EDUCATION LEADERSHIP
FOCUS GROUPS:
STARTING THE CONVERSATION

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**Prepared by the
Leadership Quality Task Force:**

Dr. Craig Beck
Dr. William Berube
Ms. Jill Bramlett
Mr. Ken Griffith
Ms. Susan Kinneman
Ms. Nancy Messer

Introduction

Without high-quality, skilled, and sustainable leadership at the school, district, and policy-making levels, the transformation of public schools will not occur. Change will require strong leaders - those who can build, maintain, and strengthen collaborative relationships within schools and outside of schools. –McREL Board of Directors, 1999.

In 2001 the Wyoming Legislature established the Teacher and Leader Quality Initiative in the Wyoming Department of Education (WDE). This initiative is aimed at providing systematic research on issues related to the recruitment, retention, and professional development of teachers and education leaders. With increased national and state attention on standards, assessment and accountability, interest in the factors that improve student learning has intensified both in Wyoming and nationally. The success of current reform efforts relies upon effective teaching and leadership.

As part of the Teacher and Leader Quality Initiative, WDE brought together six educational leaders from five school districts and the University of Wyoming as the Leadership Quality Task Force. Its mission was to research and collect data on recruitment and retention issues related to school and districts administrators. On November 13, 2001, the Leadership Quality Task Force conducted focus groups with school and district administrators from 45 school districts. This report contains the summaries of those focus group conversations. It highlights the most pertinent and pressing issues for leadership quality in Wyoming, and it includes specific recommendations generated by focus groups.

WDE would like to thank the following members of the Leadership Quality Task Force for their continued interest in and dedication to improving education leadership in Wyoming:

Dr. Craig Beck—	Superintendent, Fremont County School District #25
Dr. William Berube—	Associate Dean of the College of Education, University of Wyoming
Ms. Jill Bramlett—	Principal, Libbey Elementary School, Platte County School District #1
Mr. Ken Griffith—	Principal, Guernsey-Sunrise Junior and Senior High School, Platte County School District #2
Ms. Susan Kinneman—	Principal, Expedition Academy, Sweetwater County School District #2
Ms. Nancy Messer—	Assistant Principal, East High School, Laramie County School District #1

Pre-Service Education

The following issues received the highest priority in relation to pre-service education:

1. Quality leadership candidates in Wyoming may not be interested in leadership positions because of the job expectations and minimal salary.

2. Certification requirements may provide a barrier for some to pursue a preparation program.

3. University school leadership preparation programs have not adjusted to accommodate future leaders.

4. The WEN (Wyoming Educational Network) is not being utilized to provide preparation training or professional development for school leaders.

5. Internship commitments (length, time away from classroom, loss of compensation, etc.) can pose a hardship.

6. Training and professional development activities and opportunities for practicing school leaders are minimal.

7. Quality Wyoming school leaders are leaving the state.

8. A standard-based learning environment requires additional knowledge and skills, and consequently, additional training.

9. Quality mentors are needed to assist the growth of new school leaders.

10. Level of compensation and length of contract time periods are concerns.

Recommendations:

1. Scholarships for aspiring school leaders should be funded. (Possibly to assist with internship monetary losses)

2. Monetary incentives for leadership mentors should be funded.

3. A Wyoming center for educational leadership should be established. This center would coordinate leadership activities in Wyoming.

4. The University of Wyoming Educational Leadership Department should be funded to support a faculty position to focus on professional development activities for practicing school leaders.

Certification

Participants felt the Professional Teaching Standards Board (PTSB) was flexible and worked well with administrators when they are in a crunch trying to fill a position. Participants talked about certification in a "grow your own" environment in which draw upon portfolio, collaboration and transitional certifications. Moving a good veteran teacher through a program and into administration means losing a good teacher. Veteran teachers often don't want to make that change because salary in relation responsibilities isn't high enough. Also, teachers give up tenure to enter administration.

One thing participants reiterated over and over was that we not lower standards in an effort to fix a shortage. State law (21-7-303) requires all teachers and leaders, except superintendents and driver education teachers, to hold a certificate.

