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Development of school leaders in Hong Kong: contextual changes and future challenges
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Schools in Hong Kong have been operating in a fast changing external environment in the last two decades; not only have they had to follow the international trend of implementing various educational reform initiatives but they also have had to adjust to the social changes brought about by the transfer of political governance. These changes have led to new expectations of the roles of school leaders and the ways potential leaders are prepared for these roles. This article reviews the development of leadership preparation in Hong Kong and explores future development opportunities, taking into consideration the unique nature of Chinese culture and the history of Hong Kong.

Keywords: school leaders; leadership development; Hong Kong

Introduction

Education in Hong Kong schools has undergone profound changes since 1997 when China reclaimed sovereignty from the British government. This transformational political change translated into a new mission and new policies for the education system in Hong Kong (Bray 1998). Reforms as varied as changing the medium of instruction and implementing a new six-year secondary school curriculum structure were introduced in subsequent years. Concurrent with these far-reaching changes, emerging from a new political environment, Hong Kong schools have found themselves adjusting to the same educational reforms that were making their way around the globe (e.g. school-based management, student-centred learning, and educational quality).

These changes have placed school principals centre stage as the persons responsible for the implementation of these changes and accountable for results. Recognition of the importance of school leadership has been, on the one hand, welcomed by local principals, but on the other hand, increased intensity in the work role, more varied expectations of that role, and a range of new accountability-oriented policies have combined to create a new context for principal leadership in Hong Kong.

Consequently, it is observed that the whole approach to the preparation and development of school leaders has changed in Hong Kong:

- A framework for leadership preparation and development has been created and is supported financially by the school system.

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More varied modes of learning that depart from the prior model of centrally provided ‘one off’ training programmes are now provided.

Leadership preparation and development is viewed as a career-long pursuit, the responsibility for which lies with each individual.

However, an understanding of school leadership cannot be developed without taking into consideration the contextual elements. So a brief introduction of Hong Kong’s education system is given in the first section of the article. The second section reviews the development of leadership preparation in Hong Kong, and the third section explores future development opportunities.

The Hong Kong context
Hong Kong is located at the south-eastern tip of China, has a population of about 7.0 million and covers a total area of only 1103 km. Approximately 98% of the population is ethnic Chinese (Census and Statistics Department, Hong Kong Special Administrative Region [HKSAR] Government 2010). The Education Bureau (EDB) is the government department in charge of education; it was called the Education Department (ED) in the colonial and the early post-colonial days and the Education and Manpower Bureau (EMB) from 2003 to 2007. The EDB is headed by the Secretary for Education and is responsible for formulating and reviewing education policy, securing funding from the government’s overall budget, and overseeing the effective implementation of educational programmes. Education accounts for the largest proportion of public expenditure, amounting to about one-fourth of total recurrent public expenditure (Education Bureau, HKSAR Government 2010).

The contemporary culture of the Hong Kong Chinese is a blend of Western culture grafted onto an otherwise historically ingrained Chinese culture. However, despite the powerful Western influences experienced persistently over a long period of time, the majority of Hong Kong Chinese have maintained their inherent Chineseness. They share a Confucian cultural heritage, which is the foundation of the Chinese cultural tradition and still provides the basis for norms guiding Chinese interpersonal behaviours (Fang 2000). The following two sections discuss the policy environment external to schools and the internal school context in which school leaders work respectively.

