

Introducing Professional Standards to the Chinese Superintendency: A Comparative Study of Leadership Development

Abstract

Purpose: This article provides a review of the current state of superintendency in China and explores the viability of introducing professional standards from a comparative perspective. Recognizing the increasing need to establish a knowledge base and the growing interest in existing practices, we explore the theoretical justification and practical implication of cross-cultural learning in educational leadership. **Method:** Using data collected from two surveys administered to more than 200 Chinese superintendents and feedback from a follow-up focus group study in 2007, we look at the changing role of system-level education administrator and the forces that drive professionalization in China today. We also examine the extent to which a set of well-established U.S. professional standards for the superintendency align with the priorities of Chinese educational reform. **Findings:** Noteworthy differences are identified between the two educational systems particularly in governance scheme, administrative structure, and occupational path. However, our findings unveil convergence on a set of essential professional competencies that are covered by the U.S. standards and emphasized by the Chinese educational administrators. Comparative analysis also indicates gaps between the current capacity of system-level administrators and the competencies needed by the Chinese national reform. **Implications:** This paper contributes to the efforts of building meaningful dialogues among researchers and practitioners on developing a new generation of education administrators, a top priority of reform efforts in both countries.