In summary, support was high for the alternative kinds of certifications and permits that the PTSB has available for districts and teachers to use in times of shortages. Certification continues to be an issue of quality supports "grow our own" or other alternative approaches.

Focus Group Comments:

- Moving a good teacher into Admin…means we loose a good teacher.
- Good teachers making $40,000 have no desire to be a Principal at $50,000.
- Young male and middle age females after family is grown are pool from which they come.
- Some don't want to give up security…and while raising kids not want burden of principal.
- Legislative issue might be tenure for principals this gives them security.
- Multiyear contracts.
- Quality of candidates is lower.
- What are the roadblocks to teacher leaders going up to principal?
- I can have more effect from where I am [in the classroom] rather than be a principal.
- Do internship in other place than your school.
- Role of the principal is changing and teachers don't want any part of it.
- Raise the principal wage to draw the teacher in.
  Bring back the scholarship system to pay for education and if you teach for 4 years don't have to repay. Could do that for 48 districts train one principal.
- Legislature doesn't trust educators…need to build that bridge.
- Accountability should make some difference.
- Scholarships…entice kids into field…

Recommendations:

1. The certification process has evolved and is very workable for teachers and districts. There are avenues present to allow for potential candidates to become certified while they work through any deficiencies they may have. The process of certification was not a deterrent for potential candidates.

2. Any expansion of current alternative kinds of certification should be approached with a strong concern for quality, include aggressive follow-up and a directed mentorship for continued growth.

3. The "grow your own" process that is occurring around the state with potential administrators should be augmented with some sort of scholarship program to defray the cost of making the crossover from teaching into administration.

Compensation

National studies have found that the most limiting factor in attracting prospective education leaders to the profession is the number and degree of school and district leaders' responsibilities. The majority of focus group participants reported that they took administrative positions, in part, due to increased salaries. However, many pointed out that principal salaries have not kept pace with teacher salaries, especially when total salaries for both teachers and leaders are compared to the number of contracted days.

The focus groups on compensation represented a total number of years of experience as 42 years in the principalship, 43 years in the superintendency, and six years in a district office. While teachers are generally contracted for 178 days, principals reported working 200-215 contracts days and superintendents work 260 days.

On a scale from 1-10, with 10 representing "extremely fair compensation for the level of responsibilities of the job," participants rated their salaries. On average, participants rated their salaries a six. Participants indicated that the two most critical reasons why veteran teachers are not crossing over into administrative positions are: 1) a lack of pay differential that is significant between teaching and administration and 2) the loss of pay while pursuing advanced credentials, especially during required internships.

Average principal salary in 2000 was $57,437.00. This average represents an increase of $8,096 since 1993. Average national principal salaries range from $61,553 for elementary principals to $69,477 for senior high school principals (Educational Research Services, 2001).

In 2000-2001, salaries were highest for principals in the central ($60,038) and southeastern ($58,853) regions of the state and for principals in cities/large towns ($61,351). Average principal salaries are lowest for those in the northwest ($54,575) and in rural areas ($53,770) (see Reichardt, 2001b)[1]. The percent of female principals has almost doubled since 1993, from 16 percent in 1993 to 31 percent in 2000. Cities/large towns have seen the largest growth in female principals from 11 to 46 percent.

Generally, participants supported the idea of some kind of performance-based pay systems. However, they also emphasized the importance of building an infrastructure for such a system prior to implementing it. Issues that would need to be addressed: explicit definitions of quality teaching and leadership, clear evaluation rubrics and processes that are standards-based, and training for evaluators and those being evaluated.

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[1] Reichardt, R. (2001b). Laying the groundwork: Qualification and supply issues in Wyoming's school & district leaders. Denver, CO: Mid-continent Research for Education and Learning.

Recommendations:

1. **State and district policymakers should strive to maintain all leader salaries at a regionally competitive level to continue to attract and retain high-quality candidates.** February 23, 2001, the Wyoming Supreme Court ruled in Campbell County School District vs. State of Wyoming that leader salaries must be adequately adjusted for inflation to remain constitutionally cost-based. This will make it harder for small, rural districts to offer competitive salaries due to lower costs of living in these areas. To remain competitive in attracting and retaining leaders statewide and regionally, salaries in all areas of Wyoming in relation to surrounding states need to be maintained.

