HOT TOPICS

School Administrator Shortage?

With passage of the No Child Left Behind Act of 2001, the importance of strong school leadership in the education reform movement became increasingly significant. But just when states are relying more on school administrators to help meet their new accountability requirements, some policymakers are concerned that schools and districts are finding it difficult to attract and retain qualified school administrators to do the job well. A new RAND study, titled Who Is Leading our Schools? An Overview of School Administrators and Their Careers, reviewed and analyzed existing data on school administrator careers and the factors influencing decisions to enter these careers. The authors found that there is little evidence of a nationwide crisis in the market for certified school administrators but did identify three primary areas of concern: state and local variation in career incentives, barriers to entry into the field, and the number of administrators nearing retirement.

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Mental Health Services at Substance Abuse Treatment Programs

Adolescents entering substance abuse treatment programs often suffer from mental or physical health problems in addition to substance use disorders. A new RAND study, funded by the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA), suggests that whereas care for physical health disorders is commonly available to youths receiving substance abuse treatment, provision of mental health services may be inadequate. This study, which is the first of its kind to examine service use in such a large and diverse sample of adolescents, examines the medical and mental health services received by adolescents at seven substance abuse treatment centers across the country, four outpatient and three residential programs.

Though entry into a substance abuse treatment program might be expected to either provide or facilitate mental health treatment for such problems, 64% of adolescents reported severe mental health problems three months after admission for treatment. The rate of mental health care was low, with only 33% of those reporting severe problems receiving any mental health services in the time since admission. The authors consider this a missed opportunity to provide mental health services for adolescents in many substance abuse treatment programs.

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Racial and Ethnic Differences in Smoking

Prior studies that have examined racial and ethnic differences in smoking have not fully explained why African American and Asian young people exhibit lower rates of smoking than Whites and Hispanics. Such studies have generally been intraethnic, which limits the ability to make sound conclusions about differences across various racial and ethnic groups. Those that compare several groups have frequently focused on bonds with family, school, or religious institutions to explain why some groups are less likely to smoke than others.

A RAND study on the subject takes a more comprehensive approach by following youth into adulthood and adding variables from an adolescent’s environment as a factor in smoking habits. The additional variables account for influence from peers, parents, and other people who smoke or approve of doing so. With these variables, the RAND research builds on previous work to develop a more complete explanation and concludes that prior exposure to pro-smoking social influences, particularly parents who approve of smoking and siblings or friends who smoke, fully accounts for the lower rates of African American and Asian young adults.

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FORTHCOMING REPORTS

Children’s Readiness for School

While recent national and local efforts have increased the focus on children’s readiness for school, few studies have actually examined school readiness so far. To address this gap, the investigators of the Los Angeles Family and Neighborhood Survey (L.A. FANS) will soon release the results of a study on Los Angeles County children’s school readiness, including children’s early literacy experiences, their emotional well-being, and their language and mathematical skills.

PROJECTS UNDER WAY

The Impact of Teachers on the Cognitive Development of Young Children

Although recent research suggests that individual teachers have large effects on student achievement, little is known about the particular factors that make some teachers more effective than others. This study will investigate the relationship between teacher characteristics and practices and the cognitive development of young children, using data from the Early Childhood Longitudinal Study, a large nationally representative sample of kindergartners.