



Closing the Skill Gap

NEW OPTIONS FOR CHARTER SCHOOL
LEADERSHIP DEVELOPMENT

Christine Campbell, Brock J. Grubb



center on **reinventing** public education



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National Charter School Research Project

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The National Charter School Research Project (NCSRP) brings rigor, evidence, and balance to the national charter school debate.

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- ✓ Helps policymakers and the general public interpret charter school research.

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Introduction

One week before the start of school in late summer 2007, an ad for a Los Angeles charter high school seeking a principal was posted on Craigslist. The ad listed over 20 discrete, highly skilled job demands and described the ideal candidate as one who would, among other things:

oversee the development and day-to-day operations of all academic programs and school operations; recruit, evaluate, and manage staff; develop and maintain relationships between parents, students, teachers, classified staff, community members, governance board and all other stakeholders; show a demonstrated ability in helping students graduate from high school prepared for success in institutions of higher learning; demonstrate an intellectual dexterity to synthesize the vision, goals, and objectives into an operational plan . . . Bilingual (Spanish-English) preferred.

Though daunting, this type of job description is not uncommon. Every year, 400 new charter schools open their doors seeking principals equipped with the skills to complete the tasks listed above. Additionally, scores of the existing 4,000 charter schools need new principals to replace founders or other leaders each year.¹ These figures signal a significant demand for highly qualified leaders in charter schools nationwide. Given this demand, an important question remains unanswered: what does the supply side of charter school leadership look like?

1. National Alliance for Public Charter Schools, "Growth and Quality in the Charter School Movement: 2007 Dashboard" (Washington, DC: National Alliance for Public Charter Schools, 2007).

Preparing the Principals We Need

Beyond needing a pool of applicants for challenging jobs, charter schools need strong candidates—those who can handle the pressures of the job while guiding much-needed student achievement growth. If charter schools are to deliver on their promise of providing a superior alternative to traditional public schools, they need effective leaders—leaders with a broad base of knowledge who can meet the challenge of managing a complex self-governing institution.

As the National Charter School Research Project (NCSRP) looks toward the new and emerging issues facing charter schools, none looms larger than addressing the issue of leadership development to increase the sustainability of these schools. Where will these high-quality leaders come from? How will they prepare for the challenge of leading a charter school? How do charter school leader preparation programs differ from traditional principal preparation programs? Are these new programs interacting and learning from each other?

This paper explores these questions by examining (1) where charter school leaders come from, (2) charter school leader preparation options that already exist, and (3) the skills charter school leaders say they need. The paper also explores ways to expand and improve training options, not only for charter school leaders, but for leaders of all schools.

Who Are Today's Charter School Leaders?

Information about who is leading America's charter schools is fairly new. The 2003–2004 national Schools and Staffing Survey asked charter school directors questions about themselves and their work.² It seems that although charter school directors are fairly well educated (78 percent have a Master's degree or more), more of their traditional public school counterparts in general have advanced degrees (98 percent have a Master's degree or more). Charter school leaders tend to be relative newcomers to administration. Almost one-third (29 percent) of charter school principals are new to administration and more than half (58 percent) are in the first four years of serving as a principal. Traditional public school principals tend to be more seasoned, with only 16 percent new to administration and 42 percent with four or fewer years under their belt. Urban charter school leaders and traditional urban public school principals exhibit slightly different racial diversity: 30 percent of charter school leaders are African American (as opposed to 26 percent in traditional public schools) and 8 percent are Hispanic (as opposed to 11 percent in traditional public schools).

In addition to the Schools and Staffing Survey, this paper draws from an original survey of charter school directors in three Midwest states (Illinois, Ohio, and Wisconsin). That survey was developed by NCSRP and administered jointly with the National Alliance for Public Charter Schools in the winter of 2007. The results provide a view into the background characteristics of leaders in these schools.³ The directors in this regional survey have a broad range of training and experience, especially in organizational management, curriculum and instruction, and the local community politics. On average, the leaders in this survey are late in their careers—respondents averaged 51 years or older and one-third expect to retire from this position. More of these charter school principals (42 percent) are new to administration, in contrast to the 2003–2004 national survey respondents.

The survey of Midwest charter school leaders also provides detail about where they have

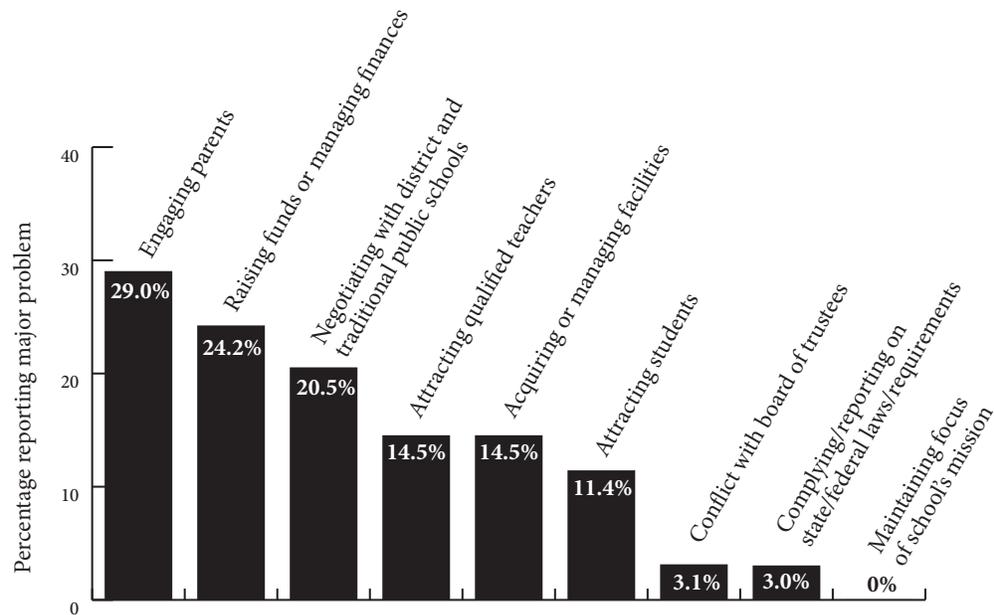
2. U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics, Principal Questionnaire, 2003–2004. A nationally represented random sample and all statistics reported reflect weighted measures.