2. **To improve leadership and student achievement, it is recommended that districts build career advancement and knowledge- and skills-based compensation systems that support novice, career and accomplished leaders by rewarding increases in expertise.** This should be tied to certification and re-certification processes for principals.

3. **To retain leaders, especially in high-need areas, additional financial incentives (e.g. signing bonuses, differential salary schedules) also may be required.**

Recruitment

1. While recruiting for recent administrative vacancies, did you have a sufficient quantity of qualified applicants?

Recruiting stumbling blocks common among focus group respondants include the difficulty in filling late vacancies from a shallow pool of applicants. One also mentioned an apparent shortage of secondary principal applicants. Another respondent cited the Rule of 85, that leads to earlier retirement among experienced principals. Recent vacancies in two districts were filled in one district through the hiring of qualified, but inexperienced candidates, and in another through the hiring of a retired principal from another state. Finally, a focus group member with several years of experience noted that candidate-availability may be a cyclical event.

2. Describe the recruitment practices used in your district. Are these practices effective in your opinion?

The responses to this question differed widely. The responses included paying moving expenses, a signing bonus, seeking known candidates from another district, or using year-around-recruiting methods. Other responses stressed hiring from within, posting on the Internet, recruiting from states that offer lower salaries, and teamwork "among other small districts." This question revealed the possibility of escalating recruitment costs, due to incentives, and the growing need to expand principal recruiting practices to neighboring states, if not nationwide.

3. What can school districts do to increase their pool of quality candidates?

The expected response, "recruit from within," was faulted by some from rural districts. . . There are problems with "grow your own." "We grew our own and then they left." Another principal from a smaller district advocated the need for new blood in district leadership. Other responses suggested incentives, including annuities beyond the usual retirement, working with PTSB to grant temporary "permits," paying for all out-of-state experience, and keeping in touch with the Department of Educational Administration at the University of Wyoming.

4. *How can teachers in your district with administrative aptitude be encouraged to* prepare for careers in administration?

Reponses varied from citing districts that pay both time-release and educational financing to districts that have no recruitment program whatsoever. Some districts assume costs for the substitute teacher, but do not reimburse teachers for loss of pay, and vice versa. One respondent recommended Title I training. Another flatly emphasized the need to increase salaries for administrators, as it cannot be denied that salary is the biggest issue in recruitment.

5. *Do you believe the job descriptions for principals in your district are both realistic and attractive to prospects? Explain*

Several participants indicated that when added hours required of principals were factored in there was little if any advantage in leaving the classroom. One respondent suggested the job description should be about teaching and learning, not about filling out reports. Another focus group participant stated that he was told that the principal's job was the worst job in town. Others emphasized toughness of the job, a "tremendous learning curve," additional pressures, accountability issues, and the growing number of hours per week on the job. A unique but salient point made by one focus group member was …(the burden of)…more district responsibilities such as assessment, curriculum alignment, accreditation, and the tracking of data.

One interesting sidelight is that one of the two focus groups unanimously agreed that they would enter the field if they had it to do again.

6. *What recruitment practices assure fair and equitable opportunities for minority and women candidates?*

Two focus group members answered the question directly, the first stating that the district recruited every qualified candidate; the second group member noted that the school district encouraged women educators to pursue administrative certification. Remaining focus group members cited a shortage of minority applicants; one stated that black women candidates were hard to find. There were other views presented that stated there were few minorities currently on the district payroll, and two observed an improvement in the numbers of women in Wyoming districts who were employed as principals. The "good ol' boy network" is breaking down, noted another focus group member.

7. *Do you believe partnerships among school districts, state departments of education, professional organizations and universities are needed to improve recruitment and preparation of administrative candidates?*

Evidently some respondents believe the present system requires closer cooperation, if not in the form of information sharing, then in a more formal partnership relationship. Other individual or group suggestions presented include the need for partnership between the university and the school districts, a proposal that mentoring be shared between districts, and that promising candidates go to neighboring districts to widen their experience base and increase their professional outlook. The Professional Teaching Standards Board (PTSB), Wyoming Education Association (WEA), and other professional organizations should also be tapped for ideas. It was suggested that a need exists to improve the scope and quality of the administrative internship program, now somewhat uneven in its effectiveness.

