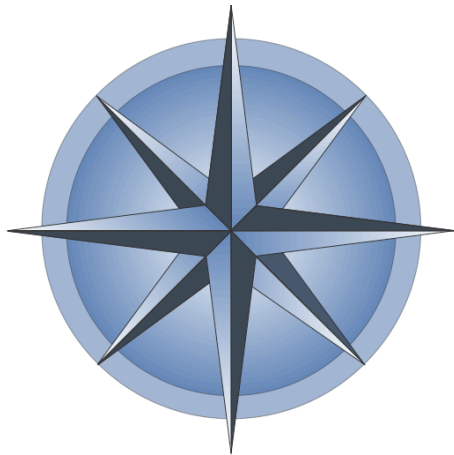


**School Leadership Study  
Developing Successful Principals**



**Exemplary Programs Produce Strong  
Instructional Leaders**

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### About the School Leadership Study

Principals play a vital role in setting the direction for successful schools, but existing knowledge on the best ways to prepare and develop highly qualified principals is sparse. What are the essential elements of good leadership? How are successful leadership development programs designed? What program structures provide the best learning environments? What governing and financial policies are needed to sustain good programming? “School Leadership Study: Preparing Successful Principals” is a major research effort designed to answer these questions. Commissioned by The Wallace Foundation and undertaken by Stanford University in conjunction with The Finance Project, the study is examining eight highly-developed pre- and inservice program models to address key issues in developing strong leaders. Once effective processes have been identified they can be replicated, ensuring that more and more schools become vibrant learning communities under the direction of outstanding leaders.

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Public demands for more effective schools have placed growing attention on the crucial role of school leaders in promoting powerful teaching and learning. Research suggests that effective instructional leadership strongly affects the quality of teaching and student learning (Leithwood, Seashore-Louis, Anderson, and Wahlstrom, 2004). Most scholars and practitioners today agree that traditional methods of preparing instructional leaders fall short of providing the knowledge, skills, and dispositions needed to lead schools and advance student learning in an increasingly complex and diverse society (Elmore, 2000, NCATE, 2002; Dilworth and Thomas, 2001; Peterson, 2002).

In an effort to increase the knowledge about professional development programs that promote strong instructional leaders, the Wallace Foundation recently commissioned a study of innovative principal professional development programs and the policy and funding mechanisms that support them. In fall 2003, the foundation awarded a grant to a team of researchers from the Stanford School of Education to design and implement a nationwide study of both the pre- and in-service professional development of school principals. A central goal of the study was to determine if graduates from exemplary programs reported leadership practices that are more instructionally focused than graduates from other programs.

In an effort to answer this question, and several others related to the characteristics of pre- and in-service programs, the Stanford researchers examined the literature on school leadership development, interviewed dozens of scholars and experts in the field of educational leadership, reviewed the curricula and structures of numerous pre- and in-service programs across the country, conducted surveys of school principals and teachers in several states,

participated in extensive on-site visits of several promising programs and schools led by program graduates, and studied the policy and funding frameworks of the states where exemplary programs were identified by the research team.

### **Eight Exemplary Programs**

Based on interviews with experts in the field, a review of the research, and initial research on a much larger sample of programs, the research team selected eight programs with reputation in the field for being effective. To facilitate deep study of context, a sample of both pre- and in-service programs was selected that consisted of several cohorts of graduates who work in a concentration of districts. These exemplary programs were also selected to represent a variety of approaches with respect to their design, policy context, and the nature of the collaboration with surrounding school districts. Sample programs include:

- San Diego (CA) Unified School District working in partnership with the Educational Leadership Development Academy (ELDA) at the University of San Diego;
- Region 1 of the New York City Public Schools, in collaboration with Bank Street College;
- University of Connecticut's Administrator Preparation Program (UCAPP);
- Hartford (CT) Public School District;
- Jefferson County (KY) Public Schools; and
- Delta State University (MS).

The eight professional development programs documented in the SLS represent innovative curriculum and instructional methods, and reflect a variety of structures, collaborations, and institutional arrangements. (See Table 1.)

What distinguishes these programs from many traditional principal development programs is the tight focus on instructional leadership. Whereas many traditional programs focus on school management, these exemplary programs seek to develop the ability to coach and support teachers, to share a vision for reform, and to lead a team to implement that vision for improved teaching and learning. This was evident in the survey results and emphasized by program staff in interviews.