The external policy environment
As a British colony, Hong Kong did not have a clear vision of its educational development (Sweeting 2004). Although the government introduced nine years of compulsory schooling in 1978, it was a response to criticism by the European Economic Community rather than part of a planned strategy (Postiglione and Lee 1997). The period between the late 1970s and the early 1980s was described by Cheng (2002) as the ‘Quantitative Era of education development’ which primarily focused on the physical expansion of the system. Capitalising on China’s closed-door foreign trade policy and its unique geographical location, Hong Kong achieved remarkable economic growth during this period. The extraordinary economic growth led to greater demand for skilled and knowledgeable manpower, and, by extension, more schools. In the demand-driven era, challenges to school leadership were rare.
The quest for quantity continued until the early 1980s when Hong Kong began to assume an important role in the international finance market. Being the exclusive bridge between China and the rest of the world, Hong Kong was able to draw substantial capital investments from multinational organisations that were attracted to the potential of the mainland China market. The internationalisation of Hong Kong’s finance and trade sector called for corresponding developments in its legal and social domains (Chan and Mok 2001). Educational reform was one of the social arenas that the Hong Kong Government attended to for strengthening its role on the international stage. In February 1984 the government established the Education Commission (EC) to review the education system’s status and to advise on policies. The first report produced by the EC was released later in the same year, after the first comprehensive review of education in Hong Kong. Five more reports were published during the pre-1997 period, proposing hundreds of policy recommendations on a broad range of issues including the medium of instruction, teacher education, school management, and curriculum development. Cheng (2003) labelled this period as the ‘effective school movement’ which focused on school operation and curriculum improvement. In 1991, the Hong Kong government launched the School Management Initiative (SMI) which mirrored the School-based Management model introduced in other international school systems. The SMI gave schools a higher degree of autonomy and flexibility in their operations on the one hand and imposed on them a more rigid set of quality assurance mechanisms on the other. Schools were required to conduct self-assessment as well as to be externally evaluated. Performance indicators in the four domains of Management and Organisation, Learning and Teaching, Student Support and School Ethos and Student Performance were developed and they formed the benchmark against which the performance of schools was gauged.

Hong Kong’s role in the international finance sector was preserved, if not accentuated, in the early post-colonial days and continued to have an impact on other sectors. The Education Commission Report Number 7 (ECR 7) released in 1997 differed sharply from the preceding reports in its business-focus and market-orientation. Standard business concepts such as quality, accountability, efficiency and effectiveness were introduced into the education domain. Education was seen as a provision of service to satisfy multiple stakeholders, instead of a learning process for students. Reform initiatives such as school self-evaluations, external school reviews, and new modes of school assessment reflected a new focus on accountability, quality assurance, efficiency and effectiveness. Moreover, for the first time, school-level performance comparisons became available.

In 1998, the government instructed all but 114 secondary schools in Hong Kong to use Chinese as the Medium of Instruction (MOI). Although this directive was intended to help students gain knowledge of subjects in their mother language (i.e. Chinese), it resulted in a new type of labelling (or grading) of schools. Notably only the ‘better performing schools’ were allowed to use English as the MOI. The English MOI schools automatically became highly sought after by parents. The introduction of the MOI policy intensified competition amongst schools for students in the wake of a decline in the total student population in Hong Kong.

The rapid pace of education reforms in Hong Kong maintained its momentum after the turn of the millennium. This wave of reform followed the global trend of privatisation and marketisation (Chan and Mok 2001). Amongst the most prominent
 iniciatives implemented in the new millennium were the reactivation of the Direct Subsidy Scheme (DSS) in 2001, the introduction of Incorporated Management Committees (IMC) in 2007, and the New Senior Secondary Curriculum (NSSC) in 2009. The DSS allowed grant receiving schools the autonomy to redesign the curriculum, to recruit and select students themselves (the central student allocation scheme was done away with) and to collect tuition fees from students. The IMC altered the governance of schools to a certain extent by requiring them to incorporate external members such as parents and alumni into their school management committees. The NSSC replaced a seven-year secondary school curriculum with a six-year structure, and made General Studies a compulsory subject.

The decentralised environment in which schools now operate allows growing disparity among school practices, and the marketised environment makes every school decision an irrevocable strategic move. The increasing complexity and diversity of school leaders’ roles are associated with these developments. Indeed, as noted by Bottery (2004), one of the challenges in a reform environment is to generate commitment to change in school teachers. However the success of leaders at infusing changes in schools is in turn greatly affected by the internal school culture. A brief discussion of the internal school context in Hong Kong schools today follows.

The internal school context

In comparison to the external environment, internal school structures and culture have remained relatively stable during the reform era. The quantity quest for education was perceived as solely a macro-level issue, to be addressed by policy makers who were responsible for central funds allocation, rather than by school leaders who were primarily accountable only for utilisation of the monies allotted. Challenging of school leaders by communities then was a rare phenomenon as the demand for schools far exceeded the supply; there was no urgent need to improve school quality.

School leaders, working in a high power-distance culture, commanded a great deal of respect from the community, parents and teachers. Decisions in schools could be made in an authoritarian and autocratic manner, without much consideration of staff participation or parental consultation, as the need for democracy and delegation of authority was yet to be felt (Dimmock and Walker 1998). Consequently, schools continued to enjoy a great degree of autonomy, without much external interference.