3. Betheny Gross and Kirsten Martens Pochop, *Leadership To Date, Leadership Tomorrow: A Review of Data on Charter School Directors*, NCSRP working paper #2007-2 (Seattle: Center on Reinventing Public Education, June 2007), 6-9. Sample size is 132 out of a census of 497, a 33 percent response rate. Due to the low response rate, there is the possibility of selection bias.

been trained and how well prepared they felt they were to do the job. Most charter school leaders (80 percent) have a degree in education, while a few have degrees in social science (7 percent) and business (4 percent). Most leaders (80 percent) have taken courses in education leadership, curriculum and instruction, education law, and child development. A much smaller proportion (22 percent) took courses in nonprofit management.

Regardless of preparation—in education, social science, business, or nonprofit management—charter school leaders say they struggle with important aspects of the job. In the Midwest survey, charter leaders were asked about areas that are problems for them and their schools (see figure 1). Almost one-third report that engaging parents is a major problem, while close to one-quarter struggle with raising funds and managing finances. The third biggest problem is negotiating with local school districts.

Figure 1. Charter Leaders Struggle with Some Unique Challenges



Traditional Leadership Programs Found Lacking

Leading a quality school today—charter or otherwise—requires skills in many areas. Recent studies of school leaders catalog a wide array of required skills.⁴ The variety and complexity of these skill requirements suggest the need for rigorous, on-going training for all school leaders. However, other recent studies find that traditional public school leadership preparation programs are falling short. In 2005, Arthur Levine, former president of Teachers College at Columbia, released the results of a four-year study he had conducted of such programs at the nation's 1,206 schools, colleges, and departments of education. His findings were grim: the majority of the leadership preparation programs offered irrelevant curriculum, low admission and graduation standards, a weak faculty, inadequate clinical instruction, inappropriate degrees, and poor research. Surveys he conducted of principals and superintendents were equally sobering, with almost all respondents claiming they were unprepared to cope with classroom realities and in-school politics. A full third complained that they were unprepared to educate multi-ethnic and multi-racial populations, deal with parents or school bureaucracies, and adapt to increased testing and accountability.⁵ Critics of the study claim Levine used a negative lens, missed innovative efforts already underway to improve leadership preparation, and based some findings on anecdotes and mediocre survey response rates.⁶

More recently, in 2007, Frederick Hess and Andrew Kelly produced another critical assessment of principal preparation programs. Hess and Kelly reviewed the nation's programs that train the most candidates, as well as those that are regarded as the most prestigious. They set out to look closely at what principals are being taught, believing that "effective principal preparation ought to include considerable attention to accountability, managing with data and utilizing research; to hiring, recruiting, evaluating, and

4. See Bradley Portin et al., *Making Sense of Leading Schools: A Study of the School Principalship* (Seattle: Center on Reinventing Public Education, 2003), 18.

5. Arthur Levine, *Educating School Leaders* (Washington, DC: The Education Schools Project, 2005), 28.

6. Michelle D. Young et al., "An Educative Look at 'Educating School Leaders,'" *UCEA Review* 47, no. 2 (2005): 1-5 <http://www.ncate.org/documents/EdNews/EducLeadersRespMar18.pdf> (accessed February 13, 2008).

terminating personnel; to overseeing an effective instructional program; and to exposing candidates to diverse views regarding educational and organizational management.”⁷ The authors conclude that, in the 31 programs reviewed, principals currently receive limited training in all of these areas.⁸ Hess and Kelly also refer to a 2003 Public Agenda survey, in which 96 percent of principals reported that on-the-job experiences or guidance from colleagues was more helpful than their graduate school studies, and 67 percent reported that typical leadership programs in graduate schools of education are out of touch with the realities of what it takes to run today’s schools.⁹

Recall that in the 2007 Midwest survey, 80 percent of charter school leaders have a degree from traditional public school leadership preparation programs like those Levine, Hess, and Kelly have studied. These charter school leaders have received the same training as their peers in traditional public schools, and it is training that is arguably equally as “out of touch” for charter school leaders as it is for traditional school principals. Even if a school leader earns a degree at an Ivy League principal preparation program and performs at the top of the class, chances are that leader still lacks important skills needed to manage a charter school effectively. While many of the skills needed to run a charter school are similar to those of today’s traditional public school principals (leading instruction, tending to the culture of the school, and managing people), charter leaders also need to ensure sufficient student enrollment to fund operations, find and manage school facilities, hire the right faculty for the school, and negotiate relations with boards, parents, and authorizers.¹⁰ Against that backdrop, when a traditionally trained school leader agrees to run a charter school, he or she faces a daunting skill gap.

7. Frederick Hess and Andrew Kelly, “Learning to Lead: What Gets Taught in Principal Preparation Programs,” *Teachers College Record* 109, no. 1 (January 2007), 246.

8. *Ibid.*, 268.

9. Steve Farkas, Jean Johnson, and Ann Duffett, *Rolling Up Their Sleeves: Superintendents and Principals Talk About What’s Needed To Fix Public Schools* (New York: Public Agenda, 2003) 39.

10. Brett Lane, “A Profile of the Leadership Needs of Charter School Founders” (Portland, OR: Northwest Regional Educational Laboratory, 1998); Terrence E. Deal and Herbert C. Hentschke, *Adventures of Charter School Creators: Leading From the Ground Up* (Lanham, MD: Scarecrow Education, 2004); Boyd Dressler, “Charter School Leadership,” *Education and Urban Society* 33, no. 2 (2001): 170-185; Priscilla Wohlstetter and Noelle Griffin, “Creating and Sustaining Learning Communities: Early Lessons from Charter Schools,” Occasional Paper Series (Philadelphia: Consortium for Policy Research in Education, University of Pennsylvania, 1998); Amy Stuart Wells, *Beyond the Rhetoric of Charter School Reform: A Study of Ten California Districts* (Los Angeles: UCLA Charter School Study, 1998).

