



## Principals as CEOs—Vision Versus Management

*Remarks: NJPSA-FEA School Leadership Program Directors Meeting ■ Thursday, November 10, 2016*

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It's a pleasure and a privilege to be here, on behalf of the Woodrow Wilson National Fellowship Foundation. Your work in strengthening school leadership, and in better preparing school leaders for the challenges they face today, resonates deeply with ours. Through your collective efforts, you have demonstrated the importance of bringing together strong pre-service preparation, mentoring and coaching, and school-based experiences. Integrating these components may sound like simple best practice, but, as I am sure you know, not everyone involved in principal preparation has such a broad, practical, thoughtful approach.

For many years now, we as educators have collectively committed ourselves to making sure that every child is on a meaningful path to college and career. Many have looked to classroom teachers as the key to student success—and, indeed, study after study has shown that the single most important in-school factor for student achievement is the teacher standing in the front of the classroom.

So we all agree that effective classroom educators are essential to the process. That is one of the reasons the Woodrow Wilson Foundation has worked tirelessly across the nation over the past ten years—in five states and at 28 universities, to date—to transform teacher preparation, creating better pipelines of effective teachers for high-need schools.

Through the Woodrow Wilson Teaching Fellowship, we have partnered with universities and school districts to create new, forward-looking teacher preparation programs that are built on a foundation of strong academic content knowledge, a rich clinical experience, and years of mentoring and support for beginning teachers. So far, the Woodrow Wilson Teaching Fellowship has prepared more than 1,000 STEM teachers for our nation's high-need secondary schools—including schools right here in New Jersey.

And yet this work has also emphasized another point that the research makes clear: As you well know, principals account for at least 25 percent of a school's total impact on student achievement. Studies conducted by organizations such as ASCD and the Wallace Foundation continue to show how central principals are to schools' successes. Teachers urgently need excellent principals and school administrators supporting them.

Today, that means much more than managing a school. Perhaps there was a time when school leadership meant filling teacher vacancies and assigning coaching jobs and budgeting for supplies and making sure there were enough overhead projectors to go around—but we all know that those days are long gone. The schools of tomorrow are taking shape now, and they require a new kind of vision: How much learning happens outside the classroom, and how do we incorporate new digital, personal learning approaches with what happens inside the classroom? How do we work effectively with finances with a range of different revenue streams and possible resources? How do we help provide the environment—technology, physical plant, support staff—that truly helps teachers excel? And how do we create meaningful professional development for teachers while helping them juggle standards and testing requirements? What, in fact, does tomorrow’s school look like, and are we ready to find ourselves right in the middle of it?

Five years ago, after working for some time with teacher preparation, the Woodrow Wilson Foundation asked: How can we help prepare school leaders who can address more effectively the full range of increasingly sophisticated school issues—in and beyond the classroom—that have a bearing on instructional delivery? How can future principals and administrators best learn not simply to manage, but in fact to lead—to develop and implement their vision of what a school needs to be in this increasingly complex environment?

Your collective work, as well as the leadership and support provided by the U.S. Department of Education, demonstrates the importance of such questions and the need for answers.

Historically, too few of our nation’s preservice programs for school leaders have addressed these questions adequately. Admissions and graduation standards have not been as rigorous as they could be. Coursework has not been as relevant as it could be. Clinical portions of such programs are too often weak. And, too many times, candidates not seeking leadership positions have been herded through these programs as the easy route to a master’s degree and a salary bump.

Despite their shortcomings, these preparation programs have remained in great demand. Why? Because the principal’s job—the principal’s *essential* job—grows more and more challenging, and matters more each year. Yet many principals enter that job and find they needed more or different preparation for the challenges and opportunities of the modern principalship. They have not learned to support decisions with data, nor to use evidence to design and lead necessary change. They may have expertise in curriculum design but lack the leadership training to influence an organization.