However, with the later reforms, many initiatives that were introduced to help schools turned out to be more burdens than avenues for improvement in schools (Wong 1995). For instance, the School Management Initiative (SMI), features of which mirrored school-based management initiatives in other schooling systems, was intended to help improve schools’ performances by introducing an accountability system. However, school leaders and teachers were sceptical about the enormous amount of paperwork required by the government in preparation for the restructuring (Wong 1995). The reluctance and/or incapacity of principals and school teachers to cope with the new set of requirements was quite understandable given a cultural context in which replication, rather than generation, was the norm.
Principals who had been counting on previous experience and prior knowledge for managing schools found no precedents or ready solutions. The hasty introduction of SMI without fully-prepared school personnel in advance of the initiative was also one of the factors contributing to the negative response.

The apparent lack of experience of Hong Kong principals to cope with uncertainties has been further exacerbated by their being accustomed to a stable career path which was typically steady and lifelong, punctuated infrequently by resignations due to health problems (Lam 2003). It is currently not uncommon to find a principal who has worked in one school (or in schools run by the same school sponsoring body) for his or her entire professional life. Loyalty to a school, or to a school sponsoring body, is still considered as patriarchy, a value highly treasured in the Chinese culture (Westwood 1997). In fact, hiring bodies for the post of principal in Hong Kong tend to view applicants from the same school or the same sponsoring body more favourably, as a better match between the candidate and the school is assumed (Kwan and Walker 2009). Prevalence of such a belief appears to reinforce the importance of affiliation, loyalty and long service in a particular school or school sponsoring body, and makes things difficult for principals wanting to move to other schools (Walker and Kwan in press).

The career pattern of school teachers in Hong Kong today exhibits a similar mode of stability to that of school principals. Although the concept of school-based teacher evaluation was proposed in SMI, it was found that schools were still reluctant to adjust themselves to the new system more than 10 years after its inception (Chow et al. 2002). A mandate to establish an appraisal system in all schools by the end of the 2001–2002 school year was given by the government (Education Department 1999). In the absence of an enthusiastic endorsement by school principals, the system has become more of an administrative measure to satisfy policy makers, than a means to improve teacher performance (Chow et al. 2002). Despite the formal establishment of the appraisal system, its core purpose has often been marginalised because of the prevailing practices under which dismissal of teachers appointed on regular (tenure) rather than temporary terms entails a very complicated and lengthy procedure. The value of performance appraisal is further impeded by the remuneration structure of Hong Kong teachers, in which a scale system charting a specific salary scale point with years of teaching experience of job incumbents is still in place. Teachers in Hong Kong are basically rewarded on the basis of seniority rather than merit.

Teachers’ lack of motivation to undertake additional responsibilities can also be attributed, at least in part, to the collectivist culture in which preservation of harmony and suppression of emotional displays have been strategically stressed by school leaders (Dimmock and Walker 2005). They often avoid open and transparent assessment of teachers’ performances which can provide critical feedback, upholding the ‘save face’ phenomenon. The notion of the ‘save face’ concept is that any actions by leaders that impact upon the respect, pride, and dignity of an individual teacher are considered unacceptable (Leung and Chan 2003). The high value placed by school leaders on maintaining harmonious working relationships with colleagues is borne out by the findings that those who are more concerned about collegial relationships in schools are less predisposed toward becoming principals (Walker and Kwan 2009). In this context of stability and tradition, there has been little incentive for teachers to take on additional responsibilities.
The respect enjoyed by school principals in a high power-distance environment also facilitates the formation of a bureaucratic structure as it is not culturally permissible for those lower in the hierarchy to disagree with the views of seniors. The interacting effect of a bureaucratic structure and a collectivist orientation in Hong Kong schools has resulted in a clear division of responsibility between the ruler (school leader) and the ruled (teachers). This has significant effects on the implementation of reform initiatives. If the reform initiatives are seen as a personal endeavour of school principals, for achieving individual rather than school objectives, teachers are less than enthusiastic about embracing the proposals, failing to see benefits for themselves from the changes.

The fast-changing nature of external reform and the continuing inertia of internal school environments together have shaped the expectations of leadership practice in Hong Kong schools. In the following section, a brief review of leadership preparation programmes in Hong Kong is provided.

