

# Help wanted: Principals who love change

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Training principals for new roles is key to U.S. Department of Education school reforms, according to a new report by SMU researchers. But insufficient training and support for principals to meet the new expectations is leading to a leadership crisis. Twenty percent of newly minted principals leave the profession after two years and seasoned professionals are opting for early retirement.

Education researchers Lee Alvoid and Watt Lesley Black Jr. examine [school](#) districts at the forefront of supporting and training effective principals in their report "The Changing Role of the Principal: How High-Achieving Districts are Recalibrating School Leadership," published July 1 by the Center for American Progress. As former principals and current faculty members at SMU's Annette Caldwell Simmons School of Education and Human Development, both Alvoid and Black bring unique insight to the study.

Teacher evaluation is key to President Obama's Race to the Top [education](#) reform initiative, which in turn places demands on principals' expertise and time.

After analyzing six school districts across the United States with innovative support and training for principals, Alvoid and Black developed key recommendations for school districts.

Their recommendations include focusing principal training on coaching teachers, redesigning principal job descriptions to focus on teachers and student outcomes, and developing partnerships with universities to

recruit and train future principals.

"Few reformers have paid attention to growing demands on principals and few districts have intervened to help reevaluate the tasks," says Alvoid, chair and clinical associate professor of education policy and leadership at the Simmons School. "The districts we feature in the report pay attention to the need of supporting practicing principals with deeper instructional training as they implement stronger teacher evaluation systems."

Strategies differ among [school districts](#). The charter school district Uplift Education in Dallas added at each school an operations director, responsible for all non-instructional aspects of running a school, such as building maintenance and student nutrition.

Charlotte-Mecklenburg schools in Charlotte, North Carolina added a dean of students position to support principals with student issues. Other districts strengthened principal [training](#), particularly on coaching teachers.

"The principal shapes the instructional vision and goals and is positioned to leverage his or her influence to effect substantial changes in instructional practice," says Black, clinical associate professor of education and policy at the Simmons School. "In short—though the teacher has the most direct impact on students—the principal has the most direct impact on the teacher."

Provided by Southern Methodist University

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