

Leadership in Charter Schools

A Survey of Charter School Directors
in
Illinois, Ohio, and Wisconsin



center on **reinventing** public education



Room for Development: Emerging themes

- There will be a large need to fill leadership positions in the next 10 years
- There is a need for support and development in some key areas
 - Finances
 - Strategic planning and implementation
 - Negotiating politics and families

The Survey of Charter School Directors

- Survey Goals
 - Who are charter school directors?
 - What is their background?
 - What is the job?
- Survey of all directors in IL, OH, WI
- To date, poor response rate

Information on the Sample

- State representation
 - IL=16, OH=58, WI=58
- Age of schools
 - 10+ yrs=6%, 5-9 yrs=45%, <5 yrs=49%
- Authorizer representation
 - Local Board=49%, State organizations=32%, Other organizations=17%

Who is the Director?

- Highly educated – largely in the field of education
- Older with many (31%) expecting to retire from this position
- Almost 1/3 founders
- A diversity of training and experience – especially organizational management, curriculum and instruction, and the local community and politics

Pre-service and In-service Training and Experience

- Many (but not most) receive training specific to the school's program
- Make use of local networks – state or national networks are less valuable
- Report broad assistance from CMOs including strategic planning, instructional programs, technical assistance

The Job of School Director: Time

- Management and instruction dominate director's time
 - Want less time on management and more on instruction
- Least time spent on public relations, strategic planning and human resources
 - Want to give more time to public relations and strategic planning

The Job of School Director: Sharing the Responsibility

- ❑ Despite multiple administrative positions, directors rarely share primary responsibility
- ❑ Teachers are, notably, not reported as having primary responsibility for key planning issues

The Job of School Director: Strengths and Weaknesses

□ Strengths

- Overwhelmingly confident
- Engaging staff in a common vision and high expectations

□ Weaknesses

- Engaging parents
- School wide improvement and initiatives, strategic planning

The Job of School Director: Challenges

□ Challenges

- Raising funds and securing facilities
- Engaging parents
- Dealing with their affiliated districts

□ Notably, *not* a problem

- Relationship with board
- Maintaining school mission
- Compliance with regulations

Planning for Leadership Change

- Expect the core mission of school to survive leadership change but expect some organizational instability
- Planning for change is not widespread – just over half schools have a known plan for succession
- Of those with a plan:
 - Plan to recruit from within
 - Will accept district assignment

Emerging Themes: A Need to Think About Future Leadership

- ❑ Bad news: Directors will be retiring in the next 10-15 years, many of them are founders, and many expect some measure of instability with change
- ❑ Good news: Recruiting from within is common and many future leaders are in charter schools
- ❑ Leadership training should also target teachers

Themes: The Director's Needs

- Securing finances
 - Few have training or experience, many feel their training or experience doesn't help, and most do not feel they get support from their boards
 - Directors need more relevant training and support
- Strategic planning and school wide initiatives
 - Reported weakness in carrying out large strategic projects especially school wide instructional initiatives
 - While getting some support from CMO and governing boards, probably need more support especially in providing professional development

Themes: The Director's Needs

- Negotiating Politics and Engaging Parents
 - A background with the community is important and most report living in the community they serve
 - Nonetheless, many continue to struggle with engaging parents and feel that boards or CMOs do not buffer them from politics and they struggle to negotiate their relationship with districts
 - While training directors to engage in the politics of running a school may be difficult, the local networks that directors favor may be a useful source for mentorship and support