District School Principals:
Unsurprising Recruiting Difficulties

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Who would want to do a job with mediocre pay, high expectations, and little authority in many of the areas quite likely to significantly impact their effectiveness? For examples, the vast majority of district school principals have little say in their school's instructional program, or its personnel. Indeed, it is quite difficult to recruit people prepared to succeed in yet another critical public school system job that political imperatives have made unnecessarily challenging. Recall that I have previously described the daunting challenges the current system imposes on district superintendents and public school teachers. Of course, every public school eventually gets a principal, but often the district hires an under-qualified person from within the district. "There's not much strategic thought going into the identification of exceptional talent."

Because of the uniformity imperative – it is not politically feasible to provide anything significant at an assigned school that is not available at every assigned school – principals cannot create schools with unique missions suited to their strengths and passion. They can only manage a comprehensive school created and staffed by the district. Like the superintendent, principals also face the daunting challenge of having to achieve high rates of academic improvement with a uniform approach applied to a diverse clientele. The political staying power of the imperative and the resulting, widely recognized mismatch between principals' responsibility and decisionmaking authority is demonstrated by: "authority to run his building has generally not increased. In far too many places, the principal's role is [still] more akin to middle manager than to executive." They are held responsible, officially (but often few consequences), for squeezing

results from a dysfunctional ([heroic assumptions](#)) schooling strategy. "Today's great principals

tend to succeed *in spite of* district conditions, not because of [them](#)."