Table 1: Program Sample

Pre-service Programs	In-service Programs	Program Descriptions
Educational Leadership Development Academy (ELDA) at the University of San Diego	San Diego Unified School District (SDUSD)	San Diego's continuum of leadership preparation and development is a <b>deeply aligned partnership</b> between ELDA and SDUSD. The pre- and in-service programs <b>support ongoing development of leaders across the stages of their careers</b> , focusing on rich field experiences, strong mentoring, and fostering adult learning.
The Principal's Institute at Bank Street College (NY)	Region 1 of the NYC Public Schools	Working with Bank Street College, Region 1 has developed a <b>continuum of leadership preparation</b> . This continuum is focused and coherent to create <b>leadership for improved teaching and learning</b> in all district schools.
University of Connecticut's Administrator Preparation Program (UCAPP)		The UCAPP program is dedicated to <b>continuous program improvement and deep support for administrator candidates</b> . UCAPP is transforming a high quality but traditional university-based program into an innovative program that integrates graduate coursework and field experiences.
	Hartford (CT) Public School District	The LEAD Initiative in Hartford has used <b>leadership development to leverage reforms</b> vital to working itself out of state takeover. Working with the Institute for Learning at the University of Pittsburgh, Hartford is seeking to create <b>a focus and common language around instructional leadership</b> .
	Jefferson County (KY) Public Schools	With sustained leadership since the late 1980s, JCPS has created a leadership development program <b>tailored to the needs of principals and their districts</b> . Working with the University of Louisville, they crafted a pathway from the classroom to the principalship that is recognizable to educators in each district. This initiative includes 24 separate professional development programs.
Delta State University (MS)		Delta State provides a funded <b>full-time internship</b> experience for one year that is focused on preparing principals who can transform schools in this poor, mostly rural region. The program is <b>supported by local districts and the state</b> of Mississippi.

Not only does the program content and pedagogy focus on instructional leadership, but these exemplary programs seek out aspiring principals with strong teaching experience. While the program and comparison groups had similar amounts of teaching experiences (13.39 years v. 14.74) the types of experiences varied. Program principals were more likely to have been a special education teacher (19% v. 10%) or a literacy or math coach (23% v 8%). In contrast, they were much less likely to have been a physical education teacher (.01% v. 18%) or an athletic director or coach (14% v. 39%). (See Table 3.) Programs in our sample used their recruitment and selection process to find candidates with the experience necessary to become strong instructional leaders.

**Table 3. Respondents' Teaching and Leadership Background**

	Pre-Service Graduates	District Principals	National Comparison
<b>Percentage of respondents, by subject area taught:</b>			
• Special Education	20.1% N=43	23.9% n=55	10.5% n=66
• Physical Education/Health	4.7% N=10	9.1% n=21	18.7% n=117
<b>Percentage of respondents, With experience as:</b>			
• Curriculum Specialist	25.6% N=53	30.5% N=68	19.6% N=117
• Athletic coach or director	17.9% N=37	14.3% N=32	40.5% N=242
• Literacy or math coach	29.5% N=61	20.2% N=45	8.0% n=48

### **Recruiting and Selecting Candidates for Instructional Leadership**

When asked about their recruitment and selection processes, program administrators documented how they actively recruit teachers with a record of strong instructional practice and the ability to lead their colleagues. *Bank Street College's* active recruitment and rigorous selection process identifies candidates with leadership capacity and a strong foundation in instruction. The process relies on nominations from regional school leaders and uses group

process activities. New York City schools *Region I* has used its leadership development program to successfully prepare candidates with the necessary skills in instructional leadership. In *San Diego*, ELDA's recruitment process also relies on nominations from district leaders and uses an instructional observation as a critical part of the selection process. Faced with an aging population of principals (many of whom retired under the "golden parachute" early retirement plan), USD developed the ELDA program. USD's primary objective was to replace retiring principals with a pool of qualified administrators trained in, and deeply committed to, the reform model and who could support and sustain the reform efforts at the school level. The *Hartford Public Schools* has created a pathway to the principalship designed to develop the ability of effective teachers to coach and mentor their colleagues. The district is starting to identify potential leaders early in their teaching careers and recruit them into various positions where they can develop the ability to work with teachers. Hartford's pathway includes several administrative roles, including instructional coaches, turnaround specialists who work with a few schools on reform strategies, and finally the principalship.

