



Commissioned by



Districts Developing Leaders

Lessons on Consumer Actions and Program Approaches from Eight Urban Districts

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Executive Summary

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The Study

This study explores the investments of eight urban school districts in school leadership preparation, with a specific focus on the different approaches that they took, the role that local universities played, and the perceptions of district officials about program effectiveness based on graduates' performance as new school leaders.

The Wallace Foundation contracted with Education Development Center, Inc. (EDC), for this evaluation research; the study was led by Cheryl King (EDC), Margaret Terry Orr (Bank Street College), and Michelle LaPointe (EDC) and was completed by a team of researchers with expertise in leadership preparation, organizational studies, and program evaluation.

Research Questions

Four research questions about the relationship between district investments in leadership preparation and the overall impact of those investments on school districts and universities and their programs guided our initial evaluation efforts:

- How are **districts using their influence** as “consumers” of university preparation programs to create needed changes in candidate selection, program content, and internship experiences?
- In what ways do Wallace-funded leadership preparation programs reflect the **core quality features** of effective leadership preparation described in the research literature?
- What organizational **relationships** exist within and between districts and universities for district-university affiliated programs and how do they affect the quality of preparation programs being developed and implemented, the quality of leaders, and the relationship to other district investments in leadership and its development?
- How do **differences in district context** (based on student achievement needs, district reform approach, and district leadership) relate to districts' consumer action approaches, leadership preparation strategies, and relationships with local universities?

Executive Summary

Developing school leaders who are equipped with the knowledge, skills, and dispositions needed to effectively lead low-performing schools has become a critical goal for local school districts intent on dramatically improving student outcomes.¹ Given the current criticism surrounding leadership preparation programs and the changing nature of school leadership itself, school districts are becoming more actively involved in influencing the quality of their school leaders and the preparation programs that develop them.

Recent research on exemplary school leader preparation programs suggests that school districts, as the direct “consumers” of program graduates, are strategically positioned to exercise meaningful influence over the content and design of program practices.² It also suggests that programs preparing candidates are more effective when they work from an understanding of the challenges the districts face, a collaboration with the districts on redesigning programs, and a shared initial accountability for new leader support and performance.³

Based on this recent activity and research, The Wallace Foundation has provided funding and other system resources that enable school districts to take steps to improve the effectiveness of school leader preparation through collaboration and innovation.

The eight urban districts profiled in this report are among those that received long-term, sustained funding from The Wallace Foundation to design, or influence the redesign of, leadership preparation programs that match their leadership needs. They represent different contexts (from varying city size and population to number of local universities and demographic and economic mixes) and have different state policy environments (particularly in their prescription

for quality leadership preparation). The choices that these districts made about the specific ways to improve leadership preparation locally depended on a variety of factors. The results of their efforts, presented in our findings and seven conclusions, offer valuable insights on effective leadership preparation practices for aspiring principals and the organizational and systemic constraints to this work.

As much as anyone in public education, it is the principal who is in a position to ensure that good teaching and learning spreads beyond single classrooms, and that ineffective practices aren't simply allowed to fester. Clearly, the quality of training principals receive before they assume their positions ... has a lot to do with whether school leaders can meet the increasingly tough expectations of these jobs.

—Christine DeVita, President, The Wallace Foundation

The Eight School Districts and Their University Affiliates

We selected eight school districts from a pool of 15 Wallace-funded sites that received funding and resources to support their leadership preparation efforts for three or more years. The districts ranged in size from 34 schools to more than 650. All had significant school improvement needs, according to their Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP) status. They varied in

their leadership needs, based on growth or decline in student population, principal retirement and turnover, and the pressure of under-performing schools. Seven of the eight districts formed an affiliation with one or more local universities for their grant-funded leadership preparation efforts leading to certification (see table below).

