals per year. The timing for developing such a program was especially propitious because of the district's participation since 2001 in Wallace's education leadership initiative that provided additional funding for mentoring and other professional development initiatives.[30]

In common with other school districts in Kentucky, Jefferson County, the state's largest, had been governed by the rules of KPIP. But under the long-time leadership of Superintendent Stephen Daeschner, the district has also been a standout in the importance it has attached to the recruitment, preparation and development of high-quality school leaders. It has developed some two dozen programs to build an adequate and well-qualified pipeline of principals, including training sessions for aspiring principals from within the district, a highly-structured, rigorous and selective internship program through a strong partnership with the University of Louisville, as well as mentoring programs for new principals and assistant principals.

The philosophy behind the new district-level mentoring program, called the Induction Support Program (ISP), as stated in its program handbook for participants, contrasts with the harder-edged tone of KPIP:

> "When a new administrator begins working in a school, it is an important time for both the administrator and the entire school community. We know that job adjustment and transition into leadership is a process—not an event. District leaders want to provide a meaningful and intentionally delivered entry experience for all new principals and assistant principals."[31]

Jefferson County's and the state's mentoring program shared in common a strong emphasis on standards-based performance and accountability. But the district's program characteristics and overall approach differed from the state's in a number of key respects:

First, the district provided more contact with mentors and the content areas of the mentoring were developed more collaboratively with

the new principal. Along with the 50 hours of mentoring provided by the state program, Jefferson County's first-year principals received an additional 40 to 90 hours of advisory assistance time. To use that time productively, the mentoring committee and the new principal collaborated on an induction support plan tailored to specific work areas for assistance, shadowing, and observation.

The district's mentoring also contrasted with KPIP in the length of time that new principals are supported. KPIP provides one year of mentoring, after which a judgment is made about the principal's effectiveness and worthiness to receive full licensure. The district provided a second year of follow-up support for principals if the mentoring committee, the new principal, and the assistant superintendent or supervising principal believed it would be useful. In that case, a non-evaluative support plan was provided for specific growth needs.

The district program was also more flexible than the state's in terms of the pool of potential mentors. In common with the state, mentors are usually active principals. But as part of ISP, the district also provides new principals with "advisers" who are retired principals, including a number who occupy district-level posts and are therefore well-versed in the current thinking and goals of the district.

Crucially, the district expanded the training of mentors beyond the 12 hours provided by KPIP. In 2004, Jefferson County joined with the Kentucky Leadership Academy to develop and provide training sessions for mentors that were more closely adapted to the full range of the district's conditions and needs, from budgeting and finance to comprehensive school improvement strategies. The district also offered opportunities four times a year to bring mentors together around focused topics to learn and share lessons with each other. The result was a significant expansion of mentor training beyond KPIP content to include the appropriate rules of engagement between mentor and protégé—how, for example, to decide when it's necessary to tell the novice principal how or what to do, versus encouraging them to be reflective by supplying the right questions instead of answers.

"While it's always good to have a buddy, that is insufficient support for someone beginning, or even continuing in, a principalship."

Finally, the district uncoupled mentoring from the licensure decision. Repeatedly, we heard from new principals, their mentors and district officials that this key decision, made temporarily possible by the suspension of KPIP by the state, changed the tenor of mentoring in Jefferson County. In the words of one mentor, "When it was a requirement for the State Department, you had a bureaucratic layer that we have not had, a kind of mechanical feel to it. So in terms of supporting principals, it (ISP) probably has been more about relationships, and support, and some reliance—dependence you know—on each other, and using each other's talents even more than with the KPIP program."

The removal of the judgmental component meant "a more give and take sharing," said another principal we met. "I know the critique is there, but I don't feel that if I don't get it right they're going to sit there and mark it off and it could affect your future. I just feel it's more of a 'we're here to help you improve' and just because of the very nature of how we interact, you feel safer asking questions. I feel safer saying, 'I don't know how to do this.'"

