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## Memphis City Schools: The Next Generation of Principals

On November 18, 2004, Memphis City Schools (MCS) Superintendent Carol R. Johnson waited in her office for a telephone call from the principal of Geeter Middle School (Geeter). That morning, Johnson had arrived to a flood of parental complaints and media calls regarding the principal's decision to suspend the entire eighth-grade class because students refused to apologize and clean up after a cafeteria food fight. The Geeter principal was leading a school for the first time, and while some parents supported the new principal's actions, many questioned her judgment and experience in maintaining an orderly learning environment. Johnson worried that the school's escalating disciplinary problems and the community's response would distract the principal from her role as an instructional leader. Before communicating with school board members, news reporters, and parents, Johnson wanted to speak directly with the principal to make sure she had all of the facts. The media frenzy had brought attention to the recent influx of first-time principals hired to turn around several of the district's underperforming schools.

In the four years leading up to the 2004-2005 (SY05), Geeter had been under heavy scrutiny by the district and the state for not meeting adequate yearly progress (AYP) targets. As with several other schools in a similar predicament, Johnson appointed a new principal to Geeter as part of the district's action plan to improve student achievement and to reverse the school's substandard record. Overall, MCS hired 31 new principals that year, 29 of whom had no prior experience as principals. Because 52% of MCS's 185 principals would be eligible to retire within three years, Johnson was preoccupied with developing new principals and expanding the pipeline of high-quality candidates.

Johnson reflected on her team's initial efforts to strengthen the pipeline of quality candidates, match newly hired principals to appropriate schools, and provide principals with the support and resources to be successful instructional leaders. The situation at Geeter raised questions concerning a new principal's capacity to carry out MCS's instructional agenda and the district's ability to effectively support the increasing number of inexperienced principals. She believed that high-performing principals were a key lever for improving student achievement across the district, and she wondered if her team had built the right foundation for identifying and preparing candidates.

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Research Associate Tonika Cheek Clayton prepared this case under the supervision of HBS Lecturer Stacey Childress and HGSE faculty member Robert Peterkin. PELP cases are developed solely as the basis for class discussion. Cases are not intended to serve as endorsements, sources of primary data, or illustrations of effective or ineffective management.

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## Background

### *MCS Demographics and History*

Serving over 119,000 students, MCS was the largest school district in the state of Tennessee (see **Exhibits 1** and **2** for MCS facts and figures). Shaped by a history of desegregation laws, busing integration policies, annexation, and racial tensions, MCS evolved over 50 years from a majority white student population<sup>1</sup> at the time of the 1954 *Brown vs. Board of Education* ruling to one in SY05 that was 86% black, 9% white, 4% Hispanic, and 1% other, including Asians and other ethnicities. Seventy-one percent of students qualified for free or reduced-price meals, 14% participated in special education programs, and 4% had limited English proficiency. In SY04, MCS showed modest gains in reading test scores and significant improvement in every subgroup on math test scores. In high school algebra, the percentage of students scoring at proficient or advanced increased from 42% in SY03 to 60% in SY04. Nevertheless, MCS still fell short of meeting state goals across several student achievement indicators assessed yearly by the Tennessee Department of Education (see **Exhibit 3** for MCS student achievement indicators).

In Tennessee, county governments typically ran school districts. However, MCS had special status as a city-operated district and was funded by the city, county, state, and federal government. The district was located in Shelby County, which independently operated a neighboring school district, Shelby County Schools (SCS), making Shelby County a rare dual-district county. Serving approximately 46,000 students, SCS catered to a predominantly white (68%), middle-class community with less than 13% of students eligible for Title I<sup>2</sup> federal funds.<sup>3</sup> In recent years, conflicts between the two districts over county funds had escalated in part due to SCS's population influx as a result of suburban growth and MCS's request for more financial resources to fund student achievement initiatives. In contrast to MCS, SCS surpassed the majority of the state's student achievement goals in SY04 and was two percentage points short of reaching the state's graduation goal of 90%.<sup>4</sup>

Attempts to consolidate the two districts over the years (most recently in early 2003) were opposed by SCS leadership and residents who felt that consolidating the districts would bring down the quality of education in SCS schools. Some MCS board members and community leaders also publicly expressed skepticism at the proposed benefits of handing over the reins of MCS to SCS leadership. Proponents of consolidation argued that it would streamline the tax and budget process in the city and county, provide more equitable resources to schools across the county, and maintain the quality of education at any given school. Although the most recent push to dissolve the MCS charter had failed, this issue perpetually loomed over both districts.

### *Superintendent Carol Johnson*

Originally from Brownsville, Tennessee, a town 63 miles outside Memphis, Johnson took the helm of MCS in the fall of 2003 following a six-year stint as the superintendent of Minneapolis City

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<sup>1</sup> "City Schools Integration Timeline," *The Commercial Appeal*, May 16, 2004.

<sup>2</sup> Federally funded programs in high-poverty schools that target children with low achievement (definition cited from the Tennessee Department of Education website, <http://www.state.tn.us/education/Primer%20Terms%202.doc>, accessed January 15, 2005).

<sup>3</sup> "Shelby County Report Card 2004," Tennessee Department of Education website, <http://www.k-1.state.tn.us/rptcrd04/system.asp>, accessed January 15, 2005.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*

Schools. Highly respected and trusted in Minneapolis, Johnson built a strong reputation for working collaboratively with parents, board members, principals, teachers, and the external community to achieve results. After spending 30 years of her career in Minneapolis, Johnson chose to bring her skills and experience to MCS, a school district almost three times the student enrollment size of Minneapolis's with tighter financial constraints and a higher rate of poverty and illiteracy.

In her first 15 months, Johnson took action in a number of key areas. Forced to cut over \$25 million from the proposed MCS SY05 budget in her first term, she eliminated over 90 central office positions and restructured the district's administrative departments. She also successfully campaigned to repeal the school board's policy for corporal punishment after a highly publicized community debate. MCS also won bids to partner with national programs, New Leaders for New Schools and the New Teacher Project to raise the quality of its principals and teachers.

With 148 of 191 MCS schools on the state's No Child Left Behind (NCLB) watch list of failing schools at the start of SY04, Johnson's administration successfully worked to clear 77 schools from the list by the start of SY05. After assessing the 15 schools in the "corrective action" category under the NCLB guidelines,<sup>5</sup> Johnson decided to "fresh-start"<sup>6</sup> the five worst schools. She removed the principals in these five schools and replaced them with new leaders and instructional staffs. Fresh-start principals were given the autonomy to completely replace existing staff, from custodians to teachers. Johnson placed first-time principals in three of the five fresh-start schools. For the remaining 10 schools under corrective action, Johnson prescribed a mix of actions from replacing principals and/or selected teachers to reconfiguring grade structure and program designs. In total, Johnson assigned 11 of the 29 new first-time principals to underperforming schools labeled as "high priority" under NCLB guidelines.<sup>7</sup>

Johnson believed that principals were critical change agents because of their front-line interaction with teachers and students; therefore, an important component of her strategy focused on preparing and managing principals to be more effective instructional leaders. She noted, "In the schools where we've had progress, despite poverty and language barriers, it seems to be that the principal's leadership has created an environment where the staff believes in the notion that all students can learn and can achieve at higher levels."

