

The Idea

The United States is facing an immediate need, dramatized by the “restructuring” requirements of NCLB, to transform thousands of our lowest-performing schools so that virtually all their students can become academically proficient. While it is possible to turn around such schools, it is difficult and complex to do so. The most critical ingredient is having skilled leaders to lead the transformation process, including guiding and coordinating teams of teacher leaders and other key stakeholders in initiating the needed changes in expectations, beliefs and practices. Although America does have a small number of educators with the necessary skills and experience, experts concur that that number is wholly insufficient to meet the need. Further, there is not yet agreement as to all the principles and practices necessary for the school turnaround process to succeed, nor on the best curriculum for preparing individuals to lead it.

Accordingly, Congress should create a National Education Leadership Academy to train experienced principals, superintendents and senior district officials, working closely together, how to effectively lead overhauls of our chronically lowest performing public schools. The Academy would bring together in one place, as the Academy’s faculty, the most accomplished principals, superintendents, teachers, and others who have already done this successfully, the academic researchers who study this process and the top trainers from private and public organizations who prepare school leaders. Together, in the main campus, they would distil the experience and research that has already been done nationally and internationally to gain maximum understanding of what works in school transformation, what does not, and why.

Then, they would take their collective knowledge and experience to the next level by creating a national “model” state-of-the-art curriculum and pedagogy for training experienced educators how to successfully lead the transformation process. This would include intensive, individualized, long-term mentoring and peer support networks for all trainees, as well as, for principals, a full academic year supervised field placement under a principal who has successfully led the turnaround process. The curriculum would most likely feature research on organizational change, instructional leadership, and notions of distributed leadership. Wherever appropriate, the curriculum would be differentiated to meet any distinctive needs in elementary, middle and high schools, and in urban, rural and suburban areas, respectively. Next, the faculty, composed chiefly of practitioners, would teach its curriculum and pedagogy to the first class of carefully selected principals, in conjunction with their own superintendents and senior district staff representative. By having superintendents, principals and senior staff participate together, the Academy would enable them to develop a shared understanding and cooperative approach to leading school turnarounds in their district.

After a trial run, the Academy’s training program would be scaled up by having selected training organizations, partnerships, universities or other qualified organizations operate as many as 7 regional campuses of the Academy. With the main campus and all 7 regional campuses operating, the Academy would graduate approximately 640 principals, 200 superintendents and 200 senior district officials per year skilled in how to lead transformations of our lowest-performing public schools. Independent evaluations would be conducted and publicly reported regularly of both the quality of the Academy’s program and the effectiveness of its graduates in leading school turnarounds. The need is so urgent that this should be done now, as free-standing legislation, without waiting potentially years for the ESEA reauthorization.

Why Is Such A National Education Leadership Academy Needed Now?

There are already about 3,500 chronically low-performing schools in “restructuring” under NCLB, projected to increase to about 5,000 by 2010, as well as other similarly situated schools that may not yet technically be in “restructuring.” Whether or not one endorses NCLB’s current methods for identifying exactly which schools should be “restructured,” there are thousands of schools where the expectations, beliefs and practices of many principals, teachers, parents and students need to be dramatically changed for the students to learn at a high academic level. Unless such an Academy, or other similar, large scale, precisely targeted initiative is undertaken to prepare thousands of very well qualified school transformation leaders soon, millions of poor, minority and other students will continue to be deprived of an adequate education.

Why Would It Be Appropriate for the Federal Government to Establish the Academy?

All Americans share strong national – not just state or local - economic, political, security and social stability interests in giving all our students the academic knowledge and skills they need to be productive members of our society. There is longstanding precedent for the Government to call together far-flung experts to address critical national problems, as with the National Academy of Sciences and the Manhattan Project. Moreover, the federal government has the prestige to attract top experts, the ability to draw in other key interests and the financial capacity to support the Academy.

How Would the Academy be Governed and Funded?

The governance of the Academy would be modeled heavily on that of the National Assessment Governing Board. It would be established in the U.S. Department of Education and governed by an independent board of directors appointed by the Secretary. The members of the board would reflect particular kinds of relevant roles and experience specified by Congress and would be selected based on nominations from stakeholder organizations. It would be funded by a federal/state/philanthropic partnership. Congress would fund the full cost of the main campus, estimated at \$3 million for the first year and \$25-27 million/year thereafter. In addition, it would fund 50% of the cost of a maximum of 7 regional campuses, costing an estimated \$94 million/yr. if all 7 were established. The balance of the regional campus costs would come from matching grants by the states and philanthropies....