Another first-year principal echoed that view: "It's more supportive and personal. KPIP is more in my mind something that has to be done to meet an end."

The less judgmental nature of ISP mentoring does not leave new leaders unaccountable for addressing shortcomings in student performance. Explains Superintendent Daeschner, new and veteran principals alike are subject to monthly or even weekly observations and monitoring visits from district teams if the data show that their school is persistently weak in one or more academic areas. If repeated district interventions fail, a principal, whether new or veteran, could find his or her job in jeopardy.

As is true in other districts, meaningful information about program

costs is difficult to come by. However, an upcoming analysis of principal training programs in nine urban districts commissioned by Wallace, including Jefferson County, calculated that in 2004-05 (when ISP was in full operation), the two-year cost of mentoring per participant was about $6,600.[32]

When funding for KPIP resumed in 2005, Jefferson County briefly suspended its enhancements to mentor training, but decided to restore them a year later. Using federal Title II funds, the district also continues to offer additional hours of first year mentoring beyond what the state requires, and provides a second year of mentoring for principals who are recruited from outside the district if they need it. But along with all other districts in Kentucky, Jefferson County was compelled to return to the state system that tied mentoring to licensure.

What about results?

It is noteworthy that in a district where its leadership takes pride in being data-informed in its decisionmaking, there is to-date little beyond anecdotal evidence that mentoring has had any measurable effect on the performance of its new leaders. During the period that ISP was in full operation, the district collected some information on principals' and mentors' experiences and satisfaction with the program, the majority of which was quite positive. Interestingly, however, the survey data also suggest that 43 percent of the time being spent together by mentors and mentees was devoted to management, operations and budgeting, 35 percent on staffing and personnel issues, and just 10 percent on instructional matters.[33]

Summary and Implications

Kentucky and Jefferson County were well ahead of the pack in recognizing both the importance of leadership, and the critical role that mentoring can play as part of a continuum of professional development that can enhance the quality of leadership. During visits to schools and interviews with school leaders and their mentors, we found examples of excellent and mutually satisfying mentoring relationships. But recent experiences in both Kentucky and Jefferson County also illustrate the challenges and tensions that may confront other states and districts as they consider how to create systems that help make excellent mentoring the norm.

"I know the critique is there, but it's more of a 'we're here to help you improve' and just because of the very nature of how we interact, you feel safer asking questions."

The first tension concerns the relationship between state-funded mentoring systems and the design of district programs. Kentucky was a pioneer in requiring and funding mentoring statewide. But it also illustrates the challenge for any state system in developing uniform requirements while giving districts enough latitude to innovate and shape their programs to fit their distinctive leadership needs. This challenge is clearly compounded when the issue is entangled with state licensure. The larger issue indicated here is the need for states and districts to align their respective responsibilities for mentoring principals in ways that maximize efficiency while avoiding rigidity, duplication or conflicts in goals or methods.

A second tension concerns focusing the core goal of mentoring unambiguously on providing new principals with a supportive, experienced colleague to help the novice enter a difficult, high-stakes leadership position. Kentucky is one of the few states that adds a judgmental dimension to mentoring in the name of accountability. It seeks to use mentoring, in other words, as a device to identify and weed out weak leaders as early in their careers as possible. Yet hardly anyone "fails" mentoring in Kentucky and state officials continue to worry out loud about the quality of school leadership in their state. It is reasonable to ask whether such an evaluative system of mentoring is likelier to result in effective quality control or to a compliance-oriented exercise.

Finally, both Kentucky and Jefferson County illustrate the consequences of the absence of data about results, which not only makes it difficult to answer questions about mentoring's efficacy, but can also render programs vulnerable as "nice but not necessary" in tight budgetary times, as actually happened to KPIP.

IV: CONCLUSION: EXPANDING THE VISION

The recent spread of mentoring for principals is a hopeful sign that state and district policymakers are more willing to invest seriously in the success of new school leaders. At the same time, our analysis convinces us that getting mentoring right for new principals, given their daunting daily challenges and expectations, will require fresh thinking—and probably won't be cheap. But failing schools carry a high price, too. The time seems especially ripe for a reconsideration of the methods and the goals of mentoring while programs in many states and districts are still new and relatively malleable.

