


2004

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Theodore J. Kowalski

University of Dayton, tkowalski1@udayton.edu

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Kowalski, Theodore J., "The Ongoing War for the Soul of School Administration" (2004). *Educational Leadership Faculty Publications*. Paper 12.

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The Ongoing War for the Soul of School Administration

Theodore J. Kowalski, Ph.D.

*Professor and the Kuntz Family Endowed Chair in Educational Administration,
University of Dayton*

Citation: Kowalski, T. J. (2004). The ongoing war for the soul of school administration. In T. J. Lasley (Ed.), *Better leaders for America's schools: Perspectives on the Manifesto* (pp. 92-114). Columbia, MO: University Council for Educational Administration.

For many school administration professors, *Better Leaders for America's Schools: A Manifesto*, published by the Broad Foundation and Thomas B. Fordham Institute (2003) is a declaration of war. More accurately, it is part of a recent escalation in a long-term battle waged by forces committed to making school administrators domesticated government employees. This conflict's initial hostilities occurred nearly 100 years ago when captains of industry, troubled by the course of public education, used their political influence to redefine superintendents as organizational managers (Callahan, 1962). This war for the soul of school administration has and continues to be centered on intractable conflict concerning tensions between democracy and professionalism in school governance—a fundamental disagreement that dates back to the formative years of public education (Spring, 2001).

Currently, three special-interest groups, each driven by different values and beliefs, are engaged in this war. The first group, referred to here as the *anti-professionists*, consists primarily of persons not readily identified with school administration; they are corporate executives, current or former political officeholders, foundation officials, and would-be school reformers. They seek to deregulate the practice of school administration, an action that would eliminate preparation and licensing requirements and thus allow local school boards to determine independently the appropriate credentials of superintendents and principals.

The second group, referred to here as the *status quo professionists*, is composed almost entirely of education practitioners and professors unified by the belief that school administration is a legitimate but grossly mistreated profession. These forces rarely commit acts of aggression but their passivity and defensive postures unquestionably influence the war's course. Members

are resigned to living with a standing arrangement that permits them to claim professionalism even though they are denied the most basic and fundamental trappings of a profession. Although this group is not discussed in detail here, its contributions to the war are noteworthy with respect to understanding the political climate in which deregulation is being pursued.

The last group, referred to here as the *reform professionalists*, is also composed primarily of education professors and practitioners unified by a belief that school administration is a quasi-profession in need of becoming a full profession. They encourage substantial reforms in administrator preparation, program accreditation, and state licensing standards. Viewing professionalism and democracy as equally important to reforming public education, they argue that deregulation will make local school systems even more vulnerable to political manipulation than they are now.

In this paper, I first examine two issues highly meaningful to the ongoing war: tensions between democracy and professionalism and the development of professions in this country. Then I critique two similar but separately published deregulation proposals: the *Manifesto* previously mentioned and *A License to Lead? A New Leadership Agenda for America's Schools*. The former has no identifiable authors and the latter was written by Frederick Hess (2003). My disagreements with these publications are organized around four recurring anti-professionist assertions: (a) there is a shortage of qualified administrators; (b) persons who have mastered generic management skills can be effective school administrators; (c) strengthening requirements (i.e., reforming preparation and licensing standards) will not improve the condition of school administration; (d) non-traditional administrators already have proven they can be highly successful. Last, I share my thoughts about the possible outcomes of the ongoing war.

Historical Context

Public education's governance structure was established when the Constitution and its amendments decreed that this social service was a state responsibility (Sergiovanni, Burlingame, Coombs, & Thurston, 1999). Guided primarily by the values of liberty and equality, states

delegated much of the responsibility for this social service to local community officials. Although public schools were established as early as 1640, the office of superintendent was not created until the mid-1800s (Griffiths, 1966). Between 1837 and 1850, 13 urban districts established the position; by 1890, most major cities had done the same. The trend toward appointing an educator to this office, however, was not uniformly supported. Many political bosses feared superintendents would establish their own power base and then defiantly stand apart from the entangled mechanisms of big-city government. Ambivalence toward the position and the potential threats it posed to political elites were evidenced by the fact that several cities disestablished and then re-established it (Knezevich, 1984).