Although the district mandated that principals adopt common literacy and math curriculums, they were given some autonomy in the day-to-day management of when and how to deliver the content. As instructional leaders, they were expected to ensure that teachers effectively taught the curriculum set forth by MCS. Johnson described her view on instructional leadership:

For awhile across the nation, we saw principals hired for their management skills so that buses ran on time, kids were served, the halls were clean, and the school had no major incidents. And that was what constituted good leadership. But I think in the new order of work, leadership around instruction takes center stage. We need principals who know what high-quality instruction looks like and how to work with teams of teachers to achieve it.

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<sup>5</sup> If after four years a school has still not improved, it is placed on the "corrective action" list and put on probation. At this stage, the State Department of Education may take action such as removing school staff, increasing the length of the school day or year, or decreasing the authority of local management (explanation cited from the MCS website, [http://www.mcsk12.net/admin/communications/NCLB\\_Webpage/NCLB\\_frames.htm](http://www.mcsk12.net/admin/communications/NCLB_Webpage/NCLB_frames.htm), accessed January 28, 2005).

<sup>6</sup> "Fresh-start" schools were assessed as having no prior proven record of effectiveness. These schools were completely restructured and assigned new leadership and instructional staff.

<sup>7</sup> Schools categorized as "high priority" have not met NCLB federal benchmarks for at least two consecutive years.

## Principal Management and Support

In order to more effectively manage and support school leaders, Johnson hired Deputy Superintendent Bernadeia Johnson and appointed five academic directors to directly supervise principals (see **Exhibit 4** for organizational chart). Bernadeia Johnson oversaw both the academic directors and the academic leadership team (ALT), which included, the academic directors, the associate superintendent of curriculum and instruction, and the district's NCLB representative. The ALT created the district's academic agenda each year and was responsible for carrying it out at the school level. Each week, the group met to report on the status of the current agenda, to refine the agenda for the upcoming year, and to discuss issues that had surfaced at the school level. By participating in the ALT, academic directors used the input they gleaned from daily interactions with principals to help steer the academic agenda and its implementation. At the same time, the ALT influenced the academic directors' management of principals by setting the district's instructional priorities, which informed decisions about resource allocation to and professional development for schools..

### *The Role of Academic Directors*

Carol Johnson revised a long-standing organizational structure in which principals were geographically assigned to one of three zone directors whose primary function was operational support. Under the old system, one zone director supervised and evaluated principals across both elementary and secondary levels with less of a focus on the school's instructional agenda. The revised structure created an academic director for high schools, one for middle schools, and three for elementary schools. The number of schools managed by one academic director ranged from 25 to 38 schools. An academic director's main function was to drive the district's instructional agenda and to provide his or her principals with support and development opportunities (see **Exhibit 5** for a list of academic director responsibilities).

High school academic director James Bacchus explained some differences between the new and old roles:

In the past, the zone directors were more or less operational managers involved in all the K-12 schools in their geography. A former zone director confessed he didn't know anything about elementary schools because his experience was in high schools. Every time he needed to address a situation at an elementary school, he had to talk to another director who had elementary experience. By being focused only on high schools, I can focus on all of a school's issues, not just the operations piece. I can support the principal by helping them focus on academic challenges and by assisting them with resource allocation issues such using staff and dollars more strategically.

In addition to providing support for individual schools, academic directors oversaw resource allocation across schools in an attempt to achieve a more equitable balance of resources. Under the old system, a principal's ability to garner resources from the central office often depended more on his or her personal relationships within the district than on the relative level of need compared with that of other schools. Consequently, some schools had the latest technology and renovations, while others operated with significantly fewer amenities. Elementary school academic director Virginia McNeil observed: "We try to make sure there's an equitable distribution of funds, personnel, grants, materials, and equipment. So each time we have a chance to allocate funds or distribute personnel, we take into consideration those schools with the highest rate of poverty and those schools listed under 'corrective action' or 'high priority.'"

### *Principal Support and Development*

Bernadeia Johnson and the academic directors communicated with principals in a variety of ways. Before SY05 began, principals attended the Principal Leadership Academy (PLA), a three-day session hosted by the district designed to introduce principals to the new academic leadership team, review the MCS academic agenda, and provide them with some professional development tools for the upcoming year (see **Exhibit 6** for PLA agenda).

Each month, all principals convened for a mandatory four-hour meeting to get the latest district updates from Carol Johnson and other MCS central office administrators. These meetings also allocated time for the academic directors and principals to break into their subgroups to discuss issues or progress made at individual schools. Additionally, each academic director put together a principal advisory committee that helped determine the kind of developmental support principals within their subgroup needed. To make sure that the majority of interests were served, the academic director usually selected principals of varying experience levels and from different backgrounds to serve on the committee.

Support from academic directors varied across principal subgroups depending on the academic director's management style and the nature of the challenges facing the principals. Academic directors also differentiated the support they provided for schools based on the school's performance and the principal's experience. Underperforming schools and schools with first-time principals were subject to more instructional "walk-throughs" and visits than other schools. Academic directors typically required new principals to meet more frequently and participate in more development sessions than their more experienced peers. Also, first-time principals were paired with a mentor, a veteran principal whom they could rely on for guidance about building-level issues or help in navigating the larger system. Elementary school academic director Myra Whitney discussed the work she did with her principals:

I've been working with my principals mainly on two things: school improvement plans and literacy. When I visit the schools, I have all of their data with me, and I take materials that can help them. They share with me and I share with them what I've thought of and what they might want to use. These visits are very focused. My next step is to help them see the impact that the learning environment can have on promoting our literacy initiative.

My first-time principals and principals in their second and third years are participating in a book study. Everybody's reading a book on creating professional learning communities. I meet with them once a month. I'm constantly on the phone with them and going out to their schools. The new principals are also participating in a book study on emotional intelligence because I'm trying to stress the importance of relationships for first-time principals, especially relationships with families and the staff, before they make quick judgments.

Middle school academic director Brenda Cassellius described the kinds of support she provided to her group of principals:

I love technology and I love data, so I contacted the IT Department and I said, "Look, I've got 11 schools on the [NCLB] list only because of attendance, and these 11 schools also have high suspension rates. For every meeting, I need to give my principals data on suspension and attendance and how their suspensions are affecting their attendance rate." And so at every principals meeting they got a packet with all that information and we talked about how to analyze what the data said and how to act on it.