Despite the need for more data to substantiate mentoring's value in states and districts that have adopted it, there is considerable support for the belief that high-quality mentoring can provide important benefits to principals, just as it has to new entrants in many other professions. Moir of UC, Santa Cruz states that those who receive high-quality mentoring are much likelier than those who are unsupported to progress from "problem driven to vision driven, from management focused to instructionally focused, dependent to independent, and reactive to analytical." Carmen Farina, former deputy chancellor of the New York City school system and a respected thinker on education leadership practice, calls principal mentoring the "best professional preparation I know."[34]

"The constant challenge is how do you continue to highlight that instruction is key?"

If anything stands out, however, it is that mentoring should be seen as only one stage—albeit an important one—in a continuum of professional development of principals that begins with pre-service training and, ideally, continues throughout leaders' careers. And it is only one piece among many that must be in place if states and districts are to increase the likelihood that principals can eventually become effective leaders of learning. This includes taking the necessary steps to ensure a high-quality, diverse pool of candidates for the principalship who understand teaching and are disposed to leading change, rather than admitting nearly all comers through self-selection to the ranks of school leadership, as many preparation programs do.

Understanding mentoring as a necessary but not sufficient element in the professional preparation of school leaders has two key consequences: First, mentoring is more likely to be effective when it is developed as an integral part of a continuum of professional development, rather than a brief or isolated "add-on." And second, despite the critical need for more and better data, it will likely be difficult to isolate the impact of mentoring, in and of itself, on the eventual ability of principals to contribute successfully to the ultimate objectives of improving instruction and student performance in a given school.

The key question however, is this: could mentoring be re-imagined in a way that would allow it to play a significantly larger role in developing leaders capable of transforming teaching and learning?

PUTTING LEARNING FIRST—AN ACT OF COURAGE

Mentoring can provide new principals with crucial aid and support in dealing with all kinds of daily leadership dilemmas. In the end, however, an expanded vision of mentoring that goes beyond a buddy system involves providing new school leaders with an experienced guide who has both the training and the disposition to press new principals to put learning first—whatever that takes, whatever the obstacles or opposition.

What does such an expanded vision of mentoring look like in practice?

Sometimes, it's simply a matter of learning priority-setting—for example, helping the new principal to schedule his or her workday to keep learning and instruction at the forefront. As one Louisville principal told us, her mentor routinely challenges her: "She'll say, 'wait a minute. How much time did you devote to instruction today? How many classroom walkthroughs did you do? Did you review lesson plans?' I now have templates I created with her help so that I'm on a schedule. So that every month the lesson plans are reviewed and a timeline pops up on my calendar."

A mentor in the Bronx related how she advised a new principal to resist the common impulse to be "everywhere" in his school and instead delegate and distribute responsibilities and authority among his school staff and set priorities to free his time to focus on instructional improvement. "The constant challenge," she said, "is how do you continue to highlight that instruction is key? For example, what becomes more important: dealing with an angry parent, or keeping an appointment to do a classroom observation? There are some things that you can learn to delegate—create layers so that you can first send the angry parent to see a guidance counselor so that you can do the observation. These don't become 'emergencies' until you ignore them and your school gets identified as low-performing."

At other times, the challenge of putting learning first is far tougher and may involve helping the new leader weigh choices that could place him or her painfully at odds with teachers, parents or others in the school community. How the new leader performs in such circumstances can literally shape how he or she will behave throughout his career. Does the new leader learn the "art" of deal-making and conflict avoidance that may preserve the peace and the status quo at the expense of what's best for some or all children? Or is the new principal helped to discover the willingness and ability to challenge cherished practices and put the success of all children first, even when it means a tough battle?

"It's easy to have a mediocre school. Having high expectations for all children takes courage."

