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# Restructuring Principal Preparation in Illinois: Perspectives on Implementation Successes, Challenges, and Future Outlook

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## Restructuring Principal Preparation in Illinois: Perspectives on Implementation Successes, Challenges, and Future Outlook

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and Michelle Hanh Huynh

POLICY RESEARCH

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## Executive Summary

In the past 20 years, many states have implemented rigorous standards and requirements to improve the quality of preparation and training for school principals, with the end goal of improving student achievement. These reforms have been focused on providing stronger training for principals to better equip them to direct instructional change and to lead schools that produce high levels of student learning.

Prior to the reforms, many in the education field argued that principal preparation did not adequately prepare principals to lead schools that were successful in reaching high levels of student achievement (Bottoms & O’Neill, 2001; Finn & Broad, 2003; Levine, 2005). Principal preparation programs were seen as having an irrelevant curriculum, low admission and graduation standards, a weak faculty, inadequate clinical instruction, inappropriate degrees, and poor research (Levine, 2005). In part, this was due to the programs’ focus on the principal as school manager instead of the principal as instructional leader. Principals were traditionally seen as school managers whose jobs were supervisory and administrative in nature (e.g., ensuring that there were enough teachers in the classrooms and that the buses ran on time).

Over time, many in the educational field began to argue that in order to improve, schools needed strong principals and that principals are ultimately responsible for schools’ success. Bottoms and O’Neill (2001) argued that in order to lead schools that are organized to produce higher student learning, school leaders needed to “have comprehensive understanding of school and classroom practices that contribute to student achievement; know how to work with teachers and others to fashion and implement continuous student improvement; and, know how to provide the necessary support for staff to carry out sound school, curriculum, and instructional practices” (p. 8). Thus, future principals needed to have better, higher quality preparation prior to entering the field in order to enable them to be transformational instructional leaders (Bottoms & O’Neill, 2001; Finn & Broad, 2003; Levine, 2005).

Over the past two decades, many states have responded to the call for better principal preparation. At least 46 states have adopted the Interstate School Leaders Licensure Consortium (ISLLC) standards (Shelton, 2012); however, not all of these states have implemented a statewide comprehensive reform of preparation programs. Illinois stands out in front with a handful of other states that have enacted legislation which requires a cohesive and comprehensive approach to preparing school leaders for today’s challenging school environments. Recently, Illinois was recognized for its innovative policy, winning the 2014 Frank Newman Award for State Innovation from the Education Commission of the States. In addition, Illinois has been cited by the Center for Enhancing Early Learning Outcomes as the only state to include early childhood content specifically in their licensure, accreditation, mentoring, and evaluation processes (Brown, Squires, Connors-Tadros, & Horowitz, 2014).

Illinois’ redesign of principal preparation was intended to represent a paradigm shift from “candidate as consumer” to “district as consumer,” with the ultimate goal of improving student achievement. Rather than focusing on the candidates’ possible goals—principal endorsement, middle leadership position (e.g., athletic director), salary increase—as with the

prior general administrative certificate that principals and other school leaders used to receive in Illinois (Type 75), the new policy emphasizes meeting the needs of the district to ensure highly qualified candidates are trained to effectively lead their schools. It also emphasizes the critical role of the district in preparing their principals.

The goal of Illinois' new principal preparation policy is to ensure that the newly redesigned programs will "prepare individuals to be highly effective in leadership roles to improve teaching and learning and increase academic achievement and the development of all students" (Programs for the Preparation of Principals in Illinois, 2015). Under the new policy, candidates who complete a principal preparation program "obtain a principal endorsement on a Professional Educator License and are eligible to work as a principal or an assistant principal or in related or similar positions." Each program is required to:

- include partnerships with school districts in preparation program design and delivery;
- meet the Educational Leadership Policy Standards outlined by ISLLC;
- offer curricula that address student learning and school improvement and focus on:
  - learning at all grade levels (pre-K through 12);
  - the role of instruction, curriculum, assessment, and needs of the school or district in improving learning;
  - the Illinois Professional Teaching Standards (Standards for All Illinois Teachers, 2015);
  - learning needs of all students, including students with disabilities, English language learners, gifted students, students in early childhood programs; and
  - collaborative relationships with all members of the school community;
- include a performance-based internship that enables the candidate to be exposed to and to participate in a variety of school leadership situations in settings that represent diverse economic and cultural conditions and involve interaction with various members of the school community;
- admit candidates who meet specified minimum requirements and are selected through an in-person interview process; and
- provide collaborative support for candidates from both faculty and mentor principals.