During the late 19th century, conflict between democracy and professionalism mounted. Many local school boards hired superintendents reluctantly and resisted yielding power to them over finances and personnel functions such as teacher employment (Carter & Cunningham, 1997). Political elites were especially wary of administrators who attempted to present themselves as professionals (Kowalski, Björk, & Otto, 2004). Yet, complaints about the misuse of funds, poor facility management, and the employment of unfit teachers had become increasingly common. Bothered by the fact that big-city school boards were abusing their power, Andrew Draper, president of the University of Illinois and later commissioner of education in New York, issued a report in 1895 urging school boards to delegate to superintendents the authority to employ teachers, supervise instruction, and manage finances (Callahan, 1962). The document was immediately attacked, not on the grounds that its content was inaccurate, but rather because Draper's suggestions were viewed as being injurious to the principle of local control. William George Bruce, then editor of the *American School Board Journal* and one of Draper's harshest critics; used his publication as a political platform to denounce the report (Callahan, 1964). This incident demonstrates that tensions between professionalism and democracy existed from the very inception of school administration.

Although administrators typically have been socialized to treat politics as antithetical to professional behavior (Kowalski, 1999; Malen, 1995), they recognize that their work occurs in highly political contexts (Björk & Keedy, 2001; Kowalski, 1995; Rowan & Miskel, 1999). In this vein, school administrators simultaneously face the public's demand that they be accountable to the community and the organizational demand that they provide expert knowledge to make critical decisions (Shedd & Bacharach, 1991). Many authors (e.g., Bauch & Goldring, 1998; Darling-Hammond, 1987; Strike, 1993) have discussed the dynamics associated with this inherent conflict between participatory democracy and pedagogic professionalism, including relevance to modern-day reforms (e.g., Sykes, 1991; Zeichner, 1991). These tensions focus most directly on power and authority:

Democracy institutionalizes distrust. Professionalism relies on trust. Because we distrust our rulers, we have instituted a system of checks and balances to prevent any interest of office from amassing too much power. Because certain practices rest on expertise and knowledge not widely distributed in the populace, we trust professionals on their pledge to use such knowledge in the best interests of their clients. These two systems of preference formation, service delivery, and authority allocation appear fundamentally at odds with one another, and the great historical puzzle is how a strong form of professionalism flourished just in the world's greatest democracy. (Sykes, 1991, p. 137)

In democratic societies, intractable differences between meta-values rarely get resolved because compromise is accepted as a satisfactory alternative. Consider, for instance, disputes over state funding formulas for public education. The authority of school boards to set local property taxes, an expression of liberty, and the state's responsibility to provide reasonably equal educational opportunities, an expression of equality, are fundamentally incongruous. Adjudicating lawsuits in which plaintiffs from low-wealth school districts have sought more equitable state formulas, judges have refused to rule that one value trumps the other. Instead, they have found that some degree of inequality is legally acceptable in order to preserve liberty (King, Swanson, & Sweetland, 2003; Verstegen, 1990). Even so, outcomes of finance litigation across

the states have not been uniform with respect to the degree that each value has been emphasized (Reed, 2001; Theobald & Malen, 2000).

Similar accommodations have been fashioned to ameliorate tensions between democracy and professionalism, with the degree of authority and trust granted by society varying from profession to profession. In the case of school administration, practitioners have been allowed to claim professionalism but they have been granted relatively little trust and freedom away from their immediate workplace. Recent reform initiatives empowering parents and other citizens have reduced the autonomy of educators even more (Bauch & Goldring, 1998). Within this context, deregulation would tip the scales decidedly toward politics and disrupt an essential equilibrium between democracy and professionalism.

Examining the historical roots of medicine and law, Connelly and Rosenberg (2003) discovered that these occupations had to overcome suspicions and political interventions before becoming established professions. In both, internal reform, initiated and sustained under the umbrella of a unified national organization, preceded political action necessary to promulgate laws favorable to professionalism. The history of the medical profession provides a relevant example for school administration.

