



Succession Planning

Fifth in a series of six

‘Find and keep the very best principals’

Building leadership at the school level is one of the most critical issues facing any public school district. Principals are the key lever for change at any school. Who will be the next generation of principals, administrators and superintendents, and how will they be chosen and trained?

How well a district addresses succession issues will shape its public schools for decades. In the case of Charlotte-Mecklenburg Schools, those decisions are also shaping the present: The district’s principal turnover each year can approach 25 percent, thanks to retirements, relocations, dismissals and other factors. Moreover, CMS has opened a dozen new schools in two years, and several more new schools are in the planning stages, increasing the number of school leaders that will be needed.

District leaders believe that it is essential to have a coherent, purposeful framework for choosing school leaders, rather than relying solely on self-selection through individual promotions and ambitions. To that end, Charlotte-Mecklenburg Schools has built a strong leadership pipeline through two innovative partnerships – one national, one local – to find and train aspiring principals.

“Training our present and future leaders is one of the biggest responsibilities we have,” says Dr. Peter C. Gorman, superintendent. “I’ve never seen a great school that didn’t have a great principal – so we want to find and keep the very best principals.”

The district has partnered with the national nonprofit New Leaders for New Schools, which trains principals for high-needs schools. The partnership will provide CMS with more than 50 principals over the next five years.

Another 50 assistant principals will be trained over the next three years through Leaders for Tomorrow. This unique program was developed by Winthrop University in collaboration with CMS administrators – and graduates of the master’s-level program are trained and licensed to serve as school principals.

These two programs are helping CMS meet a critical and growing need in the district. Both programs are expected to yield a diverse, highly qualified group of leaders for the future. This white paper examines both programs in detail.

New Leaders for New Schools

Charlotte-Mecklenburg Schools was chosen as a partner by New Leaders for New Schools in December of 2008, successfully completing a longstanding push by the district to bring the program to Charlotte.

“Our district was chosen for this partnership after a rigorous, yearlong selection process that looked at our needs, our capacity for growth and our commitment to academic excellence,” says Ann Clark, the CMS chief academic officer who led the work to bring the program to CMS. “It also reflects our district’s deeply held belief that we can have 90 percent or more of our students on grade level.”

District projections show that between 2010 and 2014, 37 of the 174 principals who were working in CMS in 2008 will become eligible to retire. That represents 21 percent of all principals in the district, or about one in five. “That’s a lot of turnover,” says Clark.



New Leaders for New Schools will recruit and train 50 new principals for high-need schools in CMS through 2014. The executive director for New Leaders for New Schools in Charlotte is Eric Guckian, who began his career as a Teach For America teacher in the South Bronx before launching Teach For America in Charlotte. An executive director in one of the district's learning communities was also tapped to help manage the program with Guckian.

“We expect to find 50 very strong candidates over the next five years through this partnership, and they’ll be even stronger when they complete the New Leaders for New Schools training,” Guckian says.

Applicants chosen for the training program will participate in intensive summer training, followed by a one-year, full-time paid residency in a leadership position with a strong mentor principal.

New Leaders finds outstanding individuals from diverse backgrounds, experiences and perspectives. All candidates have two years of prior teaching experience; half come from the partner districts and half come from outside, with a wide range of experience. Participants may be education veterans with a record of instructional leadership, former teachers now active in nonprofit organizations, business or nonprofit leaders with teaching experience and young leaders with a record of success.

New Leaders for New Schools focuses on training principals for high-needs schools. The first class of nine principal candidates began training in June 2009. Each New Leader is expected to make a long-term commitment to serve Charlotte-Mecklenburg Schools and commit to achieving ambitious goals for students. This includes the goal that schools led by New Leaders principals for at least five years will have 90 percent to 100 percent of students achieve proficiency or above in core academic subjects.

The partnership with New Leaders was greeted with praise by educational leaders around the state.

“North Carolina’s economic future hinges on our ability to improve K-12 and graduate more students who are fully prepared for today’s knowledge-based global economy,” said University of North Carolina President Erskine Bowles. “I’m thrilled to support this partnership, which will produce thousands more CMS students who will be ready to enroll on one of our UNC campuses and will be fully prepared to compete and compete successfully with the world’s best and brightest, wherever they may be.”

The program is also supported by the North Carolina Department of Public Instruction and Mecklenburg Citizens for Public Education (MeckEd), a foundation that supports education in Mecklenburg County.

Local corporations and foundations supporting the partnership include Bank of America, Duke Energy, Presbyterian Health Care, Rodgers Builders and the Wachovia Foundation.



Leaders for Tomorrow

An innovative, unique partnership with a local college, begun with seed money from a local realtor, a Chamber of Commerce affiliate and a local foundation, is helping CMS develop talent already in the district.

The Leaders for Tomorrow advanced-degree program was created at Winthrop University near Charlotte in collaboration with CMS administrators. The program is designed to yield principals trained to lead in a diverse, urban district.

Educational research has shown the need for partnerships, such as the one between CMS and Winthrop, if public schools are going to meet student needs and increase academic growth. Thus far, however, few districts have undertaken this task. In the words of one study, “Traditionally, districts have accepted what they got from universities as the best that scholarship and research can offer.”