Table 1. Charter School Leadership Preparation Programs in 2007

	PROGRAM NAME	YEARS IN EXISTENCE	SCOPE OF SERVICE	LENGTH OF PROGRAM
FULL-TIME	New Leaders for New Schools, <i>Multiple sites</i>	7	Nationwide	15-month residency; 5 years of ongoing support
	Building Excellent Schools, <i>Multiple sites</i>	6	Nationwide	1 year
	KIPP School Leadership Program, <i>Multiple sites</i>	6	Nationwide	1 year
ONLINE	Master of Education for Educational Entrepreneurs — Arizona State University*, <i>Phoenix, AZ</i>	7	Nationwide	18 months
	Master of Arts in Educational Leadership — Central Michigan University, <i>Mount Pleasant, MI</i>	< 1	Nationwide	2 years
PART-TIME	Edison Leadership Development Academy, <i>Locations vary</i>	13	Nationwide	16 days
	California Charter Schools Association — Charter Launch, <i>CA, Locations vary</i>	3	Statewide	18 months
	California Charter Schools Association — California Charter Quality Institute, <i>CA, Locations vary</i>	3	Statewide	3 years
	Chief Business Officer Training Program — Charter Schools Development Center <i>Sacramento, CA</i>	< 1	Statewide	22 days
SUMMER ENRICHMENT	Leadership Institute — Colorado League of Charter Schools, <i>Denver, CO</i>	3	Statewide	8 days
	Leadership Institute — Charter Schools Development Center, <i>Lake Tahoe, CA</i>	9	Statewide	6 days
	Summer Institute for Charter School Leadership — Vanderbilt University, <i>Nashville, TN</i>	3	Nationwide	5 days
	Charter School Institute — Harvard University, <i>Cambridge, MA</i>	No response	Nationwide	4 days

* Includes some face-to-face instruction

Charter School Leadership Programs Take Up the Challenge

Given this skill gap, a combination of markets and philanthropy has responded with some early solutions. In recent years, a new crop of specialty training programs for charter school leaders has developed. From the Knowledge Is Power Program (KIPP) School Leadership Program to California's Charter Schools Development Center's Summer Institute, in 2007 NCSRP research staff identified 13 charter school leadership preparation programs trying to address the need.¹¹

To learn more about these programs, NCSRP contacted administrators at each program and sent them an online survey asking a range of questions about the mechanics, curriculum, and quality of the programs: What do they teach? How many people do they enroll? How selective are they? What does it cost to attend? Do they provide mentoring?¹² The response rate was very encouraging, and most programs were eager to talk about their training; of the 13 programs contacted, 11 provided data.

Table 1 outlines the charter school leader preparation programs surveyed in 2007. They ranged from full-time to summer enrichment/professional development programs, and from classroom-based efforts to online training. The longest established had been in existence for 13 years at the time of the survey, while the newest had been operating for less than a year.

11. This list includes programs intent on training charter school leaders. There are many other programs—both traditional and alternative—where charter school leaders train but that is not the emphasis of the program itself. In addition, new programs are opening each year. For example, see the programs offered by High Tech High Graduate School of Education, which opened in September 2007 (<http://gse.hightechhigh.org/>).

12. See Appendix A for complete text of survey.

NO MORE ONE-SIZE-FITS-ALL TRAINING FOR CHARTER SCHOOL PRINCIPALS

A quick glance at table 1 shows how different these programs are from each other in a variety of ways. They vary in size. Some programs train over 100 leaders per year by open registration, while others ask leaders to compete for 15 or fewer spots. They vary in duration. The longest programs run for over a year and include ongoing support; others operate as four-day ‘weekender’ conferences. Program content also varies from site to site. Some are consistent, featuring a rigorous, original, core curriculum sequence, while others change each time, rotating guest speakers one year to the next.¹³ The programs also vary on their desired product—some train people to open charter schools and some train current principals on state-specific charter issues, while others train school leaders who receive a Master’s degree and principal certification on completion. They also range in cost. A six-day program may cost the participant \$600, while a program lasting 1 ½ years, while free to the participant, costs the program \$120,000/individual to provide.

Despite their variations, however, these charter school leader preparation programs actually are more similar to each other in their courses, methods, instructors, and training time than they are to traditional principal preparation programs. In fact, charter school leadership preparation programs differ significantly from traditional programs and these differences are striking.

Coursework comparison

Regarding traditional principal preparation programs, Levine’s 2005 survey of 738 principals reveals that most (over 80 percent) took the same nine courses for their core training: instructional leadership, school law, education psychology, curriculum development, research methods, historical and philosophical foundations of education, teaching and learning, child and adolescent development, and the school principalship. These classes totaled between 75 and 90 percent of the required credits. Levine sums up the course array this way: “If one removed the class on the principalship from the list, it would be a real challenge to guess the purpose of the program.”¹⁴ It might be an exaggeration to say that schools of education took a sequence already developed for teacher preparation, added a course on the school principal, and called it a leadership training program—but it would not be much of an exaggeration.

13. See Appendix B for complete program information.

14. Levine, *Educating School Leaders*, 28.

In contrast, most of the 13 charter school leader preparation programs that NCSRП surveyed covered the following topics as their core coursework: leadership skills; personnel (recruiting, hiring, evaluation, discipline) and labor relations; charter school law and legal issues; charter school financial management fundamentals; special education; academic accountability (defining and measuring student performance); facilities management; and charter renewal. These topics are practical and fundamental. If one took out the word “charter” from the titles, these topics seem to be the substance to which most potential school principals should be exposed. That is not to say that all these programs cover the topics in the same way or in the same depth. Some programs explore these issues over the course of two years; others quickly and lightly cover them in a week. Still, the essential point is clear: charter school principal preparation programs expose educators to these leadership issues; traditional principal preparation programs, if Levine’s survey is an accurate guide, do not appear to do so.

Instructional methods comparison

Levine’s survey of principals also found that almost half (47 percent) believed the curriculum of their education schools to be “outdated,” especially with regard to “textbooks, examples used in class, curriculum, professors’ knowledge, and classroom practices.”¹⁵

NCSRП’s survey of 13 charter school leadership training programs does not provide instructional information comparable to Levine’s analysis. It offers no information, for example, about textbooks. However, most charter school leadership programs reported that they are light on lecture, while heavy on field observations, project- and task-based learning, and discussion. For obvious reasons, the summer institutes conduct very little field observation.

Instructor comparison

Instructors at graduate schools of education include full-time academic professors and part-time adjunct practitioners. The criticisms by principals-in-training in Levine’s survey about full-time academics were that they were disconnected from practice. In fact, of the over 2,000 faculty who replied to Levine’s faculty survey, an average of only 6 percent had ever been a principal.¹⁶ The part-time adjuncts, on the other hand, tended

15. *Ibid.*, 30.

16. *Ibid.*, 38.

to be practitioners (superintendents and principals) but often taught subjects in which they had very little scholarly knowledge or expertise and resorted to “telling war stories—personal anecdotes about their adventures as school administrators.”¹⁷

Instructors in the charter school leader preparation programs include a mix of university faculty and expert practitioners. It is entirely possible that the university faculty in these programs is equally divorced from practice and that the practitioners also spend their time on “war stories.” The 13-program survey reveals little on this score. What is known is that each of these 13 programs surveys participants at the end of the program, relies heavily on word-of-mouth for enrollment, and (except for tenured faculty at university-based programs) does not guarantee instructors their positions.