Circa 1830, many states amended licensing laws for physicians making a diploma from a medical school equivalent to a license to practice. This form of deregulation created an entrepreneurial environment in which many students of limited ability or academic interest paid high tuition costs to get degrees from sham institutions. America soon had a glut of physicians, many unqualified to perform services entrusted to them. Even worse, some who had received diplomas were actually illiterate. The negative effects of states relinquishing their authority over licensing physicians were still apparent nearly a century later. In 1914, for example, fewer than 60% of Wisconsin's 2,800 medical practitioners earned enough to pay income taxes (Numbers, 1988).

Circa 1900, astute observers recognized that the medical profession had been damaged severely by (a) an inability to separate legitimate preparation programs from shoddy entrepreneurial programs, (b) the absence of defining criteria that could be used to separate qualified and unqualified practitioners, and (c) a legal environment that allowed fads and unproven therapies to coexist with those grounded in science, theory, and research (Connelly & Rosenberg, 2003). Although this problem was nested in politics, it was resolved through internal reforms. Most notably, the American Medical Association assumed an aggressive posture and established standards for accrediting medical schools. Thereafter, Abraham Flexner, ironically a school principal from Louisville and not a physician, wrote the book, *Medical Education in the United States and Canada*. His treatise, published in 1910, and commonly referred to as the *Flexner Report*, called for a medical school curriculum composed of strong biomedical sciences and hands-on clinical training (Numbers, 1988). Once the medical profession convinced policymakers that a relevant national curriculum for preparing physicians had been formulated and that rigorous standards for accrediting medical schools had been adopted, state control over licensing was reinstated. Quickly thereafter, ineffective preparation programs closed, the number of licensed physicians declined dramatically, and the quality of medical practice increased considerably.

The legal profession has a similar history. After the American Bar Association established standards for law school accreditation, many states abandoned open-door policies allowing individuals with minimal credentials to practice law. In the aftermath of these reforms, law schools have been permitted to control their curricula but states have retained control of licensing. Regulating the standard for passing the bar exam allows states to determine how many attorneys are admitted to practice in a given year (Connelly & Rosenberg, 2003). In both medicine and law, elitism was an important factor with respect to the public's acceptance of professionalism. Put another way, society viewed professional birth control, accomplished through program

accreditation and state licensing, as evidence of rigor; autonomy and trust were then awarded in relation to the perceived difficulty of entering a profession.

The evolution of medicine and law helps us to understand why educators have been relegated to the status of quasi-professionals. Unlike these two respected professions, school administration lacks a unified national association enrolling both practitioners and professors, a common practice-based curriculum used across preparation programs, rigorous standards for accrediting preparation programs, and national standards to guide state licensing. These shortcomings assume added importance in the present turbulent environment in which policymakers are being asked to determine the fate of school administration. Likewise, they provide a context for grasping the political and philosophical dispositions that divide the combatants in the ongoing war. The status quo professionalists, for instance, are threatened by the present turmoil but not to the extent that they are willing to relinquish their opposition to reforms. While opposing deregulation, they patiently and anxiously hope that policymakers will leave things as they are. The anti-professionists and reform professionalists, by comparison, view political tumult as an opportunity to win the war. For the anti-professionists, victory requires total deregulation; for the reform professionalists, victory requires removing the deficiencies that thwart professionalism.

Critiquing the Anti-Professionalist Agenda

Logically, deregulation of a profession is prudent when there is no discernible need for the state to protect the public from practitioners. That is, such policy is justified if the knowledge base for the position is found to be fraudulent or irrelevant (Kowalski, Björk, & Otto, 2004). The Manifesto and A License to Lead? are characterized by four recurring topics suggesting that current preparation and licensing requirements are immaterial and responsible for a critical shortage of qualified practitioners. Each theme is critiqued.

