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Preparing Rural Administrators: What Do They Need? What Do They Want?

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Serious questions have been raised recently about the preparation of educational administrators. These concerns are particularly relevant for those individuals who will lead America's rural schools. Using responses from a nationwide survey of rural school administrators, the data suggests that institutions of higher education need to review the quality of their preparation programs, particularly the clinical sequence and internship. When asked to rate their educational training, more than half the rural respondents rated their preparation as being no better than "fair," and 46% believed that the current requirements of graduate preparation are not sufficiently rigorous to meet the demands of the job. The paper concludes with recommendations for the reform of programs preparing educational administrators for America's rural districts.

INTRODUCTION

Leaders for America's Schools (UCEA 1987), the recent report of the National Commission on Excellence in Educational Administration, makes explicit the pivotal role of educational administrators in the current movement to reform our Nation's schools:

> The evolution of reforms over the past few years has progressed from cosmetic changes in course requirements to radical restructuring of the school environment. The new roles envisioned for teachers in reports of both the Holmes Group and the Carnegie Task Force on Teaching as a Profession draws education into a broader field of management research from which it has been isolated for too long. At the same time, these reports identify the unique setting of the school workplace, envisioning how teachers could respond to greater autonomy and professionalism. Yet, the reforms cannot be successful without strong, well-reasoned leadership from principals and superintendents (p. 5).

Research on school effectiveness supports the National Commission's contention that administrative leadership is one of the critical factors in creating "effective" schools. For example, Coleman (1986) argues:

> This component (administrative leadership) has emerged from virtually all the effective school studies as critical, even when the initial expectations did not include it as a factor. Any consideration of school district processes necessarily must include leadership as a primary linking mechanism (p. 93).

There is perhaps no educational setting in which the quality of administrative leadership is more closely related to the quality of the educational program than in the small rural school district,

> In many rural schools, the building is the district. The district leadership is the superintendent who often also serves as principal. *To think of an administrative support system is a bit of a misnomer.* With good leadership, improvement can happen relatively quickly, with poor leadership, programs can deteriorate even faster. With the frequent turnover of leadership experienced by many rural districts, the infrastructure for long-term school improvement is just not available (Nachtigal 1987, p. 8) [emphasis added].

As Nachtigal implies, many of the problems currently faced by our rural schools may be more the result of *under*-administration than *poor* administration. Since small rural districts often confront severe fiscal constraints, their electorates sometimes attempt to restrict the growth of school budgets by capping the size of their districts' administration. In order to "make-do," the rural administrator is often forced to assume more responsibilities than can be adequately managed in the time allowed. Unfortunately, if not performed well, any one of these

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disparate roles can affect negatively the quality of his or her district's educational program. For example, in one small rural New York district with a K-12 enrollment of less than 400 students, the superintendent also served as secondary school principal, school business manager, personnel director, staff development coordinator, athletic director, football and wrestling coach, and, on occasion, substitute bus driver. His assistant superintendent was also the district's elementary school principal, curriculum coordinator, director of vocational education, chairman of the committee for special education, district representative for collective negotiations, clerk of the board, and girls' softball coach (Jacobson 1988a).

Needless to say, few individuals have the ability or time to address as many diverse responsibilities equally well, and the resulting frustration created by the multifaceted role of the rural administrator is perhaps best expressed in these responses from the recent *Executive Educator/UB* survey (Heller et al. 1988)[1]:

> I have been a school superintendent for a small district in a rural area for the past 20 years. As an administrator in a small district, I am "Jack of all trades," and am expected to be an expert on every phase of school operation that you can imagine. No one told me about the trials and tribulations of writing specs for the purchase of a new heater or repairing roofs.
>
> The position is getting more frustrating every year because of increased responsibilities and paperwork. Maintenance items keep me frustrated and bogged down.

How then does one prepare for a position that requires being a jack of all trades and an expert in all? Rural administrators train in the same programs that prepare most of our nation's educational leaders. Yet, in its recent report, the National Commission raised serious questions about the preparation of educational administrators and their ability to lead our schools into the twenty-first century. Specifically, the Commission identified ten major deficiencies in the present state of administrator preparation, some of which are particularly relevant for those future educational leaders who will serve America's rural districts.

This paper examines both the needs and wants of current rural administrators in order to better understand the context in which future rural administrators must be prepared to serve and the changes necessary in the programs that prepare them. In order to ascertain what educational administrators need, the paper begins by enumerating the major deficiencies in administrator preparation identified in the *Leaders* report. Those deficiencies that are particularly relevant to rural administrators are described in greater detail, and then responses taken from the 1988 *Executive Educator/UB* (Heller et al. 1988)[2] survey of school administrators are discussed in relation to them.