Length of training comparison

University colleges of education are fairly uniform in the credits needed to graduate, and in what students achieve upon completion—Master’s degrees, Ed.D.’s, and Ph.D.’s. A Master’s degree might take up to two years of full-time study (and longer if pursued on a part-time basis), while it is not unusual for Ph.D. candidates to spend ten years or more in pursuit of the “terminal” degree.

Broadly speaking, there appear to be two types of charter school leadership preparation programs. ‘Full-service’ programs are designed to act as a substitute for a traditional preparation program. Full-service programs teach a comprehensive curriculum and have or aspire toward the ability to award a Master’s degree or equivalent. Of the 13 programs surveyed by NCSRP, 5 can be classified as full service.

‘Enrichment’ programs make up the remaining 8 charter school leadership preparation programs. Rather than attempt to provide a comprehensive training program, enrichment programs are designed to provide leaders with a limited number of specific skills in shorter increments of time. Another difference between enrichment and full-service programs is audience. While full-service programs are oriented to meet the needs of aspiring leaders, enrichment programs are designed to help current leaders delve deeper into or diversify their existing skills, often through practitioner-led seminars and workshops.

17. Ibid.

CHARTER SCHOOL LEADERSHIP PREPARATION OPTIONS SHOW PROMISE

Pooling both full-service and enrichment programs together as a whole suggests some positive trends emerging in the new market of charter school leadership preparation programs.

- In the 15 years since the first charter schools opened, there have been **quick and innovative responses to the need** for training leaders. Edison Schools opened its own Edison Leadership Development Academy 13 years ago; 12 additional alternative programs followed, growing right along with the charter movement and in much the same entrepreneurial manner.
- Charter school leader preparation programs offer **training to build an array of skill sets and expertise**. Building Excellent Schools is focused on the goal of producing leaders ready to open their own charter school. New Leaders for New Schools concentrates on producing high-caliber instructional leaders who can raise student achievement in the most challenging schools, leaving the business side of running charter schools to management organizations or others. California's Chief Business Officer Training Program is the first of its kind and specific for charter schools' financial officers. Some programs offer a credential upon completion; others do not. This differentiation of program is in contrast to traditional education programs that take a more uniform approach to training principals.
- Charter programs put a special emphasis on **apprenticeship and support**. The foundation of both the KIPP and New Leaders for New Schools preparation programs emphasizes learning while doing. So, prospective principals shadow or work under current strong charter school principals. The rest of the programs offer more training, mentoring, or networking after the initial training is completed. In general, the apprenticeship and support are better coordinated and more strategic than the experiences offered at most traditional principal preparation programs.
- Nearly all programs **accommodate working leaders**, offering courses in short sessions during the year and longer sessions during the summer.

CSDC OFFERS SPECIFIC TRAINING PROGRAM FOR CHARTER SCHOOLS' FINANCIAL OFFICERS

California's Charter Schools Development Center (CSDC) is one of only a few multi-service technical support organizations in the charter sector. Serving California's 700-plus charter schools, CSDC provides charter school operators, developers, and granting agencies with technical development and consulting services. Recognizing a need for additional training in the areas of financial management, categorical program management, and compliance, CSDC launched its Chief Business Officer (CBO) Training Program early in 2007. The training offers a unique sequence of coursework that provides 22 modules of technical coursework and training for charter school leaders in California. Program participants' tuition is partially subsidized by a state categorical funding program that provides a \$3,000 cash subsidy for each participant that completes the program.

Eric Premack, Co-Director of CSDC, believes that state support for in-depth training can be beneficial, but should be consistent and administered by agencies that are reasonably sympathetic to chartering. He says, "The up-front costs of developing technical training programs are huge. It would be helpful if the State could distinguish between these costs and the costs of keeping a program in operation—and to structure funding accordingly."

In seeking financial support from the state of California, CSDC has created a potential model for using state support as a tool to bridge the charter school leader skill gap. Future adopters of this model will need to learn from these efforts and work to ensure that their own attempts will result in sustained support.

NLNS' YEAR-LONG RESIDENCY OFFERS APPRENTICESHIP AND SUPPORT

New Leaders for New Schools (NLNS) was founded in 2000 with the goal of improving the academic achievement of every child by recruiting, training, and placing talented principals in urban public schools—both traditional and charter. As of 2007, NLNS has trained 430 people (28 of whom are leading charter schools). The program's focus on accountability for student achievement and the applied and hands-on nature of the principal's job led NLNS to build its training around a year-long residency (with a mentor principal) in a school similar to the one the new principal would be leading. For example, aspiring charter school leaders are paired with a mentor charter school principal. In an interview with the authors, Jon Schnur, co-founder of NLNS, explains:

The year-long residency is an absolute cornerstone of our training. Aspiring charter leaders do their residency in a charter school. So they are taking on a very structured leadership role in a charter school, and getting feedback from both a principal on-site, as well as a leadership coach, while they are leading and learning about what it takes to lead a charter school.

In addition to job search support, New Leaders participants receive “lifelong” support from NLNS staff and the broader New Leaders Community through continual feedback, coaching, and the exchange of effective practices.

- Some of these programs **differentiate training based on principal experience**. Both Edison Schools and California's Charter Schools Development Center Summer Institute, for example, offer an array of workshops and networking based on experience.
- Although these 13 programs cannot duplicate the offerings of literally hundreds of schools, colleges, and departments of education, they are relatively **accessible**, with training offered throughout the country or available online.
- These programs **offer an array of ways to learn**, with both online and classroom instruction, with projects, field visits, and lectures. Instructors include experienced practitioners and university professors.

- For the most part, these programs are **affordable**. Full-time programs like the KIPP School Leadership Program treat trainees as employees and pay them a salary. The online programs associated with universities charge a fee on par with typical state university tuition. Summer enrichment programs, however, are proportionally more expensive. Harvard’s four-day Charter School Institute charges nearly \$2,000, as does Vanderbilt’s five-day Summer Institute for Charter School Leadership.¹⁸
- And finally, these programs seem to be **meeting trainee expectations**, each with many more applicants than openings, screening entrants at the front end and raising the odds that graduates will be high caliber and committed. NLNS turns down ten applicants for every one it accepts. Arizona State University turns down four for every one, and even summer enrichment programs like the Leadership Academy offered by the California Charter Schools Development Center turn away two applicants for every one accepted.