I meet with new principals every two weeks, and they drive the content of our meetings for the most part. I've also started meeting with assistant principals on a voluntary basis. These meetings are about professional development for them and how they can get to the next level. That serves two purposes. One is to give them tools so they support the current academic agenda, and the other is to identify those who are really interested in becoming leaders. Therefore, it's optional. And as we meet, I will get to know them better and will develop an understanding of their strengths as future leaders. So as I get to know them better, I'm not only growing the leadership pipeline but also am able to gather more accurate evidence to present to the superintendent for best fit and promotional opportunities.

Development opportunities for an individual principal were largely left up to the principal and his or her respective academic director. Academic directors had the autonomy to decide what their principal's developmental needs were and how to best supplement those needs to meet MCS's academic goals. Each principal's budget included a small amount for professional development that they could use at their own discretion. Although professional development for assistant principals was primarily managed by their principals, the new academic directors were committed to more actively engaging assistant principals at the district level to help develop them for the principal role.

## Developing a Pipeline of Principals

With 52% of principals eligible for retirement in three years, MCS needed at least 96 new principals over the next three years, not counting normal attrition or terminations for poor performance. School board policy required new principals to have a minimum of three years administrative experience as an assistant principal or instructional supervisor. Applicants were also required to receive principal certification from an accredited state program, which could be earned at a local university by enrolling in evening or summer courses.

Many current MCS principals had risen through this system, but many in the district were concerned that assistant principal experience combined with certification was not always adequate preparation for leading a school. While some principals had built a track record of developing their assistant principals into good leaders, others relegated their assistant principals to specific roles that failed to offer the leadership experience necessary to prepare them to be successful principals. First-time MCS principal Corey Harris remarked:

I just don't feel like the average assistant principal gets that breadth of experience that I was able to get from my former principal. It seems that many deal primarily with the three Bs: the books, the butts, and the buses. That means textbooks, discipline, the cafeteria and those sorts of responsibilities. They don't really have an opportunity to immerse themselves in leading teachers, learning curriculum, and instructional leadership. My experience was not like that. I had responsibilities as it related to the curriculum, meeting with teachers in teams, working with parents, and participating in athletic activities. I got to see the good, the bad, and the ugly.

When Carol Johnson joined MCS, efforts were already underway to improve the quality of the pool from which new principals were chosen. The University of Memphis (U.Memphis) was in the first year of its Memphis Leadership Fellows Program (MLFP), a leadership development program targeted toward assistant principals aspiring to become principals. Separately, a push from community and business leaders had led to discussions between MCS and New Leaders for New Schools (NLNS), a national program that trained principals to lead in urban school districts. With MLFP and NLNS, MCS seemed poised to reach its goal of training at least 60 qualified principals over the next three years (see **Exhibit 7** for comparisons and costs of MLFP and NLNS).

### *Memphis Leadership Fellows Program—University of Memphis*

Piloted in SY04, the Memphis Leadership Fellows Program (MLFP), a joint venture between the University of Memphis and MCS, allowed MCS assistant principals to develop leadership skills and become certified to assume a principal position in the state of Tennessee. The university redesigned its existing principal certification program, which was described as “a traditional program that adequately certified and licensed aspiring principals but did not prepare them to assume leadership roles that made a difference in an urban school district.” MLFP bore little resemblance to its predecessor besides the requirement that participants had to have at least two years of administrative experience in a school district. The new program aimed to develop each fellow’s unique leadership style and to cultivate the management and organizational skills needed to run a school. To evolve the program to better suit MCS’s needs, U. Memphis was committed to adapting the curriculum and training for fellows “to prepare them to lead in different kinds of situations, such as taking over a ‘fresh-start’ school, following a low-performing principal, or following an exemplary principal.”

**Selection process** In an attempt to raise the quality of candidates, the program required that applicants could not self-select into the program, unlike with other state certification programs, but instead had to be nominated by their supervisor. A selection committee that included MCS academic directors and U. Memphis faculty reviewed applications and decided which candidates to invite to the next phase. In the second screening, the selection committee judged the applicants’ communication skills and leadership ability using interviews, role plays, and situational activities. Finalists were chosen using a composite scoring system that assigned varying weights to each component of the selection process (see Exhibit 8). During the program’s first year, 23 of 51 nominated applicants were selected for the program, and in the second year 15 of 32 applicants were selected.

**Program components** To foster team unity among the cohort of fellows, MLFP’s program introduction was Team Trek, a four-day outdoor orientation that included team-building activities with U. Memphis faculty and program coaches. Throughout the year, fellows attended seminars and workshops focused on instructional leadership, organizational management, school law, finances, and “principled leadership.” Additionally, fellows would go on two-day site visits each month to schools and community businesses to gain exposure to different styles of leadership and to observe the different challenges across elementary, middle, and high schools.

Over a five-month period, fellows worked on a team project to address a district-wide issue facing MCS.. Near the end of the program, fellows wrote a detailed report on the issue and presented their findings and recommendations to MCS administrators and MLFP faculty. Because MLFP fellows maintained their full-time positions at MCS schools, program components were usually scheduled outside of the school day. During site visits or other program activities that conflicted with school events, the program provided funding for the principal at each fellow’s school to hire a substitute administrator, if requested.

Mentorship and coaching were also key components of the MLFP program. At the start of the program, each fellow was assigned an individual mentors and a program coach. There was also a shared pool of principal mentors, business coaches, and community organization mentors. The principal mentors were highly regarded MCS principals nominated by other principals and interviewed by the MLFP faculty. By exposing fellows to a variety of principals, one faculty member “hoped that fellows would experience the leadership style of at least 10 different stellar principals and use an eclectic approach to hone their personal leadership style.” Business coaches, who held upper-level management positions in the Memphis business community, provided fellows assistance with management questions and networking. Program coaches were U. Memphis faculty members who followed each fellow’s personal growth over the course of the program. Community

organization mentors helped the fellows learn about challenges and benefits to schools partnering with community-based youth and family learning organizations.

**Fellow evaluations** At the beginning of the program, an individual profile compiling data from the selection process and Team Trek evaluations was made for each fellow detailing his or her strengths, weaknesses, and personal growth areas to focus on during the program year. Program assignments, site visits, and mentors were assigned specifically to address the needs outlined in the fellow's individual profile. Using the profile as a basis for evaluation, mentors, coaches, and the fellows themselves documented ongoing assessments. In the fellows' midyear reviews, program coaches collaborated with the mentors and the fellows to assess areas of improvement and to provide feedback. In the final evaluation, program coaches again consulted with mentors and the fellows to prepare a performance status report on each fellow and filed the report with MCS administration. Finally, MLFP faculty ranked the fellows according to their "readiness for principal leadership" and presented each candidate in rank order to MCS's principal selection committee.

**Reactions from MLFP fellows** Linda Campbell, an MCS assistant principal and MLFP fellow, described her experience in the program:

I chose this program because I believe that someone coming straight from the classroom to the principalship misses an important middle piece of being an assistant principal. And there are some things that you're not going to get unless you've had to make certain on-the-job decisions at the spur of the moment, like when you're faced with that angry parent, faced with that child that's out of control, faced with that school emergency.