A review of the development of school leaders in Hong Kong

Leadership preparation and development in the ‘Quantity Era of educational development’ was viewed as a measure serving administrative purposes, rather than educational objectives. The general focus of school leader development programmes centred on equipping participants with the necessary administrative skills for the position.

In the early 1980s, new principals were required to attend a basic, 10-day leadership course in the case of primary schools and a nine-day course in the case of secondary schools. The design and delivery of the programmes were generally outsourced to universities, and as a result they were usually designed and built around needs considered important by academics. Programmes were normally conducted in a classroom setting with only rare involvement of practising school principals (Walker and Dimmock 2006). Drawing on the differentiation between training and development suggested by Beebe, Mottet, and Roach (2004), the programmes could be viewed as having a ‘training’ nature that focused upon, and was evaluated against, the immediate job requirements, rather than having a ‘developmental’ nature that aimed to prepare an individual for their career.

The importance of school leadership and leadership development in improving schools was first acknowledged in 1997 in ECR 7, which stated that: ‘to provide quality school education, we need quality principals and teachers with a strong sense of mission, appropriate personal attributes, adequate academic and professional qualifications... They should be provided with suitable support and development opportunities’ (ECR 7, 22). In January 1999, the Task Group on the Training and Development of School Heads was established with the aim of setting up a Continuing Professional Development (CPD) framework for school leaders. A consultation paper was released in which a broad framework for leadership development was suggested (Education Department 1999). A second consultation document was published in 2002 which considered feedback from the 1999 paper and was later adopted as the policy for Continuing Professional Development for School Excellence (Education Department 2002).

The development of school leaders appeared to lag behind the pace of policy changes. Although the importance of school leadership was embraced in ECR 7 in
1997, it was not until 2002 that the government introduced new school leader development initiatives. The focus of these programmes was to help school leaders to more effectively and efficiently discharge their responsibilities in schools. Adhering to the traditional practice of seeking professional advice from academics, the government invited a team of academics to develop a framework to delineate the responsibilities pertaining to the roles of school leaders in Hong Kong. Building on extensive research on Hong Kong principalship, a six-dimension framework based upon principals’ values, knowledge, skills and attributes was proposed. The six dimensions were: strategic direction and policy environment; teaching, learning and curriculum; leader and teacher growth and development; staff and resource management; quality assurance and management; and external communication and connection (Walker and EMB 2003). The framework set the first theoretical foundation on which school leadership programmes in Hong Kong were to be designed.

Differentiated leadership development programmes for aspiring, newly appointed and serving principals, with a time-regulated framework, were made mandatory under the new policy. Aspiring principals (APs) were to attain, within a two-year period, a Certification for Principalship, which required them to pass a 75-hour academic course built around the six-dimension responsibility framework, to attend a one-day needs analysis workshop, and to submit a portfolio. Newly appointed principals (NAPs) were to undergo a needs assessment, an induction programme, a school leadership development programme, and an extended programme. They were also asked to present annually a professional portfolio to their school management committees. Serving principals (SPs), who were of diverse backgrounds in terms of their years of experience, educational level and professional knowledge, were expected to engage in a self-selected range of professional activities for a minimum of 150 hours over three years (Education Department 2002). The programme reflected a shift of focus from ‘training’ to ‘development’, from ‘classroom’ to ‘multi-facet’, and from ‘off-the-job’ to ‘on-the-job’.

A review of the NAP (Newly Appointed Principals) programme, through a survey of participants and focus-group interviews, was conducted in 2004 by the EMB. The findings reflected that the programme had a positive impact on the performance of schools. The participants valued highly the opportunities to establish a network of NAPs and to liaise with experienced principals (EMB 2004). The replicative, rather than generative, culture resulted in NAPs generally being inclined to depend on advice from peers and experienced principals. The review also called for better coherence between various programme components and greater involvement of experienced principals serving as mentors. In a separate study, Cheung and Walker (2006) also reported that NAPs preferred their mentors to be experienced practitioners, and to be supported by academics. The formulation of school leader development programmes was adjusted in accordance with decentralisation and marketisation policies. However, instead of setting a rigid framework to be followed by school leaders such as that in the NAP programme, the government delegated the design and delivery of the programme to the school leader community. The Blue Skies programme was launched in mid-2005 on a trial basis, as a replacement for the NAP, under the sponsorship of the government and a group of experienced school principals. Blue Skies was of 12 months’ duration and was designed by the principals, for the principals. One of its unique features was the exchange platform built around
the concept of learning squares. In each of the learning squares, there was an experienced principal (called the sponsor) who agreed to ‘sponsor’ one or more NAP(s) for the duration of the Blue Skies programme, assuming the multiple roles of being the peer mentor, the principal coach, and the professional counsellor for the newly appointed principals. Members of the learning squares could determine their own schedules of meetings and focus of learning.