EDISON OFFERS 3 DISTINCT TRAINING PROGRAMS FOR NEW AND EXPERIENCED LEADERS

Over the past 13 years, Edison Schools has seen its leadership development program grow to keep pace with the organization’s network of schools. Program offerings are currently organized into a “leadership framework” composed of three distinct training programs designed to accommodate leaders as they progress through their careers. First, the Aspiring Leaders Training offers future principals an opportunity to begin skill development through mini-conferences. A second program, Edison Leadership Team Training, is aimed at giving new principals and their leadership teams guidance in growing as a team and developing school-wide goals. Experienced principals receive ongoing development opportunities through a third program, the Edison Leadership Development Academy. Taken together, these three programs provide a “pipeline” to “veteran” framework for teaching and reinforcing the leadership skills of Edison principals.

18. See Appendix D for more details on costs.

Developed out of a need to prepare leaders for the complex world of charter school management, these pioneer programs are doing many things well. Accessibility, affordability, and diversity in program type have lifted these programs to prominence in recent years. There are, however, several basic problems that need to be addressed if these programs are to scale up to serve the growing population of charter school leaders.

WHY CURRENT PROGRAMS ARE NOT YET SUFFICIENT

Three major problems have been identified as the primary barriers to getting charter school leadership development on track. First, though these programs cover a lot of topics, they miss or treat too lightly some of the issues charter leaders report the greatest struggles with on the job. Secondly, there is not enough data available to sufficiently assess the quality of these programs. While most programs would claim to create successful charter school leaders, little is known about the success graduates experience in raising student achievement or accomplishing the other goals of the training programs. Finally, despite their relative accessibility, these programs are not plentiful enough and cannot meet the capacity demands.

Not training in areas of greatest challenge

One major criticism of traditional principal preparation programs is that they are not focused on the areas in which principals say they most need help. In the Levine study, for example, principals complained they were not being trained to deal with classroom realities, in-school politics, educating diverse populations, working with parents and school bureaucracies, and preparing for increased testing and accountability.¹⁹ In NCSRP's Midwest survey, charter school leaders echoed these frustrations. They find themselves struggling to engage parents, raise funds and manage finances, negotiate with the district and other schools, and attract qualified teachers. They also say they lack strategic planning skills and struggle to collect and use data well.²⁰

The 13 programs in the NCSRP survey represent a range of different responses in terms of their emphases in these areas. Table 2 lists the struggles reported by traditional and charter school principals in both the Midwest and Levine surveys cited above, and the

19. Levine, *Educating School Leaders*, 28.

20. Gross and Pochop, *Leadership to Date*.

extent to which the programs report covering these topics in some way.²¹ The short research timeframe of this study made it impossible to go very far below the surface to find out how these topics are covered and whether people who come out of these programs report being better prepared or more confident in dealing with these issues. Despite those shortcomings, the results are instructive, even if cursory. At a minimum, they offer some insight into what the 13 leadership development programs say they are doing to help potential charter school principals deal with these important challenges.

At a glance, it is easy to see that financial management is a topic universally covered. All responding programs pay attention to finances. Data-based decisionmaking also seems to receive a lot of attention, with the collection and use of data a close second to financial management in terms of the frequency with which these programs address the issue. Negotiating with the district is also covered by a majority of the responding programs, followed by attracting teachers. Working with diverse students and with parents are less frequently cited issues. It is also interesting to note that the KIPP, Edison, and Central Michigan University models (one full-time, one part-time, and one online, respectively) seem, unlike the other programs, to cover most of the challenges that create the greatest frustration for principals.

As table 2 shows, financial management and collecting and using data—two areas the Levine study revealed are rarely taught at traditional leadership preparation programs—get consistent attention in the charter preparation programs.²² Given that a majority of these programs have a limited timeframe in which to work, it can be assumed that even when a program covers these topics, it is unlikely to cover them in much depth. The Colorado League Summer Institute, for example, offers training on strategic planning and using data, but only over the course of eight days of training and in combination with other important topics. This represents a good start, but it is hard to believe the program is detailed enough, or sustained enough, to really improve skills in that short time frame.

21. Programs in the survey were asked to list the topics they cover in training. This table comparing the responses against leadership skill gaps was reviewed by each program and modified as needed. Because self-reported, the results are limited, but they are interesting nonetheless.

22. Levine, *Educating School Leaders*, 27-29.

Table 2. Charter Leader Preparation Programs Hit Some Important Areas, Miss Others

Program Name		Educate Diverse Students	Collect and Use Data	Strategic Planning	Attract Qualified Teachers	Engage Parents	Negotiate with District	Financial Management	Fundraising
Full-time	New Leaders for New Schools		■			■	■	■	
	Building Excellent Schools							■	
	KIPP School Leadership Program	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■
Online	Arizona State University		■					■	
	Central Michigan University	■	■	■	■		■	■	
Part-time	Edison	■	■	■	■	■		■	
	Charter Launch		■	■	■		■	■	■
	California Charter Quality Institute		■	■				■	
	Charter Schools Development Center — Chief Business Officer						■	■	
Summer Enrichment	Harvard Summer Institute	NR	NR	NR	NR	NR	NR	NR	NR
	Vanderbilt Summer Institute	NR	NR	NR	NR	NR	NR	NR	NR
	Charter Schools Development Center — Summer Institute	■	■		■		■	■	
	Colorado League Summer Institute		■	■				■	

*NR = No response

Difficult to judge quality

A principal's success at raising student achievement in his or her school is a clear indicator as to whether a training program is relevant and of high quality. This information needs to be more readily available. When asked how they measure their success, many of the training programs noted that they survey participants at the end of their training. This information about the quality of training as perceived by the participants is important, and rarely sought by traditional preparation programs.²³ And it is an important start in assessing whether the training was relevant and effective. However, only three of the charter preparation programs link their effectiveness to the principal's success in the field.²⁴ Nor do the other programs mention other measures of success or accountability.

The NLNS measure of success, by contrast, is clearly spelled out and well known by trainees and those within the organization: at schools led by NLNS leaders, 95 percent of students will perform at or above proficiency on standardized tests in five year's time. By using an accountability measure that is linked directly to student achievement, NLNS will be able to test the quality of the program based on desired results, rather than an intermediate outcome of principal satisfaction with the training. After seven years' experience with the program, the first NLNS leadership cohorts are just now approaching the five-year threshold at which the program can begin to monitor its own success.²⁵ If the ultimate goal of a principal preparation program is to create well-educated students, then there should be a measure for testing whether the goal is being met.