School districts, their enrollment, AYP status, and primary university affiliates for leader preparation

School District	Number of Students	Number of Schools	Meeting Federal AYP*	Primary University Affiliate
Boston, Massachusetts	56,168	143	No	University of Massachusetts Boston
Chicago, Illinois	380,787	655	No	University of Illinois at Chicago
Fort Wayne, Indiana	31,606	53	No	—
Jefferson County, Kentucky	92,000	157	No	University of Louisville initially, and later added Bellarmine and Spaulding universities and Indiana University, Southeast
Providence, Rhode Island	23,344	52	No	University of Rhode Island
Springfield, Illinois	28,000	34	No	Illinois State University
Springfield, Massachusetts	25,233	55	No (for some schools)	University of Massachusetts Amherst
St. Louis, Missouri	30,000	84	No	University of Missouri–Columbia

* AYP status of all schools and districts is for 2007–08.



The Findings

1. Districts had challenging school and leadership contexts
 2. Districts exercised consumer influence in different ways to improve quality
 3. New program designs redefined the scope of leadership preparation
 4. The organization and delivery of leadership preparation reflected innovation
 5. Leadership preparation incorporated the features of high-quality programs
 6. Creation and sustainability of programs required well-developed inter- and intra-organizational relationships
 7. State policies complemented district actions and program approaches
 8. District investments in leadership preparation yielded both direct and indirect educational and organizational benefits
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1. Districts Had Challenging School and Leadership Contexts

Across the board, we found that the eight study districts were faced with two persistent challenges in addressing their school leadership needs: (1) a continuing demand for highly qualified school leaders that exceeded the number of qualified and available local candidates; and (2) a number of chronically low-performing schools, requiring leaders who are equipped to dramatically improve them. While all eight districts already had begun reform initiatives to foster instructional change, over the course of their funding period districts increased their focus on a formal leadership development strategy.

The districts' ability to address those challenges was influenced by several factors:

Number of vacancies. School districts seeking to fill 50-plus principal vacancies on an annual basis faced considerably different sets of challenges than did smaller school districts with fewer than 12 vacancies to fill each year.

Leadership stability. The overall stability of leadership in a school district was also a determining factor when considering leader preparation options. In some districts, where leader turnover was high for both the schools and the district, there were significant shifts in reform strategy from one administration to the next.

Number of low-performing schools in need of a principal. High numbers of low-performing schools directly increased a school district's

sense of urgency to take swift and decisive action in providing strong, effective school leadership.

The availability of local universities ready to make change. The eight districts were located near several university-based leadership preparations programs, often including a public university-based program. The universities varied in their initial interest in working with districts to adapt or redesign their programs to meet district needs, ranging from disinterest to eagerness to change. Leadership turnover and other university-related changes sometimes disrupted their capacity to sustain participation.

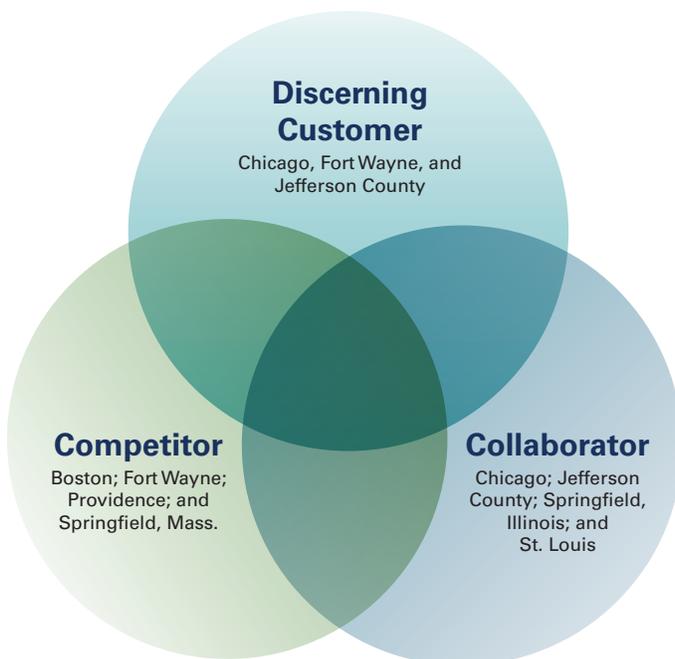
2. Districts Exercised Consumer Influence in Different Ways to Improve Quality

The school districts increasingly viewed themselves as “consumers” of local universities’ program graduates. We found that they used three predominant consumer approaches to influence the content and quality of school leader preparation programs and their graduates, often starting with one and then branching out into others. Each of the approaches placed demands on the school districts and universities, required different resources, presented different challenges and benefits, and varied in their potential for program sustainability:

Becoming a discerning customer. This approach is defined by clear expectations for school leader standards and competencies and the strategic use of them to articulate recruitment and selection criteria for aspiring principal candidates and preparation programs. It was used by Chicago, Fort Wayne, and Jefferson County. For example, Chicago identified five core competencies to assess aspiring leaders’ eligibility for their principal candidate pool and to set the performance expectation bar for preparation programs. This consumer approach required time on the part of the district and (if involved) university faculty to define these new standards, but little direct financial cost. It seemed to have the greatest potential to improve both the program outcomes—the graduates themselves—and the institutions and programs that prepare them.

Becoming a competitor. Districts became a competitor by creating their own leadership preparation programs that were directly aligned with their standards and reform priorities. This approach was used by Boston; Fort Wayne; Providence; and Springfield, Mass. Boston and Springfield preparation programs had certification authority from the state; Fort Wayne operated its own post-certification internship

Districts’ consumer approach to leadership preparation



program independent of state requirements. Offering their own leadership preparation programs gave districts the greatest control over outcomes—in terms of program candidate competencies—and the processes of developing these outcomes through district-defined preparatory experiences. This approach proved to be the most costly and time-consuming option, however, and may be the most vulnerable to changes in districts' leadership, funding, and overall reform approach.

Becoming a collaborator. By using contracts and other inducements (e.g., scholarships and designation of “preferred provider” status or collaborator status) districts could induce local university programs to change selection criteria and customize program content, instructional methods, internships, and assessment practices. This approach was used by Chicago; Jefferson County; Springfield, Illinois; and St. Louis. Districts' use of inducements to effect change in local universities' programs was more costly but enabled more finely tailored program redesign to meet districts' changing needs than did a focus on standards alone. The approach of locating the changes in the universities had greater potential for program sustainability than did use of a district's own program. For example, Springfield's co-constructed program is continuing without external funding, suggesting the potential for sustainability in this consumer approach.

Combining consumer approaches that clarified the district's leadership standards and expectations and induced local leadership preparation programs to change to meet district needs had the greatest potential for broad-reaching, sustainable change in the quality of leadership preparation and graduates ready for school leadership.

3. New Program Designs Redefined the Scope of Leadership Preparation

The focus and nature of the Wallace support encouraged districts to be innovative and responsive to their own leadership needs. The most substantive innovation was the expansion, by all eight districts, of the scope of preparation beyond minimal requirements for leadership licensure or certification. The new requirements typically included more content about school and district systems and procedures and more applied learning experiences (through full-time internships). They also provided more time for program completion (typically, three to four years instead of one to two). These changes resulted in a broader and progressively more in-depth leadership preparation continuum. The scope and length of the preparation appeared to match the leadership challenges that the districts experienced—i.e., the work was challenging and difficult and more preparation was needed to help aspiring leaders be ready.

The addition of multiple applied learning experiences suggests that while formal leadership preparation programs are important and necessary, they may not be sufficient when preparing candidates for positions in demanding school and district contexts.

4. The Organization and Delivery of Leadership Preparation Reflected Innovation

The district-university affiliated programs, to varying degrees, organized leadership preparation experiences in new ways. Like conventional leadership preparation programs, they were constrained by state accreditation and licensure requirements, resulting in similarities

in program length and core course requirements. The method of delivery, however, varied. The greatest variation occurred in how instructional time was scheduled and courses were sequenced, ranging from weekly courses and summer institutes, to coursework scheduled around full-time internships and in formats that offered more intensive learning experiences. These organizational features appeared to enable the programs to be more accessible to candidates and to increase opportunities for district-relevant coursework.

School districts are becoming more actively involved in influencing the quality of their school leaders; they are giving careful consideration to their role in selecting candidates and influencing the program content, field experience, and assessments used to develop prospective principals.

An example of redesigned content, internship, and program time is found in the St. Louis program. In that program, candidates are in internships four days a week and attend classes Thursday evening and all day Friday. Class sessions focused on problems of practice and issues as they emerged, linking course content and hands-on learning assignments. Course topics were introduced with the cycles of the academic year, current issues and priorities of the district, and learning needs of the program candidates.