How Would the Academy Differ From Existing School Leadership Training Organizations?

While there are already a number of university, private, city, state and foundation-based school leadership training organizations, the Academy would be **unique** in six critical respects:

- National – The Academy would be a national training center, serving the needs of all states. With as many as 7 regional campuses, it would train turnaround leaders for rural and suburban schools, as well as urban schools, nationwide.
- Large Scale – The Academy would train as transformation leaders as many as 1040 principals, superintendents and senior district officials per year, dramatically contributing to the goal of turning around 5,000 lowest-performing schools.
- State-of-the-art Curriculum and Pedagogy – The Academy would assemble the top practitioners, scholars and training experts nationwide to distil and build on existing knowledge and experience and take them to the next level by creating a cutting edge, model, transformation leadership curriculum and pedagogy.

- Governance – The Academy would be governed by an independent, non-partisan board whose members would be nominated by national stakeholders’ organizations of principals, superintendents, teachers, etc., and selected by the Secretary of Education.
- Funding – The Academy would be funded by a federal/state/philanthropic partnership, with the federal government fully funding the main campus and 50% of the cost of the regional campuses and states contributing 40%, and philanthropies 10%, of regional campus costs.
- Duration – The Academy would only exist for about 10 years – the time necessary to develop and refine a model curriculum and pedagogy and meet the urgent national need to prepare large numbers of school turnaround leaders for our lowest achieving schools– after which it would terminate.

In addition, the Academy would **differ from virtually all the other training organizations** in the following important ways:

- Training Only in Transformation Leadership – The Academy would focus exclusively on training leaders to lead turnarounds of schools in “restructuring” under NCLB and comparable schools.
- Trainees Only Experienced School Leaders – The Academy would train only experienced principals and superintendents, not individuals “aspiring” to those positions.
- Faculty Chiefly Practitioners – The majority of the Academy’s faculty would be accomplished transformation practitioners.
- Principals and Superintendents Together – Principal trainees would participate in the Academy’s program together with their own superintendents and a senior district official selected by the superintendent; joining principals together with their superintendents and senior district staff will break down traditional isolation and promote shared understanding, development and cooperation in implementation of district-wide turnaround strategy.
- Intensive Program – The Academy would provide an intensive training program, including: a summer course of at least 6 weeks for principals, with a senior district official attending at least 3 of the weeks and their superintendent attending at least 1 week; a full academic year field internship for each principal trainee assisting a principal who has successfully led the transformation process, and, to the maximum extent possible, in a school then undergoing turnaround; intensive weekend instructional and support programs for superintendents regularly throughout the year; and two years of individualized mentoring by Academy faculty for every principal and superintendent participant.
- Impact on University and Other Training Programs – Because of its unique character, role, scale, composition and funding as the national school transformation academy, drawing faculty from, and working closely with, various universities and training organizations, it is predictable that, over time, the Academy would have a significant impact enhancing administrator preparation and professional development programs around the country.

We understand that existing training organizations lack all of the Academy’s “unique” features. In addition, we believe that each of the existing organizations also lacks one or more of the Academy’s unusual features. Please see the attached Addendum for a description of some of these differences.

What Organizations and Arguments Oppose the Academy and How Could They Be Rebutted?

I know of no organizations that oppose the Academy. However, questions have arisen whether the problems facing very low performing schools have enough in common, and experts have enough knowledge and experience, to prepare a valuable curriculum. We believe the answer to this is “yes” and have gotten the support of top scholars in the field for the Academy. Question has also been raised about whether the model curriculum would prevent school leaders from exercising discretion

to adapt to unique local facts. We believe the answer to this is: “no.” The curriculum would offer principles, processes and options, but how to apply them would be up to each leader. In addition, question has been raised as to whether Congress would be prepared to provide the level of funding necessary, both initially and over the years, for the Academy to accomplish its objectives. We believe that once Congress understands how valuable the Academy would be in addressing a critical national education goal, and how effectively and efficiently targeted its funds would be, that it would provide the needed funding.

