



New report highlights steps to improve public education *Foundation focuses on the role of principals in urban schools*

NORWALK, April 21, 2010 – By 2012, more than half the principals in the Bridgeport, Danbury, Norwalk and Stamford school systems are expected to retire.

Unfortunately, there are few qualified, dedicated school leaders waiting to step into their shoes. While teachers greatly influence a child's academic success, a principal is the strongest force for influencing the success or failure of an entire school.

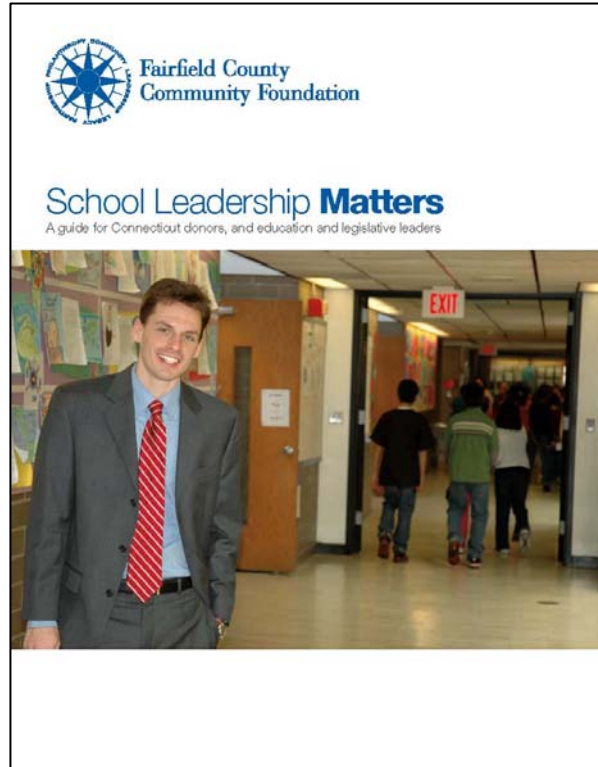
At stake, the education and future of 60,000 students in 92 local urban schools which consistently have one of the widest achievement gaps in the nation between poor students and their wealthier peers.

In a new report, *School Leadership Matters*, the Fairfield County Community Foundation proposes increased development and training of school principals to reverse the achievement gap and improve the county's urban schools. The full report can be found online at www.fccfoundation.org.

In 2007, the Foundation developed the Urban School Leaders Fellowship to address the looming leadership crisis. The program, an initiative of the Foundation's Fund for Academic Excellence, identified, recruited and trained 67 potential school principals to take the helm of a local urban school and steer it toward success.

"While the Fellowship has successfully prepared future school leaders, private philanthropy is not the solution to solving this growing problem," said Susan Ross, President and CEO of the Fairfield County Community Foundation. "It takes years to recruit qualified principals to lead urban schools. Unfortunately, Connecticut does not have alternative certification programs for principals, limiting the number of new school leaders who are trained for these critically important positions."

The report identifies steps which can be taken by citizens, local school districts, colleges and universities, the philanthropic community and the state government to ensure quality leadership for urban schools.
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Among the recommendations are:

- 1) Support H.B. 5421, currently being consider by the Education Committee in the General Assembly, which would enable alternative routes to certification and increase the number of qualified school leaders.
- 2) Sponsor more programs to identify, train, motivate and support emerging school leaders within the urban districts.
- 3) Improve incentives for principals to work in urban districts by decreasing administrative responsibilities and providing the autonomy they need to affect change in their schools in exchange for greater accountability.
- 4) Support the Foundation's Fund for Academic Excellence to continue programs which strengthen public education throughout the county.

“Passage of H.B. 5421 is the most critical and urgent of these steps,” said Ms. Ross. “With this legislation, Connecticut can dramatically increase the number of school leaders trained to address the achievement gap.”

More information on H.B. 5421 and ways to take action can be found at www.conncan.org.

The Fairfield County Community Foundation promotes the growth of community and regional philanthropy to improve the quality of life throughout Fairfield County. Individuals, families, corporations and organizations can establish their own charitable funds or contribute to existing funds focused on specific areas of need or communities in Fairfield County. The Foundation also provides philanthropic advisory services, and develops and leads initiatives to tackle critical community issues. It is in compliance with the Council on Foundations' national standards for community foundations. The Foundation has awarded over \$110 million in grants to nonprofits in Fairfield County and beyond. For more information, visit www.fccfoundation.org.

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