5. Leadership Preparation Incorporated the Features of High-Quality Programs

Program modifications appeared to be guided by three aims: improving alignment to district reform approaches, fostering candidates' skill development, and balancing theory and practice. Given that The Wallace Foundation encouraged high-quality preparation, we expected there to be a strong emphasis on incorporating program design features found in high-quality leadership preparation programs.⁴

Without comparative program assessments, however, the question remains of whether the districts' approaches were better than conventional leadership preparation, and were yielding better-qualified school leaders who could make positive improvements in the districts' schools. What we can conclude is that the new approaches taken by district-university affiliated programs have potential for yielding better-prepared candidates. The more that programs use innovative strategies and integrate them coherently around a core set of principles as found here, the more likely it is that their graduates will be able to meet challenges in their schools.

Among the program features, we found several innovative approaches to program content and design; these addressed challenges commonly cited in the historic criticisms and shortcomings of university-based leadership preparation programs that were the impetus for these districts' work:

Recruitment and selection of the "right" program candidates. To ensure that candidates admitted into preparation programs were well-suited to be leaders, the eight districts used a combination of strategies. Most district-university affiliated programs added to or replaced the list of qualifications for candidate eligibility as one critical step toward improving

candidates' caliber. Districts' development of leadership standards informed their affiliated programs' recruitment and selection criteria by clarifying certain qualities, particularly pertaining to instructional leadership, commitment to challenging conditions, and leadership dispositions. In some districts, the standards became an extension of the district's vision for education.

Some districts chose to identify, recruit, and develop future school leaders from within their own teaching ranks and invest in and nurture these candidates' development over time. Many districts added various candidate assessments, multiple interviews, and simulated assignments that placed heavy emphasis on screening applicants for previous instructional leadership experience and dispositions (i.e., temperament and attitude) that signal strong school leader potential.

Increased emphasis on leadership expectations in program content. Some districts developed or revamped their leadership standards to be more explicit about local needs and expectations and to reflect their assumptions about effective leadership for their schools. They then used the standards to frame program content and delivery. An analysis of the standards suggests that districts and programs placed greater emphasis on assessment, the use of data, and school change through transformational leadership practices than exists in the national Interstate School Leaders Licensure Consortium (ISLLC) standards, but less emphasis on school management and operations and on family and community engagement.

To varying degrees, all seven district-university affiliated programs tried to structure program content and learning experiences around core values and beliefs about leadership. Our study limited its focus to four content areas that were most relevant to the districts' priorities:

- All seven district-university affiliated programs had courses that covered

instructional leadership, although their content varied in scope, breadth, and explicitness. Some programs included courses that looked generally at the principalship, whereas others focused more narrowly on content for teacher observation, supervision, and development.

- *Change leadership* as a content focus that was part of, or complementary to, instructional leadership was less explicit in the program content and was often described by program officials as "stressed in" or "woven into" the courses, although a few programs had explicit courses. In some programs, learning activities were designed around the districts' school improvement processes, in which candidates were asked to analyze a low-performing school and develop an improvement plan.
- All eight districts incorporated instruction on *district operations and processes* into their leadership preparation continuum, but rarely as an explicit course within the formal program. District operations courses and seminars were largely drawn from information about how the districts themselves managed operations and about their processes for supporting schools through supervision, oversight, and coordination of services.
- Only some districts' programs had an explicit focus on *urban education issues* or a more general focus through topics within courses on school-community relations. Only one program had seminars in which candidates engaged in activities that explicitly addressed the equity and cultural diversity issues of that district.

Use of experiential pedagogical practices.

Some districts' programs made extensive use of experiential learning approaches, such as immersing participants in analyzing and planning for high-need schools and assessing their leadership options. In our site visits, we

observed frequent examples of exercises that enabled candidates to apply what they were learning to district-like situations or to construct learning for other candidates based on their own school-based experiences. Course-related assignments and capstone assessment projects also tended to be constructivist in nature because they created opportunities for candidates to learn and develop skills related to district leadership tasks. One common task noted was the development of a school improvement plan or other district-required reports and communications.