Of the 1,123 school executives who responded to this nationwide survey, 349 or 31.1% were from rural districts. The perceptions of these current rural administrators about the problems their jobs entail and the adequacy of their own educational preparation provide useful insights into what rural administrators want. In order to develop a better understanding of the issues that are of particular importance to rural educators, we compare and contrast some of the responses of rural administrators with those of administrators serving in urban and suburban settings.

The paper concludes with a discussion about where America's rural districts may be heading and then provides a number of recommendations for the reform of administrator preparation programs developing educational leaders for these districts.

PROBLEMS WITH ADMINISTRATOR PREPARATION

Among the deficiencies in administrative preparation identified in *Leaders for America's Schools* the following are particularly troublesome in rural schools:

- The lack of a definition of good educational leadership;
- The lack of collaboration between school districts and universities;
- The lack of systematic professional development for school administrators;
- The lack of preparation programs relevant to the job demands of school administrators;
- The lack of sequence, modern content, and clinical experiences, in preparation programs;

"Good" Educational Leadership

Clearly, the issues addressed by the Commission should be of concern to all school districts, and not just rural ones. Therefore, let us begin by addressing the question of what makes for "good" educational leadership. Achilles (1988, p. 41) defines the "complete" administrator as someone who, ". . . knows what to do, how to do it, and most important of all, why an action is appropriate." He suggests that aspiring administrators view administration as a science, in order to understand 'what administrators do'; as a craft, in order to understand 'how administrators do what they do'; and, as an art, in order to understand 'why administrators do whay they do'.

[1]Unreported data.

[2]The 1988 *Executive Educator/UB* survey questionnaire was mailed to a stratified random sample of 4,000 current school administrators drawn from a population of over 110,000 by Quality Education Data, an independent education data base firm. Responses were tabulated and analyzed by a research team from the Department of Educational Organization, Administration and Policy at the State University of New York at Buffalo. The survey response rate was 28.1%, with returns from every state except Rhode Island. Assuming a random return, a possible error rate of plus or minus 3.5 percentage points is estimated at the 95% confidence level.

Achilles' three essential elements of preparation are particularly important to rural administrators who have so many different things to 'do', thereby multiplying the number of 'what', 'how', and 'why' questions for which they need answers. Yet Achilles' contends that even our best preparation programs provide only two of these three essential elements. Therefore, it is perhaps not surprising that when rural administrators were asked to rate the quality of specific areas of their graduate school training so many responded that their preparation was either fair or poor. Specifically, more than 50% of the rural respondents rated their preparation in curriculum and instruction, education research, community relations and school finance as being no better than "fair." Training in the areas of community relations and school finance seemed especially problematic to rural administrators, with only 41.2% rating their preparation in community relations as "good", while 13.9% rated their training in finance as "poor". Among the concerns about their training in finance, rural administrators noted:

> Administrators generally do not have a business background which to me is a major problem—graduate programs should at least address the issue with a course on cost accounting in addition to school finance.
>
> Even though our product is different, a lot of private business techniques can be used in the education business. We have absolutely no direction in this area.
>
> One rural respondent added the following observation to his "poor" rating of community relations preparation: It bothers me that we continue to teach our administrators how to "handle" parents and other community participants in our programs. I much prefer that they know how to "work with" these folks.

Theory vs. Practice

It should be added that negative perceptions about graduate preparation were not restricted to rural administrators, with training in the areas of school finance and community relations receiving especially poor grades from respondents in suburban and urban districts as well. Interestingly, when asked whether the requirements of graduate training are rigorous enough to meet the demands of the job, rural administrators were somewhat more supportive of administrator preparation programs than either their suburban or urban counterparts, nevertheless, 44.6% of our rural school leaders believe that current preparation requirements are not sufficiently rigorous. Deficient requirements were cited by 47.4% and 48.3% of suburban and urban administrators respectively. But even a positive endorsement of preparation may belie a less than enthusiastic perception of what presently passes for administrator training, for as one rural administrator commented, "The requirements are fine, it's what is covered in classes that's lacking!"