In conversations with new principals and mentors, we repeatedly heard that such defining moments can be among the loneliest for any leader—but particularly for a new principal, they can be times of overwhelming self-doubt when the confirmation and assurance of an experienced, nonjudgmental colleague can make all the difference. At such moments, the mentor can help a new principal develop what school leadership authority Dennis Littky calls "moral courage"—the willingness and ability of a principal to stand alone when necessary, do what's best for children "despite the dictates of others," bring others along in your vision rather than find yourself alone and isolated, and "challenge assumptions and traditions and help others do so as well."[35]

We conclude with a story about such a defining moment.

A first-time principal appointed two years ago to lead a New York City high school with a strong local reputation in math found herself confronted with an immediate challenge. The math faculty in this school were clinging to a very traditional curriculum that test scores suggested served many kids well. A closer inspection of the test data by this new leader, however, revealed that the school's relatively rigid curriculum sequence was failing to provide realistic options or pathways for success for kids with special needs or for whom English is a second language. So while this school seemed on the surface to be doing very well for many of its students, alarming numbers were repeatedly failing the

final year of math and were being denied graduation.

With the guidance of her mentor and drawing on data to make her case, the new principal took a number of controversial steps to establish herself as an instructional leader. She pushed for alternative classes in math to provide more options for different levels of learners so that they could graduate without watering down standards. She conducted classroom visits and beefed up resources to non-math subjects that had long gotten short shrift. These steps gained her allies among non-math teachers. But they also stiffened the resistance of the school's math teachers to any changes in their curriculum. Two years into her tenure, the math dilemma that is leaving many children behind in this school remains a continuing and unresolved source of conflict. But the new principal expresses no regrets about taking on the battle.

"There was a lot of reaction to it, but I held the line and said there is no way that it's good to have so many people failing," she recalled. "What I learned from my mentor is not to be afraid to talk to staff members about the issues."

"She took this battle on and she was unbelievably brave," her mentor told us. "There was this history of academic success in (her) school. In those cases, everyone hides behind their test scores and says, 'we're doing a great job.' A lot of my role has been as a sounding board, when she thought she was crazy to take this on. She also asked for my help in strategizing. She looked for small pockets of teachers in the school to build her relationships with them. And she moved on instructional leadership at the cost of political support from some of her staff. Her life would have been much easier if she had less guts."

"It's easy to have a mediocre school," her mentor said. "Having high expectations for all children takes courage." ■

ENDNOTES

[1]Sharon Feiman-Nemser, "Teacher Mentoring: A Critical Review," ERIC Digest ED397060, July 1996.

[2]Thomas M. Smith, Vanderbilt University, and Richard M. Ingersoll, University of Pennsylvania, "What are the Effects of Induction and Mentoring on Beginning Teacher Turnover?" a paper in the summer 2004 edition of the *American Educational Research Journal*.

[3]While principals may receive mentoring or coaching as part of their pre-service professional training, this report focuses exclusively on the mentoring that states and districts provide for school leaders once they are actually on the job.

[4]The "indirect," nature of a principal's role in fostering better teaching and student learning is described in How Leadership Influences Student Learning (Kenneth Leithwood et al., 2004) a report commissioned by The Wallace Foundation and downloadable for free at www.wallacefoundation.org. The authors pinpoint three sets of practices that make up what they call the "basic core of successful leadership": setting directions, developing people, and redesigning the organization.

[5]Linda Hartzer, Tom Galvin, Administrator Induction Programs: Summary of Research and Promising Practices, a report prepared for the Connecticut State Department of Education with funding from The Wallace Foundation, 2003, 3

[6]Connecticut, Ohio, Kentucky and Iowa are among states that have gathered principal mentoring data.