8. *If present day shortages of certified candidates continue, will a growing number of school leadership positions be filled by professionals from outside education?*

Metropolitan areas can entice high profile professionals from fields outside education by offering higher salaries, sign-on bonuses, relocation grants and retirement deals. Small school districts located in agricultural, lumbering or mining areas simply cannot compete. However, smaller districts may not want or need the political and public relations skills of such professionals.

Respondents are aware of these non-education-trained leaders being hired by larger districts. One respondent questioned if that (hiring practice) "was the intent of the Wyoming Legislature last year, when they eliminated certification requirements for superintendents." and further asked if …"that is the direction that they are going." Another participant stated that hiring of principals to be superintendents who lack superintendent endorsements is one thing . . . principals have the background in educational systems. A third focus group member stressed the importance of a background in education as being a major prerequisite for any effective school administrator. "We need to ensure that school leadership positions are filled by experienced educators."[2] (Fenwick and Pierce, 2001)

Recommendations:

1. Leadership Academies.
   - Training of prospective candidates for the principalship.
   - Address job workload of administrators.
2. Increase Compensation for Principals.
   - Recruitment incentive for prospective administrative candidates.
   - Bring salary more in line with time and energy required for the job.

3. Reimbursement of educational expenses for teachers enrolled in approved programs in educational administration.
   - Provide financial incentives for tuition and salary/substitute teacher costs related to internships so that financial hardships do not discourage candidates from pursuing certification.

4. Partnerships Strengthened Among Those Institutions and Associations and Associations That Have a Direct Interest in the Preparation of Administrators.
   - Improve quality of leadership training and of internship in administration.

5. Education Service Centers.
   - Establish educational service centers perhaps associated with the junior college system for staff development, leadership training, and mentoring programs.

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[2] Fenwick, L. T., & Pierce, M.C. (2001, March). "The Principal Shortage, Crisis or Opportunity?" Principal Magazine.

School Climate, Culture, and Organization

<u>Attributes of a Successful School Leader</u>

1. A positive school climate exists in schools that show evidence of:
   - Enthusiastic students, teachers, and staff
   - Students & teachers who are excited to see you & want to show and talk to you about their work (even if they don't know you!)
   - Student work on display in hallways (elementary)
   - Student athletic & academic trophies displayed in lobbies (secondary)
   - Teachers & staff valuing students
   - Secretaries welcoming you to their school
   - Positive conversations in teacher workrooms, hallways, office

2. Successful educational leaders:
   - Model what they want their school to be
   - Develop and use a site-based decision model (good facilitator)
   - Have a vision that is well articulated
   - Value relationships with students, teachers, parents & community
   - Are good communicators
   - Develop trust daily
   - Are positive (even when it's difficult to wear the same face day to day)
   - Admit mistakes and apologize sincerely
   - Are honest
   - Are knowledgeable about today's educational & instructional issues
   - Are team members
   - Are solution oriented

3. Successful educational leaders communicate by:
   - Being a good listener
   - Being visible
   - Having faith in people to do what needs to be done (delegating)
   - Celebrating and recognizing achievement of educators
   - Gathering & reporting educational & instructional data to teachers, in newsletters, media, and Annual School Report Cards
   - Having contact with EVERYONE daily
   - Being consistent in their actions
   - Caring enough to confront
   - Going to the root of the problem
   - Trusting others to get you the information you need
   - Demonstrating integrity
   - Using the process that is in place

4. Vision, Mission, and Goals are successful in schools & districts when:
   - They are "built" by everyone involved (not 'top down')
   - They have a clear focus and people believe them and are committed to their implementation
   - They are focused on student learning

Attributes Found in Wyoming's Educational Leaders

Fourteen people responded to a survey identifying leadership attributes of Wyoming's educational leaders.