Inclusion of lengthy, authentic internships in real school settings. All eight programs made significant investments in providing lengthy, authentic internship experiences with a focus on developing competencies to address the school challenges that principals were likely to encounter. Several programs developed solutions to creating quality internship experiences while faced with a shortage of highly effective principals who could mentor them by (1) rotating candidates through a series of internships in multiple school contexts, (2) providing clearer guidance for required internships, (3) developing measures for assessing intern performance, and (4) implementing programs to train coaches and mentors. These solutions show some promise for improving the quality of the internship experience. Other practical issues associated with on-site supervision of leadership interns (i.e., costs, capacity, and accountability) remain largely unresolved and will demand the joint attention of school districts, universities, and state policymakers.

Assessment of candidates. All eight districts integrated leadership preparation assessments into program experiences. They also tied assessments to candidate advancement along

the preparation continuum (if one existed) or used them as part of the selection process for a leadership candidate pool or leadership position. Assessments took a variety of forms: ongoing assessment of candidates using program standards; capstone or culminating projects as final, integrating assessment experiences; and portfolio-based assessment of the internship and other related experiences.

6. Creation and Sustainability of Programs Required Well-Developed Inter- and Intra-Organizational Relationships

Creating and sustaining locally responsive leadership preparation programs required districts to coordinate with one or more local universities around elements of preparation. Such coordination would entail one or more of the following: developing shared goals and objectives, having planning and decision-making processes, awarding master's credit and degrees for coursework, creating program-related roles and responsibilities, establishing processes for program operation, and sharing resources.

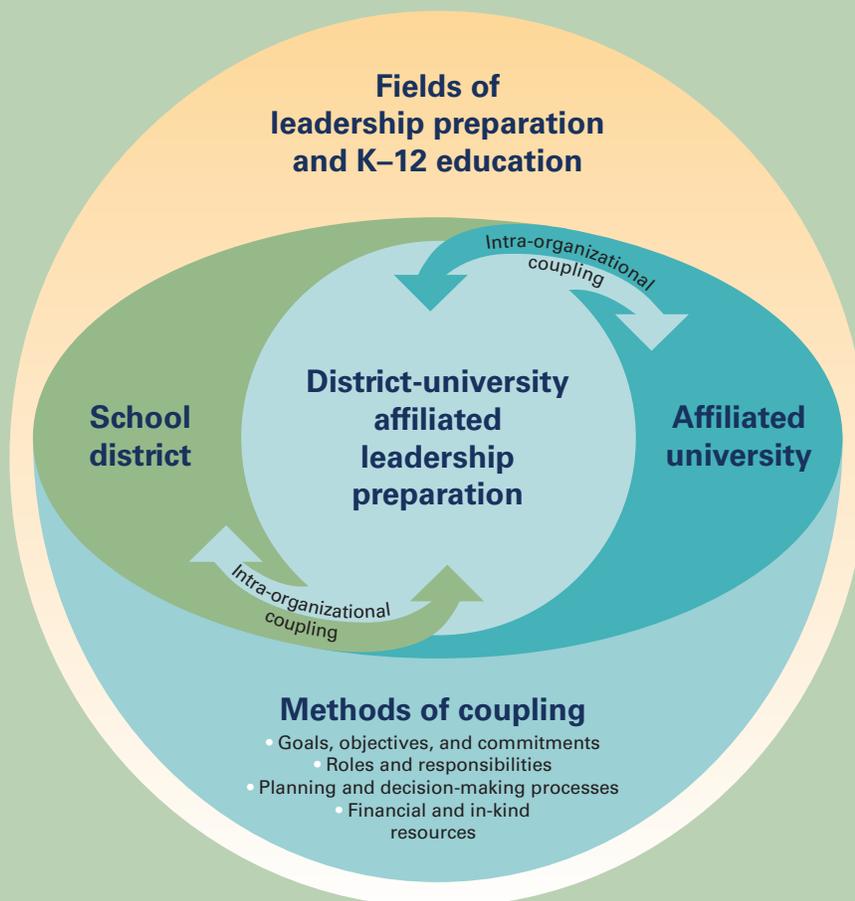
We found that additional coordination was needed within the districts and universities. We could evaluate the level of coordination by looking at how tightly coupled the program was to other organizational leader-related processes, such as hiring, placement, and supervision, in both the districts and universities. The tightness or looseness of these external and internal levels of coordination influenced the approach, quality, and impact of the district-university affiliated leadership preparation programs, protected the program from external influences, and facilitated or hindered sustainability.