I've learned that it's not enough to want to be a principal or to lead a school community. It's about self-analysis, self-assessment, and identifying who I am first. I can't lead anybody else unless I know who I am. I've engaged in a lot of discussions and reflection about why I want to be a principal, why I want to lead. Then once I'm there, how do I lead a school community? How do I develop teachers? How do I impact student achievement?

Cory Harris, a middle school principal and graduate of the MLFP program, explained the benefits and drawbacks of the program from his experience:

I think the program was very effective in that you very seldom get an opportunity to leave your own school to go into another school to see some of the strategies and some of the best practices that they're using. A lot of graduate programs give you a lot of theory, but they don't really give you any application. The program was great because it gave me an opportunity to see theory in practice and to learn from more veteran administrators in the system. It also got me down the path of reading more for my own professional development as well as attending seminars. It also gave me a cohort of people that I can trust, that I can call on, and that I know are going through the same challenges that I'm going through.

I think the one draw-back is that it's hard to fully benefit from the program and hold down a job. Whenever we were out to visit another school, there would be so much work left when we came back that it would be difficult to keep up with the new knowledge and the reading. In contrast, New Leaders for New Schools fellows are immersed 100% of the time and not trying to hold down other administrative duties at the same time.

### *New Leaders for New Schools (NLNS)*

With wide support from local business and community leaders, MCS won a nationwide competition with other urban school districts to partner with NLNS to recruit, train, and support

high-quality candidates for principal positions. Starting in February 2004, NLNS contracted with MCS to develop 60 new principals over a three-year period beginning with 10 principals the first year, 20 principals the second year, and 30 principals the third year, with an option to develop 30 more principals in a fourth year.

As part of the agreement, NLNS negotiated with the University of Memphis and the MCS Board of Commissioners to become an official alternative principal certification program, which allowed NLNS candidates to bypass the board policy requirement of having three years' administrative experience before obtaining principal certification. In exchange for services, NLNS would receive \$2 million in private funding from local business and foundation donors to cover training expenses. MCS agreed to create a paid position for each "new leader" and pay each one a salary of \$60,000 during the fellowship year. As part of its agreement with NLNS, MCS agreed to give more autonomy to high-performing principals starting in SY06, when the first cohort of "new leaders" would enter principal roles. MCS committed to interviewing each NLNS participant during the principal selection process, but not to hiring them.

**Selection process** In the program's first year of operation in MCS, NLNS chose nine of 250 applicants to become the first cohort of new leaders. Memphis NLNS Director Billy Kearney pared down the first wave of applications by assessing each candidate based on the NLNS selection criteria (see Exhibit 9). Candidates minimally demonstrating all components of the selection criteria in their applications and during a first round of interviews were invited back to "finalist day." "Finalist day" was a daylong intensive process in which a team of MCS administrators, NLNS staff, veteran principals, and business leaders evaluated the candidates on their instructional knowledge, case-study analysis, role plays, and interviews. Successful applicants exhibited a readiness to fill a principal position after a year of training in addition to "NLNS qualities" outlined in the selection criteria. Eight of the nine new leaders had prior experience working in MCS.

**Program components** The NLNS program began in the summer with an intense six-week national institute in Philadelphia where principals and faculty from education and business schools taught new leaders from all NLNS districts courses in instructional leadership and the management of systems, people, and financial resources. Though the participants came from all over the country, they lived with their city cohort for the institute's duration in order to foster a peer support group (see Exhibit 10 for program content).

Following the summer institute, each new leader was assigned an MCS mentor principal in the school in which they would fulfill their full-time residency. The residency model was designed to enable the NLNS participants to apply the skills developed through the coursework to a real urban school under guidance from mentor principals. To select mentors, NLNS interviewed 35 self-selected principals who had records of effective instructional leadership and were willing to supervise and evaluate NLNS participants. During the residency, the NLNS participants worked with their mentor principals and NLNS leadership to define the projects on which they would be evaluated at the end of the academic year in addition to other managerial and operational tasks they would undertake as part of their role. NLNS participants met weekly with their mentor principal and their NLNS program coach for intensive coaching and feedback.

**NLNS evaluations** At the culmination of the residency, each new leader was evaluated using the "NLNS Principal Leadership Competencies Rubric" in Table A to assess their ability.

Table A

NLNS Principal Leadership Competencies	
1. Lead Change	7. Nurture Excellent Teaching
2. Plan Strategically	8. Develop and Empower Teams
3. Distribute Leadership	9. Build a Safe and Supportive Culture
4. Manage Time and Priorities	10. Engage Parents
5. Focus on Student Outcomes	11. Schedule and Manage Effectively
6. Learn from Data	12. Network Outside the School

Source: New Leaders for New Schools

Taking into account the project and the work experience completed during the residency, mentor principals and Kearney gave each new leader a rating of expert, proficient, developing, or novice in each competency area. The new leader's final evaluation would be made available to the MCS principal selection committee.

**Reactions from NLNS fellows** Randy Thompson, an NLNS fellow in SY05, described his relationship with his mentor principal:

My mentor principal involved me in virtually every decision he made to give me a real sense of everything I would be required to do as a principal. He even warned me that he would probably have to call me to meet him at 2 a.m. when the alarm is tripped at the school because that is all part of the job. During our conversations at the end of school days, he regularly asked me what I would do under different scenarios and gave me feedback on my decisions.

Another NLNS fellow, Tisha Stewart, explained the iterative process of crafting her role with her principal:

Initially, I was not pleased with the level of work my mentor principal assigned to me due to a lack of communication and understanding between the both of us. However, my relationship with my mentor principal improved tremendously after the lines of communication were opened and we reached a level of understanding as to what my role entailed. We've since become a lot closer, and I've become much more involved in her day-to-day decision making.

## Principal Placement

Participation in either the MLFP or NLNS program did not guarantee placement as a principal. The MCS principal selection committee, which included Bernadeia Johnson, the academic directors, and other executive focused on selecting the candidate most qualified to match the specific needs of a school with a principal opening. Given Carol Johnson's focus on the principalship as a lever for change, she paid particular attention to principal placement and worked closely with the selection committee. As she explained,

You don't want the candidate's first principal role to be a career-busting experience. In their first role, you want to make sure that they are successful and that they have an opportunity to see success in the role so that as they progress they know what skill sets worked. So what I'm always looking for is not just the best candidate. I want the best candidate for the particular kind of school and school environment. There's no perfect match, but you can make the best match possible. When you select someone who is not quite the right

fit it forces you to put in fillers that compensate for their lack of experience or growth areas. It is nothing short of a miracle when it's done right, and nothing is more tremendously stressful for you for the rest of the year and years to come if it's done wrong. It has an impact on teaching and learning and on how confidently families view the school.

