The Condition of School Administration in Arizona: 2004

Arnold Danzig
Arizona State University Tempe Campus

Walter Delecki
Northern Arizona University

Contributor: Gary Emanuel
Northern Arizona University

Reviewer: David Quinn
University of Arizona

Background

In the past few years, there has been a renewed interest in school administration. Several research centers, policy centers, and professional organizations, with the support of foundations, have issued reports related to the following:

- School administrator supply and demand.¹
- Career paths of school administrators.²
- Perceptions and attitudes of school principals and superintendents.³
- Reculturing of school administration around a reform agenda.⁴
- Principal as learner-centered leader.⁵
- Principal preparation and professional development.⁶

The extended discussions presented in this brief on school administration indicate the increasing interest and scrutiny recently accorded educational administration and school leadership.
At the same time, federal and state legislation places new demands on school administrators, particularly school principals, for school performance and accountability. Both the No Child Left Behind legislation and state legislation represented in Arizona LEARNS raise the stakes for school administrators by making them increasingly responsible for student performance.

Licensure Standards for School Administrators in Arizona

Title VII of the Arizona Administrative Code (Section R7-2-603) lists five professional administrative standards, with multiple subsections for each standard. Applicants are required to meet these standards in order to qualify for administrative certification:

- **Standard 1**: The administrator facilitates the development, articulation, implementation, and management of an organization's mission.
- **Standard 2**: The administrator facilitates the success of all students by understanding, responding to, and influencing the social, cultural, and legal aspects of the community.
- **Standard 3**: The administrator implements positive and proactive communication strategies for effective parent and community involvement to improve the learning environment for all students.
- **Standard 4**: The administrator effectively manages services, programs, operations, and resources.
- **Standard 5**: The administrator advocates and supports curricular and instructional programs which promote the success of students.\(^7\)

To achieve administrative certification requires, in part, successful “completion of a program in educational administration”\(^8\) (Section R7-2-614) and successful completion of the Arizona Administrator Proficiency Assessment. According to Section R7-2-604, “the administrative preparation program shall include training in the standards described in Section R7-2-603 and a practicum which provides students in the program
opportunities to observe and practice the standards under the supervision of certified administrators.” (part C).⁹

Section R7-2-614 describes three different administrative certificates that are available: A Supervisor Certificate is required for all personnel whose primary responsibility is administering instructional programs, supervising certified personnel, or similar administrative duties. A Principal Certificate is required for all personnel who hold the title of principal or assistant principal, or others with similar administrative duties. A Superintendent Certificate is required for superintendents, assistant or associate superintendents, district chief executive officers regardless of title, and others with similar district-level administrative duties.

All three administrator certificates require three years of teaching experience, a Master’s degree or an advanced degree, and specific requirements for graduate coursework in educational administration (18 hours for Supervisor, 30 hours for Principal, and 36 hours for Superintendent). All three certificates require a practicum in educational administration at the appropriate level. A valid administrative certificate from another state may be substituted for the program in educational administration, teaching experience, and practicum described earlier.

**Recent Developments**

In Latin, the word principal means “first teacher.” Appropriately, one view gaining increasing popularity holds that administration is directly related to instructional improvement. Consistent with this idea, Elmore argues that school administration is best understood as it relates to instructional leadership. In other words, he claims that the purpose of leadership, regardless of role, is the improvement of instructional practice and performance; and that the roles and activities of leadership flow from the expertise required for learning and improvement, not from the formal dictates of the institution.¹⁰

Arizona has passed legislation to assess administrators’ success in leading their schools. According to the Arizona Revised Statutes (A.R.S.) §15-241, an achievement
profile must be prepared for every Arizona school and used “to determine a school classification that designates each school as one of the following:

- An excelling school.
- A highly performing school.
- A performing school.
- An underperforming school.
- A school failing to meet academic standards.11

Underperforming schools that fail to meet academic standards must also prepare and submit improvement plans. According to the statute, “if a school remains classified as an underperforming school for a third consecutive year, the department of education shall visit the school site to confirm the classification data and to review the implementation of the school's improvement plan.”12 Pursuant to subsection M of this section (A.R.S. §15-241), the school shall be classified as failing to meet academic standards unless an alternate classification is made.

These statutes require administrators at the school and district levels to engage constituents and prepare district consolidation plans and site improvement plans to raise student achievement across grade levels and across demographic groups, including ethnic minorities and special education populations.

