

with the baggage they brought in initially. Some competencies come easily; others are hard to build and require ongoing reflection and fine-tuning. The clear articulation of expectations enables the district to be equitable and transparent in its response to leaders' work.

## Recruiting Principals

Skillful Central Office leaders and committed boards recognize that finding and nurturing the next generation of school leaders is a key part of the legacy they leave a district. Unfortunately, few districts have a robust strategy that will ensure a pool of talented applicants for principalships. Driven by political pressure, habit, or tight timelines, they tend to pluck new principals from the ranks of APs. Because they are not part of a district with a development strategy, many of those APs are likely to have worked in narrowly defined roles with little or no opportunity to practice or acquire the full range of competencies demanded of school leaders.

### Developing a Strong Pool of Potential Candidates

Districts organized for excellence know they need a renewable pool of prospective principal candidates and that they must be resourceful and proactive in seeking them. These districts look for key beliefs and attitudes that are critical to principals' success. Aspiring principals should:

- **Believe in adults' ability to learn and like working with adults.** Many people enter the teaching profession because of their love of children. If they later become principals, they are often startled by how taxing adults can be. Although adult misbehavior may not be much different from kid misbehavior, it is often more veiled. For some aspiring principals, failure to keep promises or meet expectations is much less tolerable in adults than in children. Leaders who enjoy working with adults tend to lead schools that have a warmer school culture and are more fun to work in. If they see working with adults as a less enjoyable part of the bargain, their school culture often reflects that.
- **Have a clear, sustaining vision for and commitment to children's success.** Effective principals are compelled by what they are trying to create for students. They understand that realizing their vision for students requires an artful balance of engaging, supporting, coaxing, cajoling, and demanding significant accomplishment from their staff.
- **Have strong convictions about the potential of specific subgroups of children.** Most aspiring principals will speak about a generic vision for young people and mouth the oft-repeated line that all children can learn. Suppose candidates have spent the last decade in a school culture that believes certain students need to be controlled and that

their learning is of secondary importance. Suppose these same candidates have been trained in keeping order above all else. They may not emerge from that experience with deep-seated conviction about students' ability and need to do challenging work. Nor will they have models for the ways in which the most powerful schools and teachers draw out even seemingly hopeless students' potential.

- **Have a sense of urgency and hope and be able to convey it.** In recruiting prospective principals, skillful leaders need to examine the context of candidates' past experiences and the attitudes they bring to the system's goals and core values. Good models from past experiences and a positive attitude contribute both to resiliency and the ability to manage all the challenges associated with leading a school.

Adult beliefs can be changed over time, but it is a difficult task. Most school districts are ill prepared to help people make such changes. Thus it is wise to make sure the individuals you recruit have those key beliefs in place.

The prospective principal pool can be divided into four main feeder groups: (1) assistant principals carefully chosen for a constellation of skills, (2) teacher leaders, (3) experienced principals from other districts, and (4) non-educators with leadership experience. We can identify clear advantages and disadvantages of drawing principals from each of these experience groups.

## Selecting Assistant Principals

Table 11.1 summarizes the relative merits of appointing assistant principals to principalships. If a school system selects its assistant principals with deep understanding of effective instruction and leadership potential, the strategy can be a good one. It also works well if the system has a substantive, well-designed program such as Montgomery County Maryland's for developing the leadership skills of aspiring and/or sitting assistant principals. However, many districts regard the assistant principal position as a way to divide up a heavy workload or to allow a principal to "dump" parts of the job that s/he either does not like or does not do well. Few school systems carefully consider what it would mean to build assistant principals' competence and ensure their readiness to lead a school; most assume that competencies will be acquired through observation and osmosis. Additionally, many school systems choose assistant principals who do not see the job as a stepping stone to higher administration. Such individuals prefer to have someone above them taking the responsibility and the hits. They like comfortable hours and well-defined expectations. If districts want their APs to be the pool from which principals are hired, they must have an explicit strategy to build APs' instructional and leadership skills.

