Chicago conducts nationwide search for principals
By Wendell Hutson
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Chicago Mayor Rahm Emanuel is looking to recruit principals outside Illinois to help improve the nation’s third largest school district.

The mayor made the March 2 announcement at the “Education Now: Cities at the Forefront of Reform” forum in Washington D.C. Mayor Emanuel was participating in a panel discussion with U.S. Education Secretary Arne Duncan, New York City Mayor Michael Bloomberg, Los Angeles Mayor Antonio Villaraigosa. CPS boss Jean-Claude Brizard and Education Superintendents Dennis Walcott and John Deasy also attended.

The mayor said the city plans to pay a $25,000 signing bonus for up to 50 new principals to serve in low-performing schools. Chicago Public Schools plans to conduct a nationwide search for principals and provide a $5,000 bonus to current CPS leaders, who recruit high-performing principals. And the money to support this effort will be privately raised.

“Strong school leaders are the key to boosting student achievement as they set the bar for every student, teacher and parent at their school,” said Emanuel. “A signing bonus will ensure that we attract the best principals from around the country, but we can also create the best principals by working with these organizations, which have the experience and expertise to develop a training program that will prepare the next generation of principals and provide our schools with effective leaders.”

Clarice Berry, president of the Chicago Principals & Administrators Association, was unavailable for comment.

About 75 principals are expected to retire after this school year, said Marielle Sainvilus, a spokeswoman for Chicago Public Schools. And the current salary range for principals are based on the school size and starting salaries range from $114,318 to $128,032.

CPS also unveiled its partners for the Chicago Leadership Collaborative (CLC) initiative. They are Loyola University Chicago, New Leaders, Teach for America/Harvard, and University of Illinois/Chicago will work with CPS in the coming months to begin preparing principal candidates for the upcoming 2012-2013 school year. All partners must first win approval by the Chicago Board of Education before working with CPS.

The CLC was chosen to help, said Brizard, because of their successful track record in developing principal leaders, their rigorous system to recruit and select high potential candidates, and the program’s alignment to the new CPS standards for principals.

“These partners will play a key role in giving aspiring principals the training and hands-on experience they need to enter a school ready to lead that school toward success on day one,” explained Brizard, chief executive officer for CPS. “And we need to prepare them for the unique challenges of our District in order to ensure that they are ready to lead change within their schools and drive student achievement.”
CLC will recruit, train, support and retain effective principals, creating a pipeline of highly qualified and high skilled leaders to meet the school district’s growing needs. Under the new program, CPS will triple the number of residency program seats available to aspiring school leaders from 32 to 100, added Brizard. And nearly 75 percent of current CPS principals come from within the CPS system.

Additionally, to ensure that CLC develops effective programs, Brizard said CPS will conduct an ongoing monitoring of partner programs to ensure the Request for Proposal is being followed.

“Our end goal is to improve student achievement by giving our new principals the tools they need to succeed and supporting our existing principals in ways that help them improve student performance year after year,” said Brizard. “The best gift we can give a child is a great teacher and the best gift we can give a teacher is a great principal.”