Alleged Shortage of Qualified Administrators

Deregulating a controlled occupation becomes more probable when policymakers believe that a critical labor shortage threatens society's interests (Kowalski & Sweetland, 2002;

Sweetland & Kowalski, 2004). This assertion predictably is highlighted in the early portions of both deregulation documents. The *Manifesto* quotes the executive director of the National Association of Elementary School Principals who laments a shortage of “qualified” principals (p. 16). Hess quotes the executive director of the American Association of School Administrators (AASA) who laments a shortage of “good” superintendent candidates (p. 1). According to the *Manifesto*, the core issue in the labor shortage problem “is not one of quantity: Most states have plenty of people licensed as school administrators, often more than they have positions to fill. The urgent problem is quality” (p. 16). Despite the fact that the anti-professionists frame the supply problem qualitatively, they never define critical adjectives such as “good,” “qualified,” and “successful.”

The reform-professionists have a different perspective of the alleged labor shortage. They admit that programs of dubious quality produce under-qualified candidates but they do not concede that this unfortunate circumstance produces a shortage of qualified administrators. In a recent article published in the *Journal of School Leadership* (Kowalski, 2003b), I addressed this issue as it pertains to superintendents. After evaluating evidence using economist definitions, I concluded that claims of a serious shortage of qualified practitioners were invalid. Although declines in the number of superintendent applicants have been documented (e.g., Glass, 2001; O’Connell, 2000), the size of applicant pools remains relatively large. As an example, a recent study asked national consultants to identify the average size of superintendent applicant pools for searches conducted by them. None reported average pools of less than 10; only 21% reported that the average was between 10 and 20 and 53% reported it was over 30 (Glass, 2001). Clearly, some school districts experience difficulty attracting qualified applicants but they typically are placed at a disadvantage because of poor working conditions, low salaries, and a lack of local community support.

In truth, the supply of teachers and administrators usually has exceeded demand considerably (Bliss, 1988). Although the causes of this condition are debatable, the economic

effect is quite clear. Large applicant pools have permitted school boards to determine employee salaries politically—that is, on the basis of community sentiments. As applicant pools dwindle, market conditions are more apt to influence salaries. The easiest and least expensive way to prevent this from happening is to discontinue professional preparation and licensing as means of sustaining large applicant pools.

Alleged Nature of School Administration as Generic Management

Calls for deregulation also are predicated on the conviction that generic management skills, regardless of the context in which they were acquired or previously applied, are easily transferable to districts and schools. In an effort to gain public acceptance of this dubious claim, the anti-professionists attempt to (a) disassociate teaching from school administration, (b) declare professional preparation and licensing unessential, and (c) disavow the contention that there are real differences between managing a business and administering a school. Hess (2003), for example, rejects the notion that principals must have been teachers to monitor classrooms by suggesting that this requirement “may have been plausible when we did not collect outcome data on teachers, and administrators had little capacity to judge teacher effectiveness except by observing the occasional class and monitoring parental complaints” (p. 8). He adds that today “we have a wealth of data on achievement, and entrepreneurial managers are finding ways to gather more data on more facets of teacher performance” (p. 8). Unfortunately, he did not disclose the nature of these data or the facets of teacher performance to which he was referring. Even so, this perspective of a principal-teacher relationship narrowly focuses on summative evaluation. In our best and most effective schools, principals have been transformational leaders devoting much of their energy to improving teacher performance.

Authors of the *Manifesto* attack the traditional requirement of teaching experience by proclaiming that management qualifications are more important than education credentials. For a principal, their list of qualifications includes a bachelor’s degree (presumably in any field), a careful background check, and passing a test on basic laws and regulations pertinent to a

principal's job. For a superintendent, they include only a college education and a careful background check. In this and several other ways, the *Manifesto* makes sharp bureaucratic distinctions between superintendents and principals. For example, the authors wrote: "If superintendents are education's field marshals, principals are its front-line officers" (Broad Foundation & Thomas B. Fordham Institute, 2003, p. 29). Perhaps the managers from outside the profession who want to be field marshals would be offended if they had to take a test on basic laws and regulations pertinent to administering a school district. If the generic management concept espoused in the *Manifesto* were extended to the armed services, corporate CEOs and school superintendents could become generals without prior military service. Thankfully, members of Congress have not fallen victim to this peculiar management philosophy.