But administrators at CMS were not willing to just settle for what they could get. Similarly, Winthrop did not want to offer a degree with inadequate training for the real world of public schools.

The partnership has been enriched by Winthrop’s long history with educators. The college was founded in 1886 in Columbia, S.C., with 21 students. Its mission was the education of teachers. In 1895, the college moved to Rock Hill, S.C., about 20 miles from Charlotte, and today has 6,500 students studying arts and sciences, education, business administration and visual and performing arts.

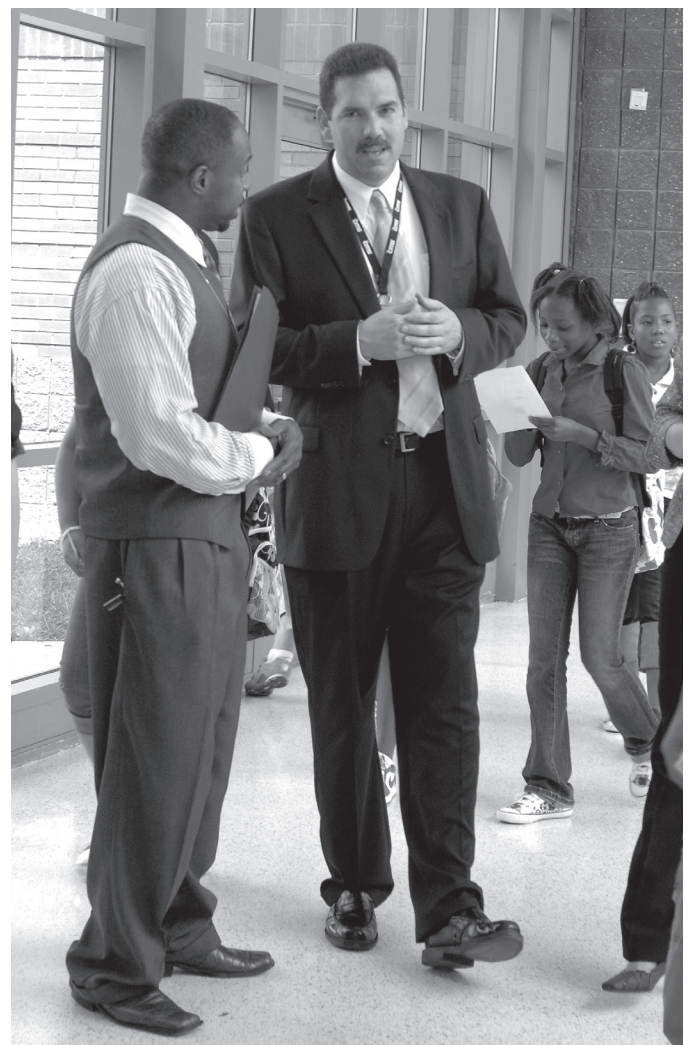
“Our sense of urgency around putting the right principals in the right schools helped us develop a unique partnership with Winthrop University,” says Dr. Gorman. “The Leaders for Tomorrow program is the only one of its kind in North Carolina so far and we believe that over time, it will help the district raise academic achievement by strengthening the leadership in our schools.”

The first cohort of Leaders for Tomorrow began in the summer of 2008 and a second class began in the summer of 2009. Candidates learn through a mix of face-to-face and job-embedded instruction. Courses are scheduled in eight-week blocks so that candidates can focus on one area at a time. Key components of the program include a

rigorous nomination and selection process using a writing sample, a presentation and an interview.

Each participant is also required to complete three internships in different schools with a variety of demographic profiles, for a total of nine hours of coursework. The internships will help the participants build expertise in leading high-needs schools by training with a top administrator at a school.

Seed funding for the program was provided by Allen Tate Realtors and the Advantage Carolina fund, which supports initiatives in four key areas – economic development, regionalism, education and inner-city development. Additional funding was provided by MeckEd. The district is seeking long-term funding for the program through corporate and private support.



Summary

Charlotte-Mecklenburg Schools is moving aggressively to identify and train new leaders for district schools as part of the district's overall effort to improve student achievement. Great schools require great leadership, and district leaders believe that New Leaders for New Schools and Leaders for Tomorrow will help build great leaders for the future, both immediate and longer-term.

"It's almost impossible to overstate the effect these principals will have in the years ahead," says Dr. Gorman. "If we are going to educate every child well – and we've

stated that as our goal at CMS – we need strong leaders in every school and great teachers in every classroom. The need is particularly great in our struggling schools, and schools with high levels of poverty or students learning English as a second language. How effectively we teach these students strongly affects our success as a district – and that's why it's imperative that we have top-flight leaders in every school."



About Us

Charlotte-Mecklenburg Schools is North Carolina's second-largest school district, with 137,000 students (pre-kindergarten to grade 12), 180 schools and 19,000 employees. The district has been recognized nationally for excellence and innovation. These white papers are an informational series designed to share the district's experience and expertise with others involved in public education. If you would like additional information about CMS, please call the office of public information at (980) 343-7450.

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