To be sure, some schools of education have worked hard to keep their school leadership programs innovative and relevant—often in conjunction with partners like those of you in this room. But at the Woodrow Wilson Foundation, based on the research of our

president, Arthur Levine, when he was at Teachers College, we began five years ago to ask: What if a principal was prepared more like a CEO? What if the challenges facing school leaders were treated less as a question of managing inputs and more as a way of leading outcomes—the way that business schools teach organizational leaders to do?

Typically, when this conversation begins, there's sometimes a little resistance. We know that schools aren't businesses. We know that schools are in the game to help young people succeed, not to make profits. The point of thinking about schools in a way that reflects best practices in business leadership is not to reduce them to spreadsheets and HR decisions, but rather to begin to acknowledge them as the complex, open systems that they are, shaped and pulled by economic and social forces that the best school leaders are fully conversant with, and fully prepared to grapple with.

So, if principals were to be treated more like the heads of complex organizations—like CEOs who earn MBAs—then, the Woodrow Wilson Foundation asked, what would such a program look like? How could we blend the best that our education schools and our business schools have to offer?

This is the work of the Woodrow Wilson MBA Fellowship in Education Leadership and the programs it has helped spark in Indiana, New Mexico, and Wisconsin, thus far, with more states waiting in the wings.

In these three states, business schools are selected to work with the WW MBA Fellowship, partnering with school districts to identify and establish the conditions that will help graduates driving sustainable gains in student achievement. Arthur Levine likes to say it's a B2B model: the school or district must nominate a promising leader before she or he applies to the program; the Fellow has to identify a practical project in her or his school as part of the program; and the school must promise to support the Fellow's clinical efforts in working on this project, as well as to help identify leadership opportunities for them afterwards.

Instead of pursuing the traditional M.Ed., Fellows work toward an MBA, studying topics such as leadership, quality management, talent management, data analysis, and organizational change—all provided through an education lens. Through the integration of clinical and academic instruction, the Woodrow Wilson MBA Fellows are drawing on the most innovative thinking on leadership preparation today.

All participants have a two- to-four-week immersion experience, for example in a strong high-need school domestically, through a residency at a high-performing school in another country, or in an organization that helps development necessary expertise in specifically identified areas.

Such preparation is supplemented with three years of executive coaching once Fellows have assumed a role as a school leader.

As with the Woodrow Wilson Teaching Fellowship, the Woodrow Wilson MBA Fellowship in Education Leadership does not have a specific curriculum of its own; rather, it relies on the blend of MBA curriculum and education content that each partner university creates with its business school, ed school, and local districts. Together, however, this collection of Woodrow Wilson MBA programs serves as a set of models for other universities and school leader preparation programs. They also provide clear pathways for our institutions of higher education to develop executive education programs and professional development offerings to help everyone—from the aspiring school principal to the most experienced, successful leader—further develop his or her skill sets and abilities.

Ultimately, we will see these MBA-prepared school leaders serving as true instructional leaders in their communities while closing the achievement gaps and putting every child on a path to success.

Preparing to come here today, I reflected on some of the early lessons our school leader preparation work has offered—lessons that are also embodied in your work.

- First, a well-prepared principal is essential to school and student achievement.
- Second, working in tandem with effective teachers, principals are an important part of efforts to close our twin achievement gaps—and by that, we at the Woodrow Wilson Foundation mean both the gap between America’s best-performing and lowest-performing schools *and* the gap between our nation’s top schools and our international competitors.
- Third, to ensure a strong pipeline of those well-prepared principals, we, as a nation, need to improve the quality of our education leadership programs. That means the education offered to prospective education leaders should be integrated clinical and academic instruction that draws on the most innovative thinking on leadership preparation.
- Fourth, such preparation must be developed in collaboration with school districts to ensure principals are prepared for leadership needs today—particularly in high-need districts—and are equipped to drive sustainable gains in student achievement.
- And finally—and this one is obvious—principals matter, and their development and ongoing support must be taken seriously and reflect the level of responsibility that they will take on. There are no shortcuts to becoming an effective school leader. As with leadership in other key professions, principals need ongoing coaching and mentoring.

It is clear that much of our work, as a community, is focused on the here and now, and rightfully so. For most of us, the concern is the current pipeline. How do we ensure we have enough high-quality leaders to head our schools?