All respondents reported that either "all" or "some" of the educational leaders they knew possessed the following attributes:
- Demonstrates a genuine respect for staff & students
- Provides help & support to staff & students
- Has developed trust with staff and students
- Communicates effectively in writing and orally
- Visible at school & in the community
- Organized

Four respondents reported they knew "very few" educational leaders who:
- Expected, respected & encouraged parent and community input

The top 3 attributes most important for educational leaders were:
- Holds high achievement expectations for staff & students
- Leads by example
- Has a desire to learn

Barriers that may interfere with successful educational leadership are people in leadership roles who:
- Are resistant to change
- Lack a clear vision
- Experience difficulty developing positive relationships with students, teachers, staff, and community
- Lack trust
- Have limited experience
- Experience difficulty with communication (including being a good listener)
- Feel they are a victim, are over worked, & have too much paperwork to do

Other barriers to success may include:
- Politics in the district & community
- Culture of the community
- Lack of decision making process in district – causing micromanagement from board members
- Change in leadership and board

- Agendas that do not match district's vision

Finding Prospective Educational Leaders

Participants believed prospective educational leaders exist in Wyoming districts. Most supported the "grow your own" concept to keep consistency within a district. Most participants also noted that it is sometimes best to bring in someone "new" or "outside the district." The critical key was knowing when and determining the type of leadership that was in the best interest of the school & district.

To recruit potential candidates, participants suggested educational leaders:

- Identify potential leaders in their districts
- Help them identify their leadership qualities
- Encourage them to take on leadership roles in their schools
- Create real learning opportunities for them
- Support & mentor them (Don't overload them!)
- Tell them the "GOOD" things about being an educational leader

Providing Leadership Education & Opportunity

Wyoming school districts are unique in that many are small or rural. School districts are often many miles apart. As a result superintendents, curriculum directors, principals, and special education directors find it difficult to communicate and collaborate with their peers. New technologies have increased some collaboration efforts, however participants felt there was a need for other resources.

Participants felt the key to successful training was that it needed to be "on-going" and that follow-up was a critical key. This made the partnerships, networking, and mentor programs most palatable.

Recommendations:

1. Developing a "partnership program" with another nearby district that would allow them to learn from and with their peers
2. Participating in a cohort group connected with UW
3. Developing a state-wide educational leadership network where educational leaders could find a colleague or district with similar attributes that they could informally mentor with or to
4. Developing a partnership with business leaders within the community
5. Developing a professional development academy with WDE where new educational leaders meet periodically throughout the year on focused topics that are relevant to leadership, instruction, and management
6. NCA process, school improvement process, completing a desk audit, etc.*
7. Taking on-line classes (NAESP)
8. Belonging to state organizations
9. Attending state conferences

10. Having and making time to visit with colleagues informally
11. Developing a mentor program in larger districts

*These educational opportunities are available to leaders. Participants noted that new educational leaders are often not familiar with these process or expectations.

Support for New Leaders

1. *Does your district conduct an induction (orientation) for new administrators?*

Generally districts do make an effort to induct new administrators about how things are done in the district, i.e.: purchase orders, policies, insurance programs and so on. In some cases there was a specific time set aside to accomplish the induction process. In those cases, the time varied from half a day to as much as a full day. Often, the induction process was carried out randomly and intermittently – when the new administrator had a question or it was obvious they were missing some information. One comment made was "you hope they have a good secretary", indicating the secretary was the one that told the principal how things are done in the district when a question arose about district programs and procedures. There were several focus group participants that echoed this short comment.

2. *Does your district have a mentor program for new administrators?*

Again, districts generally make an attempt to provide some sort of mentoring, but it is very much left to chance and conducted in an informal manner. More often than not, it is up to the protégé to seek out a mentor, rather than the district making a conscious effort to match a new administrator with a specific mentor. None of the respondents in the focus groups indicated that there was a formal approach used in mentoring new administrators. For the most part, it would be accurate to say that new administrators 'learn to swim' on their own. At least the new administrator would have to seek out mentor support on their own when recognizing they needed help. It would appear that new administrator mentoring is more of a reactive than a proactive process and largely driven by the protégé.

3. *If so, how is the mentor program funded (grants or general fund)?*

The responses indicated there really wasn't a 'line item' funding concept for mentoring programs for new administrators. Based on the nature of the mentoring that was conducted, any costs were very incidental and were covered from various other sources.