These negative perceptions about university-based preparation perhaps explain why only 7.5% of responding rural administrators viewed graduate training as the most beneficial aspect their own preparation. In contrast, 55.5% of these same administrators reported on-the-job training as the best preparation for their current position. Although negative perceptions about university-based preparation were recorded for the urban and suburban cohorts as well, comments by rural administrators about the usefulness of graduate preparation were particularly focused and enlightening:

> Graduate school preparation needs to be more realistic and practical and less theoretical.
>
> I think a more practical approach rather than a philosophical approach to training is essential in our business. Professors need to get out in the "real world" . . . and see what really goes on rather than what they feel should be going on.
>
> Maybe the professors should take an internship and get out in the field.
>
> I think most of our graduate courses are too much theory—they are not practical. Many of our profs never were out in the field and so what they think is the ideal and what actually happens are two different stories.
>
> Practitioners should teach these courses, not . . . college professors who are not on top of central office problems.
>
> The best administrators are those with good common sense and good public relations regardless of which schools they attended.

As these comments testify, it was professors of educational administration and their theory-based approach to preparation that were most often singled out for criticism by rural respondents. The comments concerning administrative preparation made by the total group of respondents indicated a clear call for experience-based training. It is informative to compare the comments from all the respondents with those from the rural respondents on this topic.

If the types of preparation are placed on a continuum from theoretical graduate work to experience, the comments concerning administrative preparation made by the total group of respondents express a need for preparation to move on that continuum from theoretical graduate work to practical graduate work and/or internships. The set of comments from the rural respondents leans toward preparation moving farther down the continuum to internships and on-the-job training/experience.

The comparison of the comments made by rural respondents with those made by the respondents as a whole reveals that while the respondents as a whole would advise a move away from theoretical graduate work toward practical graduate work and internships, the rural respondents are concerned that preparation should be even more experience-based. They would have preparation programs move toward on-the-job

training and experience. The rural administrators evidence a concern for their on-going in-service as well as their preparatory pre-service.

Rural respondents' reflect their concern for the need for experience-based preparation in such comments as:

> On-the-job provides practical experiences which cannot be duplicated in the classroom.
>
> I don't believe graduate courses can prepare anyone to be an administrator. The graduate program does a fair job with course offerings but experience is the only way to truly get there.
>
> I think a more practical approach rather than a theoretical approach to training is essential in our business . . . Even though I feel very confident in my profession, most of the learning has been "do-it-yourself," hands-on, or round table discussions with other superintendents. Learning by doing has been the most beneficial to me. Attending meetings and seminars has been extremely helpful for current issues, legislation and concerns . . . years of experience "on the firing line" have been invaluable.
>
> I feel I am as well or better trained than my contemporaries because of the excellent on-the-job training I received . . .

Rural administrators *want* a more practical orientation as they prepare for the field. Clearly, the comments of these rural respondents support the Commission's concerns about the lack of content and program relevance to the job demands of school administrators.

THE LACK OF UNIVERSITY-SCHOOL DISTRICT COLLABORATION

Other problems addressed by the Commission that seem to be particularly troublesome to rural administrators, and the districts they serve, include the lack of collaboration between school districts and universities and the lack of clinical experiences and systematic professional development for school administrators. These problems were manifest both explicitly in the survey responses of rural administrators, and implicitly in the demographic characteristics of these individuals. For example, let us examine first the lack of collaborations between school districts and universities and how it impacts negatively both administrative pre-service, such as the lack of internships, and programs designed to encourage administrator in-service, such as mentoring.

Administrative Internships

Although more than two-thirds (68.4%) of all respondents believe that an administrative internship would be a very useful experience, only 37.4% of the rural respondents work in districts that provide an administrative internship. In contrast, 57.8% of the urban respondents work in districts offering an administrative internship, with the figure increasing to 60.8% among suburban respondents. It is interesting to note that while more internship opportunities exist in urban and suburban districts (which may have more to do with fiscal constraints and geographic proximity than interest on the part of individuals or institutions), the percentage of incumbents who have themselves served an administrative internship is remarkably consistent (and uniformly disappointing) across sites, ranging from a high of 36.8% in the suburban districts to a low of 36.0% in the city districts. Of the rural respondents, 36.1% served an administrative internship during their own preparation, although only 8.3% served a full year internship.

Although the internship percentages are consistent across settings, the consequences of having an administrative work force comprised of almost two-thirds who have had no formal clinical experience as part of their preparation is particularly problematic to rural districts. If one accepts Jacobson's (1988b) argument that rural districts serve as an "administrative farm system," in which young administrators learn their craft on-the-job before moving on to higher paying suburban and urban districts, then many of the non-rural administrators who reported having not served a formal internship as part of their graduate preparation, may have in fact served an informal on-the-job internship at the expense of their initial rural employers. Demographic data collected for all survey respondents reveal marked differences in the experience, salary, and job satisfaction of rural administrators and their urban and suburban counterparts. These differences may help to explain why rural administrators often choose to move on to other districts and why clinical internships are therefore especially important in the preparation of rural administrators.

