



PRESS RELEASE

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“RESTRUCTURE SCHOOL DISTRICT LEADERSHIP” SAYS TASK FORCE

“There is no ‘one-size-fits-all’ solution,” panel declares.

February 8, 2001, Washington, DC – In a report some reviewers are already labeling “controversial,” the Institute for Educational Leadership (IEL) says that the recipe for effective school district leaders must include:

- planning for recruitment and succession,
- creating and maintaining an informed leadership base,
- building a learning organization, and
- holding leadership accountable.

A task force, co-chaired by Rod Paige, the newly-appointed U.S. Secretary of Education (and former superintendent of schools for the Houston [TX] Independent School District), and Becky Montgomery, chair of the St. Paul (MN) Public Schools Board of Education, tackled the challenges local communities face—both in ensuring that all students learn to high standards and in addressing shortages of qualified, high-quality superintendents, school board members, and central office staff. The task force report, **Leadership for Student Learning: Restructuring School District Leadership**, is intended as a tool for communities to initiate discussion and action.

“District leadership is a concern in most communities—and a crisis in others. So, we went to experienced community leaders from a variety of sectors to address the issue,” said Michael Usdan, IEL’s president and director of the two-year initiative.

The task force found that district leaders too often are not prepared to provide the organizational, public, and instructional leadership needed to improve student learning. Contributing factors cited by the report include:

- lack of clarity in leadership roles and responsibilities,
- inadequate preparation and training, and
- lack of understanding of complex community issues.

Further complicating these matters are current and projected shortages of qualified superintendents, principals, and teachers who comprise the traditional school leadership pipeline.

Given the huge variance in school district size, governance, demographics, effectiveness, and environmental forces, the task force recognized there is no “one-size-fits-all” solution. Task force members did agree that district leaders must focus on a common goal of improving student learning and then organize the school system to make it the fundamental priority. They also urge all school jurisdictions to take a hard look at the quality, qualifications, and growth of their schools’ leaders and not simply assume that they will “take care of themselves.”

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Strategies for restructuring include:

- Facilitating improved communication and interaction with the public, including in the design and implementation of efforts to improve student learning.
- Spelling out the roles and responsibilities of school board members, superintendents, and other members of the district leadership team.
- Evaluating district performance annually and holding district leaders accountable for the results.
- Supporting and promoting professional standards for school board members and superintendents.
- Promoting increased research on successful models and analyses of effective district leadership.

Communities are urged to examine district leadership issues by involving a broad spectrum of members, collecting data, gaining consensus, and planning specific actions. Questions which can be used in these discussions are included in the report.

The **Leadership for Student Learning: Restructuring School District Leadership** report is the second to be released through a series of forums over the next several months. The first report, **Leadership for Student Learning: Reinventing the Principalsip**, was released in December 2000. Upcoming task force reports will address *teacher leadership* and *state leadership*. Panels of local school or state education representatives will respond to the task force reports, and their responses will be used to inform a final document to be released later this year.

The *School Leadership for the 21st Century Initiative* is made possible by funding from the U.S. Department of Education’s Office of Educational Research and Improvement, the Ford Foundation, The UPS Foundation, the Metropolitan Life Foundation, and The Carnegie Corporation of New York.

Copies of the report are available free of charge via IEL’s Web site (www.iel.org) or by e-mailing, faxing, or writing Mary Podmostko, Project Associate, Institute for Educational Leadership, 1001 Connecticut Avenue, N.W., Suite 310, Washington, DC, podmostkom@iel.org, or 202-872-4050 (fax).

Established in 1964, the Institute for Educational Leadership (IEL) – a non-profit, nonpartisan organization based in Washington, D.C. – works to achieve better results for children and youth. At the heart of our effectiveness is our unique ability to bring people together to identify and resolve issues across policy, program, and sector boundaries. As a natural outgrowth of our work, we have created and continue to nurture diverse networks across the country. Today, IEL is working to help individuals and institutions increase their capacity to work *together*. We are building and supporting a cadre of diverse leaders, strengthening the capacity of education and related systems, and informing the development and implementation of policies. Our efforts are focused through five programs of work — *Developing Leaders; Strengthening School-Family-Community Connections; Governing; Connecting and Improving Systems that Serve Children and Youth; Improving Preparation for Work*.

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