AMERICAN ASSOCIATION OF COLLEGES FOR TEACHER EDUCATION
REJECTS CALL FOR ELIMINATING ED.D DEGREE FOR SCHOOL LEADERS

Statement of AACTE President & CEO David G. Imig

“Arthur Levine’s usual careful and insightful analysis of American higher education is missing from Educating School Leaders, the first of a series of papers issued by The Education Schools Project. Levine, the President of Teachers’ College, Columbia University, is highly respected for his provocative and controversial pieces on American higher education. He has repeatedly issued reports insisting that colleges and universities need to anticipate and respond to market forces and conduct programs in the current highly competitive climate.

“Yet, in this 87-page report, he deplores the hundreds of education schools that have responded to these forces and created practical, practitioner-oriented programs. What can be intuited from the report is that competition, marketing, and an emphasis upon practicality and local need are not the answer to refashioning school leadership preparation. We think otherwise. Let competition and the free market work; help local school districts and school boards raise their expectations and standards, and higher education based preparation programs will respond.

“Despite state controls over all school leadership preparation (in the form of state criteria for licensure of graduates and the approval of programs conducted by colleges and universities), Levine says that everything about higher education-based school leadership is wrong. His argument is for more state controls and we argue for greater deregulation and greater emphasis on market forces and catering to the aspirations and ambitions of local teachers. He says they are low quality; we argue that they are responsive to the needs of local schools.

“The solution to the problem, Levine insists, is greater public, professional and state interest in school leadership. We applaud his appeal for greater interest in school leader preparation but insist that greater state regulation is not the answer. We hope that this report creates a demand by local school systems and school boards for better-prepared principals and superintendents. Levine hints at the need to change the hiring priorities and expectations of local school systems but then focuses his attention on college degrees and certificates. His answer is to tinker with the Masters Degree in Educational Leadership and to eliminate the Doctorate of Education. His appeal is for the profession to exert greater leadership in setting standards and (calls for greater reliance on National Council for the Accreditation of Teacher Education accreditation standards and Interstate School Leaders Licensure Consortium ISLLC criteria) but fails to spend enough time analyzing why local school boards and local school administrators hire the people they do. Absent such analysis, we believe this study is flawed. Drive up the expectations for school principals and superintendents at the district or building level, we insist, and education schools will respond.

“Just as the Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching is launching a major effort to
recast the Doctorate in Education, Levine suggests that the Ed.D. degree be eliminated. Rather than offering a way to strengthen teaching and learning by making a post-baccalaureate degree in a teaching field a prerequisite for school leadership preparation, Levine calls for creating an alternative: a new Masters Degree in Educational Leadership. We reject this approach and call, instead, for strengthening current degree programs and a major effort to recast and strengthen the Education Doctorate. We call for strengthening the Ed.D. degree (as a practitioner or clinically focused preparation program paralleling similar levels of preparation in other fields) and applaud the initiative of Carnegie and the 12 institutions that have embarked upon that effort. We are working with the Interstate Leadership and Licensure Consortium and the NCATE to build better programs that meet the needs of America’s schools. We are betting that they will be even better when local school systems set higher expectations for hiring principals and institutions are given the opportunity to respond. AACTE insists that this option should not be given away in the rush to judgment that this report may generate.

“Levine offers nine criteria to judge school leadership programs but cites just two of nearly 600 school administration preparation programs that seem to meet most of those criteria (Peabody at Vanderbilt and Harvard’s Graduate School of Education). The Teachers College president appeals to a British model for school leadership (recently created in the absence of such preparation programs in Britain) but leaves the policy community without a helpful set of policy proposals and recommendations. In the rush to judgment about education leadership preparation programs, Levine offers too little in the way of direction and recommendation.”

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