

A Long-Range Approach to

Instructional Leadership

In Anchorage, Alaska, future principals are getting on-the-job experience through a local intern program.

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The Anchorage, Alaska, school district has devised a two-year internship program for prospective school principals that emphasizes instructional leadership. To be eligible for the program, applicants must have a Master's degree and the principal's credential, have proven their abilities as outstanding teachers for at least three years, and possess working knowledge of current literature on effective schools and effective instruction.

During the 1983-84 school year, Anchorage had over 100 applicants—61 at the elementary level and 45 at the secondary—for 15 slots. Interns are on a teacher's contract, which is shorter than an administrative contract, and their salaries are equivalent to those of classroom teachers with similar experience and education.

A unique aspect of the program is that interns assume a two-year administrative assistant role carrying genuine administrative responsibility. They deal with day-to-day problems of schools: handling discipline, auxiliary services, teacher evaluation, supervision of instruction, curriculum planning, and other challenges that principals face. Although the building principal has ul-

timinate responsibility, the intern is in a decision-making position. The experience is genuine.

Elementary-level interns spend their first year in one building and move in the second year through placements in a variety of settings and programs lasting about two months each. Secondary-level interns usually stay in the same building for two years, moving from one role to another. Anchorage's secondary schools are large enough that a variety of experiences is available under one roof. There is a provision in the program for elementary interns to spend an additional, third, year at a larger elementary building. In general, though, interns who are successful in the program are placed as principals after two years and, in a few cases, even before that time.

An Investment in the Future

Benefits to the district are several. Since the intern contract is for one year at a time, the district may reassign an unsuccessful candidate after the first year or after the second. Candidates who decide administration is not for them also have the option of returning to the classroom at either point. A financial benefit to the district is the fact that 15 administrative

assistants are working for the salary of 15 classroom teachers.

The school board is pleased with the program since it gives teachers who already have an investment in the community the opportunity to move into leadership roles in their own school system.

Anchorage's Superintendent Gene Davis, who has been a strong force in leading the program, lists three major benefits of training interns. First, the district has the opportunity to mold the style of its new administrators. As a result, the characteristics of administrators over the years are likely to be consonant with district philosophy.

Second, the intern program facilitates long-range planning, which serves continuity in the administration of schools. The district's contract with administrators provides a one-time \$4,000 bonus for those who announce impending retirement before signing their final year's contract. Knowing ahead of time what vacancies will exist allows for more efficient planning to fill vacancies.

Third, the district has the opportunity to test its administrative aspirants by fire. Candidates demonstrate in real-life situations how they would handle the responsibilities of the building principal.

Allowing interns to participate in principals' meetings and the leadership academies constitutes a genuine acceptance of the interns by the administration. In fact, in a budget-cutting session early in the 1982-83 school year, the principals voted as a group that the last program that ought to be cut from the budget was the intern program.

Last year, the district initiated an inservice program specifically for the interns. Every other week they met in a two-hour, after-school session conducted by district principals and administrators. Topics covered a range of subjects from building management to purchasing, but the emphasis was on the role of the principal as instructional leader.

Participants and district administrators alike are enthusiastic about the internship program and what it can do for instruction. While it is true that principals need to be skilled managers, research emphasizes the importance of their being instructional leaders. In Anchorage, school officials are doing something about it. □

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