4. *How many years has your district had a new administrator mentoring program?*

In the cases where districts did make a conscious effort to mentor new administrators, even though informal, the program has been in place for a number of years. Since there tends to be a fairly high turn over rate with administrators, giving an exact time frame for the existence of mentoring programs was difficult. Where mentoring of new administrators was a function of chance rather than any particular planned efforts, the response tended to be, "we have always done it that way."

5. *This question asked for a description of the mentor program, i.e.: length of mentoring relationship, mentor qualifications, types of activities and evidence of success.*

Since new administrator mentorship programs appear to exist more by chance than design, or are at best are very informal in nature, specific answers could not be provided. Qualifications tended to be if someone would serve as a mentor.

What surfaced with respect to activities was that when staff development was provided to the professional instructional staff, administrators usually participated in those activities. With respect to an evaluation of success of any mentoring conducted, it was felt that what was provided was successful since there did not appear to be a lot of problems/issues that arose with new administrators.

A series of follow-up questions that were suggestive in terms of specific activities were asked at this point to generate more thought and discussion. What was found was that districts conduct more activities for new and existing administrators (no distinction made) than they realized. While not all districts conducted these activities, nor did any of them conduct all of these activities, it was found that book studies, Requisites Of A Leader (administrator in-service delivered by satellite), leadership workshops, inquiry projects and professional organization activities were not uncommon.

6. *Evaluation of administrators.*

There appeared to be no distinctions between how new administrators are evaluated as compared to existing administrators. Mostly corrective action was provided on an as needed basis with the 'obligatory' formal end of year evaluation also taking place. Some districts made an effort to make the evaluation process a learning/growth experience, but more often than not it was a summary of 'how you are doing' feedback process.

Other comments from the focus groups*:*

The administrative position of superintendent is the position where the least amount of mentoring/support seems to occur. While new as well as existing superintendents found other superintendents helpful, if you needed help you had to figure out who might know the answer to your question, who was approachable and you also had to know 'you didn't know' in order to obtain mentoring support.

Conclusion:

While sincere efforts are made by districts to assist new administrators, actual activities of mentoring are for the most part left to chance, initiated by the protégé, and/or are informal in nature with no specific structure for the process. Upon reflection, the focus group saw a need for a more concerted effort in mentoring of new administrators.

Factors of district size, distances between districts, general geographical isolation and time for administrator mentors were identified as obstacles to providing good mentoring programs for new administrators. Technical support and staff development with respect to various state educational initiatives for new and existing administrators were also perceived as a major need.

<u>Recommendations:</u>

1. It was felt that the WDE should make a more effective, aggressive and continuous effort to provide staff development for administrators with respect to various initiatives required by the State, i.e.: standards-based school reform, funding system, assessment and accreditation processes.

2. Sizes of districts as well as distances between districts, the general geographical isolation of districts and time for administrator mentors were perceived to be obstacles to providing good new administrator mentoring efforts. Discussions took place as to how the WEN, on-line programs and satellite delivered programs could provide some of the content and technical support for mentoring of new administrators as well as for existing administrator staff development. It would appear that these items had not been previously considered.

Professional Development

The definition of Professional Development used with the focus groups was: Any training, cohort group, study group, reflection activity, or workshop activity meant to improve professional performance. The most **memorable and the most useful** of all professional development activities included one or more of the following components:

- Group (cohort) organization with internal support of similar people
  - Many mentioned their cohort experience at UW during principal preparation
- Assistance with leadership: communicating, facilitating, motivating, and relationship building
  - Almost unanimously, the educational leaders we talked to during this focus group yearned for more assistance in the areas of human communication and motivation-they wanted to know how to be better leaders.
- A mentorship with a more experienced professional
  - A principal working with his/her superintendent
  - Students working with professors
- Opportunities to develop a long-term relationship with the presenters and the other participants enhance the experience.
  - Those who had developed "study groups" or enrolled in classes or groups that met many times over the course of a period of time were very enthused about the increase in effectiveness compared to a one-time workshop.
- Gain of specific skills that could be utilized immediately
  - Some were very impressed with some classes that gave them ideas they could go back to their schools and try out immediately

Another theme was the sense of **isolation** felt by many principals. They often didn't have someone in their same professional level in their district (i.e. only one high school principal). The actual acquisition of "skill" level wasn't as much of an issue for these principals and superintendents. They felt that they had acquired the knowledge to use technology, collect data, evaluate employees, and, in general, do the management of day-to-day business during their graduate studies and in their first years on the job. What they felt they needed now was more help with the human, motivational, and leadership side of being a school administrator.