Out of 31 principals hired to start in August 2005, two had prior experience as principals and 29 would begin their first year as a principal. Of the first-time principals, three were assigned to "fresh-start" schools, and 11 were placed in "high-priority" schools. Twelve of the first-timers came through the MLFP program. During the hiring process, MLFP faculty presented a short vignette on each MLFP fellow that summarized their strengths, weaknesses, and overall rank relative to their peers. Carol Johnson recalled:

They were pretty candid in their remarks, like, "This person needs more growth before she'll be ready to lead in these core areas," or "This guy might never be ready." And of the 12 assistant principals we promoted to principal from MLFP, I have to say that if they said a particular fellow was the best they had, what I've seen is of the principals I appointed, that fellow is the best I have.

In the coming year, NLNS fellows would be eligible for review by the MCS principal selection committee for the first time.

## Challenges Ahead

After speaking with Geeter's principal, Carol Johnson immediately asked a retired veteran principal to go to Geeter and serve as an advisor to the principal, who had not participated in either the MLFP or NLNS programs. Then she released the following statement to the media: "Although we support the principal's actions, we acknowledge that there were other ways to send just as strong a message to parents and students."

Though Johnson did not second-guess the principal's decision, a few things still concerned her after their conversation. She wondered why more preventative measures had not been taken to avoid the escalation of events in the cafeteria. Furthermore, she knew from experience that the Memphis community could be harsh critics of principals and hoped that the principal could still garner sufficient community support. She also worried about the extent to which the instructional environment at Geeter had been irreparably compromised due to the events and the media attention.

As she watched the day's events unfold, she revisited her administration's work on principal leadership. Were they progressing toward systematically preparing principals to use good judgment, create the environment necessary to improve student achievement, manage instruction, and build successful partnerships with the community? What more should the district do to support its principals, especially the new ones? Did the district have the right long-term approach to recruiting and retaining qualified principals?

**Exhibit 1** MCS Facts and Figures**SY05 MCS Overview****Student Demographics**

Number of students (K-12)	119,021
African-American	86.1%
White	8.9%
Hispanic	3.7%
Asian/Pacific Islander	1.2%
Other	0.1%
Eligible for free and reduced-price lunch	71.0%
English-language learners	4.1%
Special education students <sup>a</sup>	14.4%
Graduation rate (SY04)	62.1%
Dropout rate (SY04)	19.8%
K-8 Attendance Rate (SY04)	93.6%
9-12 Attendance Rate (SY04)	87.2%

**Schools and Staff**

Number of schools	191
Elementary	112
Middle	25
Junior High	4
Senior High	31
Alternative	13
Charter	6
Number of principals <sup>b</sup>	
Principals	185
Assistant Principals	157
New Principals	31
First-time Principals	29
Number of teachers	8,035
African-American	59.0%
White	40.0%
Other	1.0%
Total full-time employees (FTEs)	16,500

Source: Memphis City Schools.

<sup>a</sup> Twelve percent of the total number of special education students are enrolled in special programs for gifted students.

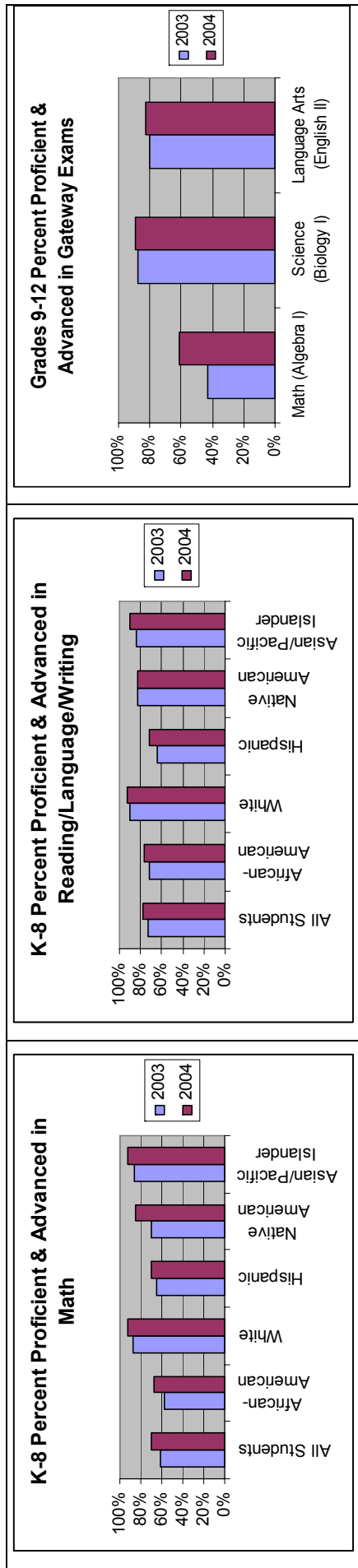
<sup>b</sup> Figures do not include charter school administrators. MCS did not pay or manage charter school administrators.

## Exhibit 2 MCS Budget (\$ millions)

	<b>SY05</b>	<b>% of Total</b>	<b>SY04</b>	<b>% of Total</b>	<b>SY03</b>	<b>% of Total</b>
<b>Total Budget</b>	<b>773.6</b>		<b>737.3</b>		<b>731.3</b>	
<b>Revenue Sources</b>						
State	346.5	44.7%	319.7	43.5%	309.8	42.4%
Shelby County	230.8	29.8%	222.8	30.3%	225.8	30.9%
Local Sales Tax	97.3	12.6%	92.1	12.5%	95.5	13.1%
City of Memphis	88.9	11.5%	89.5	12.2%	81.3	11.1%
Federal Funds	8.3	1.1%	4.6	0.6%	3.4	0.5%
Local Funds	3.4	0.4%	4.5	0.6%	5.5	0.8%
Transfer to Charter Schools	-6.7	-0.9%	-1.9	-0.3%	-	0.0%
Fund Balance Reserves	5.1	0.7%	4.1	0.6%	10.0	1.4%
<b>Total Revenue</b>	<b>773.6</b>		<b>735.4</b>		<b>731.3</b>	
<b>Expenditures</b>						
Salaries	515.6	66.6%	494.1	67.2%	491.6	67.2%
Employee Benefits	147.6	19.1%	127.7	17.4%	122.5	16.8%
Professional Services	21.9	2.8%	23.1	3.1%	23.7	3.2%
Property Maint. Services	28.3	3.7%	27.3	3.7%	26.8	3.7%
Contracted Services	24.4	3.2%	20.7	2.8%	20.9	2.9%
Supplies and Materials	14.9	1.9%	19.7	2.7%	19.7	2.7%
Travel	1.0	0.1%	1.0	0.1%	1.4	0.2%
Furniture/Equipment/Property	9.9	1.3%	11.5	1.6%	14.7	2.0%
Other	10.0	1.3%	10.3	1.4%	10.0	1.4%
<b>Total Expenditures</b>	<b>773.6</b>		<b>735.4</b>		<b>731.3</b>	

Source: Memphis City Schools.