Hess (2003) also discredits the idea that administration in public education is unique. He refers, for example, to Sergiovanni's distinction between corporate models of leadership and leadership in the schoolhouse, as a "simple-minded dichotomy" (p. 4). What message should we glean from this dismissive attitude? Are teachers no different from assembly line workers? Is constructing a computer no different than nurturing the intellectual, social, and emotional growth of children? Are factories the same as schools?

Prominent scholars (e.g., Bennis & Nanus, 1985; Burns, 1978) identify management and leadership as separate functions. To Hess's credit, he acknowledges this fact but then unfortunately fails to treat each function as essential to school administration. He wrote, "some schools or districts need managers, some need leaders, and because it is difficult to draw hard and fast distinctions between these, the sensible course is to opt for flexibility whenever possible" (2003, p. 4). The ambiguity of this statement aside, contemporary conditions require school administrators to perform both functions effectively (Kowalski, 2003a).

As noted previously, the contention that school administration is nothing more than a generic management occupation is not new. From approximately 1910 to 1930, this myopic idea was advanced by captains of industry and the politicians they controlled to ensure their dominance

over public education policy. Raymond Callahan (1962) chronicled these dark days and the problems created by the anti-professionists of that era in his book, *Education and the Cult of Efficiency*. The evidence presented clearly shows that their actions and the actions of the education dupes they manipulated resulted in a tragedy. Callahan identified these four destructive byproducts:

1. Educational questions were subordinated to business considerations.
2. Administrators were produced who were not, in any true sense, educators.
3. A scientific label was put on some very unscientific and dubious methods and practices.
4. An anti-intellectual climate, already prevalent, was strengthened. (p. 246)

He then concluded, “The whole development produced men who did not understand education or scholarship. Thus they could and did approach education in a businesslike, mechanical, organizational way” (p. 247).

Other writers, such as John Walton (1969), also warned that accepting the idea that management skills were interchangeable across institutions would likely remove administrators from the most critical functions in a school. Much more recently, Jim Collins (2004), author of the best selling book, *Good to Great*, repeated these caveats. Speaking about the need to improve our nation’s schools, he cautioned that trying to achieve meaningful reform by running them more like a business is clearly the wrong answer.

Disappointingly, present day anti-professionists, much like their forefathers, appear to view the purpose of public education and the role of school administration narrowly—dispositions nurtured by a proclivity to view public education solely through political and economic lenses. By resurrecting the imprudent idea that “management is management,” they demonstrate either that they are unaware of the history of public education or that they are unaffected by its moral lessons.

Alleged Futility of Pursuing Preparation and Licensing Reform

Central to the anti-professionist quest for deregulation is the assertion that reform is not a plausible alternative to improving practice in school administration. Authors of the *Manifesto* wrote, “tightening requirements will not improve the situation” (Broad Foundation & Thomas B. Fordham Institute, 2003, p. 13). In support of this idea, they attack a core belief of the reform-professionist agenda—school administration should complement teaching. Hess (2003), for example, provides a lengthy argument as to why holding a teaching license and having teaching experience are unessential, even for school principals. Presumably recognizing that some readers will reject this contention, he offers a contingency argument. He tells us that administrators, by their actions, have made any valid nexus between teaching and administration irrelevant. In this vein, he wrote, “research has found that principals and superintendents spend little or no time on the curricular and pedagogical components that might plausibly be regarded as education-specific” (p. 8).

The anti-professionists fail to mention that many of the counterproductive behaviors of educators are deeply ingrained in imposed institutional cultures that long ago relegated teachers and administrators to being obedient public servants. Numerous authors have described why public schools were forced to accept the organizational ideologies of political elites (e.g., Bates, 1987) and how these impositions produced school cultures resistant to change (e.g., Fullan, 2003). In his studies of American public schools, psychologist Seymour Sarason (1996) offers some insightful conclusions about the absence of professionalism and the inability of administrators and teachers to reshape negative cultures that deterred necessary improvements. Such information is conspicuously missing in the anti-professionist literature.