Steve, the AP introduced in Case 11.1, possesses many of the strengths and limitations outlined in Table 11.1. His impression that his years of managing operations made him ready for the principalship suggests that Steve isn't fully aware of the range of principals' responsibilities and doesn't appreciate the importance of understanding and leading instructional

**TABLE 11.1 Strengths and Limitations of Assistant Principals**

Strengths of AP's	Limitations of AP's
Understand the operational elements of the job, e.g., buses, lunch, facilities, test administration, and student discipline	May think operations management is the most important element of the principalship
Know the culture of schools and people in the district and the community and how to get things done	May not have had much opportunity to learn about and take responsibility for the teaching and learning aspects of the school
May have assumed some leadership of instructional improvement	May not have the big-picture perspective and the ability to think strategically
May have good working knowledge of the school's curricula if teaching experience is recent	May have limited experience in simultaneously managing the teaching and learning and operational components of the job
May be popular with faculty because they handle daily irritations efficiently	May not respond well to conflict or stressful situations.

improvement. Support in this area before he assumes a principalship would surely increase the likelihood of his success.

### Selecting Teacher Leaders

In school systems that have differentiated roles for teachers and a variety of teacher leadership opportunities focused on instructional improvement, teacher leaders are another pool of potential principals. Mentors, instructional coaches, grade level/cluster/department leaders, student performance data managers, or members of the school's leadership team often receive training and develop leadership skills as they carry out their roles. They also develop an understanding of the power of teacher collaboration, gain a school-wide perspective, build their understanding of the elements of effective school leadership, and have the chance to practice in arenas beyond their own four classroom walls. These leadership skills and opportunities complement their deep knowledge of instruction and talent as classroom teachers.

Isabel, the teacher leader who took over for her sick principal and was hired to fill a late principal vacancy, possesses both the strengths and limitations of teacher leaders listed in Table 11.2. She was a good teacher and understands how to help students learn in a variety of ways. Her experience beyond her classroom helps her understand the larger picture of a school. Yet the leap from teacher-in-charge to school principal is huge. Isabel is moving from a role where she was filling in to one in which she is charged with setting the vision for the school and putting the structures and systems in place to realize the vision. When she covered for her sick principal, she had the backing and additional support of her fellow teachers who were happy to pitch in during a difficult time and wanted to ensure her success.

**TABLE 11.2 Strengths and Limitations of Teacher Leaders**

Strengths of Teacher Leaders	Limitations of Teacher Leaders
Are experienced in using standards, effective instructional strategies, and data analysis to support student learning	May find the transition from teacher to administrator challenging as they mourn the loss of peer colleagues and struggle with the isolation and responsibility for adult performance that principals face
Understand the school and all of its dimensions more broadly than many teachers	May not have much experience with the strategic aspects of the job and how to fit together all the pieces of leading a school
Have a clear understanding of the work of teacher colleagues, including the range of skills and experience among teachers and the skills required to work effectively with adults	May be unfamiliar with the operational responsibilities of the job
Understand the power and possibility of teacher collaboration	May not respond well to conflict or stressful situations
Might have had the opportunity to build skills in differentiating support to teachers	

Leading a school of her own will be a lonely experience for Isabel and something for which she needs to prepare herself.

### Selecting Experienced Principals from Other Districts

Table 11.3 contrasts the benefits and drawbacks of hiring experienced principals. Assuming they are in good standing, experienced principals from other districts bring school leadership know-how that can be powerful and can increase the likelihood of a smooth transition. However, the environment from which they come shapes the way they view the role and their own capacities. If they have been highly successful, lone rangers, or much revered in another district, they may have difficulty in adapting to a new culture and set of expectations. Or they may be stunned and dismayed by the level of dysfunction in their new environment. It is important to ensure that their beliefs and style of leadership match the district’s vision and that the standards and expectations of the hiring system are both transparent and clearly communicated. Relying on this outsider group to fill principal vacancies has a potential downside. By poaching, a district gains a principal at the expense of another system. The result does not expand the principal pool.

### Selecting Non-educators with Leadership Experience

To be competitive, non-educators must bring strong leadership and managerial experiences, a fundamental understanding of the work of public K-

**TABLE 11.3 Strengths and Limitations of Experienced Principals**

Strengths of Experienced Principals	Limitations of Experienced Principals
Know the transferable “nuts and bolts” of the job	May not know how the district works
May have firsthand experience with other programs that would enhance the hiring district’s repertoire and success with students	May not know the priorities and initiatives of the district
May bring standards and expectations that will help receiving district push for excellence	May not have contacts within the district
Bring another perspective on how to lead a school	May bring an attitude of complacency from prior work
Are likely to have learned to stay calm in stressful situations and to respond to crises	May be homesick or unable to move from “how we did it where I came from”

12 education, a willingness to learn all they do not yet know about schooling, teaching, and learning, and a sense of humility about what they do not know. Equally important is their ability to work within the existing culture of schools and the district. Outsiders are often hired with the idea that they will change the culture of the school or be part of a district culture change effort. While this may be a reasonable long-term strategy, it is crucial that these hires can thrive in the current culture. One of the greatest assets outsiders bring is a broad perspective on how things can be done and a tendency toward more innovative and entrepreneurial thinking than is often represented in schools. Table 11.4 summarizes the relative advantages of this group.