Fourteen principals filled out a survey (below). The results follow in a chart format. They ranked each area in the manner of **level of bearing** it would have on their participation in a professional development opportunity. For example, one person ranked accessibility as a 2 (little bearing), 6 people ranked it a 3 (neutral bearing), 4 people ranked it a 4 (some bearing) and 2 ranked it a 5 (that it had a significant bearing on whether or not they would participate).

The top five factors effecting whether or not an administrator would take advantage of a professional development opportunity were:

- Usefulness
- Purpose
- Level of Meaningfulness
- Personal Choice
- Time

	1	2	3	4	5	Total of 4 & 5	# who put in the top 5
Accessibility		1	**6**	**4**	2	6	4
Location		1	6	5	1	6	1
Availability			4	6	2	8	4
Time		1	2	5	5	**10**	7
Other Obligations	2	2	6	3		3	2
Support	2	5	5	1		1	
Follow Up	1		4	5	2	7	**5**
Higher Ed Credit	5	4	3	1		1	2
Mandated	2	2	3	5	1	6	2
Optional	1	2	6	4		4	
Personal Choice			1	2	9	**11**	9
Usefulness				3	10	**13**	12
Purpose			2	9	3	**12**	5
Level of Meaningfulness			1	3	9	**12**	11

This feedback suggests that other factors like location, availability, graduate credit, etc. would **not** interfere if the administrators had the opportunity to attend professional development that had a lot of use, meaning, and was a personal choice on their part rather than mandated. The subject of time arose frequently during the discussion. Many administrators were not attending workshops even though they really wanted to, because they felt they couldn't leave their buildings.

When columns were totaled for numbers 4 and 5 to see which issues seemed to have the greatest bearing on attendance (in bold), usefulness (which may seem self-evident) earned the greatest response, followed closely by purpose, level of meaningfulness, and whether or not it was a personal choice. Time was fifth most important element on this list. Of lowest concern was whether or not it gave the participant any higher education credit or whether or not they received support to attend (logistics, arrangements, etc.)

However, when asked to choose the top five issues, *purpose* was not included, maybe because the respondent believed that level of *meaningfulness* and *usefulness* were similar enough. This time, follow-up was a top contender as far as importance.

The National Staff Development Council had identified ten areas that were current issues in education at the present time. I asked the participants to choose their top five. The top five issues in order of importance:

1. **Linking** the staff development of school leaders to student achievement.
2. Enhancing **quality** of school leaders.
3. Advocating for **policies** that support **quality** staff development for school leaders.
4. Developing school leadership that engages the school community in sustained, focused action (motivation).
5. Facilitating the improvement of low performing schools.

<u>Focus Group Comments</u> :
- Although I asked the same questions and used the same materials with each group, they each went their own direction in the conversation. However, some of the same subjects appeared in both, some not. I have organized comments under the common headings. I have not always quoted verbatim. Sometimes, I summarized or edited. I took the information from both the notes and the tape recorder.
- Working with other people-the human side of things-increases the level of meaningfulness.
- When I took a class it had a sharing atmosphere that affected me more than the classroom, it affected me emotionally. Having the conversations about things that are going on in their schools made a big difference.
- Cohort atmosphere makes all the difference.
- The best opportunity is when we can work on facilitating, motivating, leadership, visioning, and organizing.
- We need to know things like how to facilitate groups.