Introduction of the Blue Skies programme has been a milestone in school leadership development in Hong Kong. It not only incorporates intensive involvement of practising principals, as suggested by research findings, but also creates (in the learning squares) a collegial environment which allows participants to learn at their own pace, putting emphasis on topics they consider relevant to their respective schools.

Future challenges

The discussion above shows that school leadership development in Hong Kong has undergone substantial change in the recent reform environment. However, when it is considered in tandem with the still largely inert school cultural environments, a number of areas have yet to be addressed by school sponsoring bodies and policymakers.

Creating school leadership development programmes for vice principals

The design of leadership development programmes for APs has had a future-focused orientation, being primarily centred on helping them to prepare better for effectively discharging their responsibilities when they become principals. Assisting vice principals to deal with their existing roles has been somewhat neglected. Recent research work reflects that a general perception that school improvement can only be achieved at the expense of school harmony is firmly rooted among school leaders (Kwan 2009a). In view of the fact that harmony is highly valued in the group-oriented culture of Hong Kong, Walker and Kwan (2009) report that vice principals with a higher disposition for collegial relationships and friendships are less motivated to become principals. The authors also report that Hong Kong principals prefer to use vice principals as buffers against teacher disagreement when changes are to be implemented, and very often task them with the responsibilities of ‘supervising and reviewing performance of teachers’, ‘handling grievances among teachers’, and ‘assigning work to staff’. Being the ‘man in the middle’ is not an enjoyable experience; vice principals often find it hard to strike a balance between being accountable to the principals for efficient implementation of changes in schools and simultaneously maintaining friendly relationships with teachers. Therefore, it is important that development programmes for vice principals be oriented more toward helping them effectively discharge these responsibilities, rather than preparing them for roles of principals.

Encouraging schools to formulate a leader succession plan

Research works on Hong Kong vice principals report that they have rarely been involved in resource and financial management (Kwan and Walker 2008; Kwan
This suggests a general absence of succession planning in schools if vice principals have not been given responsibilities in this important area, which constitutes an essential duty of principals in school management. Evolution of the competency of vice principals to undertake the full set of responsibilities of principals is further hampered by the commonly practised pattern of division of labour in Hong Kong schools. Schools normally have two vice principals; one responsible for academic matters and the other for student or pastoral matters. Work is allocated within these broad areas on the grounds of management effectiveness and efficiency, rather than with any developmental considerations. Once allocated, in general, vice principals tend to retain their defined responsibilities; and job rotation appears to be rather rare. Such a practice allows vice principals who are not interested in taking up a principal position to exclusively focus on their confined responsibility area. However it fails to provide a solid training ground for those who do aspire to a principalship. Therefore, school sponsoring bodies are advised to formulate a leadership succession plan for those who are identified to have the potential and the interest to become principals with a view to exposing them to various leadership practices.

Creating a school culture conducive to innovations

In a review of the Blue Skies programme, Walker and Hu (2008) reported that participants in general appreciated the opportunities to build a network with fellow principals and to be inspired by others’ successes and failures. The respondents indicated that the programme helps them gain insights into leadership issues and practices, and to be conversant with practical management skills. However, they find bringing innovations to their own schools difficult. The difficulties involved in introducing change in schools are explained, in part, by the cultural resistance to change, i.e. innovations are often seen as personal agendas of principals, rather than an avenue to improve school function in general, a phenomenon exacerbated by the absence of adequate communication between the teachers and the principals. Without the support of a team of like-minded and highly-competent colleagues, the possibility of successful introduction of innovations always remains rather slim. Therefore, professional learning should not be confined to school leaders but should also be provided to all school members.

