TRAINING TOMORROW’S PRINCIPALS

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The most critical step in any systematic effort to cultivate effective school leadership may be to align principals’ performance to recognized standards (Young and Peterson 2002). Unfortunately, until recently there had been no nationally accepted standards by which to evaluate that performance. Not until 1996 was the Council of Chief State School Officers’ Interstate School Leaders Licensure Council (ISLLC), with assistance from 24 state agencies and a number of professional associations, able to develop six standards to guide principal performance (Green 2001). The ISLLC standards were subsequently embraced by the Interstate School Leaders Licensure Council (ISLLC), with assistance from 24 state agencies and a number of professional associations, and are now used in many states as a basis for evaluating principal performance. The authors’ research found seven consistent instructional and learning actions, or habits, they believe establish a framework for providing future educational leaders with opportunities to connect their knowledge and skills to reality through carefully designed experiences. The authors examined 14 principal preparation programs and found seven consistent instructional and learning actions, or habits, they believe establish a framework for providing future educational leaders with opportunities to connect their knowledge and skills to reality through carefully designed experiences.

“Principal Preparation Programs: What constitutes successful principal preparation programs?”

James Davis and Michael Jazdar

IN BRIEF

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National Council for Accreditation of Teacher Education and the National Policy Board as the basis for their own Standards for Advanced Programs in Educational Leadership, which are used to accredit educational leadership programs in many colleges and universities across the nation.

Too often, however, principal preparation programs continue to lack the curricular coherence, rigor, pedagogy, and structure to provide the kinds of knowledge, skills, and dispositions needed to produce well-qualified school leaders (Jackson and Kelley 2002). The quest to improve educational principal preparation programs continues.

The authors, who collectively have 40 years of K–12 school and district leadership experience, share this quest. With the question “What constitutes successful principal preparation programs?” firmly planted in our minds, we examined 14 leading educational leadership programs and conducted extensive interviews.

Cultivating Good Habits

As each program was investigated, data analyzed, and comparisons established, we found seven instructional and learning actions repeated time and again. We labeled them as the seven habits of effective principal preparation programs, and they have been affirmed by principal preparation program directors, practicing principals, and university faculty as vital to raising the competency level of future school leaders.

1. Curriculum and instruction. Effective principal preparation programs strive to provide relevant, standards-based, and job-embedded curricular and instructional experiences. Aspiring principals are provided ample opportunities to learn, share, and reflect on curricular and instructional learning activities that can lead to school improvements.

2. Clinical learning internships. Aspiring principals experience relevant and timely learning opportunities by participating in clinical internships. These internships are designed to embrace bold, new strategies and provide realistic experiences beyond descriptive studies. Many programs require participants to engage in intensive learning experiences at multiple sites in and out of their home school districts.

3. Providing mentors. Working with exemplary principals, who act as coaches, guides, or resource leaders for aspiring principals, is integral to all successful preparation programs. The key to successful mentoring is to have the experienced principals encourage the aspiring ones to be candid, critical, and reflective, rather than reactive or defensive.

4. Collaborative experiences. Collaborative activities resulting in internal networking, teamwork, and cooperative initiatives are considered vital experiences of good principal preparation programs. Collaboration in learning communities, especially those that include other aspiring principals, exemplary practicing principals, and university faculty members, are considered a premium in all the programs we researched.

5. Authentic assessment. The assessment of participants in effective principal preparation programs no longer is based on paper-and-pencil testing. Instead, aspiring principals are asked to write a student discipline letter to a parent, justify budget cuts, develop and defend a portfolio, and provide practical solutions to problems. Culminating assessment activities might include developing a community relations manual or an orientation program for new teachers.

6. Research-based decision-making. Strong preparation programs instill in aspiring principals the importance of making decisions based on research rather than impulse or nearsightedness. They are taught and given opportunities to use a systemic approach, in which data is gathered and analyzed in light of school improvements and student achievement.

7. Turnkey transitions. Ready, set, go, succeed! These four words express the intent, hopes, and wishes of effective preparation programs for aspiring principals. By focusing on strong leadership skills, grounded with in-depth knowledge of leadership theory and best practices, these programs produce graduates primed for success in their first principalships.

These seven habits of effective principal preparation programs positively affect both organizational change and workplace productivity. By developing a leadership platform based on these habits, aspiring principals build a foundation for successful entry into educational administration. By assimilating...
the habits into their leadership and management routines, they are more likely to experience a rewarding and productive administrative career.

**References**


James Davis, an award-winning teacher, is presently enrolled in the North Carolina Principal Fellows Program at the University of North Carolina at Charlotte. His e-mail address is jvdavis@email.uncc.edu.

Michael Jazzar is an assistant professor of educational leadership at the University of North Carolina at Charlotte. His e-mail address is mjazzar@carolina.rr.com.

**WEB RESOURCES**


[www2.educ.ksu.edu/EDADL928/ISLLCstandards.pdf](http://www2.educ.ksu.edu/EDADL928/ISLLCstandards.pdf)

The American Association of School Administrators (AASA) includes an archive of articles on principal preparation programs on its Web site.

[www.aasa.org](http://www.aasa.org)

The National Council for Accreditation of Teacher Education (NCATE) describes its accreditation standards for schools, colleges, and state education departments.

[www.ncate.org](http://www.ncate.org)