Types and Characteristics of Affiliations

As shown in the figure below, district-university affiliations require three types of relationships: (1) inter-organizational: between districts and universities in support of the district-university affiliated program, (2) intra-organizational: between the district-university affiliated program and other parts of the district itself, and (3) intra-organizational: between the district-university affiliated program and other parts of the affiliated university. Each relationship can be analyzed for its goals, structures, and processes and their degree of tight/loose coupling.

The figure also illustrates that the goal of district-university affiliation is to combine the two broader fields in which the respective institution's work exists, to make them more complementary. The figure shows how the fields influence the institutions and their affiliated programs and also how the institutions' work through the programs has the potential to influence the larger fields. Finally, the figure acknowledges the intra-organizational couplings within each institution that influence the potential and feasibility of the programs and their alignment with other district and university programs and operations.

District-university affiliation for leadership preparation: Structures, processes, domains of coupling, and field influences



Types and Characteristics of Affiliate Coordination

Most districts had developed an affiliation with one or more local universities for locally focused leadership preparation, with a contract or other form of agreement that outlined their shared work, roles, and responsibilities. The more collaborative the affiliation, the more likely the district and university had shared goals, objectives, and commitments for leadership preparation.

We found several examples of formally defined and written agreements for the inter-institutional arrangements, such as a contract or initial Memorandum of Understanding, but no advisory committees or formally designated forms of joint governance.

School districts need to recognize their power as the consumers of principal preparation program graduates, and the resulting influence they can wield in shaping these programs. By behaving as consumers, districts can improve the quality of program candidates and graduates, increase the number of qualified candidates for leadership positions, and ensure that program curricula address district needs.

In fact, much of the coordination between districts and universities for the affiliated programs occurred informally, facilitated by district and university leaders who served as bridges with designated responsibility for working across institutions. It appeared that looser, informal district-university relationships were better suited to address the variety of ongoing program issues and decision-making required for candidate recruitment and selection, program content, staffing, internship placement and support, and assessment; they offered flexibility amid district and university leadership turnover.

However, such informality and loose inter-institutional relationships had their drawbacks. Decision-making was ad hoc; without systemic input; and without any means for formal program review, monitoring, and feedback.

Types and Characteristics of Affiliate Investments

The district-university affiliated programs required both financial and in-kind investments by districts and universities. In addition to The Wallace Foundation grant support, districts contributed human resources (specifically, bridge and program leaders for program design and operation), district information and expertise on operations and procedures, space for course instruction, internship placements, and internship supervisors. The universities contributed faculty expertise in course development and instruction and internship support, credit and degree management, candidate support, and higher education resources such as libraries. Some universities chose to forego potential income by reducing or waiving tuition altogether, or by granting course credit for district-delivered instructional experiences or credits earned at other institutions as part of the program. Generally, the more collaborative the affiliation, the greater the financial and in-kind resource contributions from both districts and universities.

The Opportunities and Challenges of Intra-District Organizational Relationships

We identified three ways that the affiliated leadership preparation program fit within other district systems and processes: as a component of district reform; in its alignment with principal recruitment, selection, and hiring; and in its fit with other district leadership education and principal supervision. Further, two organizational conditions influenced this fit: the program's location within the district's organizational structure, and feedback mechanisms on

program graduates' career advancement and effectiveness as school leaders. The districts varied in the extent to which they used these opportunities and had optimal organizational conditions.

Typically, programs were placed under the umbrella of one of three departments—human resources, professional development, or curriculum and instruction—or they functioned as a stand-alone office for leadership preparation, which facilitated some alignment of the program with certain district systems and less with others.

Generally, we found that over the course of the grant period, some programs became more tightly coupled with some district functions (e.g., central office professional development, instruction, and leadership departments). By the end of the grant period, most districts reported that they were working toward an aligned continuum of leadership development and leader education for school leaders that differentiated programs and support for aspiring leaders, new leaders, and mid-career principals. Investments in clarifying leadership standards and expectations for the leadership preparation programs seemed to have a carryover effect for these other programs, and the use of standards for multiple purposes was often coordinated by bridge leaders for the district-university affiliated leadership preparation programs.