**Exhibit 3** Student Achievement Indicators Based on Tennessee Department of Education Standards, SY03-SY04



**MCS Elementary & Middle Schools (TVAAS<sup>a</sup> Report Card Data)**

Year-by-Year Breakdown	Science	Social Studies	Reading/Language Arts	Math
School Year 2003-2004	A	B	D	D
School Year 2002-2003	D	F	F	F

**MCS High Schools (TVAAS<sup>a</sup> Data - ACT Scores)**

	Mean Student Score/2004	Status/2004	Mean Student Score/2003	Status/2003
Act Composite	17.4	Above State Expectation	17.2	(NDD) Met State Expectation
English	17.3	Above State Expectation	17.2	Above
Math	16.8	Above State Expectation	16.6	Above
Reading	17.4	(NDD) Met State Expectation	17.3	(NDD) Met State Expectation
Science	17.5	(NDD) Met State Expectation	17.3	Below

**Additional Indicators**

Indicator	2002-2003	2003-2004	State Goal
K-8 Attendance Rate	93.4%	93.6%	93.0%
K-8 Promotion Rate	91.1%	92.4%	97.0%
9-12 Attendance Rate	87.4%	87.2%	93.0%
Cohort Dropout Rate	19.9%	19.8%	10.0%
Graduation Rate	60.0%	62.1%	90.0%

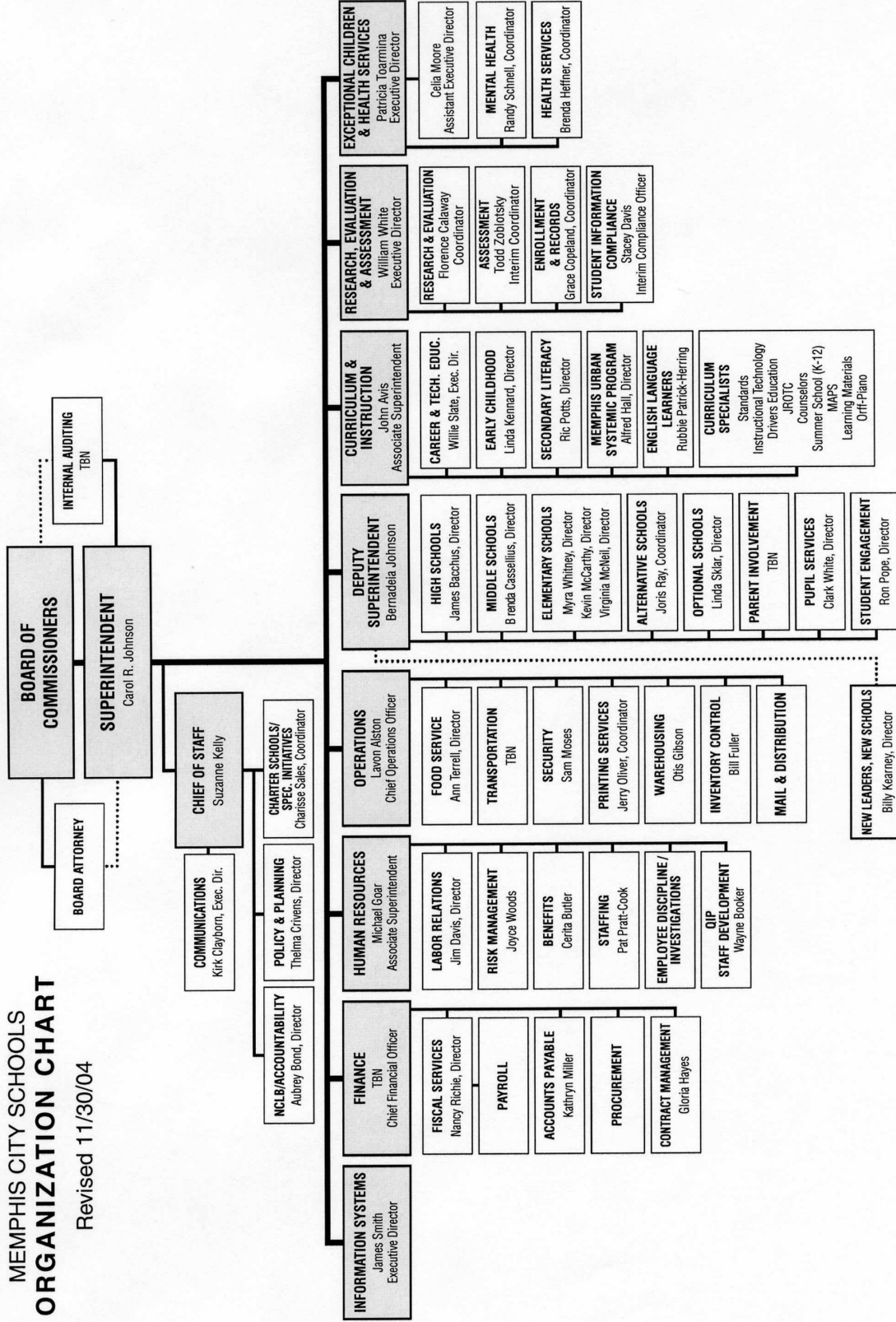
Source: Memphis City Schools.

<sup>a</sup> The Tennessee Value-Added Assessment System (TVAAS) is a diagnostic tool used by the state and school systems to measure the effectiveness of teachers and administrators in producing expected growth in student achievement. A grade of "C" means the school system has met the standards for average performance in that area. A grade of "A or B" represents exemplary or above-average performance for that system. A "D" is a below-proficient score, while an "F" deems that area of the school is deficient in meeting the students' needs. Grades are based on Normal Curve Equivalent (NCE) test scores.

Exhibit 4 MCS Organizational Chart

# MEMPHIS CITY SCHOOLS ORGANIZATION CHART

Revised 11/30/04



Source: Memphis City Schools.

**Exhibit 5** MCS Academic Director Responsibilities

Academic Directors report directly to the Deputy Superintendent and are responsible for all MCS educational sites. They recognize that the most important work of education takes place at the school and classroom level, and that effective leadership provides instructional focus and necessary support and assistance to bring about school improvement. They directly supervise and support building administrators.

Responsibilities include:

- Work with schools to achieve the District's goals related to academic learning;
- Develop professional learning communities that will support student achievement;
- Assist and monitor each school in the development, implementation and assessment of individual school improvement plans; provide additional support for schools identified by the NCLB criteria;
- Serve as advocate and identify and coordinate school system and community resources for schools;
- Develop a network for increased parent-community awareness, involvement, and help the district to strengthen community confidence;
- Design and conduct regular meetings and professional development opportunities to address the instructional and management needs of principals and assistant principals (principals' professional development);
- Identify and help advocate for each school's financial, physical, and human resource needs;
- Evaluate principals using multiple indicators including leadership competencies;
- Create a process for supporting new principals' professional growth;
- With the assistance of human resources, establish a process for identifying potential principal candidates and support principals whose assignment has changed (reassignments);
- Work with the principal's advisory committee to increase communication between central office staff and school leaders;
- Identify and assign principal, assistant principal, and intern candidates;
- Support events and activities being sponsored by schools and the community;
- Collaborate and identify opportunities for schools to "spotlight" their success in the district and collaboration with communications;
- Visit school sites, attend school events, and continue to identify ways to build collegial relationships with principals and assistant principals;
- Liaison between the school community and the district leadership;
- Work with Deputy Superintendent to establish and implement a process for responding to parents, staff and community concerns and complaints.