**Administrative Costs**

The Arizona Laws 2002, Chapter 330 §50, required the Joint Legislative Budget Committee and the Office of the Auditor General to analyze administrative costs.13 Administrative costs are those associated with directing and managing a school district’s responsibilities. These include salaries, benefits, purchased services, and supplies associated with the governing board, superintendent, principal, and business offices. In addition, there are categories of expenditures that the U.S. Department of Education’s National Center for Education Statistics (NCES) uses in its reports, which allow identification of any significant administrative costs associated with the implementation of other programs and funds. A.R.S. §41-1279.03 required the Office of the Auditor
General to monitor the percentage of every dollar Arizona school districts spend in the classroom and to conduct performance audits of school districts.\textsuperscript{14}

**Term of Appointment for School Administrators**

According to A.R.S. §15-1325, a superintendent shall be granted a one-, two- or three-year contract. In A.R.S. §15-503, there is also permissive authority for multiple-year contracts for principals: “The term of employment of superintendents or principals may be for any period not exceeding three years…”\textsuperscript{15} Multiple-year contracts, although the rule for superintendents, are the exception for school principals. The potential consequence of one-year contracts is discussed later.

**School District Unification and Consolidation**

A.R.S. §15-458 and §15-459 set out the conditions for elections to approve the unification or consolidation of school districts. Unification typically refers to a new unified school district formed from a common (elementary) school district and a high school district.\textsuperscript{16} Consolidation (as distinct from unification) is defined as the merging of separate unified K-12 school districts to form a single school district in their place. Arizona statutes require that each affected community hold an election to approve the changes. Although this is not a new development, there has been recent interest in and momentum for school district unification and consolidation. Legislators have proposed a commission to study the 236 school districts in the state and have proposed that some of these school districts be combined by mandate. That plan would go to the Legislature by the end of 2005. The legislature could approve it as proposed or amend it and mandate the consolidation.\textsuperscript{17} Incentives for unification and consolidation are listed in A.R.S. §15-912 and A.R.S. §15-912.01, and allow school districts assistance with consolidation and unification. In the newly formed school district’s maintenance and operations (M & O) budget, the form of assistance is increased revenue control limit—a recommended increase of 21 percent over three years (10 percent in the first year, 7 percent in the second year, and 4 percent in the third year).
Available Data

Administrative Positions in Arizona

Table 1 reports the full-time equivalents (FTE) and Employee Count for Arizona school administrators. According to the Arizona Department of Education’s School District Employee Report for the 2002-03 school year, there were 2,892 administrative positions in Arizona. Of this number, 304 positions are listed as superintendents and assistant superintendents, and another 1,933 listed as principal or assistant principal positions. Some of the other administrative categories include curriculum and personnel directors, supervisors, business managers, vocational educational administrators, and head teachers.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Position Number</th>
<th>Position Name</th>
<th>Position 1 FTEs</th>
<th>Position 2 FTEs</th>
<th>Total FTEs</th>
<th>Position 1 Employees</th>
<th>Position 2 Employees</th>
<th>Total Positions</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>100</td>
<td>Superintendent</td>
<td>179.79</td>
<td>0.40</td>
<td>180.19</td>
<td>188</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>190</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>101</td>
<td>Administrative Assistant</td>
<td>21.00</td>
<td>1.85</td>
<td>22.85</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>28</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>102</td>
<td>Assistant Superintendent</td>
<td>113.39</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>113.39</td>
<td>114</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>114</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>103</td>
<td>Principal</td>
<td>1,152.89</td>
<td>5.40</td>
<td>1,158.29</td>
<td>1,176</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>1,189</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>104</td>
<td>Assistant Principal</td>
<td>726.36</td>
<td>1.60</td>
<td>727.96</td>
<td>739</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>744</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>105</td>
<td>Curriculum Coordinator</td>
<td>88.15</td>
<td>1.46</td>
<td>89.61</td>
<td>92</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>97</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>106</td>
<td>Personnel Director</td>
<td>22.00</td>
<td>0.50</td>
<td>22.50</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>24</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>107</td>
<td>Supervisor</td>
<td>97.61</td>
<td>0.37</td>
<td>97.98</td>
<td>102</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>104</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>108</td>
<td>Head Teacher</td>
<td>24.50</td>
<td>2.54</td>
<td>27.04</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>34</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>109</td>
<td>Other</td>
<td>290.75</td>
<td>6.80</td>
<td>297.55</td>
<td>307</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>325</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>110</td>
<td>Vocational Ed. Admin</td>
<td>22.99</td>
<td>0.50</td>
<td>23.49</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>28</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>111</td>
<td>Business Manager</td>
<td>13.5</td>
<td>0.50</td>
<td>14.00</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