Capacity Unable to Meet Demand

Together the five full-time programs in our sample train only 100 new charter school leaders each year. This represents just a drop in the bucket compared to the number needed.²⁶ There are simply not enough preparation programs or open slots to train the hundreds of new leaders needed every year to run charter schools. Each year, the number of new charter schools continues to expand—over 330 new charter schools opened in the

23. Levine states in his study of over half of the nation's 1,200 schools, colleges, and departments of education that "self-assessment is largely absent." *Educating School Leaders*, 47.

24. The three programs that reported linking their own success to principals' success were Building Excellent Schools, New Leaders for New Schools, and the California Charter Schools Association's Charter Launch program.

25. New Leaders for New Schools has also commissioned RAND to conduct a five-year study of the program and its effectiveness, with results three years away.

26. See Appendix D for program capacity information.

2006-2007 school year alone.²⁷ In addition to new schools forming, the existing 3,800 charter schools require new leaders as a result of turnover. Meanwhile, experienced principals seek additional training on the job. In light of these realities, it is not surprising that all 13 programs indicated that demand is growing. If the charter school movement is serious about growth, the question about how to create additional training options is crucial.

A second limitation on access to these programs is that they often cater only to leaders who meet certain criteria. KIPP and Edison, for example, provide ample training and professional support, but they only do so for principals who manage affiliate schools. Other programs limit participation by training only leaders within the state. Taking these “restricted” programs into account, a charter school leader may be left with only six program options to choose from—two of which provide less than a week of training yearly and others that are highly selective, accepting a small fraction of those who apply. (See Appendix D for the size and constraints of current programs.)

27. Robin Lake, ed., *Hopes, Fears, & Reality: A Balanced Look at American Charter Schools in 2007*, National Charter School Research Project (Seattle: Center on Reinventing Public Education, 2007).

More Training Options Needed For Charter and All School Leaders

Even with these 13 training programs to choose from, it is clear that if the charter school sector is serious about scale, it must consider a broader strategy to train adequate numbers of current and new charter school principals.

First, strong potential charter school leaders must be identified and recruited. NLNS offers a \$1,000 finder's fee to people who recommend a successful applicant. Philanthropists and foundations could employ a similar approach. Next, training options must be updated to include relevant curricula and to continue beyond classroom time. They also need to make themselves more accessible—most have weak web pages and are hard to reach via email or phone. Although this paper identifies some of the more noteworthy differences between these training options, the programs themselves are not terribly clear about what sets each of them apart from the others. When and how should someone choose one program over another? Once training is complete, programs could benefit from taking steps to hold themselves accountable for their graduates' success. Finally, rather than toiling alone, these programs should be networked to share best practices in charter school leader preparation: What's working? What are the programs struggling with? What is innovative about what they do and how do these innovations work?

Below are some strategies to address the challenges of building a strong charter school leadership pipeline.

- **Support expansion of alternative programs**

Programs like NLNS provide evidence of at-scale programs that serve as alternatives for traditional school leadership training programs. By offering an equivalent degree, these alternative programs are able to provide a portion of the market with charter-specific training. NLNS is working with nine cities and plans to add one city a year for the foreseeable future. As it expands, NLNS negotiates many things up front, such as changing contracts around, autonomy for school leaders, and principal certification. Before entering any city, the program makes certain that its training will be valued

as an accepted substitute for training from a local school or department of education. This precondition elevates the training program and gives principals-to-be the power to select their preferred path to certification.

Programs that wish to compete at-scale with the traditional conduits for school leadership need to take steps to ensure that they can offer trainees a similar credential. This might mean negotiating with districts or tapping into existing university infrastructures. Without the possibility of a credential, some prospective leaders will choose another program to give them more options in their future. City leaders and charter school supporters can help to smooth the way for this model by working with state and district leaders to make these policy changes and open doors for other training programs.

■ **Tap into local university infrastructures**

If training programs do not have the resources to build themselves into substitute status (as NLNS has done), they should consider tapping into local university infrastructures. Arizona State University's (ASU) Master of Education for Educational Entrepreneurs is essentially a re-packaging of a pre-existing Leadership for Educational Entrepreneurs (LEE) program. Prior to its acquisition, LEE functioned for seven years as an independent competitor to the ASU College of Education. Noting the success of the LEE program, ASU decided to adopt the LEE curriculum and offer an alternative track within their school designed expressly for charter school leaders. This partnership suggests that traditional university training programs can feel the competitive effects of charter programs, and can compete by adapting or acquiring successful competitors.

Given that charter school leaders need training in many emerging educational topics (including financial management and strategic planning), it may also make sense to seek out partnerships with university schools of business, public administration, or nonprofits. Many local colleges and universities already offer working professional executive management and leadership preparation programs on weekends and during the summer. School districts, charter management organizations, city leaders, and others interested in charter leadership preparation could urge the development of new certificate programs geared toward charter school leadership and management. Adding charter-relevant themes and highly regarded practitioners to the structures and courses already offered at a business or public administration school

would strengthen the charter school leadership development movement by giving charter leaders a specialized alternative in the schools they may already be attending.

Such programs could also offer aspiring traditional public school principals the skills they are increasingly responsible for having. This cross-pollination is not lost on NLNS, which actually trains far more traditional school leaders than it does charter school leaders. Traditional public school principals can benefit from the entrepreneurial approach and data-driven focus of expert charter school leaders who teach some courses. As NLNS co-founder Jon Schnur points out, “When you look at what it takes to get dramatic improvement in a charter school, it actually is very similar to what it takes to get that improvement in a traditional public school.” Sharing the training that can get principals poised to bring about big improvements should benefit everyone.

- **Explore low-cost opportunities to offer training online**

Across all charter school leadership preparation programs, the largest barrier to their success seems to be cost. While program managers would gladly expand to provide flexible, high-quality, and affordable training to every charter school leader in the nation, the costs associated with doing so are high, and sources of revenue are few. To confront this, charter advocates wishing to improve training options should consider the benefits of online training. These courses have the capacity to draw from the experiences of the most successful charter school leaders and are flexible enough to meet the time constraints of even the busiest school leader.

By keeping overhead low, online courses are able to focus resources on creating the right curriculum to meet the unique demands of charter school leaders. While some programs, such as Central Michigan University’s Master of Arts in Educational Leadership, are based entirely online, other programs could offer a mix of online and face-to-face training or supplement training with online resources.