[7]For example, Eugene, OR's schools collected data on the satisfaction levels of four first-year principals in 2004-05 and found that all "strongly agreed" that "I can count on my mentor to keep scheduled appointments"; "My mentor is accessible and/or responds promptly when I have questions or need assistance"; "My mentor is knowledgeable about the culture of Eugene School District 4J"; "If find suggestions from my mentor to be useful"; "Conversations with my mentor have helped me be a more effective leader." Similar type "satisfaction" questions were asked in a first-ever state-level survey of new principals in Ohio conducted in the spring of 2006.

[8]Along with New York City, districts that have provided mandatory mentoring in the absence of a statewide requirement include, among others, Albuquerque, NM, and Chicago. Detailed profiles of those and other district, state and professional association models can be found in Susan Villani, *Mentoring and Induction Programs That Support New Principals*, Corwin Press, Thousand Oaks, CA, 2006.

[9]An informal national scan of state board policies conducted at Wallace's request in August 2006 by the National Association of State Boards of Education identified 23 states with mentoring requirements for all new principals, or for targeted groups of school leaders. *Education Week*, in a report in its September 13 edition ("Mentoring for New Principals Gains Policy Attention,") identified three additional states with recently enacted mentoring requirements: Alaska, Arizona and Missouri. According to the available information, nearly all such statewide requirements were enacted after 2000 except for West Virginia (1995) and Kentucky (1985). Fifteen of those states are participants in Wallace's Education Leadership Initiative that began in 2000. They, along with a dozen participating districts within those states, decided independently to adopt mentoring requirements as a key element of their overall plans to improve the quality of school leadership.

[10]For example, the New Jersey Leaders to Leaders program initiated by the New Jersey Principals and Supervisors Association, with support from The Wallace Foundation.

[11]Jay Malone, "Principal Mentoring: An Update," Clearinghouse on Educational Policy Management, College of Education, University of Oregon, Research Roundup 18, 2 (Winter 2001-02)

[12]SREB is an excellent source of information on high-quality mentoring, including training modules on mentoring and internship, and several recent reports on internship and leader preparation including *The Principal Internship: How Can We Get It Right?,* and *Preparing a New Breed of School Principals: It's Time for Action*. Visit www.sreb.org., or www.wallacefoundation.org. for these and other SREB publications on education leadership commissioned by The Wallace Foundation.

[13]Villani, 19

[14]Wilhoit was Commissioner of Education in Kentucky at the time that he was interviewed for this report. He has since become the executive director of the Council of Chief State School Officers in Washington, DC.

[15]Villani, 18

[16]Data cited here are based on a review of state level mentoring programs by the National Association of State Boards of Education at Wallace's request.

[17]The Jefferson County Public Schools is one of 12 districts participating in Wallace's education leadership initiative. Each district has received $1 million per year in grants to pursue a range of leadership improvement efforts. Wallace was one of the initial private funders of the New York City Leadership Academy, established in 2003. It provided $15 million to the Academy over its first three years of existence to develop innovative leadership training programs, including first-year mentoring. In 2006, Wallace provided an additional $3.5 million to support continued improvements in the Academy's programs, including an expansion of its mentoring program to a second and third year of support.

[18]Those include the Academy's First Year Support (FYS) and New School Intensive (NSI) programs. FYS provides mentoring to new principals of existing public schools, while NSI provides mentoring to new principals of new, small schools.

[19]By identifying the role as that of "coach," the Academy sought to clarify that the coach would henceforth provide guidance to new principals through assistance from the sidelines.

[20]The Academy has 17.27 FTE coaches. Each is paid a salary of $103,000 per year, plus benefits. According to the Academy, the range of the per-principal cost (approximately $5,500 to $7,500) assumes that 80% of a coach's time is spent, on average, on coaching. The lower per-principal cost figure is based on coaches with case loads of 15; the higher figure is for those with case loads of 11. These data do not indicate the full cost of the Academy's mentoring program, which also includes the direct costs and related expenses for training coaches and for their continuing professional development.

[21]Interview with Ellen Moir, executive director of the New Teacher Center at UC, Santa Cruz, November 4, 2006. Also see Gary Bloom, Claire Castagna, Ellen Moir, Betsy Warren, *Blended Coaching: Skills and Strategies to Support Principal Development*, Corwin Press, Thousand Oaks, CA, 2005, 7-9.