According to data made available by the Arizona Department of Education, there are currently 9,451 valid administrative certificates that have been issued to a total of 7,173 individual educators in the state of Arizona. Of the 7,173 educators with valid administrative certificates, 2,784 are working in the capacity of administrator. There are no data, however, concerning how many of the 7,173 individuals still reside in the state. Regarding the ethnicity of the certified administrator pool, ADE reports that of the 7,173 educators with administrative certificates, 4,289 are Anglo, 185 are African American, 635 are Hispanic, and 28 are Native American. Approximately 30 percent of the people holding certificates did not indicate their ethnicity.

Administrative Costs

In 2002, the Office of the Auditor General was directed by the legislature to identify why some school districts had particularly high or low administrative costs. In the most recent findings by the Auditor General, on a statewide basis, spending on administration in Arizona school districts was 9.9 percent statewide. This is in line with the national average of approximately 10.9 percent of school districts’ day-to-day operating monies spent on administration. According to the 2003 Report, “administrative costs equate to approximately $560 per pupil for the 206 districts statewide for which data were available.”
Table 2: Arizona and U.S. School Spending Comparison

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Classroom Dollars</td>
<td>58.6</td>
<td>61.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Plant Operation and Maintenance</td>
<td>11.7</td>
<td>9.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Administration</td>
<td>9.9</td>
<td>10.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Student Services</td>
<td>6.8</td>
<td>5.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Instruction Staff Support</td>
<td>4.3</td>
<td>4.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Food</td>
<td>4.6</td>
<td>4.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Transportation</td>
<td>3.9</td>
<td>4.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td>0.2</td>
<td>0.3</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


The Office of the Auditor General also identified why districts had particularly high or low administrative costs. According to the 2003 report, several key factors were identified which affected administrative costs in districts, some of which are more subject to district control than others. The primary factor affecting per-pupil administrative costs in any one district is the number of students. Most districts with particularly high costs had fewer than 600 students, while most districts with particularly low costs had more than 5,000 students. Size is an important factor because larger districts can spread costs across more students. The 2003 Report also suggests that “smaller schools, rural or isolated locations, and/or significant amounts of federal impact aid are associated with higher administrative costs. In addition, districts with higher per-pupil administrative costs have two other conditions in common. These districts typically spend a lower percentage of each dollar they receive on instruction, and . . . are more likely to have a large fund balance.”

Fund balance is the cash on hand in a district during and at the end of the fiscal year. No explanation for this last factor was given in the Report.
Table 3: Administrative Costs by Function Area – Fiscal Year 2001

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Functional Area</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Governing Board and Superintendents’ Office</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>School Administration; Primarily Principal’s Offices</td>
<td>52</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Business Activities and Central Support Services</td>
<td>33</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


Table 3 indicates that a little over half of administrative costs reside in salary and other costs associated with the office of the school principal, with business activities and central office support accounting for about one-third of total administrative costs and the superintendent and governing board accounting for the final 15 percent.

Licensing of School Administrators – Administrator Testing

Table 4 looks at the results of administrator testing in Arizona, which began in 2000. Since 2002, when the score required for passing the principal certificate exam was raised, 857 out of 1,051 applicants passed the principal exam, although this probably includes re-takes. No routinely reported information compares in-state and out-of-state applicants, or compares test results for applicants who have gone through approved certification programs with those from applicants who apply directly to the state Department of Education.

Table 4: Administrator Certification Tests Results (2000 to 2004)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>2000</th>
<th>2001</th>
<th>2002</th>
<th>2003</th>
<th>2004</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Superintendent Pass</td>
<td>119</td>
<td>115</td>
<td>46</td>
<td>44</td>
<td>21</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Superintendent Fail</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Principal Pass</td>
<td>675</td>
<td>613</td>
<td>347</td>
<td>411</td>
<td>99</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Principal Fail</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>77</td>
<td>99</td>
<td>18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Supervisor Pass</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>33</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Supervisor Fail</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Evaluation of Available Data

Supply and Demand of School Administrators

At first glance, the data suggest an oversupply of some 4,389 certified administrators, but only 2,784 out of 7,173 currently certified individuals are employed in administrative positions in the state. This would indicate an oversupply in the number of educators qualified to be school administrators. Part of the excess is accounted for by former and retired school administrators who maintain current certificates yet have no plans to practice again (as is the case with one of the authors of this chapter). There are no data, however, to determine how many of these excess certified administrators have never held an administrative appointment, and for those who have left administration, what would attract them back into practice. There are also no data concerning when these certificates expire, or whether they will be renewed.