Differences in Experience

Data from the *Executive Educator/UB* survey reveal that while two out of five rural administrators (41%) have been in their current position for less than four years, only one-third (34%) of the urban respondents have been in their current position for that amount of time. Furthermore while 7% of the rural administrators who responded to the survey were less than 36 years old and 31% were under 42 years of age, only 2% of the suburban administrators were less than 36 years old, and only 17% were under 42 years of age. Similarly, of urban administrators only 2.4% were less than 36 years old, and 15.1% were under 42 years of age. Finally, while 6% of the rural administrators had less than 11 years of employment in education and 22% less than 16 years, only 2% of suburban administrators and 1% of the urban administrators had less than 11 years employment in education and only 8% of the suburban administrators and 9% of the urban administrators had less than 16 years. In other words, rural administrators are typically less experienced and younger than either their suburban or urban counterparts. In addition, rural administrators generally are less well paid and subsequently more

dissatisfied with their compensation than either their suburban or urban counterparts.

Differences in Salary and Compensation Satisfaction

Figure 1, which reports current administrator salaries, reveals that while almost two out of five (38.9%) of the rural administrators surveyed earned less than $40,000, roughly 1 in 10 (12.6%) urban administrators and only 1 of 20 (4.7%) suburban administrators earned that little.

Focusing on only rural and suburban administrators for a moment (since they represent the extremes of the salary continuum), four out of five (79.5%) rural administrators earn less than $50,000, with only 2.3% earning more than $70,000 (none earned more than $90,000). In contrast, only 30.1% of suburban administrators earn less than $50,000 and 13.7% earn more than $70,000 (with 1.2% earning more than $90,000).

In terms of their average annual salaries, the survey revealed that rural administrators were paid approximately $41,000, as compared to $52,000 for urban administrators and $54,500 for suburban administrators. It is also interesting to note that when rural, suburban and urban administrators were asked about the average number of hours they worked a week their responses were very similar, with roughly 25% reporting 41-50, 50% reporting 51-60, and 25% reporting more than 60 hours per week. Not surprisingly, administrators' dissatisfaction with their present compensation was inversely related to their present salary, *i.e.*, 60.2% of rural administrators were dissatisfied with their salary, while only 46.8% of the suburban administrators were dissatisfied with their present compensation.

Administrator salaries may simply reflect the low prevailing wage scales that exist for almost all occupations in rural areas. Nevertheless, marked differentials between salaries paid rural administrators and administrators in urban and suburban districts, and the subsequent dissatisfaction it creates for rural incumbents, support Monk and Haller's (1986, p. 44) observation that, "Good administrators move on to better jobs in larger districts—'better' in the sense of greater responsibilities and higher salaries." These authors conclude that as a result of administrator migration to urban and suburban districts, "Excellent administrative leadership may be in short supply in New York State's rural schools (Monk & Haller 1986, p. 44)."

The *Executive Educator/ UB* survey data suggests that the problem Monk and Haller identified in New York may be a national problem as well, for as the responses of our sample indicate, rural administrators *want* better compensation. If stability and continuity of key staff are

