

I am Diana Sisson, Co-Director of Membership Development for the Connecticut Reading Association. I am here today to speak to the proposed certification requirements for administrators.

Nationally reported as of 2008 by *Education Week*, Connecticut possesses the country's largest achievement gap among socioeconomic groups. Furthermore, the state's test scores have fallen more than almost any other state (Connecticut Commission on Children, 2008). According to the annual report from *Education Week's Quality Counts* (2008), Connecticut's overall grade earned for educational quality stood at a C+. Thus, the need exists for an examination of how to close the gap on what is becoming an escalation of poverty in Connecticut.

At the core of the issue is a growing body of research that indicates that building administrator actions directly impact student learning outcomes (Andrews, Basom, & Basom, 2001). As much as 25% of the variability in student achievement has been found to derive from leadership practices (Kafka, 2009). With this understanding of their pivotal role in student achievement comes the call for a paradigm shift in administrators from one of a manager and supervisor to one of an instructional leader with direct involvement in instruction.

Yet, despite this growing call for building administrators to take on the role of instructional leaders and be held accountable for student achievement, many building administrators lack the skills to do so (Tooms, 2008). A 2003 Public Agenda survey reported that the majority of principals responding suggested that it is a "bad idea" to hold building administrators accountable for student achievement. The survey also found that only 11 percent of superintendents who participated believe that their building administrators are excellent at holding teachers accountable for instruction.

Current research proposes that school leadership is second only to teaching itself in its effect on student achievement (Leithwood, Day, Sammons, Harris, and Hopkins, 2006). Indeed, Andrews, Soder, and Jacoby (1986) found that schools who had building administrators who were perceived to be instructional leaders produced students who outperformed students in schools in which the teachers viewed their principals as lacking instructional leadership. This perception, then, was "so important, and the power of the principals' leadership so pervasive, that it has a measureable impact on student learning" (Andrews & Soder, 1987, p. 16).

Education remains, without doubt, the future of this country. Administrators possess the reins of change to better educate our children to their fullest potential. Given that extraordinary responsibility, professionals given the position need to be of the highest caliber. Therefore, their training should encompass a depth and breadth that allows them to assess the needs of a building, devise a plan of action, and be capable of implementing what needs to occur in order to produce effective schooling where students do not just exist but excel in the learning process.

In order for this to occur, building administrators need to be trained at the university level to understand what their position of influence can accomplish. The technical challenges that have historically arisen in their daily work can be resolved with limited or no training. Conversely, the adaptive challenges that face today's building administrators require skills that must confront the modern expectations of schooling which require specialized training. Their knowledge base will require a thorough understanding of literacy and its subsequent impact upon the entire curricula and affective behaviors of students. Thus, if principals in Connecticut are going to become the instructional leaders in literacy that our children need, we urge you to require principal candidates to have a minimum of six credits in reading/language arts as part of their certification and licensure expectations. For how can we expect administrators to lead instruction in a field in which they have no training to do so?

Diana Sisson, Co-Director of Membership Development for the Connecticut Reading Association  
sissonb1@southernct.edu