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CONTACT:

Frederick M. Hess (202) 828-6031

NEW PRINCIPALS UNPREPARED FOR RIGORS OF SCHOOL MANAGEMENT
Education Next analyzes principal-preparation programs

STANFORD, Calif.--(BUSINESS WIRE)--May 4, 2005--America's principals, asked to do more than ever before, are not being taught the skills and knowledge essential to 21st-century school leadership.

A new study published in the summer issue of Hoover Institution's *Education Next* finds little evidence that principal-preparation programs are introducing students to a broad range of management, organizational, or administrative theory and practice.

"Education leadership lies at the intersection of two vibrant and powerful bodies of learning and thought -- education and management," American Enterprise Institute's Frederick M. Hess, one of the authors of the study, said. "Yet these programs are leaving some of the most important management thinkers off their reading lists."

In the required readings, aspiring principals were exposed to only a narrow range of thought and rarely encountered serious discussion of productivity, efficiency, or "tough-minded" management. Notably missing were books from leading thinkers in the broader world of public or private sector management; well represented were the writings of professors of education administration.

The lack of attention to serious thinking on management or to topics like research, accountability, or termination suggests an emphasis on preparing candidates for the traditional pinched world of leadership, Hess and study coauthor Andrew P. Kelly suggest -- and a failure to teach the array of skills needed to lead effective schools.

Hess and Kelly analyzed what is being taught in a stratified national sample of 31 principal-preparation programs. Reviewing more than 200 course syllabi that covered almost 2,500 total course weeks, the researchers found a critical lack of emphasis on results-oriented management or accountability, a worrisome sign for districts expecting principals to lead improvement in the era of No Child Left Behind. They also found limited attention to effective practices in hiring, identifying, and rewarding or firing personnel.

Hess and Kelly's research showed that only 16 percent of the course weeks were devoted to management focused on results. A mere 2 percent of all instruction was devoted to using accountability as a management tool.

Fifteen percent of the course weeks addressed the topic of personnel management in some fashion, but barely 3 percent of total instruction addressed hiring, identifying, and rewarding good employees or identifying and removing ineffective ones.

Surprisingly, in this era of "scientifically based research," just 11 percent of all course weeks studied alluded to data or research.

"We need to change the way we are thinking about training our school leaders," Hess said. "Principals need to be given the kind of tools that will enable them to successfully manage 21st-century schools -- that means making meaningful reforms to current principal-preparation programs."

"The Accidental Principal" can be read in its entirety in the summer (May 2005) issue of *Education Next* online at <http://www.educationnext.org>.

Frederick M. Hess is director of education policy studies and a resident scholar at the American Enterprise Institute (AEI). Andrew P. Kelly is an education policy researcher at AEI.

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Contact:

Hoover Institution, Stanford
Caleb Offley, 518-573-9175
www.hoover.org