[22]This expansion is being supported in part by a $3.5 million renewal grant from The Wallace Foundation.

[23]A proposal to institute a statewide mentoring requirement in New York is on the agenda of the Board of Regents but no action has been taken yet. The proposed statute would mandate mentoring for all new principals, but would leave the design and implementation to the districts.

[24]KPIP Handbook, 1

[25]While linking mentoring to licensure is unusual among statewide programs, Kentucky is not unique. Arkansas provisionally licenses first year principals and successful mentoring is part of the system that moves a candidate on to full licensure. Ohio's statewide mentoring program also has a tie-in to licensure.

[26]While the literature on mentoring per se seems heavily weighted toward separating mentoring from evaluation, there are other precedents for blending them. Notably, "peer assistance and review" in a few districts is designed to provide new or struggling teachers with peer assistance while giving teachers a stronger voice in teacher evaluation. See Jennifer Goldstein, "Making Sense of Distributed Leadership: The Case of Peer Assistance and Review," Educational Evaluation and Policy Analysis, Winter 2003, Vol. 25, No. 4, 397-421.

[27]The $630,000 consists of $420,000 for mentor stipends; and $210,000 that goes to seven universities with principal preparation programs to fund training, and staff stipends of $300 per intern to serve on the KPIP committees.

[28]Currently the Kentucky Leadership Academy provides coaching/mentoring services to its principal membership regardless of years of experience. The service is typically provided for a fee paid for through school and/or district professional development funds.

[29]The recent departure of Wilhoit, a champion of mentoring in the state, to assume the leadership of the Council of Chief State School Officers adds another possible uncertainty to the future of these program improvement efforts.

[30]The innovative mentoring program in Jefferson County during that period was developed with funding from The Wallace Foundation along with federal Title II monies.

[31]JCPS Induction Support Program Handbook: A District Development Experience for New Principals and Assistant Principals, 2004-05, supported by The Wallace Foundation and JCPS Title II-Principal Quality Grant, p. 4

[32]The upcoming analysis was conducted by researchers at Stanford University and the Finance Project in a report on the training of principals commissioned by Wallace and scheduled for publication in 2007. The Finance Project researchers calculated that in 2004-05, most of Jefferson County's $6,600 per-participant costs for mentoring over two years were "for payments to the program coordinator, retired principals, and principal mentors, although the uncompensated time of new principals is also included." The support included observations, shadowing and group sessions, the report continued. Lynne Wheat, the district's Director of Administrator Recruitment and Development, cautioned, however, about the difficulties of computing mentoring costs: "It is difficult to cost out mentoring in JCPS for new administrators as the support is tailored to the individual's need. It would be incorrect to assume that the majority of the cost is covered by the state through KPIP. It would also be incorrect to assume that Title II funds, coupled with state KPIP dollars, comprise all expenditures. General fund dollars are also used to support new principals."

[33]The percentages were based on a tabulation by Wallace of a "New Administrator Support Questionnaire for Principal Advisors/Mentors" that was distributed by the Jefferson County Public School District to advisors/mentors in 2004 and 2005. The district office provided Wallace with copies of 35 questionnaires that were returned by advisors/mentors, of which 23 were usable in terms of providing completeness of responses.

[34]Comment made at Wallace's Annual Leadership for Learning Grantee Meeting, October 2006, St. Louis

[35]Dennis Littky and Molly Schen, "Developing School Leaders: One Principal at a Time," a chapter in *Reshaping the Landscape of School Leadership Development: A Global Perspective*, edited by Philip Hallinger, Swets & Zeitlinger Publishers, 2003. Littky, a former school principal, is founder of the Big Picture Company in Providence which, with Wallace's support, developed an innovative program for the training and professional support of principals to lead a growing network of small schools.

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The Principal Internship: How Can We Get It Right? Southern Regional Education Board, 2005

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