The data related to administrator supply and demand are not particularly reliable and not easily available. There is no annual report that the authors know of that focuses on district-level demand, or supply data that are disaggregated by ethnicity, gender, age, and so forth. Nor are there data that connects the qualified administrator pool and the requirements of the communities that these administrators serve. In the Arizona Department of Education (ADE) database, 635 of the administrators listed their ethnicity as Hispanic (8.7 percent), whereas around 30 percent of the pool did not identify ethnicity at all. This brief does not argue that school districts require a match between their student population and the ethnicity of their administrators. Nevertheless, an absence of qualified administrators suggests a possible gap in the required knowledge, understandings, and sensitivities that ensure student success in school. Given the growing number of Hispanic students in Arizona, there is a possible mismatch between supply and demand, particularly in the urban and rural areas serving large numbers of Hispanic students. Given the small number of Native American certified administrators, it is also likely that there is an undersupply of Native American applicants available to schools in the communities serving large numbers of Native American students. There may also be a shortage of qualified applicants in the more rural areas of the state. No
available data addressing supply and demand for school administrators are disaggregated by ethnicity or gender, or provide information by district or region of the state.

**Administrative Costs**

Unlike the supply and demand data, administrative and classroom costs are detailed in multiple reports prepared by the Office of the Auditor General. These reports are highly reliable and easily accessible from the Auditor General’s website. They explain administrative and classroom (i.e., instructional) costs of Arizona schools, with comparisons between states, with the nation, and within school districts in Arizona. A common misconception has been to overstate administrative costs by including support services, counseling services, food services, and transportation services. These reports prevent this type of misinterpretation. Although the data separate these other costs from administrative costs, they may fail to take into account the number of “teachers on assignment,” stipends paid for additional administrative work, and other ways in which educators not listed as administrators are still asked to accomplish administrative duties. In the review of the data in Table 1, a specific category for special education administrators in the total number of administrators listed could not be found. A more valid accounting of administrative costs and energies would include these additional considerations in determining the FTE and employee counts and total administrative costs.

**School District Consolidation and Financial Incentives**

There is renewed interest in the financial incentives associated with school district unification and consolidation. As the pressure from the public mounts to fund schools adequately and limit increases in administrative costs, consolidation is one potential response. Consolidation offers the promise of additional resources to maximize public expenditures on local schools and to increase administrative efficiency. There are also potential costs for consolidation: loss of district autonomy and loss of local control.

One example of current interest in school district consolidation is represented by the joint public forum held by the Gilbert Public Schools Governing Board and the Higley School District Governing Board to explore the benefits and issues related to the
consolidation between the Higley and Gilbert school districts (February 23, 2004). According to information prepared for the forum, which is based on a combined 2003-04 Revenue Control Limit of $128,135,501, the newly consolidated district may increase the Revenue Control Limit by $12,813,550 in Year One, $8,969,485 in Year Two, and $5,125,420 in Year Three. The sentiment in the Arizona legislature, as of this writing, is more towards unification of school districts than towards consolidation, however.

**Key Unanswered Policy Questions**

In order to anticipate the future needs of schools and communities, policy makers need to understand what it means to be a highly qualified school administrator. A deep understanding of the issues and concerns of culture, community, and families (Arizona Administrative Standard 3) and a deep understanding of teaching and learning (Arizona Administrative Standard 2) are the starting points for dialogue on identifying, recruiting, selecting, and training school administrators.

Only the three state universities and two private universities in Arizona have approved administrator certification programs. All other administrative licensure applicants apply directly to the state Department of Education for certification, based on the requirements described earlier. In effect, there is a two-tiered system: one that requires applicants to go through approved programs, and the other that allows applicants to take courses in more of an a la carte manner while applying directly to the state for certification.

