



Targeted Training: *How To Prepare Charter School Leaders For The Job*

OVERVIEW OF THE ISSUES:

School leadership without a safety net

Charter school leaders face an expanded job compared to their traditional public school peers. They rarely have the “back office” support of a district central office so it is up to them to find and manage facilities, recruit students and teachers, raise and budget funds, as well as coordinate curriculum and instruction for the school. How well are charter school leaders prepared for this expanded job? In two recent reports we find that today’s charter school leaders, though deeply committed, often lack confidence and are ill-prepared to take on these added responsibilities. (See *Working Without a Safety Net: How Charter School Leaders Can Best Survive on the High Wire* and *Closing the Skill Gap: New Options for Charter School Leadership Development*.)

RESEARCH AND FINDINGS:

Through our survey of charter school leaders (over 400 leaders from CA, HI, TX, NC, RI, and AZ), we find that the charter school leader faces more demands than a traditional public school principal, especially when it comes to managing and funding the school. Rather than getting more targeted training in these challenging areas, we find the training of charter school leaders is quite similar to their traditional public school peers: most charter school leaders come to the job from prior work in traditional public schools and with traditional training from colleges of education. In addition, charter school leaders tend to be younger and many have only a few years of experience in school administration. Their traditional preparation and relative newness to

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR:

- ✓ Charter school leader preparation programs
- ✓ State and local charter school policy leaders

QUICK FACTS:

Why they take the job:

- 86% of charter school leaders said that passion for the school’s mission was a very important factor; 13% said that pay and benefits were a very important factor.

How they were trained:

- 74% of charter school leaders received traditional training from colleges of education.

Age and experience:

- Charter schools have slightly more leaders under 40, and over 60, than traditional public schools.
- Almost one-third of charter school leaders have less than two years experience leading schools.

Plans for the future:

- 71% of charter school leaders expect to leave their job within five years.

school leadership puts these charter school leaders at a disadvantage when it comes to the expanded demands of the job.

Under-prepared for the business side of the job

In general, charter school leaders are more confident in the instructional side of the job and less confident in their ability to secure facilities, manage finances, hire qualified teachers, and lead strategic planning—some of the most important issues for charter schools and ones not often faced by traditional public school principals. These organizational issues often manifest as real problems in schools: finding and managing facilities and managing finances are the most common problems cited by charter school directors.

Experience, training, and support help

Not surprisingly, charter school leaders who have already been principals express greater confidence all around and report fewer organization problems. In addition, leaders with prior experience in financial management are significantly more confident in school finances. The benefit of traditional principal preparation seems limited to confidence in instructional leadership, not administrative leadership. Finally, many directors report that they get valuable support from other directors through formal and informal networks.

Existing leadership preparation programs do not fill all the gaps

Traditional preparation programs are unlikely to cover in any detail issues such as facilities acquisition or fundraising. Charter school leadership preparation programs hit on more of these issues; however, to date, the available options are too few in number and not geographically distributed to meet the demand for training.

The demand for strong charter school leaders continues to grow

The demand for training is high and growing. Every year about 400 new schools open their doors, and our survey shows that over 70 percent of today's charter school leaders expect to leave their current jobs in the next five years.

GUIDELINES AND RECOMMENDATIONS:

Given these findings about who charter school leaders are and what they struggle with on the job, future leaders need better preparation and current leaders need more support on the job. Below we offer suggestions to charter school preparation programs and advocates interested in supporting charter school leadership development.

Create a national charter school leadership preparation consortium

The charter school community would benefit greatly from a national effort to coordinate *information on the nation's charter school leadership preparation programs*. The demand for charter school leadership is large and growing. The existing programs are simply not expansive enough to meet this demand. Although the current training offerings provide an array of formats, including intensive internships and short workshops, these programs are few and not well distributed, making it very difficult for charter school leaders in some regions to access training.

The goals of a national consortium should be to:

1. Provide charter school leadership preparation programs with up-to-date research on what leaders say they need and struggle with;

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2. Advocate for high-quality program evaluation and assemble the results of these evaluations for consumer review;
3. Regularly track the charter school leadership preparation options; monitor the geographic distribution of programs and advocate for high-quality programs to expand into underserved regions;
4. Provide opportunities for preparation programs to share knowledge, instructors, and materials.

Expand curriculum to cover more areas of challenge

Charter school leaders, especially those new to school administration, need training and experience in the administrative aspects of their role as school leader. *Charter school leadership preparation programs should revisit their curricula to ensure that they focus with reasonable depth on the unique business demands asked of charter school leaders.* Traditional colleges of education could partner with business and management schools to offer training in the management and operations side of running schools. Charter school leader training should also include program-specific training for leaders who are planning to lead specific types of schools, such as college prep schools. (For more on how school leadership preparation programs can address these issues, see *Closing the Skill Gap: New Options for Charter School Leadership Development*.)

Provide more in-depth internships and on-the-job support

Experience on the job confronting the everyday challenges facing leaders provides the best kind of preparation, and getting this exposure through high-quality internships is an effective way for new leaders to learn. *Charter school leadership preparation programs that focus on aspiring leaders should find ways to include meaningful*

internships in their programs, possibly following the lead of the KIPP Fisher Fellows and New Leaders for New Schools, both of which require year-long residencies in schools. Once on the job, leaders say that some of their most valuable support is from their peers. These ongoing principal networks are key to supporting directors. All leadership preparation programs should make efforts to follow up with their participants and facilitate meaningful exchanges among participants and graduates.

LEARN MORE ABOUT THE ISSUES:

- *Working Without a Safety Net: How Charter School Leaders Can Best Survive on the High Wire*, Christine Campbell, Betheny Gross, National Charter School Research Project, Center on Reinventing Public Education, September 2008. Download at www.ncsrp.org.
- *Closing the Skill Gap: New Options for Charter School Leadership Development*, Christine Campbell, Brock J. Grubb, National Charter School Research Project, Center on Reinventing Public Education, June 2008. Download at www.ncsrp.org.
- A summary of this research appears in *Education Week's* annual "Leading for Learning" report, September 8, 2008. See "The High-Wire Job of Charter School Leadership," Christine Campbell, Betheny Gross, Robin Lake; www.edweek.org.

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INSIDE CHARTER SCHOOLS from research to practice

ABOUT THE STUDY:

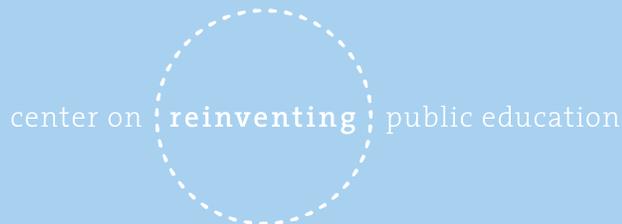
Inside Charter Schools is one of the first systematic studies to focus on the strategies that charter schools are pursuing to establish coherent educational programs supported by high-quality teachers and leaders. It is supported by the U.S. Department of Education and the National Charter School Research Project (NCSRP) consortium of funders.

NCSRP brings rigor, evidence, and balance to the national charter school debate. For information and research on charter schools, please visit the NCSRP website at www.ncsrp.org.

The Inside Charter Schools study seeks to answer three major research questions:

- What are the academic programs offered in charter schools?
- Who is teaching and leading charter school programs?
- How do charter schools build a coherent staff, manage growth, and plan for staff and leadership changes?

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