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An Innovative Look, a Recalcitrant Reality

The Politics of Principal Preparation Reform

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In the past few years, policy makers, practitioners, philanthropists, and education entrepreneurs have sought to reform the preparation of school principals. Reformers have argued that the preparation of principals has been dominated by ineffective programs that have been insulated from accountability and have been unable or unwilling to respond to the demands of school and district leaders. In such critiques, the preparation of principals has been characterized as a "cottage industry" that has been "dominated by ineffective programs" and "insulated from accountability." Such critiques have reported that

> "the preparation of principals has been characterized as a cottage industry that has been dominated by ineffective programs and insulated from accountability. Many programs appear to be driven more by tradition than by research-based evidence. Instead of being a rigorous, demanding, and coherent course of study, principal preparation programs have been criticized for being too theoretical, too disconnected from the real world of schools, too lacking in rigor, too uncoordinated, too lacking in relevance, too lacking in coherence, too lacking in quality control, too lacking in accountability, too lacking in resources, too lacking in faculty, too lacking in clinical experiences, too lacking in leadership, too lacking in vision, too lacking in a focus on student achievement, too lacking in a focus on school improvement, too lacking in a focus on school culture, too lacking in a focus on school climate, too lacking in a focus on school safety, and, perhaps, too lacking in a focus on school leadership."

Such critiques have inspired a wave of reports which have sought to identify qualitative distinctions between "good" and "bad" programs, and have sought to identify the characteristics of "good" programs. Such reports have also inspired a number of foundation initiatives, including the Wallace Foundation's Principal Preparation Initiative, which has sought to "improve the quality of principal preparation programs" by "supporting a number of redesigned programs, including the structure of education, professional organizations, curriculum, and instructional practices." The Wallace Foundation has also sought to "support the development of a cadre of leaders who can serve as effective change agents." Such efforts have been lauded by many observers as a sign that the preparation of principals is finally being "taken seriously" and "being treated as a serious enterprise." Such efforts have also been lauded