There are no data available comparing differences between the performances of graduates from approved administrator certification programs and of those who apply directly to the state. The routes of those applying directly to the state may also be quite different, with some applicants completing rigorous out-of-state programs, and others completing the minimum number of required courses. As a result, there is no way to determine if one access route is better than the other, and if it is, why.

According to the Arizona Department of Education (ADE), the average age of the certificated administrators in Arizona is 51. There are little or no data reporting administrator salary, job satisfaction, and career migration. Collecting and analyzing
these data would help district and state policy makers anticipate areas of shortage and act accordingly. Why do administrators leave? Are there differences across ethnic groups and communities in the state? Supply and demand also are affected by recent state legislation, which allows educators (including administrators) to return to practice part-time without a retirement penalty. What is the impact of this legislation on supply and demand in urban and rural communities across the state? Finally, why do some people certified as school administrators choose to not pursue those jobs? What are the costs of training for certification people who never pursue jobs? A recent report by the Morrison Institute (2003) addresses these questions for teachers,²⁹ but there is no parallel report on school administrators.

**Recommendations**

Where will the next generation of school administrators come from? What will be the requisite experiences and training that they will need in order to be successful? Who will determine quality and on what basis?

The role of school administrators is changing; increasingly, administrators are charged with setting the teaching and learning priorities of schools. Improvements in the selection and training of administrators can accompany these changing roles. Administrators tend to be self-selected. A more rigorous system that chooses the best candidates for administrator preparation would encourage more talented educators to pursue training for administrative leadership positions and help school districts effectively balance the needs and demographics of communities with who leads their schools.

University-based certification programs will produce better administrators if they make teaching and learning top priorities in their educational administration curricula and programs. This effort requires school leaders to have a basic understanding of the core values and norms of learning, to build professional communities that value learning, and to engage external environments that support a learning agenda. Embracing standards that focus on teaching and learning would help universities re-think course content,
expand delivery strategies, brainstorm new ways to assess participants’ performances, and establish an outcome-based measure of overall program effectiveness.

In Arizona, with urban, suburban, and rural districts, and with rapid growth in certain areas of the state, financial incentives will probably be necessary to attract candidates to less desirable and more remote districts and schools, and to regions in the state where there are shortages of qualified administrative applicants. Although salary data for public school administrators are a matter of public record, the state lacks an up-to-date report of salaries by school district. It also lacks accurate information regarding the supply and demand of administrators. If such information were available, it would allow for the alignment of the needs of local districts with criteria used by human resource directors and district selection committees in determining qualified applicants.

With regard to terms of appointment, few principals have multiple-year contracts. Multiple-year and longer-term contracts are options that would assist principals in dealing with the conflicting political and special interest groups and multiple constituents of schools. Multiple-year contracts would also provide greater stability to a position at a time of particular vulnerability, with the goal of attracting and keeping new talent in the profession.

Based on the analysis of the available data, five recommendations are offered here: Recommendations 1 through 3 reflect actions that can be taken based on available data, and Recommendations 4 and 5 reflect the need for additional data.

It is recommended that:

1. The Arizona Department of Education (ADE) create opportunities for school districts and colleges of education to collaborate on recruitment, selection, and training of school administrators. Colleges of education and school districts would select the best candidates for leadership preparation and training by jointly examining each candidate’s record of accomplishments and demonstrated leadership skills.

2. Colleges of education strengthen the teaching and learning focus of educational administration programs.
3. The Arizona legislature provide new incentives to attract and keep high-quality administrators. These incentives may include remuneration to attract candidates to less desirable districts and schools, and multi-year contracts to ensure greater stability.

4. The ADE develop an up-to-date database to track staff and administrator salaries by school district, and to track information on the supply and demand for administrators.

5. The ADE track the performance of graduates of administrator preparation programs and of individuals applying directly to the state for licensure to assess and compare the overall effectiveness of the different routes to certification.
Notes and References


7 Arizona Administrative Code, Title 7, Section R7-2-603.

8 Arizona Administrative Code, Title 7, Section R7-2-614.

9 Arizona Administrative Code, Title 7, Section R7-2-604.


12 Ibid.


14 Arizona Revised Statutes §41-1279.03.


18 Majerus, R. (2004, January 29). Personal communication. R. Majerus is staff analyst with the Arizona Department of Education.

19 Ibid.


26 Ibid.


28 Weibke, K. (2004, January 30). Personal communication. K. Weibke is a deputy associate superintendent at the Arizona Department of Education.