Districts committed to building leadership excellence must be prepared to help aspiring candidates and newly hired principals develop existing strengths and create new ones. School leadership competencies are comprehensive and challenging. Each of the experience groups making up the pool is likely to need skill building in at least one competency. Table 11.5 suggests likely development requirements. There are always exceptions to these generalizations, such as the assistant principal who has facilitated grade-level data analysis sessions for two years or the lead teacher who has learned conflict management skills in a former job as a school counselor.

As the chart suggests, certain skills must be built across all groups, but each role group also has distinct needs. Customized support for new and aspiring principals, mapped to competencies and based on individual assessments of skills is not the norm in most education leadership programs, much less in districts. Yet that is what is required. To meet that goal, a district needs a multi-pronged strategy that includes good assessment tools, district-sponsored learning opportunities (courses, professional development sessions, school visits, authentic work assignments set in the context of schools) in each of the standard areas, and mentoring support.

**TABLE 11.4 Strengths and Limitations of Non-educators with Leadership Experience**

Strengths of Non-educators	Limitations of Non-educators
Have experience in another sector that may allow transfer of promising leadership and management practices into the schools	May not know the core work of teaching and learning
Bring a fresh perspective	May not understand the culture of schools and school districts and how to lead effectively in this environment
May have a driving and appealing conviction that has caused them to make sacrifices others understand	Lack credibility
Bring another perspective on how to lead a school	May bring an attitude of complacency resulting from the perception that the new place has greater status
May have connections to resources outside the school	May become disillusioned by the inertia and political complications they encounter

## Professional Development

Well-designed training can be a powerful recruitment and screening strategy for aspiring principals. It can offset negative stereotypes about the role and give those who think they are not interested in moving to administration a new perspective on its possibilities. For example, a process that highlights instructional leadership may attract teacher leaders who have discovered they enjoy problem solving with adults. Often some of the most knowledgeable members of the community, these teacher leaders nonetheless shy away from the principalship if they see the job as primarily managerial. Having the opportunity to hear the district's commitment to student learning and to see principals who are strong instructional leaders can be compelling to passionate individuals who are seeking ways to maximize their impact on students. Such a focus might also inspire and energize an assistant principal who has grown bored with the operational requirements of her job. Professional development allows prospects to learn more about the district's expectations for principals and enables them to make informed decisions about the match between the actual role and their own interests and talents.

Professional development programs that build a strong pool of principal candidates pay attention to two things:

- **Vision-setting and career management to build conviction:** Programs educate staff about the position, gauge their interest, help them

**TABLE 11.5 Competency Development Needs by Experience Groups**

Role	Competencies					
	Interpersonal Leadership	Leadership	Effective Instruction	Alignment of Resources	Data	Organizations, Culture, and Change
APs  Veterans hired to manage operations and discipline			✓	✓	✓	✓
Specialists transitioning from non-academic areas	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Teacher leaders	✓	✓		✓		✓
Principals from outside district*	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Leaders new to education			✓		✓	✓

\*Focus of the learning is on the context of the district, special programs, procedures, cultural issues, etc.

decide what roles they are most interested in pursuing, and then direct them to the next steps that will best prepare them.

- **Skill development to build competence:** Once people understand the role and responsibility of principals and choose that career path, the focus shifts to building their skills to ensure they are well prepared for the role and positioned for success.

### Vision-Setting and Career Management

Vision-setting activities have several goals. They should force the district to develop and articulate a common vision for the principalship. Effective activities will help people better understand the district leadership, its vision for the work in schools, and the role of principals and other school administrators in implementing that vision. An important goal is to recruit a diverse and talented group of candidates who might not otherwise be interested in becoming principals.

School systems can organize vision-setting activities in a number of dif-