However, the district-university affiliated programs remained only loosely coupled with the districts' human resources systems for hiring, placement, and evaluation of principals, with little or no formal feedback mechanisms, particularly for candidate selection and assessment of graduates' performance as school leaders. Program graduates were rarely given preference in district hiring decisions. This loose relationship existed in both district-led and

other district-university affiliated programs and where the district's hiring was centralized or decentralized.

Moreover, there were no formal arrangements for tracking and sharing leadership appointment information on program graduates and candidates from other programs, and thus no means for following up on performance gains (or lack thereof) in schools led by program graduates or in comparison with other new school leaders prepared elsewhere. This loose coupling hindered program monitoring and improvement because program leaders could not evaluate the benefits of the district-university affiliated program compared with other programs.

Superintendent turnover hindered greater district action to couple the affiliated leadership preparation program with other district functions in the hiring, support, and supervision of principals.

The Opportunities and Challenges of Intra-University Organizational Relationships

The relationship between the district-university affiliated program and the participating university was dependent on the characteristics of the university, how the university's affiliation with the district contributed to its own leadership preparation improvement work, how program roles and responsibilities were defined and allocated within the university, what the university-related resource expectations were, and how the programs fit within the university's organizational structure. Most affiliated universities were somewhat locally accessible, public institutions with a strong community service mission and with an existing leadership preparation program. Most faculty we interviewed voiced a strong desire to reform their department of leadership preparation and become more effective in preparing leaders for the challenging conditions of their regions' schools; they saw their affiliation as a learning opportunity for their programs generally.

When the affiliated programs were situated within departments of educational leadership at a university, the departments were more likely to share faculty with the program and include the district-university affiliated program in broader departmental planning, program improvement, and assessments, such as for national accreditation. Distance, co-location of the program off-site or in the university's department of continuing education, and turnover of key faculty hindered the tightness of the relationship. The demands that affiliation placed on university resources and district leadership turnover also hindered the extent to which the district-university affiliated program was more tightly integrated into the university.

7. State Policies Complemented District Actions and Program Approaches

The districts' and universities' programs were influenced by their states' regulatory policies and requirements for school leadership licensure or certification, for leadership preparation program registration, and for public and private higher education in general. Increasingly, these regulatory influences were being shaped by national leadership standards and national accreditation requirements.

States' policies for school leadership and preparation were evolving throughout the grant period. The districts' states had concurrent Wallace grants to strengthen their leadership policies and were encouraged to include university faculty as well as school and district leaders in policy development, which unfolded over the time of the districts' own leadership development work.

The states had four potential policy levers—standards, program accreditation requirements, leadership licensure, and use of The Wallace Foundation funding—to influence the preparation and quality of leaders. In the six states, we found a trend in policy development (during the grant period) toward greater specificity in leadership standards and expectations and also varying expectations of how to prepare leaders and determine their eligibility for licensure. The more rigorous state policies complemented the local district leadership preparation and development efforts by requiring more field experience (by defining requisite internship hours and years of school leader experience before professional licensure) plus more leadership preparation and continuing development, particularly with the addition of post-preparation requirements.

8. District Investments in Leadership Preparation Yielded Both Direct and Indirect Educational and Organizational Benefits

More research is needed to determine the impact of redesigned leader preparation on school leader retention, stability, and performance. However, there are early indications of the benefits of some of these efforts for the districts and the universities.

More highly qualified leader candidates for districts' schools. First, in six years, the number of potential new leaders increased, from 35 additional program completers in one site to 111 additional program completers in another. In addition, by 2009, 58 percent of the completers had advanced to a school leadership position, including 32 percent who had become

principals. Second, according to some school and district officials interviewed, new leaders from district-university affiliated programs were better-prepared and of better quality than those from other programs. In many cases, where evidence was available, these new leaders were perceived by district officials to be more effective, particularly in their instructional leadership ability, their capacity to transition well into leadership roles, and their understanding of school district operations.