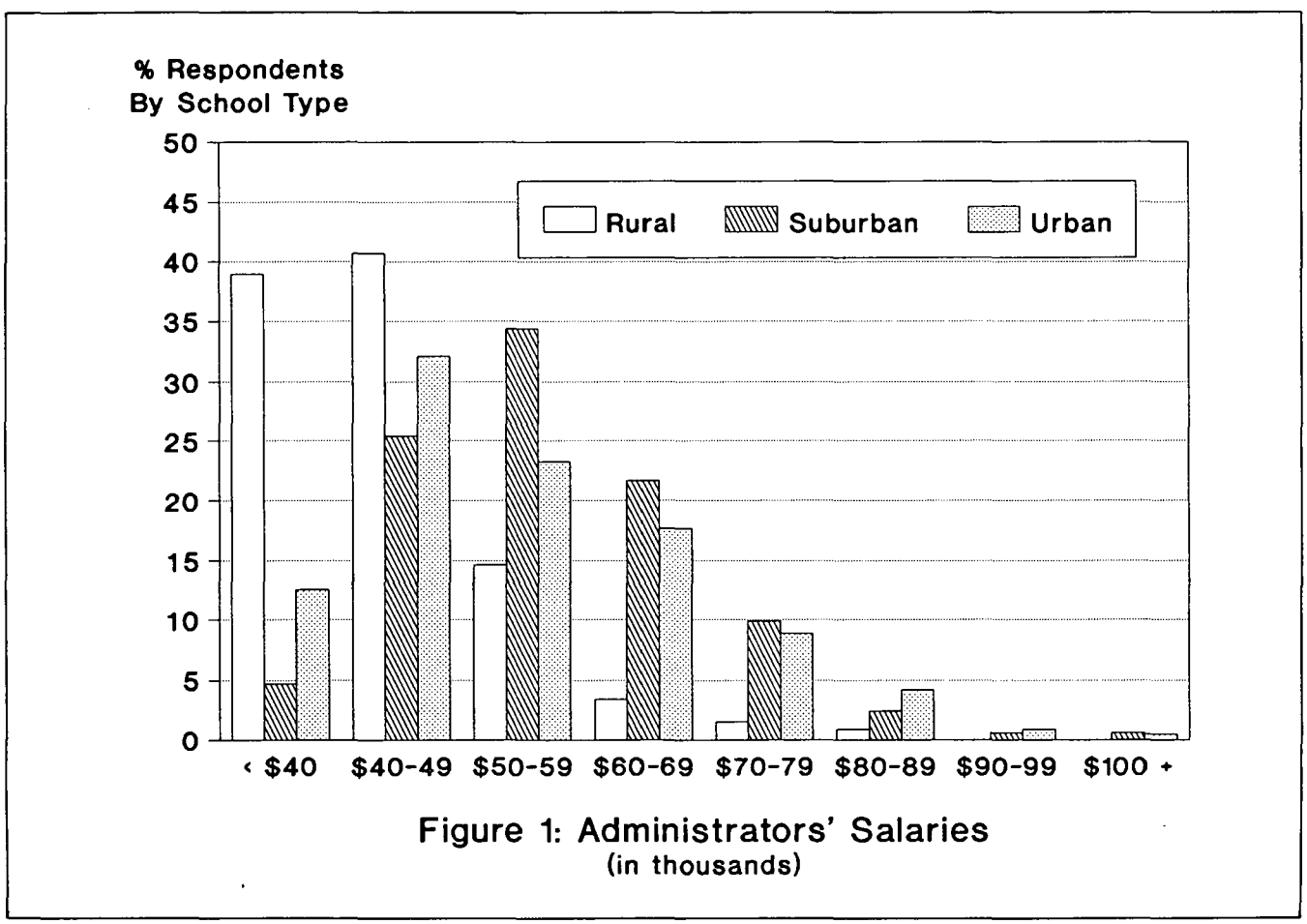

Figure 1: Administrators' Salaries
(in thousands)

essential facilitating elements of "effective" schools (Cruickshank 1986), then rural districts must develop creative ways to retain their best administrators. For example, if one views compensation as being more than just salary alone, then evidence from the survey suggests that creative perks such as access to a "company car" or an enhanced insurance benefit package might prove to be attractive incentives for some rural administrators. Presently, only 37% of the rural administrators in the survey had access to a school vehicle or an auto allowance of some sort, and just 37.5% report being provided an insurance package that differs from their teachers. Furthermore, less than half (43.8%) of the rural respondents had their professional organization dues paid in full for them, and a vast majority (92.2%) replied that they were not eligible for a performance bonus. Providing pecuniary incentives of this type might make rural districts more attractive to both current practitioners and aspiring administrators.

Lack of Systematic Professional Development

Access to good in-service training is no less important to school administrators than is the quality of pre-service education. Yet another problem identified by the Commission that is particularly troublesome for rural administrators is the lack of systematic professional development. Rural administrators often experience hardships in obtaining access to good programs due to their isolation and limited district resources. The lack of collaboration between districts and universities only exacerbates the situation. And, "one shot 'dog-and-pony shows' to fill the time allotted for 'in-service' will not suffice," as Beckner (1987, p. 18) notes.

Mentoring represents an approach to professional development that might offer some hope for rural districts, yet to this point, it has not been widely implemented. For example, 41.5% of the rural administrators surveyed had never had a mentor, while only a third of the urban and suburban respondents indicated they had never had a mentor (32.9% and 33.3% respectively). In fact, almost 40% of both the urban and suburban administrators (39.9% and 38.6% respectively) had more than one mentor. Only 1 in 4 (24.1%) rural administrators had more than one mentor. In other words, the data indicate that the percentage of suburban and urban administrators who do have the support of at least one mentor is roughly the same as the percentage of rural administrators who have no mentorship support at all. Furthermore, for those rural administrators who do have a professional mentor, the likelihood that their mentor works in the same district is less than for their suburban and urban peers. Mentors of rural administrators work in the same district in 72.9% of the cases, as compared to 80.8% in suburban districts and 84.2% in urban districts. What this means is that rural administrators are not only less likely to have the support of a mentor, but if they do have one, they will probably have to spend more time and cover more distance to maintain this professional relationship.