### **Focusing on Instructional Leadership**

Close examination of these exemplary programs shows how they are not only built on theory and principles that focus on instructional leadership, but also how they steep aspiring principals in experiences that foster an expertise in teaching and learning. District programs reinforce this when the entire district is concentrated on improving student achievement, and by providing on-going professional development to support principals in improving their skill in coaching teachers, guiding the development of curriculum, and working to identify the individual learning needs of their students.

*Jefferson County Public Schools.* For many years, Jefferson County Public Schools (JCPS) has emphasized a "grow-your-own" approach to leadership development. Their

leadership initiative was initiated over twenty years ago as part of a districtwide integration effort. The principal preparation program specifically sought to increase minority representation in leadership positions. In addition, as an early adopter of the ISLLC standards, JCPS transformed its leadership development program to prepare principals for their role in improving teaching and learning. This transformation required a shift in focus from teaching management skills to teaching instructional leadership and developing leaders who can promote change in their schools. The director of human resources, responsible in part for supervision of recruitment and selection efforts, believes that there has been a recognizable change over time in the leadership development work, from an emphasis on management to instruction:

When I first came here, I think there was probably a little bit of weight put on the management skill side of preparation and the selection. And I think that has shifted somewhat to instruction.

Influenced by the need to increase standardized test scores, all 24 elements of the JCPS leadership initiative, including the principal and assistant principal induction programs, were designed to promote instructional leadership. In the words of one program instructor:

If your test scores are not rising then you end up with a pretty significant amount of scrutiny, so it is imperative that you focus on getting into classrooms, knowing instruction, providing resources to help your teachers get the skills necessary, make personal adjustments that have to be made in order to get the best people doing the job that will lead to higher test scores, in addition to providing them with access to the resources they need to get it done. That is the primary thing we focus upon.

*San Diego Schools.* In San Diego, leadership development initiatives are aligned with a larger reform initiative that began in 1998 when the school board selected Alan Bersin and Anthony Alvarado to lead the district. In a unique “co-superintendency,” Bersin focused on managing the large urban district and Alvarado was charged with instructional leadership. Together, Bersin and Alvarado launched a tightly focused, purposeful set of initiatives to dramatically improve the quality of teaching in the San Diego schools. The San Diego initiative emphasized the development of principals as instructional leaders and teachers as instructional

experts through a set of highly coherent efforts to reshape principal and teacher recruitment, evaluation, and professional development around instructional improvement.

As part of these reform efforts, the district built a substantial infrastructure of professional learning opportunities for all principals – and for aspiring principals. In partnership with the University of San Diego, the district created a pre-service principal preparation program – the Educational Leadership Development Academy (ELDA) – tightly connected to the district’s instructional agenda. ELDA is a two-pronged approach to leadership preparation and development: a pre-service program for aspiring school leaders and an induction and support program for new leaders. All elements of the professional development program have been developed in close collaboration between both partners, spanning from recruitment and selection, to curriculum development and instruction, to culminating evaluations of candidates. One common outcome identified by all ELDA participants was the development of a strong belief in the attributes of educational leadership.

I think this program for me has helped me really examine what I believe is important as a school leader, what I believe about instruction, and then making decisions both instructionally and with operations around what I believe. I think this program has made me really look to others, other principals, other school leaders, or professors to refine what I believe in.

In addition to the credentialing program, ELDA offers an induction program for new principals. The SDUSD follows up with an intensive in-service program for all school leaders working in the district. It was this unique and comprehensive continuum of support that placed San Diego in our study sample.

The ELDA program promotes the development of instructional and transformational leadership, as well as the school’s systemic capacity to promote powerful teaching and learning. The district’s leadership development activities focus explicitly on grounding school leaders’ professional learning in observations and analyses of classroom practice. In fact, San Diego, like

several programs in our study, has embraced “Walk Throughs,” an observation strategy developed by the Institutes for Learning at the University of Pittsburgh. Walk-throughs have emerged as a signature pedagogy in exemplary leadership development programs. In San Diego, school leaders are expected to have mastered the principles and practices of effective instruction in order to facilitate teacher learning. This focus permeated all aspects of the district’s leadership development efforts, from the preparation of future leaders, teacher professional development, and the continuum of leadership development activities.