At least one district reported the cumulative benefit of having a substantial number of the current school leaders who were similarly well-prepared; it enabled a collective leadership capacity and community of practice that supported their school improvement work.

District learning benefits. The districts themselves realized several benefits from improving their leadership preparation programs. They gained a clearer picture of their own leadership expectations, a better understanding of the needs of and demands placed on new school leaders, and an increased understanding of the role of leadership education in systemic school improvement.

Affiliated university learning and program-related benefits. The affiliated universities gained both production benefits, in the number of new certification or master's degree candidates who earned course credit through them, and organizational learning and system-changing benefits. These latter benefits included opportunities to improve the quality of other programs by adopting new content and organizational strategies. Several affiliated universities were willing to make one or more programmatic, organizational, and financial changes to affiliate with the districts. These changes led to other changes in practices that

the universities have sustained or applied to other district partnerships. In addition, the universities greatly valued their preferred provider status with their districts. Although this affiliation offered only modest financial benefits, it produced less tangible but highly desirable enhancements of reputation.

Limited benefits to other universities beyond clarified leadership expectations. The impact on other institutions in the districts' communities was less clear. We anticipated that as districts became more active consumers, local universities would pay attention, even if they were not directly affiliated with the district's leadership preparation efforts. However, this was not the case, at least not in the way that had been expected. The few program faculty members (from unaffiliated institutions) who could talk about the district programs' influence on their own programs were not able to identify any changes that the district programs had engendered.

Instead, they said that their programs were more strongly influenced by national and state accreditation requirements, as their course requirements reflected. However, to the extent that the districts' work on leadership standards contributed to the new state standards, the districts did indirectly influence local programs' designs.

Conclusions and Implications

Our analysis of the involvement of eight urban school districts with leadership preparation programs led to a number of conclusions with important implications for districts, universities, policymakers, and other funders.

First, to effectively invest in leadership preparation, school districts need to recognize their power as the consumers of principal preparation program graduates, and the resulting influence they can wield in shaping these programs. By behaving as consumers, districts can improve the quality of program candidates and graduates, increase the number of qualified candidates for leadership positions, and ensure that program curricula address district needs.

Second, districts should look to harness the resources of local universities to develop, staff, and support leadership preparation programs that can meet state higher education standards and leader certification requirements. Such an undertaking requires districts and universities to work together to forge a new understanding of what school leaders need to know and be able

to do to improve local schools, and to translate this understanding into leadership preparation strategies.

Third, districts and universities can redesign leadership preparation as a multi-staged learning process, as several districts in our study did. Such a multi-staged process could begin with pre-service exploratory experiences as a prerequisite for admission to a formal preparation program that has a supervised internship. Following successful completion of certification and degree requirements (the next stage) and placement in a leadership position, the final stage of the system would be coaching and close supervision in the initial induction period. This system would begin to address the broader, increasingly more intense stages of development that are needed to effectively prepare aspiring leaders, particularly in demanding environments and conditions.

Fourth, districts and universities can focus on knowledge development, drawing from their respective areas of expertise. This effort

comprises infusing information about the districts' specific challenges and priorities into university course content and other learning experiences, while inculcating discipline-based theory about district procedures into operations and management skills development.

Fifth, feedback on graduates' performance as school leaders is essential for both districts and universities to learn from their investments and to improve program quality and effectiveness. Monitoring of and feedback on graduates' performance are crucial to turning district and university investment into improved preparation and a viable strategy in districts' systemic reform work and universities' redevelopment of their leadership preparation approaches.

Sixth, supportive district and state policies for leadership preparation complement the districts' and universities' program design and redesign work for their affiliated programs. However, as shown by recent developments in some states, such as Kentucky, states can go

further in encouraging leadership preparation programs to be more aligned with local districts' needs and priorities.

Finally, high-quality program models require more dedicated funding and cannot rely on foundation and government grants. Some of the policy-encouraged strategies—particularly offering full-time internships as part of leadership preparation—are expensive. States and districts must explore other means of providing and supporting paid, full-time internships and other program elements in order to continue such a critical component of leadership preparation, resulting in better-prepared aspiring leaders.

For information on the study methodology, see the technical report: www.edc.org or www.wallacefoundation.org.

Endnotes

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