The lack of support provided by a mentor, as well as geographic and time constraints may help to account for the fact that far fewer rural than suburban or urban administrators continue their education beyond the Master's degree. Among the rural respondents, 53.7% had a master's degree, 29.8% a specialist certification beyond the master's, and only 15.8% a doctorate. In contrast, 46% of the suburban respondents had a master's degree, 21.1% a specialist certification, and 32.6% a doctorate. Among the urban respondents, only 39.2% had just a master's, 22.2% had a specialist certification, and 37.3% a doctorate.

Educational Reform

Important changes are presently occurring in the field of education that could alter dramatically the way schools are configured and how they will be governed in the future. For example, teachers are actively seeking greater empowerment and more input into school decision-making. Administration is becoming more decentralized and as Lamitie (1989) argues, bigger is no longer considered to be necessarily better when it comes to determining the optimal size for units of educational governance. Smaller, site-based units of school governance may offer students and communities significant educational benefits that outweigh many of the advantages previously thought to be gained only through increased centralization. In addition, Swanson and Jacobson (1989) point out that, as a result of recent advancements in electronic technologies student learning outcomes will soon be independent of either school or district size. In other words, in order to improve, small school districts need no longer look only to consolidation. These concurrent movements towards greater teacher empowerment and increased school-based decision-making, as well as the recent explosion in information and communication technologies suggest that the education profession of the future will,

> . . . require educated, sophisticated career employees who perform complex and intellectual tasks often using electronic and biological technologies in an environment where there is considerable overlap between workers and managers (Griffiths 1988, p. 34).

There are many who believe that important systematic changes will have to be made in our public schools in order to accommodate the demands of these new educational professionals, both teacher and administrator:

> The existing structure of schools, the current working conditions of teachers, and the current division of authority between administrators and teachers are all seriously out of step with the requirements of the new profession (Holmes 1986, p. 67).

For rural schools this period of educational reform may affirm and support a number of the benefits ascribed to rural and small schools at the same time that it

demands a transition to those things new and different. The research evidence indicates that rural education has reached an important juncture. A growing body of literature suggests that the quality of administrative leadership outweighs district size as the critical determinant of educational quality. Yet market pressures and informal traditions, in the form of low salaries and administrative career paths, cause the most effective administrators to leave rural districts for larger districts. The logical place to begin in a time of such transition would be in administrative preparation programs.

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR THE PREPARATION OF RURAL ADMINISTRATORS

Modeling on Rural Teacher Preparation

In seeking to address the needs and wants of rural administrators regarding administrative preparation, it is helpful to look to the literature on the preparation of teachers for rural and small schools. There is a small but growing body of research regarding rural pre-service programs for teachers from which useful parallels to administrative pre-service programs may be drawn.

Gardener and Edington (1982, p. 18) review the research on rural pre-service programs for teachers and detail key aspects, themes, and categories of such programs. They make the point that,

> . . . teaching and administering small schools is different from teaching and administering metropolitan schools. Isolation, limited resources, limited services, and staff limitations increase the responsibilities of rural teachers and administrators.

Two reasons are specified for the need for "differentiated training" for rural educators: 1. to prepare them for life and work in rural settings, and 2. to "educate personnel to want to stay in the rural areas (p. 18)." Two issues are embedded in these reasons: 1. the need to prepare rural educators for work in rural educational settings as specific and different from metropolitan settings, and 2. the need to prepare rural educators for life in rural communities so that they may find it suitable and be willing to stay. Rural pre-service programs thus take on the task of preparing rural educators for both their professional and, to an extent, their personal lives as educators in rural settings.

The rural pre-service programs for teachers approach accomplishing their task in three ways: 1. by preparing educational generalists rather than specialists, 2. by exposing their trainees to rural school settings through rural field experiences and student teaching rotations in the clinical strand of their programs, and 3. by preparing their students for the sociological and economic realities of rural living.

The rural pre-service programs for teachers have a focus on preparing teachers who are generalists in education, ". . . thus preparing teachers to cope with multi-grade/multi-subject teaching loads and with extracurricular activities (Gardener and Edington 1982, p. iii)."