Federal Budget

Main Campus

1st year - \$3 million: Salary, benefits and office expenses for 10 staff to recruit faculty, arrange physical space and field placements; lease/utilities 14,400 sq. ft., incl. offices and classrooms; stipend for 20 experts for 3 months to create model curriculum/pedagogy, incl. 3 weeks on site; travel; misc.

2nd year - \$24.9 million: Full year stipend, lodging and misc. expenses for 80 principal trainees; two weeks and 6 weekends lodging and misc. expenses for 25 superintendent trainees, and 4 weeks and 6 weekends such expenses for 25 senior district officials; full year salary/benefits/office expenses faculty and staff; lease/utilities 14,400 sq. ft.; mentors; travel; and a reserve.

3rd year - \$25.5 mil.

4th year - \$26.2 mil.

5th year - \$26.9 mil

6th- 10th years – Add 2.5 percent /yr. cost of living increase.

Regional Campuses

1st and 2nd years of Academy: no extra cost, because regional campuses not yet operating.

3rd year - \$25.5 mil.: the Federal share, i.e., 50%, of the cost of 2 regional campuses, at \$12.75 mil./yr./campus.

4th year - \$52.4 mil.: 50% of cost of 4 regional campuses, at \$13.1 mil./yr./campus

5th year - \$94.2 mil.: 50% of cost of 7 regional campuses, at \$13.45 mil./yr./campus

6th-10th year – Add 2.5 percent/yr. cost of living increase.

Total Federal Budget for Main Campus and Regional Campuses

1st year - \$3 mil.

2nd year - \$24.9 mil.

3rd year - \$51 mil.

4th year - \$78.6 mil.

5th year - \$121.1 mil.

6th-10th years – Add 2.5 percent/yr. cost of living increase.

Gary Ratner, Executive Director, Citizens for Effective Schools – Revised: October 9, 2009

Addendum

For example, New Leaders for New Schools trains “aspiring” principals, i.e., current and former teachers, some returning to education from other fields, to become urban public school principals. It does not train experienced principals, superintendents, principals together with their superintendents, nor leaders for rural and suburban schools and districts. The New York City Leadership Academy Program for “Aspiring Principals” seems similar to New Leaders in these respects; while it also has a

coaching program for experienced principals, that seems to be much more limited than the Academy's one-year, intensive classroom and supervised, field placement program.

Harvard's ExEL program is taught not only to education leaders but to a broad range of local and state leaders, including representatives of mayors' offices, businesses, unions, legislatures and school boards. It advances relatively broad purposes, including "improv[ing] coherence across their organizations" and "develop[ing school] improvement strategies," rather than focusing just on training leaders to guide transformations of our lowest-performing schools. It is taught by the university's business, government and education faculties, rather than chiefly by turnaround practitioners, and is conducted for a total of only about 16 days over three years, rather than being a one-year intensive program. The Harvard Principals' Center provides a wide range of leadership development courses for principals and superintendents during the summer and school year, but they typically run only 3-7 days and are on fairly narrow topics, not comparable to the Academy's comprehensive and integrated program for all aspects of school transformation leadership.

The Broad Superintendents Academy provides an "executive management program" to prepare "top executives from business, non-profit, military, government and education backgrounds" to become urban school superintendents. Its purpose is to improve student achievement through "better governance, management, competition and labor relations." The Leadership Academy, by contrast, is designed to enable people who are already experienced superintendents, (principals and senior district officials) knowledgeable about how schools work and the special problems they face, to learn how to turn around the expectations, beliefs and practices of school stakeholders in the chronically lowest-achieving schools. The expected focus of the Academy would be on how to improve instruction and change schools' culture, rather than heavily emphasizing application of management principles from for-profit businesses.

The Darden/Curry Partnership for Leaders in Education, a collaboration of the University of Virginia's Business and Education Schools, provides several executive development programs for teams of state and district school leaders. Unlike the Leadership Academy, they are designed to teach "the same general management and leadership principles used by our nation's top business leaders." In addition, both the Broad Academy and Darden/Curry differ from the Leadership Academy in that they do not focus exclusively on the schools under NCLB "restructuring" and similar schools.