- We need to get better communication skills.
- We need to find a way to gain the knowledge and skills necessary to be a leader: patience, tolerance, understanding of vision, mission.
- How do we get "people skills" like trust, communications, ethics, etc? Can they be taught? What about people who shouldn't be leaders? Can they be helped? We have to look at qualities through interventions-creating and sustaining effective teams-find learning teams and blocks in Wyoming-look at what WDE has done and add to it.
- We also need to:

  1. Bring ethics to the conscious level-talk about how to do-and how to make decisions. Look at policy vs. is it the right thing?
  2. Use practical scenarios with others.
  3. Develop relationships-need to model for one another.
  4. Find enrichments for principals!
  5. Know what to use and when-we already know the content!
  6. Learn how to motivate teachers.
  7. Ask the SDE to put together a bank of experts who can be contacted.

- Network and call people when you need information and help.
- Develop cohorts in your area.
- Look at resources in the district.
- Network with the state department.
- Dealing with stress.
- Have regional meetings.
- Working on accreditation visits-being able to see how other districts do things.
- As principals in the Big Horn Basin, we'd get together and have dinner once in awhile and just it, let our hair down, and just talk. We did it every six weeks. Basically, we organized it in the early 80's-it was an offshoot of the state-wide athletic directors/principals/superintendents meetings and we'd get together in our area groups.
- I think that's the important thing: networking and having principals talking to one another.
- I worked closely with my superintendent-took a lot of trips with him-got a lot of good advice.
- I worked with a man from New York. When I returned to my district I had tools I could implement immediately.
- As a principal, when I am working with my teachers on a project I learn so much more.
- We have a position in our district specifically for curriculum development. Through research and by interviewing teachers she discovered a specific staff development that was needed by the whole district. This resulted in a class that is mandated for everyone. The opportunity to network has been a really positive result.
- This year we are doing one for administrators-a veteran's cohort group-ten principals are participating-we are reading one book and choosing topics-and we've gotten great stuff from our own people-some of the topics are evaluation-legal issues-standards based education-part of the cohort is made up of secondary-they'll talk about juvenile delinquency-another subject will be drugs and alcohol.
- If a group takes the opportunity to read the book, form the study group, and come up with solutions to problems, then the next level of administration needs to pay attention to it.
- I have to know that the learning that will take place will justify the time I'll be gone. More needs to be offered in the summer and then more money will be needed. There's already too much to do! You can't do fifty things! The state continues to mandate more and more for the districts to report.
- The public's perception needs to be changed. The public believes that educators and principals already have enough training. They don't want the people who are teaching their children to be out of the building. When they are told that a principal is out of the office, they think they are out of the district.
- State is now mandating staff development as part of the school improvement plan.
- Provide many different modes of delivery of the material.
- Who supports your pursuit of professional development? When superintendents don't support principals who want to make changes based on what they have learned, it makes it very difficult to want to continue.
- We hate to leave our buildings so we don't go during the school year. However, people often can't make it to conferences during the summer either.

- We started a study group of people who had taken a class. We got together and chose some topics-we would meet at a restaurant-we also got one hour of university credit-it was a neat atmosphere-lots of input.
- Too often, once the workshop it over, no one ever hears any more about it.
- One of our biggest weaknesses is lack of follow-up.

Recommendations:

1. More emphasis needs to be placed on **acquiring the leadership** necessary for a changing culture.

2. More emphasis is needed on acquiring the skills to **relate** better to others.

3. The role of principal should be redefined so that it encompasses more **leadership** and less traditional **management**. Develop other positions in our schools that would take care of the "nuts and bolts" of managing a school. (Is this a certification issue or a funding issue?)

4. Figure out a way to spend **time** more efficiently so that time spent in professional development is not seen as time "away from the job". Could this mean more money for summer institutes? Could this mean changing the school year?

5. Provide opportunities for leaders to **connect** with other leaders in the state. (Could this be done through the State Department of Education, area BOCES?)

6. Develop ways for principals and superintendents to **communicate** without spending a lot of time away from their district or without leaving their buildings with no leadership. (Again, changes in school calendars, more funding for summer training, additional funding for positions that would assist when administrators are out of the building, or using WedGate, SDE, and/or the internet.)

7. Use WedGate, SDE, and/or the internet as other means to create a **clearinghouse of experts** who can be referred to for advice and information.

8. Institute a position at **WDE** that would support and connect principals to one another.

9. Place an emphasis on **long-term programs** rather than quick fixes.