Leadership by the Illinois Board of Higher Education (IBHE), the Illinois State Board of Education (ISBE), and the Center for the Study of Education Policy (CSEP) at Illinois State University, along with numerous education policy and practitioner organizations, provided the strong foundation needed to accomplish the ambitious goal of redesigning Illinois' principal preparation programs. Informed by research on the influence of school leadership on student achievement, a wide array of Illinois education stakeholders contributed tremendous amounts of time and expertise to identify the critical elements necessary in principal preparation to ensure candidates receive training to make a positive impact on student achievement. The Commission on School Leader Preparation in Illinois Colleges



and Universities developed the recommendations for the significant shift in improving principal preparation (*School Leader Preparation: A Blueprint for Change*, 2006), followed by the work of the School Leader Taskforce to develop strategies for implementing the Commission's recommendations (*Illinois School Leader Task Force Report to the Illinois General Assembly*, 2008). In 2008, the Leadership to Integrate the Learning Continuum (LINC) Advisory Group called attention to the gap between early learning and the K-12 system and recommended that the new principal endorsement be broadened to pre-K-12. The Wallace Foundation and the Robert R. McCormick Foundation also supported these efforts by funding some of the numerous groups to convene in order to formulate action plans and recommendations for developing and implementing the new policy.

## Goals of Research Study

The goals of the current mixed methods study, the Illinois Principal Preparation Implementation Review Project (I-PREP), are to describe how the new policy is being implemented, to learn which aspects of the implementation have been successful or challenging, and to see how programs are addressing challenges in the preparation of their candidates. The overall study includes three phases:

1. Statewide Scan of Early Implementation to learn how program representatives and stakeholders view the new policy, to learn what changes they expected to occur with the policy, and to learn what potential barriers they foresee might impede their vision of success (conducted fall 2014).
2. Site Visits with 12 out of the 26<sup>1</sup> approved programs and their district partners to gather in depth information about the implementation process, catalysts and challenges to change, and resources needed (being conducted spring and fall 2015).
3. Statewide Online Survey of preparation programs to determine how well the information gathered from site visits generalizes statewide to all of the 26 (see Footnote 1) programs (to be conducted fall 2015).

This report presents our findings from the first phase of the study, the statewide scan of 23 program representatives and 22 stakeholders. The final report will include findings from the site visits and statewide survey and will be available summer 2016.

## Findings

Overall, program representatives and statewide stakeholders were largely familiar with and positive about the goals of the policy and had an overall positive view of its future impact on leaders and schools. However, some believed the redesign overstepped the need for statewide reform and that more limited policy changes would have been sufficient to address the issues. Regarding current implementation, respondents indicated they believe that the policy is bringing about many of the benefits it was intended to produce and improving the quality of principal preparation in Illinois. However, many respondents—both program representatives and statewide stakeholders—indicated that there are several challenges to successfully

<sup>1</sup> Two additional programs were approved in June and September 2015.



implementing the new policy. While many expressed optimism about the future of principal preparation in Illinois, one widespread concern is that lower enrollment in principal preparation programs will eventually lead to more constriction than initially envisioned of the principal pipeline, thus leading to shortages of qualified candidates.

### Current Implementation: Benefits

The program representatives and statewide stakeholders generally indicated that the new policy has created higher quality principal preparation in Illinois. Overall, respondents indicated the new policy has been beneficial in five main areas:

- more rigorous selection of candidates, resulting in higher quality, more committed candidates;
- more rigorous programs with increased authentic and practical principal preparation, due in large part to a more extensive competency-based internship;
- better preparation to support all students across the pre-K through 12 continuum, including preparation to meet the needs of diverse populations;
- deeper, more collaborative partnerships between programs and districts; and
- consistently higher standards statewide.

### Current Implementation: Challenges and Concerns

Respondents identified several interrelated challenges and concerns that impact the implementation efforts and buy-in of the new policy.

#### **Reduced enrollments have affected nearly all redesigned programs**

After an initial decline across nearly all programs, some programs have begun to experience a rebound in their enrollment, while others have not, thus potentially impacting their program sustainability. New admission requirements were often cited as a reason for lower enrollment. Some respondents expressed concern that potential candidates may be confused regarding the time required for internship. Also, some respondents were concerned that the increased selectivity would reduce racial diversity and possibly gender diversity among candidates and subsequently in the principal pool.

#### **Resource limitations are felt at the program, district, and principal candidate level**

Programs faced with decreased enrollment experience fewer tuition dollars, despite providing a more comprehensive principal preparation program with higher standards. Respondents reported that districts are being asked to do more under the new policy, including investing staff time and dollars to support internships, provide mentors, and complete considerable amounts of paperwork. Respondents also expressed concern that principal candidates experience challenges with increased out-of-pocket expenses.