Calls for deregulating professional preparation and licensure are grounded in the notion that professors, practitioners, and their associations are unwilling to reform (Björk, 2000). Recognizing that professionalism must have a normative base that justifies practitioners being given authority over their work (Sykes, 1991), reform-professionists actually have been attempting to improve professional preparation for nearly for some time. As an example, the

AASA 1960 Yearbook (American Association of School Administrators, 1960) was devoted to improving profession preparation. Several decades later, two internal reform groups, the National Commission on Excellence in Educational Administration (1987) and the National Policy Board for Educational Administration (1989) produced reports. In 2000, the American Education Research Association, the University Council for Educational Administration, and the Laboratory for Student Success at Temple University collaboratively formed a task force, Developing Research in Educational Leadership. The purpose was to advance high quality research in educational leadership and last year, it released its report, *What We Know about Successful School Leadership* (Leithwood & Riehl, 2003).. In addition to such reports, individual scholars, such as Joseph Murphy (2002), have proposed reform concepts. As an example, Murphy's model of professionalism is constructed around three metaphors: moral steward, educator, and community builder. Analyzing the content of suggested reforms, Willower and Forsyth (1999) found substantial consistency among the recommendations. Most notably they included more stringent selection criteria, an integrated curriculum based on theory and practice, required internships, and fewer but higher-quality preparation programs.

Unfortunately, the anti-professionists have shown little interest in examining conditions that have prevented reform and in evaluating the merits of proposed normative standards. Instead, they cite selected opinion-based studies suggesting poor practices and then argue that more rigor will be inconsequential. By doing this, they have evaded the core question: Will public schools benefit more from professionalism or deregulation?

Alleged Successes of Nontraditional Administrators

The anti-professionists realize that policymakers may be reluctant to support deregulation unless they are given proof that CEOs and retired military personnel can perform as promised. The evidence they offer, however, is primarily anecdotal and self-serving. Curiously, the *Manifesto's* authors begin by giving a testimonial for Teach for America (TFA)—a national project funded by private sources and premised on the belief that highly qualified college

graduates will become teachers if spared the agony and embarrassment of majoring in education. Promoting administrator deregulation on the basis of TFA seems a strange strategy given the anti-professionist view that teaching and administration are basically unrelated. Equally odd, the same authors who tell us to ignore credentials provide only two points of information about TFA participants: the cumulative number of recruits and their grade-point average (see p. 19).

Outcome indicators for TFA, such as participant attrition rates and student performance data, are never mentioned in the Manifesto. The reason seems obvious: some outcome data reveal the negative consequences of deregulation. Of the original 489 TFA recruits, only 206 were still teaching after 2 years—an attrition rate double that for traditionally-prepared teachers. The project has promoted teaching strategies in conflict with the knowledge base and has placed individuals with no grounding in child psychology or pedagogy in classrooms where students most need highly effective teachers (Darling-Hammond, 1994). We should not be surprised then by outcome data for students who have been exposed to these inadequately-prepared instructors. Laczko-Kerr and Berliner (2002), for example, found that students taught by under-certified teachers, including those from TFA, make about 20% less academic growth than do students taught by regularly certified teachers.

With respect to the success of non-traditional administrators, the anti-professionists provide a handful of anecdotal accounts from large, urban school districts where the top executive has literally dozens of professional staff members. Hess (2003), however, concedes that, “In those schools or systems where no one else is available to work with teachers on curricular or instructional issues, it is obviously essential that a school or system leader be willing and able to play this role” (p. 8). He then assures us that “Such situations are quite rare” (p. 8). In truth, less than 2% of the nation’s school systems have 25,000 or more students but 71% enroll fewer than 2,500 students. Even more noteworthy, 48% of all districts enroll less than 1,000 students (National Center for Education Statistics, 2002). Since district enrollment usually determines administrative staffing, we can estimate half of all school districts in this country provide neither

superintendents nor principals with regular access to curriculum and instruction specialists. Rather than being rare, the schools Hess identifies as requiring the services of an instructional leader are the norm.

Many of the unheralded but true heroes in American education are found in small school systems where they practice under the most difficult and thankless conditions and receive the most meager salaries. Given that these situations are not the exception as suggested by Hess, we must ask ourselves the following questions about deregulation: How many generals and corporate CEO's are willing to work in small school systems? What will occur when generic managers discover they are incapable of solving complicated and controversial educational issues on their own?