It is necessary for rural school teachers to be prepared to do the tasks that specialists may handle in other districts, such as diagnosis and prescription of special educational programs for students. In addition, rural teachers have to work in settings requiring more autonomy, flexibility and resourcefulness because of limited contact with same subject peers and limited resources. They may be called upon to teach a course or two outside the area of their training, to work with multi-age groupings of students, and to assist in supervising extracurricular activities beyond the scope of their teaching responsibilities. (Muse, 1981) An approach of some rural pre-service programs to preparing educational generalists is to have the students prepare in two minor fields along with their major, or in three to four minor fields in place of a major.

In a parallel sense, a rural pre-service program for administrators would focus on preparing generalists rather than administrative specialists, based on the point previously made in this paper that a rural administrator typically wears many hats, is responsible for many roles in the school, and carries the burden of those responsibilities alone. Preparation as a generalist and not as a specialist may better serve to ready the new rural administrators for the considerable responsibilities and the broad spectrum of roles they will encounter in their rural posts.

Secondly, rural pre-service programs for teachers expose their trainees to rural settings for a portion or the sum of their clinical experiences. Muse (1981, p. 402) reports on a Brigham Young University study which "found that future teachers who experience practice teaching in a rural school (and who also live in the area during this time) will most likely want to teach in that area."

Teachers-in-training who experience rural posts through supervised field experiences are brought face-to-face with the realities of rural schooling. They witness the disadvantages, for example, of the geographic distances students travel to school, the typically lower salaries of rural educators, and the responsibility of having three to five class preparations daily. They also witness the advantages, for example, of small class size, the close personal quality of a small school and the congeniality and interdependence of a small staff.

In other words, the exposure to rural school gives the teacher trainees a chance to weigh the advantages and disadvantages of rural education through first-hand experience. The time spent in rural schools helps teacher trainees to measure their abilities and preferences against that type of setting. Some decide rural teaching is not for them. It is better that they learn that lesson from a semester's practicum than from a year in their first teaching post. Some find rural teaching suits them. (Gardener and Edington, 1982).

The parallel for rural pre-service programs for administrators would be to provide rural field experiences through internships and other clinical requirements. It can be presumed that administrative trainees would

receive exposure in such rural settings to the scope and flavor of the administrator's role in rural schools. They too could begin to determine the appropriateness of a rural work setting for themselves and perhaps establish mentoring relationships.

The importance of this sorting or weeding out function of the rural field experience in pre-service training becomes evident when one considers the difficulties that rural schools encounter with attracting and retaining staff. Lower salaries relative to metropolitan districts, geographic isolation which limits cultural and professional development opportunities, the limited availability and generally poor quality of housing, and limited availability of services (Muse, 1981) are examples of difficulties rural schools may face in the matter of attracting and retaining staff. It is a costly process for a rural school district to advertise positions, screen candidates, hire and train new staff if only to lose them again soon thereafter.

Field experiences would help educators-in-training determine the personal suitability of rural posts in advance of employment and thus self-select out candidates who find rural posts unsuitable.

With a site specific field experience, the educator and his/her employer benefit from an even greater transfer of training when the educator subsequently practices in a school site similar to the site of his/her practicum or internship. Muse (1981, p. 402) comments on a study which shows "that teachers who take their first teaching position in a situation similar to that of their student teaching days tend to be rated more successful by their school administrators." It is reasonable to expect a similarly positive result for administrators.

The third manner in which rural pre-service programs ready their trainees for life and work in rural settings and for wanting to stay in rural communities is through the provision of training in aspects of rural sociology and economics. This includes examination of the traditions and customs, community and family values, history and heritage, and economic bases of rural communities. Mindful that each area of the country is unique and requires individual examination to promote understanding, pre-service programs may incorporate training to prepare the rural educator to assess the dimensions and needs of a community (Gardener and Edington, 1982).

In describing the rural pre-service program developed at the University of Victoria, British Columbia, R.L. Williams states:

> The key to our success has been in preparing teachers for the sociological shock of rural and remote living, rather than in some unique teaching strategies. Our research indicates teachers leave such areas, not for teaching conditions, but for personal and sociological reasons. Hence the development of the Early Field Experience part of our Rural Teacher Training Program (personal communication, December 28, 1988).

The Early Field Experience referred to is a semester's course of study the student undertakes in a rural school setting. As part of the semester's work the student observes teachers at work in their classrooms and throughout their school responsibilities, and the student engages in an in-depth investigation of the community and the school. The student's investigation explores the demographics, power structure dynamics, resources, and sociological factors which affect the rural school and the rural educator.

The parallel in rural pre-service programs for administrators would be to provide for training in rural cultural, sociological and economic forces and the assessment of rural communities as the rural pre-service programs for teachers do—through courses and field experiences. Gardener and Edington (1982) conclude,

> Teachers and administrators preparing for the small and rural areas need better preparation in the sociological and economic factors prevalent in nonmetropolitan education. Although each area has different needs, the educator must be aware of the cultural, social, and economic factors of the area he serves (p. 19).

