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Blueprint for Opportunity

No. 2

Implementation Memo

TO: Governor-elect Ritter
Members of the 66th Colorado General Assembly

FROM: The Bell Policy Center – Frank Waterous, Senior Policy Analyst

DATE: December 4, 2006

**RE: Implementing Bell's Blueprint recommendation No. 2
to give principals the power to lead.**

In the 2006 Blueprint for Opportunity, the Bell Policy Center recommends:

Give principals the power to lead

We need to recruit and retain the most talented principals, and we need to reward them for taking risks, innovating, and working with teachers to ensure each is performing to his or her fullest potential. This means removing bureaucratic barriers and giving principals more authority, including more financial control so they can allocate resources in a way that makes the most sense for students.

One way to accomplish this would be a weighted student-funding formula that moves spending decisions as close to the student as possible (*see Blueprint, page 8*).

This memorandum briefly discusses the issues surrounding this proposal, describes steps for implementing it, outlines some of the factors to consider and lists sources for additional information and resources.

If you are interested in pursuing this issue further, we are prepared to work with you. Please contact the author of this memo directly at (303) 297-0456 or waterous@thebell.org, or Rich Jones, director of policy and research, at (303) 297-0456 or jones@thebell.org.

Overview of the issue

Research shows that school leadership is second only to quality teaching in its impact on student learning, especially in schools where needs are most pronounced. Studies show that principals play an important role in creating strong ties with families, promoting community partnerships in support of student achievement, and increasingly serving as instructional leaders in their schools.¹

Education reforms increasingly emphasize the importance of moving resources and decision-making nearer to the student. As these reforms are implemented, the role of the principal will be

transformed and will require a different set of skills and abilities than in the past. Ensuring that principals are prepared for this new environment and their evolving responsibilities will take coordinated efforts by states, school districts, higher education institutions that prepare school administrators, and those already in the principal profession.

Across the nation, states are taking steps to enhance the training, recruitment, and retention of high quality principals.² For example, in 2006, Illinois Gov. Rod Blagojevich signed legislation that created a mentoring program for all new principals in the state.



The Illinois law identifies seven mentoring areas for professional growth and improvement:

- Analyzing data and applying it to practice,
- Aligning professional development and instructional programs
- Building a professional learning community
- Observing classroom practices and providing feedback
- Facilitating effective meetings
- Developing distributive leadership practices
- Facilitating organizational change ³

In Colorado, HB06-1001, sponsored by Rep. Mike Merrifield and signed by Gov. Owens, addressed several issues related to principal preparation and professional development. Among the bill's provisions were these:

- A requirement that the State Board of Education annually survey superintendents who employ new principals regarding preparation of the new hires.
- Establishment of a Principal Development Scholarship Program to provide need-based stipends for principal professional development, and the creation of the Principal Development Scholarship Fund for the gifts, grants, and donations received to fund this scholarship program.
Note: an early version of the bill would have used moneys appropriated from the State Education Fund for these stipends. Because state moneys were not appropriated for the fund, if no contributions to the fund are received, stipends for professional development will not be provided.
🔗 [HB06-1001 final fiscal note](#)

As introduced, HB06-1001 also included key provisions creating a Principal Recruitment and Training Planning Council to examine issues surrounding school leadership in the state. However, the provisions related to the council were removed in the legislative process and were not part of the final version signed into law by the governor.

🔗 [HB06-1001 original version](#)

🔗 [HB06-1001 final version](#)

Implementation steps

In order to develop and retain quality principals and give them the power to lead, the legislature should appropriate \$5 million and pass legislation aimed at improving principal training and skill development. The appropriations would be split, at the legislature's discretion, among various policies, programs, and actions including, but not limited to:

- **Pass legislation reintroducing and making a specific appropriation for a Principal Recruitment and Training Planning Council** similar to that originally proposed in HB06-1001. The council would be charged with examining and making recommendations on how to support and improve school leadership in the state.
- **Appropriate state moneys to support the Principal Development Scholarship Fund** established by HB06-1001, so that the stipends available through this program are not solely reliant on gifts, grants, and donations.
- **Pass legislation creating, and make an appropriation for, a Principal Mentoring Program** similar to that enacted by Illinois in 2006.
🔗 [Illinois Public Act 094-1039](#)
🔗 [Bill Status sheet for Illinois SB0860](#)
- At the state level, encourage local districts and school boards to move as much decision-making as possible to the school and principal level. This should be done in conjunction with providing the training, skills and support necessary to ensure that principals succeed.

Factors to consider

Two national reform proposals that would change the role of principals are the “portfolio approach” to public schools and the “weighted student funding” model.

Under the portfolio approach, school boards would maintain a diverse portfolio of education options rather than overseeing a system of standardized schools. Within this district portfolio of options, principals would be empowered to make budgetary and personnel decisions at the school level, as well as to provide leadership for the school community.

☞ See Paul T. Hill, [Put Learning First: A Portfolio Approach to Public Schools](#), Progressive Policy Institute, *Policy Report*, February 2006.

The weighted funding model suggests a different way of funding schools than is currently employed in most states. Under this model, funding from all levels would follow the student to whatever public school he or she attends. The amount of funding would vary based on the needs of the student and this funding could be spent flexibly at the school level. Accountability would be measured by results rather than by inputs, programs, and activities.

☞ See [Fund the Child: Tackling Inequity & Antiquity in School Finance](#), Thomas B. Fordham Institute, June 2006.

The weighted funding model would also deeply affect the role of principals in our schools, giving them more authority to make decisions and lead efforts to improve student outcomes.

Information and resources

☞ Colorado Closing the Achievement Gap Commission, [Interim Report](#), Nov. 1, 2004, Colorado Department of Education.

☞ Carol Cohen and Lucinda Fickel, [Financing and Policy Contexts for Principal Preparation and In-Service Training Programs: Mid-Course Findings from a Study of Innovative Programs](#), School Leadership Study: Developing Successful Principals, a study commissioned by the Wallace Foundation, Nov. 13, 2005.

☞ [Learning to Lead, Leading to Learn: Improving school quality through principal professional development](#), National Staff Development Council.

End notes

¹ ☞ Kenneth Leithwood, et.al., [Executive summary: How leadership influences student learning](#), Learning from Leadership Project, The Wallace Foundation, 2004.

☞ Chris Cunningham, [Engaging the Community to Support Student Achievement](#), ERIC Digest, ERIC Clearinghouse on Educational Management, ERIC Identifier: ED464395, 2002.

☞ NCSL Taskforce on School Leadership, [The Role of School Leadership in Improving Student Achievement](#), National Conference of State Legislatures, 2002.

² Jeff Archer, “Mentoring for New Principals Gains Policy Attention,” Education Week, September 13, 2006, and Jeff Archer, “States Get Tough on Programs to Prepare Principals,” Education Week, Oct. 18, 2006.

☞ www.edweek.org (subscription required).

³ ☞ [Illinois Public Act 094-1039](#) and

☞ [Bill Status sheet for Illinois SB0860](#).