Final Thoughts

Our countless invidious comparisons to more established professions usually overlook the fact that at one time they too faced political interventions that restricted trust and authority. Leaders in these professions, however, took it upon themselves to eradicate detrimental conditions by first developing a defensible national curriculum and then adopting institutional accreditation standards. Only then, did they enter the political arena in an effort to reinstate stringent licensing laws.

The reform-professionists are well aware of this history and at least for the past two decades, they have struggled to overcome the problems that stand in the way of improving practice. Nearly two decades ago, Griffiths (1988) warned his colleagues that unless radical reforms occurred, the school administration professoriate was unlikely to survive. Clark (1989) argued that these reforms had to begin by changing abysmal admission, retention, and graduation standards. Regrettably, these and similar admonitions have not been taken to heart by the status quo-professionists and their effect on professional preparation and licensing has been insufficient. Students pursuing the study of school administration continue to perform poorly on standardized tests such as the Graduate Record Examination; they still score lower than graduate students in

general and even lower than graduate students specializing in most other areas of professional education (Keedy & Grandy, 2001). And rather than eliminating weak programs, additional colleges and universities have been allowed to enter the market—many, even those extending to the doctoral level, being poorly-funded and inadequately-staffed (Kowalski & Glass, 2002).

Although the two documents addressed in this paper fail to present a compelling evidence-based case for deregulation, those dedicated to professionalism in school administration should not view them as harmless diatribes. The anti-professionists have money and political clout, especially destructive weapons when used on a vulnerable and philosophically-divided opponent. For me, the most telling statement in *The Manifesto* appears in the document’s “Conclusion”: “The signers of this document appeal to America’s common sense, its pragmatism, and its passion to do right by its children” (Broad Foundation & Thomas B. Fordham Institute, 2003, p. 39). Competent trial lawyers know that when the facts do not favor their clients, jury nullification offers the most feasible path to victory. Nullification occurs when guilt is established on the basis of fact but the jury acquits on its own sense of fairness, propriety, prejudice, or any other sentiment or concern (Kennedy, 1998). Clearly then, the anti-professionists are seeking nullification; they are asking policymakers to deregulate a critical social service on the basis of common sense, pragmatism, and passion.

The prospect that the anti-professionists might finally win the protracted war for the soul of school administration is indeed distinctive. While 41 states still require preparation and licensing for superintendents; over half of them (54%), have provisions allowing waivers or emergency certificates to be issued. In addition, 15 of the 41 states (37%) allow or sanction alternative routes to licensure (i.e., other than university-based study) (Feistritzer, 2003). Even if the anti-professionists fail to deliver a death blow and finally win the war, continuing with the present compromise ensures that other periodic escalations will occur. Far more troubling, however, is the prospect that reform initiatives requiring strong educational leaders will fail in those districts where they are most needed.

In the formative years of public education when administrators were characterized as teacher-scholars and before the dark days in which they were refashioned as scientific managers, prominent intellectuals recognized the importance of professional leadership. After studying the office of school superintendent, scholar-physician Joseph Mayer Rice (1893) concluded that

the importance of the position cannot be overestimated....Even when the superintendent labors under very unfavorable conditions, he seldom fails to stamp the schools with his individual pedagogical ideas, thus giving education in his schools at least a tendency in a certain direction. (p. 11)

Charles Thwing (1898), president of Western Reserve University, wrote that many superintendents in the late 1800s were “rendering a service to the people far greater than that which any other citizen was rendering” (p. 30). Now consider these statements in light of the observation Hess (2003) shares in *A License to Lead?*: “The sordid truth is that too often civic leaders and public officials privately express contempt for most school administrators” (p. 11).

Professions are considered to have three classical pillars: the cognitive, the collegial, and the moral (Starr, 1982). During the period in which school administrators distanced themselves from teachers and became preoccupied with management and politics, they seriously weakened all of them. Given the popular reform strategies of state deregulation and district decentralization, I and other reform-minded colleagues believe that it is far better to strengthen these pillars than to destroy them. Outnumbered and underpowered, we are compelled to continue our struggle against ideas and policy detrimental to the nation’s public schools.

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