Gardener and Edington identify a further key aspect of rural pre-service programs and that is an in-service component. In-service is seen as a necessary adjunct to rural pre-service programs for teachers so that teachers may be kept up-to-date on advances in education and aspects of rural education. Certainly the same need would be anticipated for administrators and rural pre-service programs for administrators would incorporate in-service components as well. In-service is every bit as important as pre-service as we have mentioned earlier in our discussion.

The rural superintendency requires a preparation program that must be characterized by breadth as well as depth since the most distinctive feature of the rural superintendency is the multiplicity of roles the incumbent must assume. But administrative diversity is not the only challenge of the rural superintendency.

The Curriculum

Small rural districts are often characterized as being more insulated and provincial than urban and suburban districts. The rural superintendent has to be a public relations specialist in diplomatically developing new programs that can help the district expand its horizons. The rural superintendent also has to be attentive to new innovations and educational technologies that can help the district overcome problems that result from low population densities, *e.g.*, telecommunications and distance learning. In order to implement any of these changes, the rural superintendent must also be a capable salesperson because rural districts often lack the necessary tax base to support the types of educational innovations commonly found in urban and suburban settings. Improving preparation in school finance and community relations may be particularly pertinent to rural administrators. The addition of preparation in the cultural, sociological

and economic forces of the community and rural site field experiences should be considered. Therefore, the curriculum of pre-service and in-service programs alike must be reviewed for appropriateness.

A differentiated program is needed to prepare rural administrators in much the same way it is necessary to prepare rural teachers. For, as Sher (1978) has said, "The fact that rural schools must accept teachers without specialized rural training puts them at a disadvantage they can ill afford (Muse, 1981, p. 402)." Neither can small and rural schools afford to be at a disadvantage with the training of their administrators. One concern would naturally be the breadth of the rural administrator's preparation, as was discussed earlier.

As in all curriculum work, regional and local needs must be considered, remaining sensitive to regional differences, as we are reminded by Sher (1978, p. 31), "Rural America may well represent the single most diverse and heterogeneous group of individuals in our society."

Collaborative Efforts

Brittel (1963) argues for a cooperative statewide approach to educational administration internships, to bring about such advantages as:

> amplifying the resources of single institutions, . . . enabling programs to be developed under common legal frameworks, and increasing the likelihood that supportive arrangements could be legislated (Daresh, Gallagher, and Balmores, 1987, p. 25).

Nachtigal (1987, p. 9) adds "New partnerships will need to be formed not only with other rural schools, but with institutions of higher education as well." The potential for growth and development of clinical experiences, including internships, is great. Mentoring and in-service programs may also be expanded and improved. Utilizing that potential of such programs hinges on the success of collaboration between school districts and institutions of higher education. Though the universities would do well to remember that "While rural people are willing to accept ideas from the outside, a heavy flavor of 'home-grownness' is likely to make change more acceptable (Nachtigal, 1987, p. 7)," it is evident that effort will have to be made by all involved.

Experience-Based Preparation

Considering the weight of the evidence from the *Executive Educator/UB* survey that points to rural administrators' need for experience-based preparation, clinical experiences and internships take on a great importance, for all administrative trainees.

We have argued that internships for rural administrators are a crucial part of their administrative preparation, that as new administrators they may not have to use their first rural post as a training ground only to leave it shortly for a "bigger and better" post. The evidence from the research on rural teacher preparation points out the value, as well, of rural sites for internships and clinical experiences. We advocate a full-time administrative internship in a small rural school for all prospective rural administrators.

IN CLOSING

Educational reformers suggest, and our data, confirms, that graduate schools of educational administration must review the quality of their preparation programs, particularly their clinical sequences and administrative internships. The "is" and the "ought" of educational administration must once again become more closely connected. Theory-building and theory-testing need not be dismissed from the preparation of administrators. Indeed, aspiring administrators should be encouraged to study the art and science of administration in order to improve the craft of administration. A deeper understanding of what administrators do and why they do it can only improve how administrators do what they do. Practice must become an equal partner with research in the preparation of educational leaders. At the heart of this program would be a full-time, paid internship in a small rural district.

The recommendations offered in this paper reflect both the reforms proposed in *Leaders for America's Schools* and the responses from a nationwide sample of rural administrators. If we are to begin seriously reconsidering the way we prepare our educational leaders, then this is the appropriate time to seriously reconsider the way we intend to prepare them to serve our rural districts well.

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