- **Increase access to enrichment programs**

Promoting the growth and quality of at-scale, alternative programs might suffice for those leaders at the beginning of their careers, but what about current leaders looking to expand their skill sets? During NCSRP’s research process, one valuable lesson emerged that had not been apparent when the

inquiry began: not all programs wish to provide comprehensive training. While the summer leadership conferences at California's Charter Schools Development Center and the Colorado League of Charter Schools may not suit the needs of the greenest principals, they do have the capacity to add significant value to experienced leaders. However, these enrichment programs need to make a greater impact. Those who wish to see current leaders use training programs to add value to their professional careers can begin taking steps to increase the relevance and sheer number of these programs.

Conclusion

Not unlike the bilingual, politically galvanizing CPA/MBA/experienced principal/knight-errant sought each year by charter schools, charter school leadership preparation programs need to be a lot of things if they are to succeed in providing enough highly skilled leaders. Accomplishing this goal means being strategic. It means attracting high-caliber people to pursue the work, providing current and aspiring leaders with flexible options for high-quality training, supporting them as they work, and using their performance to improve future efforts. Perhaps above all, it means taking the pulse of the needs of leaders and continually adapting to meet them.

Research shows that most current school leaders, whether charter or traditional public school, reach their jobs through traditional preparation programs, the very programs that are currently being challenged for their relevance. Even if these programs were successfully preparing principals for traditional public schools, as currently structured, they would still fall short of meeting the needs of charter school leaders. Recognizing that charter school leaders require different and/or additional training, early leadership development programs are attempting to meet that challenge. While some of these programs may be on the right track, as a group they remain too few, too light on important topics, and too loosely linked with principal success to effectively gauge their quality. If charter advocates want to boost the supply side of high-quality charter school leaders—whether through at-scale or enrichment programming—they must expand both the quality and quantity of training options.

Currently, the best that charter school advocates do for charter schools seeking leaders is provide them with a laundry list of essential professional skills and wish them luck. In the future, advocates can hope that charter school leadership will be more about skill than chance.

APPENDIX A:

Survey Instrument

AUTHORS' NOTE: *The Developing Charter School Leaders Online Survey was sent to 13 charter school leadership preparation programs in May 2007. Participants completed the survey at their convenience and submitted responses for review. In an attempt to ensure that the survey captured the full range of program dynamics, most questions were presented in free response format (as opposed to multiple choice or range of preference).*

Developing Charter School Leaders Online Survey

Dear Survey Participant—

Thank you for taking time out of your busy schedule to answer a few questions about your program. Your responses will help us understand how charter leadership programs differ from traditional principal preparation programs and how programs such as yours are attempting to address the needs of charter school leaders. Currently, little is known about the array of training options for charter school leaders—your willingness to answer the following questions will be a great service for people who want to know about available options, and for policymakers who want to help make sure there are enough training options in the future.

This survey contains three sets of questions:

Part I is designed to access the mechanics of the program: who participates, how much it costs, how long it takes to complete, and so on.

Part II contains questions that deal with the program's curriculum and instructional methods.

Finally, Part III will address the steps that your program is taking to assess performance.

Because each program is unique, we have made an attempt to use short, open-ended questions where possible. There is also space provided at the end of the survey for you to describe elements of your program that this survey has not adequately captured.

The questions are structured to be as straightforward as possible. The survey should not take any longer than 10 or 15 minutes.

Again, we appreciate your participation in this short survey. If you have any questions during the survey, do not hesitate to contact the National Charter School Research Project (NCSRP) at (206) 221-4451 or via e-mail at ncsrp@u.washington.edu.

To begin the survey, click the “Next” button at the bottom of this page.

PART I: PROGRAM MECHANICS

Question 1.

Who is this program designed to serve and in what geographic location?

Question 2.

How many years has the program been in existence?

Question 3.

Since its inception, approximately how many people has the program trained?

Question 4.

What price is charged to participate in the program?

Question 5.

Does your organization pay the participant during the program? If so, how much?

Question 6.

Typically, who is responsible for paying the program fee?

Participant (or participant's school)

State Department of Education

Outside grant

No fee

Other:

Question 7.

What, if any, admission restrictions does your program have in place?

Question 8.

Are there any additional admissions requirements or prerequisites (i.e., must have a Master's degree, must be a certified principal, maximum/minimum years experience)?

Question 9.

Which of the following best describes the admissions process?

Very competitive application

Competitive application

Advance registration

Same day registration

Other:

Question 10.

On average, how many participants do you admit into the program?

Question 11.

Would you say that you typically have more applicants than spaces in the program? If so, how many more?

Question 12.

Is there a limit to the number of participants admitted?

No

Yes: Max number =

Question 13.

How often do you offer the program (i.e., once a year, quarterly, once a month, in the summer, etc.)?

Question 14.

How long does it typically take for the participant to complete the program?

Question 15.

What activity signals that the participant has completed the program?

Final paper or presentation

Completed charter application

Formal test

Fulfillment of attendance requirement

No requirement

Program is on-going, no official end

Other:

Question 16.

Is there a degree or certificate awarded to participants upon completion? If so, please explain.

PART II: CURRICULUM AND INSTRUCTIONAL PRACTICE

Question 17.

Where does the formal coursework usually take place?

Question 18.

What is the structure of the formal course work (i.e., classroom hours, credit hours, number of seminars, modules, etc.)?

Question 19.

In the space provided, please describe the core courses associated with the program. Please be as specific as possible.

Sample responses include general curricular areas such as school-wide instructional leadership, managing people and problems, financial management, etc.

Question 20.

Please indicate the amount of time your program devotes to the following types of instruction.

(None, Almost None, Some, Almost All, All)

Lecture

Discussion

Project/Task-based

Web-based

Field observations

Other:

Question 21.

What attempts, if any, are made to accommodate working school leaders?

Question 22.

What are the backgrounds and experiences of your instructors?

Question 23.

After completing the formal program cycle, are there additional services and supports available to participants? If so, please explain.

Question 24.

What attempts are made to differentiate participants (i.e., first-year leaders vs. veterans, urban vs. rural school leaders, participants with different skill sets)?

PART III: DEFINING SUCCESS

Question 25.

How does your program measure its success?

Question 26.

Does your program use any of the following performance planning and assessment tools?

Please check all that apply

Post-program participant surveys

Focus groups

Other:

Question 27.

How do most participants learn about your program?

Question 28.

Generally speaking, how would you describe the demand for the program?

High

Moderate

Low and declining

Unknown/New program

Other:

Question 29.

Overall, how would you describe demand?

Growing

Leveling

Waning

Unknown/New program

Question 30.

If there are other aspects of your program that you feel were not fully captured by the scope of this survey, please describe them in the space provided.