*Delta State University.* The first pillar of Educational Leadership Program at Delta State is to prepare school leaders who can promote and develop powerful and equitable teaching and learning in their schools. To be admitted to the program, candidates must have at least 5 years of teaching experience and be nominated by their districts. Leadership development at Delta State, with its intense full-time internship, immerses candidates in the day-to-day realities of a school leadership. A series of reflection seminars integrates important educational theories with internship experiences and continuously re-focuses attention on ways to support instruction and learning.

Candidates in the 2004-05 cohort were well aware of the importance of being an instructional leader and the administrative practices that support teaching and learning. One was very clear about the focus of the program:

I think that's the focus, being the instructional leader in the school. If the teacher has a problem with anything, whether it's classroom management, teaching strategy or styles, they can come to you and you can help them be successful inside your school.

Another candidate spoke to the practices learned in the program that she expected to implement as a new principal:

As a new principal going into a new school, I want to establish that relationship with the teachers. And with doing that, being in the classrooms, being visible, being out there, and knowing what areas I could help in, what teachers I would pair up with other teachers in that area to help them.

*Bank Street/Region I.* Bank Street College of Education's Principals Institute has been preparing school leaders for New York City since its inception in 1988. It was launched in collaboration with the New York City Board of Education to prepare a greater number of women and minorities to lead New York City public schools. Although initiated through a partnership with several New York City districts, the program has come to be known in particular for its longstanding collaboration with Region 1. This partnership fits within a continuum of complementary and increasingly integrated leadership preparation and development programs and strategies both within the region and across the New York City school system as a whole.

The Bank Street model promotes the development of school leaders who demonstrate instructional as well as transformational practices, focusing on supporting teachers in improving teaching. One current participant describes the goals of the Principal's Institute in this way:

To become instructional leaders who understand pedagogy as well as content, well rounded in terms of what we need to do. How to bring a curriculum to a table. What do you need to put into place? I think it forces us to become planners, to think ahead. And it takes responsibility.

The success of Bank Street College's Principals Institute can be traced, in part, to the close integration between the program coursework, the field experiences, and alignment with priorities of the district leadership in Region 1. The active inclusion of region practitioners in coursework and advisement helps ensure the consistent carryover from learning into practice. The deep alignment between the program and the Region's focused reform and professional development efforts provides intensive preparation for specific demands of leadership within the region. The professional leadership development at Bank Street focuses explicitly on grounding school leaders' professional learning in observations and analyses of classroom practice. School

leaders in Region 1 are expected to have mastery of instruction in order to facilitate teacher learning. In the words of the regional superintendent, a successful school has

A great leader, a successful leader... is one who not only has instructional knowledge and is an instructional leader but also has the ability to motivate, inspire, and have a very clear vision around what are the goals they want to accomplish within a school. They are able to build teams ...[that can] really look at the work they are doing as thinking through working at “how do we make it better”. [and can create] a learning community. . .that aspires to research, to study together, to talk.

This focus on instructional leadership permeates all aspects of the Principal Institute’s efforts, and is well aligned with Region 1’s priorities.

*Hartford Public Schools.* The Hartford Public Schools, an urban district of 24,479 students, has faced chronic challenges of low student achievement, high teacher and principal turnover, budgetary problems, and governance struggles. In the 1990s, the district had five superintendents in six years. In 1999, these issues came to a head and the state of Connecticut took control of the district. The Hartford Public Schools put instructional leadership at the center of its ambitious reform plan. The plan included creating a pathway to the principalship that required candidates to have more instructional experience (as coaches, Turnaround specialists, etc.), but also provided training to coaches and administrators through the Institutes for Learning to create a common language around instruction. Strengthening instruction and instructional leadership has helped to release Hartford from state administrative control.

Much of their reform work was funded by a LEAD grant from the Wallace Foundation. With support from the grant, Hartford created the unusual position of the “Turnaround Specialist.” In this role, master teachers are relieved of classroom duties and reassigned to the central office. Under the supervision of LEAD principals\*, turnaround specialists provide

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\* Under the LEAD grant, HPS also created the position of LEAD principals. These experienced principals as part of the Central Office LEAD Team, and serve as mentors for principals in the district and facilitate the work of other instructional leaders, like the Turnaround Specialists. There are currently four LEAD principals, working with 10 schools each.

coaching and professional development activities to schools in need of improvement.