Source: Memphis City Schools.

**Exhibit 6** MCS Principal Leadership Academy Agenda

**Wednesday, June 16**

8:00-9:30am	Introductions Reorganization of District Services Academic Achievement in MCS	Dr. Carol Johnson, Superintendent
9:30-9:45am	"The Spy Glass" by Richard Paul Evans	Principals - Marty Pettigrew, Peabody Kongsouly Jones, Rita White and Charles Newborn
10:00-11:30am	Focus on Instruction Teaching and Learning Association Greater Memphis Art Council Literacy, Pre K-12  Memphis Urban Systemic Program Update	John Avis, Associate Superintendent Peggy Seessel, Dir. of Arts Education and Outreach Dr. Kathleen Cooter, Professor College of Education, University of Memphis  Dr. Alfred Hall, Dir. of MUSP
11:30-12:30pm	Lunch	
12:30-3:30pm	Creating Professional Learning Communities	Academic Directors (Breakout sessions)

**Thursday, June 17**

<i>BREAKOUT SESSIONS (8:00-9:30am; 9:45-11:15am)</i>		
8:00-11:15am	New District Policies & Grant Guidelines Communications: How to Handle the Media Secondary Special Education Transition Model Legal Issues Update Understanding NCLB, AYP, and TCAP Reports Parent Involvement/PTA/Memphis Urban League  NetTrekker	Thelma Crivens, Dir. of Policy and Planning Vincent McCaskill, MCS Communications Manager Pat Beane, Coordinator of Exceptional Children Percy Harvey, Attorney William White, Exec. Dir. of Research and Assessment Peggy Johnson, Coordinator of Special Projects Dr. Darryl Ukufu, President, Memphis Urban League (MUL)  Susanne Jackson, Dir. of MUL Education & Youth Dev. Kevin Reed, Coordinator of Staff Development
11:15-12:00pm	Lunch	
12:00-3:00pm	Human Resources Updates Selection and Retention of Certified Section (New) Teacher Performance Progressive Employee Discipline Substitute Management System	Michael Goar, Assoc. Sup. of Human Resources Bob Mathes, Coordinator of Secondary Section Dr. Lydia Abell, Quality Improvement Specialist Jim Davis, Dir. of Labor Relations Chanda Broosk, Coordinator of Special Projects Jerri Rudolph, Clerk of Human Resources Aubrey Bond, Dir. of NCLB Accountability
3:00-3:30pm	NCLB Update/Budget	

**Friday, June 18, 2004**

8:00-9:00am	Focus on Literacy	Dr. Rick Potts, Dir. of Secondary Literacy Becky Bones, Scholastic John Avis, Associate Superintendent Dr. Linda Kennard, Dir. of Elem. Literacy/Early Childhood
9:00-9:15am		Bernadeia Johnson, Deputy Superintendent
9:30-10:30am	Secondary Literacy (All Secondary Principals) Elementary Literacy (All Elementary Principals)	Dr. Rick Potts, Dir. of Secondary Literacy John Avis, Associate Superintendent Dr. Linda Kennard, Dir. of Elem. Literacy/Early Childhood
10:45-12:00pm	Breakout Sessions with Academic Directors	Academic Directors

Source: Memphis City Schools.

**Exhibit 7** Comparisons of MLFP and NLNS Principal Development Programs

	Memphis Leadership Fellows Program (MLFP)	New Leaders for New Schools (NLNS)
<b>Relationship with MCS</b>		
Inaugural Year	SY04	SY05
Term Length	1 to 5 years <sup>a</sup>	3 years <sup>b</sup>
Target goal of principals developed	Unspecified	60 principals
<b>Selection Process</b>		
MCS staff on selection committee	Yes	Yes
Supervisor nomination required to apply	Yes	No
School administrative experience required	2 years minimum	No
Teaching experience required to apply	Yes	Yes
# applicants (SY04)	51	-
# participants selected (SY04)	23	-
# applicants (SY05)	32	250
# participants selected (SY05)	15	9
<b>Program Components</b>		
Full-time residency	No	Yes
Salary/stipend for participation	No <sup>c</sup>	\$60,000 plus benefits
Principal mentors	Yes	Yes
Leadership coach	Yes	Yes
Business coach	Yes	No
Community organization mentors	Yes	No
Ranked evaluation system	Yes	No
<b>Job Placement in MCS</b>		
# principals hired from first class of fellows	12	6 <sup>d</sup>
MCS principal interview guaranteed	No	Yes
MCS job placement guaranteed	No	No
<b>Program Costs</b>		
Total cost per participant	\$15,000	\$100,000
Incremental cost to MCS per participant	\$12,000	\$60,000 plus benefits

Sources: Casewriter created with information from Memphis Leadership Fellows Program, New Leaders for New Schools, and Memphis City Schools.

<sup>a</sup> The University of Memphis contracted with MCS on a yearly basis to operate MLFP, giving MCS the option to end the program at the end of each year. The program was designed to last for at least five years.

<sup>b</sup> The current contract includes an option to extend the program for a fourth year to develop 30 more principals.

<sup>c</sup> The average MCS assistant principal salaries are \$64,511 for elementary schools and \$66,163 for secondary schools.

<sup>d</sup> At the end of the case no NLNS fellows had yet been hired, but follow-up with the Memphis City Schools provided the updated information that they later hired 6 of the 9 fellows as principals. One became an assistant principal, two left MCS.