APPENDIX B:

Program Contact Information

PROGRAM NAME	LOCATION	SUMMARY	CONTACT PHONE	WEBSITE
New Leaders for New Schools (NLNS)	New York, NY	NLNS trains leaders for charter and traditional public schools in nine cities nationwide. Services include nine weeks of intensive training, one year in residency, and ongoing support. Principal certificate earned.	(646) 792-1070	http://www.nlns.org
Building Excellent Schools (BES)	Boston, MA	BES trains leaders to found charter schools in one of 13 cities nationwide. The program includes a mixture of classroom and field experience over the course of one “fellowship” year.	(617) 227-4545	http://www.buildingexcellentschools.org
KIPP School Leadership Program	San Francisco, CA	A six-week intensive program of coursework at Stanford University run in partnership with the Stanford Educational Leadership Institute, covering instructional, organizational, and operational leadership; also residencies and training conferences.	(866) 345-5477	www.kipp.org
Arizona State University — Master of Education for Educational Entrepreneurs*	Phoenix, AZ	This Master’s degree program has a combination of online and face-to-face instruction; curricular focus on education and business concepts. Geared to those who have an interest in school leadership in today’s society.	(602) 543-3634	http://ctel.asu.edu/
Central Michigan University — Master of Arts in Educational Leadership	Mount Pleasant, MI	33-credit-hour Master of Arts degree in Educational Leadership with an emphasis in Charter Schools Administration. Offered in an online cohort format.	(877) 268-4636	http://www.cel.cmich.edu/charter
California Charter Schools Association — Charter Launch	Los Angeles, CA	A 70-hour training program for groups seeking to open a California charter school. Training includes one-on-one sessions, workshops, and site visits.	(213) 244-1446	http://www.myschool.org
California Charter Schools Association — California Charter Quality Institute	Los Angeles, CA	Includes over 30 days of professional development delivered to California school leadership teams during their first three years of implementation. Designed as a continuation of the Charter Launch program (see above).	(213) 244-1446	http://www.myschool.org

PROGRAM NAME	LOCATION	SUMMARY	CONTACT PHONE	WEBSITE
Edison Leadership Development Academy (ELDA)	New York, NY	Training and ongoing support for experienced principals and school leadership teams. ELDA focuses on leadership in the context of school improvement, offering practical opportunities to understand and hone the managerial skills needed to effectively run a district partnership school.	(212) 419-1600	www.edisonschools.com
Charter Schools Development Center — Chief Business Officer (CBO) Training Program	Sacramento, CA	Administered by the State Superintendent of Public Instruction, this program provides incentive funding to school districts, county offices of education, and direct-funded charter schools to send their CBO's or CBO candidates to training provided by state-qualified training providers.	(916) 278-6069	www.cacharterschools.org
Charter Schools Development Center — Summer Institute	Sacramento, CA	Intensive, multi-day “boot camp” designed to ensure that charter school leaders have the technical, organizational, and interpersonal skills and tools necessary to effectively lead their schools.	(916) 278-6069	www.cacharterschools.org
Harvard University — Summer Institute	Cambridge, MA	Four-day program helps individuals at the school, system, and policy levels develop leadership strategies and perspectives necessary to build capacity and significantly improve outcomes for students.	(617) 495-1825	www.gse.harvard.edu
Vanderbilt University — Summer Institute	Nashville, TN	One week of training designed for individuals and teams who lead and manage charter schools. Participants will enhance their ability to make choices for their schools grounded in theory and supported by data.	(615) 343-6222	www.peadbody.vanderbilt.edu
Colorado League of Charter Schools — Summer Institute	Denver, CO	Eight days of training designed to meet the needs of both new and existing charters, with a common commitment to student achievement and operational excellence.	(303) 989-5356	www.coloradoleague.org

* Due to lack of funding, ASU no longer offers the Master of Education for Educational Entrepreneurs. Charter school leaders are still trained at ASU, though not in a charter specific cohort. They receive training through the traditional ASU Master of Education program.

APPENDIX C:

Program Locations and Time Commitments

	PROGRAM NAME	LOCATION OF FORMAL COURSE WORK
FULL-TIME	New Leaders for New Schools	Locations vary
	Building Excellent Schools (BES)	BES central office, Boston, MA
	KIPP School Leadership Program	Stanford Education Leadership Institute, Stanford, CA
ONLINE	Arizona State University (ASU)	ASU College of Teacher Education and Leadership, Phoenix, AZ
	Central Michigan University	Online
PART-TIME	Edison	Locations vary
	Charter Launch	CA, Locations vary
	California Charter Quality Institute	CA, Locations vary
	Charter Schools Development Center - Chief Business Officer	Conference center, Sacramento, CA; Area charter schools
SUMMER ENRICHMENT	Harvard Summer Institute	Harvard Graduate School of Education, Cambridge, MA
	Vanderbilt Summer Institute	Vanderbilt University, Nashville, TN
	Charter Schools Development Center - Summer Institute	Conference center Lake Tahoe, CA
	Colorado League Summer Institute (CLCS)	CLCS office, Denver, CO; Area charter schools

APPENDIX D:

Program Tuition and Fees

	PROGRAM NAME	FEE	TRAINEES	
			PER YEAR	PAYEE
FULL-TIME	New Leaders for New Schools	No cost	100*	Outside grant, School district, Charter Management Organization, Private fundraising
	Building Excellent Schools	\$0**	12	—
	KIPP School Leadership Program	\$0**	15	—
ONLINE	Arizona State University	In state: \$2,500; Out of state: \$6,000	24	Participant/participant's school, Outside grant
	Central Michigan University	\$13,300	25	Participant/participant's school
PART-TIME	Edison	\$0***	100	—
	Charter Launch	\$12,000	33	Participant/participant's school, Outside grant
	California Charter Quality Institute	\$2,500	33	Participant/participant's school, Outside grant
	Charter Schools Development Center — Chief Business Officer	\$5,500	25	State Department of Education, Participant/participant's school
SUMMER ENRICHMENT	Harvard Summer Institute	\$1,995	NR	Participant/participant's school
	Vanderbilt Summer Institute	\$1,900	20	Participant/participant's school, State Department of Education
	Charter Schools Development Center — Summer Institute	\$600	50	Participant/participant's school, Outside grant
	Colorado League Summer Institute	\$1,400	22	Participant/participant's school

* Includes both charter school and traditional public school leaders. Approximately 24 of these are charter leaders.

** Program pays participant

*** No fee for participants from Edison schools; \$3000 for principals from non-managed schools

The National Charter School Research Project (NCSRP) aims to bring 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. Original research, state-by-state charter school data, and links to charter school research from many sources can be found there.



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