Turnaround specialists may work with one school at a time, but over the course of a school year will assist more than one struggling school. In the words of Gene Hall, the outside evaluator for Hartford's LEAD grant, "The turnaround specialist has been designed as a path for master teachers to learn about different schools." Effective turnaround specialists are often groomed for further leadership roles and are encouraged to pursue administrative certification. As a result, the position of turnaround specialist has become an important gateway in the district's efforts to recruit and attract new principals and for gifted teachers who seek to have a more systematic impact in improving instruction throughout the district. According to Dr. Hall:

The creation of this turnaround specialist role, to me, is the most powerful thing they've come up with. That's pretty original. It's a phenomenal way for master teachers to learn about leadership, learn to coach, and to experience the culture in different schools as a part of their professional development. So when they become assistant principals, they're going to be a lot more savvy about how to do it.

*University of Connecticut Aspiring Principals Program (UCAPP)*. The UCAPP program, like state education reforms in Connecticut, is focused on improving teacher practice. The internship and the coursework both focus on teacher evaluation, providing support for teachers, and creating professional development opportunities to improve teaching and learning. UCAPP stresses that teacher evaluation is a system to support teachers rather than to punish them. As noted by someone who was an early graduate of the program:

...the evaluation tool was not seen as something punitive. It was seen as something to help teachers grow professionally and to help them move ahead. No more drive-by, one-shot deals, looking at you for 40 minutes. [In the early 1990s] it was really starting to move differently - to make you grow as a teacher and what other responsibilities you could take on to really affect what goes on in your school. I had my [UCAPP] coursework concerning evaluations and then came into the principalship. I took evaluation in that light. I do that now as an assistant superintendent. I let people see what it really means to move teachers and to create environments where these teachers can go professionally.

More recent graduates echoed this, and spoke of their priority as principals to support teachers.

...The first course of business is to provide support for the teacher in whatever area I noticed the teacher is weak in. I may provide additional professional elements and that could take the form of going to a formal workshop or visiting another teacher's room who is successful in that area or me supporting the teacher myself, sitting down to brainstorm or come up with ideas that will support that teacher. I may even send a teacher to another school that is more successful in a specific curriculum initiative. I want to provide the teacher with as much support as possible.

Another UCAPP graduate talked about creating an atmosphere where teachers are open to change, and understand that professional growth is a process.

I tend to have a pretty open dialog with my teachers. I think they see it as supportive because it's not something left saying this is a feedback that I'm going to put in your file. This is, "you're on a learning curve and how can we help you."

UCAPP works with its candidates through the internship, the reflective process and mentoring experiences to foster strong instructional leadership practices.

## **Conclusion**

Results from the Stanford study show that principals who graduated from the eight exemplary programs are strongly focused on leading teachers and improving instruction in the classroom. For example, they were more likely than principals from other programs to regularly use a variety of instructional leadership practices. Such practices included activities that focused on, a) facilitating student learning, b) building a professional learning community among faculty and other staff, c) fostering teacher professional development, d) providing instructional feedback to teachers, e) working with teachers to improve teaching practices and to resolve challenges facing the school, and f) using data to monitor school progress, identify problems and propose solutions. Interestingly, the activities that program principals were less likely to engage in on a regular basis were related to managing the school facilities, maintaining building security, enforcing school rules, and attending district meetings.

An examination of the eight exemplary programs reveals some common characteristics. First, admission into principal preparation programs includes demonstrated competence as a

master teacher as well as the support of school district leadership. Second, exemplary programs provide a coherent curriculum framed around the theories, principles, and practices of instructional leadership. Program faculty are explicit in discussing and modeling program theory, and using program principles to frame assignments and reflection. Third, course content and internship experiences are closely aligned. Preparation programs require intensive internships, linked to graduate coursework, coupled with guided reflection to help candidates process their experiences. Each element informs the structure and content of the other and both work to integrate theory and practice. Fourth, district programs use leadership development to reinforce reform initiative, to concentrate their efforts on improving student achievement. Fourth, districts are developing a leadership pathway, to encourage talented teachers to become instructional leaders (leader leaders, then instructional coaches, then principals, and finally directors or assistant superintendents). Finally, professional development activities are career staged and frequently part of a continuum of learning activities designed to address the particular goals and objectives of participating school districts. Keeping the focus of the professional development on teaching and learning appears to produce stronger instructional leaders.

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