**Exhibit 8** Memphis Leadership Fellows Program—Selection Evaluation Indicators

Letter of Application (Weight 1 Point)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Expressed an in-depth level of interest in becoming an urban school leader</li> <li>• Expressed a desire to improve the human condition</li> <li>• Exhibited growth through professional development activities</li> <li>• Expressed a desire to foster learning opportunities for all children</li> <li>• Identified how participating in the Fellows program would strengthen his/her leadership ability</li> </ul>
Resume (Weight 5 Points)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Indicated three-five years of leadership experience in a variety of areas, indicating depth of experience</li> <li>• Demonstrated successful teaching experience and an understanding of global school issues</li> <li>• Provided evidence of effectively leading major schoolwide projects</li> <li>• Illustrated experience in using research to bring about change and making data-driven decisions</li> </ul>
Essay (Weight 5 Points)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Demonstrated excellent written communication skills</li> <li>• Demonstrated knowledge of at least three research-based instructional strategies</li> <li>• Described a method of influencing meaningful change in schools</li> <li>• Evidenced a belief that all children can learn</li> <li>• Described the use of a collaborative approach in addressing student needs</li> <li>• Demonstrated a willingness to assume responsibility for student learning</li> </ul>
Letter of Nomination (Weight 10 Points)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Noted specific leadership skills and contributions</li> <li>• Provided evidence of solid interpersonal relationships with various role groups</li> <li>• Identified specific projects led</li> <li>• Provided examples of the nominee’s knowledge and understanding about research and change</li> <li>• Referred to nominee’s success in at least three of the following areas: completion of instructional projects; collaboration; visionary leadership; professional development; inquiry; ethical behavior; and reflection</li> </ul>
Interview (Weight 10 Points)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Communicated a vision of urban leadership</li> <li>• Expressed a willingness to empower all stakeholders</li> <li>• Expressed the importance of the leader’s understanding school culture</li> <li>• Demonstrated potential for visionary leadership, knowledge of school and classroom policies, and methods for improving student achievement</li> <li>• Demonstrated personal presence</li> <li>• Demonstrated effective oral communication skills; statements were clear, focused, and conveyed a strong belief system</li> </ul>
Situational Activities (Weight 5 Points)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Presented ideas in a clear manner</li> <li>• Expressed a willingness to take risks</li> <li>• Demonstrated the ability to analyze problems</li> </ul>
Letter of Recommendation (Weight 5 Points)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Noted specific leadership skills and contributions</li> <li>• Provided evidence of solid interpersonal relations with various role groups</li> <li>• Identified specific projects led</li> <li>• Provided examples of the nominee’s knowledge and understanding about research and change</li> </ul>
Leadership Inventory (Weight 5 Points)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Demonstrated evidence of practical knowledge of leadership practice</li> <li>• Exhibited a belief that all children can learn</li> </ul>

Source: Memphis Leadership Fellows Program.

### Exhibit 9 New Leaders for New Schools—Selection Criteria

1. *Belief in the Potential of All Children to Excel Academically*
  - Believe each and every child can excel academically
  - Take personal responsibility for ensuring high academic achievement for every child
  - Demonstrate the personal drive and commitment to eliminate the disparity of educational quality that exists
2. *Commitment to Ongoing Learning*
  - Seek feedback and reflect on experiences to grow and develop
  - Demonstrate humility and willingness to continually improve
  - Commit to the coaching and the development of adults
3. *Communication and Listening*
  - Possess written and verbal skills to communicate with clarity, conciseness, and appropriateness to multiple audiences
  - Demonstrate poise and professionalism in diverse situations
  - Listen actively
4. *Interpersonal Skills*
  - Build successful one-on-one relationships
  - Value each person’s perspective and treat people with respect
  - Relate to adults and children: understand where they are coming from, what they need, and how to meet their needs
  - Diffuse anger and find common ground to move people towards solutions
  - Exhibit confidence and competence under pressure
5. *Knowledge of Teaching and Learning*
  - Identify exemplary teaching
  - Provide feedback and guidance to improve instructional strategies
  - Enable students to attain results despite significant challenges
6. *Problem Solving*
  - Work proactively to solve problems and reach effective solutions
  - Analyze and diagnose complex issues to develop strategic plan
  - Identify concrete outcomes as a way to evaluate results
7. *Project Management to Deliver Results*
  - Articulate a clear vision, set agenda, and implement goals
  - Select, prioritize, and communicate strategies effectively to reach goals
  - Balance day-to-day tasks and urgent needs with progress towards goals
  - Delegate decision-making and authority in responsible manner
8. *Self-Awareness*
  - Identify accurately personal strengths and areas for development
  - Demonstrate integrity by acting in a manner that consistently reflects stated values and beliefs
  - Understand how you are perceived by and impact others
9. *Team Building*
  - Collaborate effectively
  - Read group dynamics accurately
  - Mobilize adults to take action and hold them accountable for reaching common goals
  - Engage and empower others to take responsibility in decision-making to achieve results
10. *Unyielding Focus on Goals and Results*
  - Confront difficult situations head-on and implement diverse solutions to get results
  - Achieve results despite obstacles by demonstrating persistence, determination, and relentless drive
  - Exhibit resilience to persevere and overcome setbacks
  - Take personal responsibility for finding solutions when faced with challenges
  - Be decisive and hold people to core values when it counts

Source: New Leaders for New Schools.

## Exhibit 10 New Leaders for New Schools Program Content

Foundations is the year-long, academic core of the New Leaders for New Schools program. Designed to equip Residents with a comprehensive toolkit of knowledge and skills necessary to successfully lead and manage an urban public school, Foundations is best described as intense and inspirational. Foundations has two components: a six-week summer Foundations Institute and four five-day Foundations Seminars scheduled throughout the school year. (Residents who are developing new schools also attend a five-day New School Start-up Workshop.) Courses are taught by leading academics, thought leaders, experts, and master principals from around the country. They are case- and problem-based, using interactive pedagogy as much as possible and focusing on the acquisition of problem-solving skills and application of best practices.

### *Foundations Curriculum*

Our curriculum is organized into four strands, while incorporating the common themes that impact urban school leadership: parent involvement, diversity, education policy and reform.

**Transformational Leadership** addresses the essence of leadership – the skills, insights, perspectives, personal voice and authority, and change management strategies necessary to lead a school that has high expectations for every child.

**Instructional Leadership** addresses high-quality instruction, thoughtful alignment of curriculum, standards, and assessment, effective use of data to drive student achievement, and high-functioning teacher teams.

**Operational Leadership** addresses building and organizational management that supports high student achievement and a positive school culture.

**Local situation/job context** addresses the local knowledge, networks, and skills a successful principal needs to support a high-quality school.

### *Residency year*

**Principal Leadership Competencies (PLCs):** Residents will demonstrate proficiency in the PLCs, the critical skills of successful principals as identified by New Leaders for New Schools.

**Leadership Coaches & Weekly Meetings:** Through direct coaching, support, and instruction on coursework and day-to-day challenges faced at Residency sites, Leadership Coaches help Residents to gain the PLCs. Coaches also lead the weekly meetings, a time for Residents to learn, reflect, problem-solve, develop skills, and support one another.

**Mentor Principals & Residency Placements:** Residents are in a formal mentor relationship with a highly-skilled, successful urban public school principal who shares our core beliefs, believes in our model, and is willing to train and empower aspiring leaders. If you know someone who would make a great Mentor Principal, please contact us.

**Residency Project & Portfolio:** Residents complete several major projects, based on their own development needs and the goals of the Residency schools. One project focuses on working with teacher teams to improve student achievement, while another focuses on the observation and supervision of instruction. In addition, each Resident compiles a portfolio of evidence that documents their fulfillment of the PLCs and serves as a resource for their future principalship.

Source: New Leaders for New Schools internal documents.