Developing a commitment to life-long learning in school leaders

The basic concept underpinning the development of the Blue Skies programme is networking. In the same review report, produced by Walker and Hu (2008), it is stated that the participants found networking to be the most valuable feature of the programme. Blue Skies allows them opportunities to meet for informal gatherings and discuss common issues at their own pace, in any preferred format. Professional networks not only are able to sustain professional learning by making available opportunities for sharing experiences with peers, but can also provide members with emotional support. To take full advantage of a programme such as Blue Skies, however, it is important that the networks be maintained and sustained beyond the official duration of the programme. Without a commitment to lifelong learning, school leaders may be easily tempted to attend to matters that will trigger short-term
effects, instead of focussing on activities whose effects can be realised only over a much longer time period.

**Maintaining a group of competent and committed experienced principals**

The critical success factor of *Blue Skies* lies not only in the commitment of NAPs but also in the active involvement of experienced principals, who serve as mentors, coaches, and counsellors. The role of the experienced principals, as prescribed in the *Blue Skies* programme design, is to understand the learning needs of NAPs, to lead the learning activities, to build group relationships, to provide feedback on their learning paths, and to provide emotional support when needed.

Being a mentor can be a stimulating personal experience for experienced principals, especially for those who are seeking a professional challenge (Daresh 2004). The commitment of experienced principals in the programme links to the sense of satisfaction they obtain from receiving recognition from the NAPs and seeing that the practices they have followed (or even conceptualised in some cases) can be adopted in other schools. However, the services of experienced principals do not come without a cost; given the increasingly complex nature of school environments and the external factors individual schools have to cope with, experienced principals may find that their voluntary involvement in the programme is fast becoming a luxury.

**Introducing principals to emotion-regulating strategies**

In Hong Kong, internal candidates from the same school, or from schools of the same school sponsoring body, are generally preferred over external candidates when hiring bodies are selecting principals (Kwan and Walker 2009). The promotion of a vice principal to the position of principal often triggers an abrupt change in the prevailing hierarchical structure in a school. The newly-appointed principal no longer sees themselves as a colleague, but as a supervisor who commands a high degree of respect in the high power-distance Hong Kong culture. Moreover, teachers in Hong Kong schools often choose to keep the principal at a distance and to maintain a minimum level of contact and interactions for various reasons, such as to avoid being seen as apple-polishing or to allow themselves time to psychologically adjust to the hierarchical change. Drawing on Kristjánsson’s (2007) conception of emotions, this lack of concern exhibited by teachers may be seen as ‘a sign of belittlement’ by NAPs who want to be admired for their recent success and/or be respected for their new position. Failing to secure the desired behavioural response from teachers, the NAPs often experience a sense of emotional distress. This phenomenon explains, in part, why participants of *Blue Skies* treasure the mutual support rendered by fellow principals and the friendship that develops in the process (Walker and Hu 2008) as it can be taken as a cognitive strategy of emotion regulation. According to Kristjánsson (2007), cognitive strategies involve a reframing of situations by conscientious probing of the grounds of emotion-conferring cognitions for alternative interpretation. The learning from and reflecting on peers’ experiences can provide a good basis for NAPs to make cognitive reinterpretations of the behavioural responses of teachers. Their level of emotional distress can be alleviated if they can identify a justified reason accounting for teachers’ various
behaviours. As school leaders are promoted from positions collectively related to other teachers to positions socially remote from the rest of the school, they need to be psychologically prepared to adjust to the change. Therefore, leadership development needs to go beyond technical skills and leadership development must include introducing NAPs to emotional regulation strategies.

Conclusion

Hong Kong has not only been introducing a number of reform initiatives that mirror international trends in the past two decades, but has also introduced changes in a unique politically transitional environment. The reform policies set requirements to guide leadership preparation, but the actual exercise of leadership in schools is constrained by internal school contexts.

The group-oriented and high power-distance culture in Hong Kong schools constitutes a considerable impediment to leadership practices. Tracing the evolution of school leadership preparation and development programmes and practices in Hong Kong, and taking into consideration the changes in the external school environments, it is clear that there are a number of possible areas that warrant further examination. It is suggested that leadership preparation needs to include emotion regulating strategies, in addition to leadership practices and technical skills. In addition, development of all vice principals to help them more effectively discharge their current responsibilities is also an issue that warrants policy-makers’ consideration. Last, but not least, schools need to carefully consider putting in place a leadership succession plan.

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