But, looking at educator preparation as a whole, one of the great challenges we face is how we prepare teachers and leaders not just for the schools of today, but also for the schools of tomorrow. We need to do more than simply fix one or two things that aren't working so well in current educator preparation programs.

Instead, we should be looking to develop the leaders who can truly transform public education—leaders who can both meet the high demands we place on them now, in 2016, and also build the schools and learning experiences we know our children will need many years from now.

Such a mission can be incredibly daunting—yet all of you in some way, through your own work, are already demonstrating what is possible, and showing the field what can be done.

In that regard, I want to tell you about one more Woodrow Wilson program, which is also working—just as you are—to show the field what can be done. Last year, we announced our plans to create the Woodrow Wilson Academy of Teaching and Learning in collaboration with MIT. The Woodrow Wilson Academy is meant to be a graduate school of education for the future, focused solely on identifying, preparing, and supporting the next generation of truly excellent teachers and leaders.

This work grew from our efforts with the Woodrow Wilson Teaching Fellowship and MBA Fellowship in Education Leadership. But where those efforts seek to repair current approaches to educator preparation, the WW Academy seeks to reimagine educator preparation. Based in Cambridge, Massachusetts and intended as national in scope, the Academy represents the single largest investment the Woodrow Wilson Foundation has ever made.

Instead of credit hours, the Woodrow Wilson Academy will rely on mastery of key competencies for teachers and school leaders. Instead of courses, degree candidates will complete a series of challenges that allow them to learn, do, and demonstrate what they can do. These challenges will blend online and in-person learning, and draw on both academic and clinical components, created in partnership with school districts.

The work of the Woodrow Wilson Academy will begin with the preparation of STEM teachers, but will then broaden to encompass other fields, as well as school leader preparation. The Commonwealth of Massachusetts has already given us the approvals so our students, prospective Woodrow Wilson teachers, can gain state licensure in math, biology, and chemistry. Our first cohort of degree candidates in these programs will begin their work next summer.

As the Woodrow Wilson Academy's program for school leaders then evolves, it will be rooted in strong academics, rich clinical work, and coaching. It will be competency-based and embedded in the K–12 schools. Most importantly, it will begin to develop those who will truly be the next generation of school leaders, individuals who not only can lead those schools of the future, but can also conceive and construct those schools. It will also offer components of this program as ways to reimagine professional development and in-service education for current school leaders.

Seventy years ago, the Woodrow Wilson Foundation was created because the United States urgently needed more college professors to teach all of the returning GIs coming back from World War II with the promise of a college education. Many thought a rapid expansion of the nation's higher education system wasn't possible. The Woodrow Wilson Foundation helped make it possible.

A decade ago, many observers questioned the feasibility of building a diverse pipeline of aspiring teachers looking to teach STEM and other subjects in high-need schools. They further questioned the ability to recruit candidates with strong content knowledge who would be willing to remain in those high-need schools for many years to come. Now, a thousand teachers later, Woodrow Wilson has some good answers to those questions.

So today, when we look at ways to reimagine the preparation of school leaders, there's no question that we as a nation can; rather, the question is whether we will. You, and we, are working to answer that question with a resounding "yes."

The work that brings you here today already shows that education leaders across the country are ready to transform the preparation of those entrusted with our schools and school districts. We have much to learn from you, and we hope for an ongoing discussion, as we collaborate with school districts, universities, and prospective education leaders. It is a discussion we look forward to having with the aspiring principals participating in the Woodrow Wilson MBA Fellowship for Education Leadership; with those principals working with our Teaching Fellows in states like Georgia, Indiana, Michigan, New Jersey, and Ohio; and with every teacher and leader committed to improving our nation's educator preparation programs. And it is one we will have as we share the lessons learned through the Woodrow Wilson Academy with universities and leader preparation programs across the country.

I am grateful to you for your commitment, your dedication, and your success. You remind us that principals really do matter. And you show us how principals can, and should, and *must* be visionary leaders for education. Thank you.