## The increased number and specificity of requirements are challenging to implement

Although viewed as a benefit for statewide program consistency, some respondents believed increased requirements limited their ability to be flexible to meet local needs and viewed the new policy as a “one-size-fits-all” approach. Requirements pertaining to internship experiences, documenting competencies, and qualifications for mentors and faculty advisors were cited most often. The combination of multiple requirements (e.g., internship placements and mentor qualifications) creates additional burden for some programs. Finding placements with some student populations (e.g., early childhood,<sup>2</sup> English language learners, etc.) was also cited as a challenge by some programs, particularly those in rural and less diverse areas.

## Future Outlook on the Policy

With the notable exception of concerns for a shrinking principal pipeline, most of the program representatives and stakeholders had a positive outlook on the short- and long-term impacts of the new policy—namely better prepared school leaders and improved student achievement. Some also expressed concern on whether progress would be sustainable given the tendency for funding and attention to dwindle over time. Others anticipated a gradually increasing role of the school district in principal preparation and a shift from academic to more practical, applied training for school leaders.

## Implications

Based on interviews we conducted with 23 program representatives and 22 key stakeholders, we find most respondents believe principal preparation in Illinois has been improved through the new policy changes. At the same time, respondents discussed current implementation challenges and some concerns for the future. Although our study of the implementation of the new policy is still underway, we offer the following issues for consideration at this time:

- Although the recommendations and action plan from the Commission on School Leadership and the Illinois School Leader Task Force called for a more targeted recruitment approach to select high quality and more intentional candidates, the debate still continues whether the new policy is too constricting, creating a shortage of candidates in the principal pipeline, particularly in rural areas and in the gender and racial diversity of candidates. Further, there is disagreement whether the use of current Type 75 certificate holders would be a potential short-term solution. Since the intentions of current Type 75 certificate holders are unknown, further studies examining those who are more likely to pursue a principalship in the near future are needed to identify the regions where there is a potential future shortage of principals so that principal preparation programs can serve these areas better.
- Another issue related to the principal pipeline, raised by several respondents, was whether the shift from a model that produced more candidates with broader training

<sup>2</sup> Although many early childhood educators define early childhood as including birth through age eight, the new policy is principally focused on preschool students. Therefore, in this report the term “early childhood” generally refers to preschool-age students.

to a model producing fewer candidates with more defined and intense training will mean a decrease in available programs throughout the state, particularly in rural areas. Therefore, it will be critical to monitor the location and number of available principal preparation programs to determine if the new policy causes too much contraction in the supply of programs, particularly in regions of the state with fewer principal training options.

- Deeper and more collaborative partnerships between districts and preparation programs are seen as beneficial; however, this new role for districts which requires increased financial and personnel resources has been difficult for many, particularly smaller districts, given the current economic climate. The use of these partnerships to create pathways to identify high quality educators and train them for district leadership positions appears to be a promising avenue to decrease potential shortages in the pipeline.

## Conclusions and Next Steps

Although there are concerns about the new policy's implementation—particularly involving the restricted pipeline, stretched resources, and “one-size-fits-all” approach—and many of the stakeholders emphasize the need for evaluations of both programs and other policy impacts to avoid unintended consequences, the majority of program representatives and statewide stakeholders indicated that they support the goals of the new policy and have a positive outlook on its impact in the future of principal preparation in Illinois. Most believe that the redesigned principal preparation programs will ultimately create better prepared school principals, as well as improved student achievement and more successful schools. Many program representatives and stakeholder groups, such as Illinois School Leadership Advisory Council (ISLAC) and the LINC Advisory Council, are working together to find solutions to the challenges and make plans for furthering the work. Additionally, CSEP is currently implementing a U.S. Department of Education five-year grant (Illinois Partnerships Advance Rigorous Training - IL-PART) to collaborate with three university/district partner teams to examine factors and mechanisms needed for effective partnerships and to evaluate the outcomes of two principal internship models. These research endeavors, along with continued conversations and work of statewide stakeholder groups, will help inform decisions regarding any improvements in the policy. The potential envisioned by policy proponents is great and many hope that, with continued work—including measuring intended outcomes and monitoring unintended negative impacts—principal preparation in Illinois will reach this potential.

Lastly, the remaining activities for this study, namely the site visits and survey with program representatives, will be carried out this fall 2015. The results from these activities will add to our understanding of the successes and challenges of the policy's implementation, particularly in terms of the extent these were experienced by all of the principal preparation programs. Our final report, due in summer 2016, will integrate the findings from the scan, site visits, and survey to provide research-based insights in how to improve the policy and its implementation.

## Overview

In June 2010, the Illinois General Assembly passed Public Act 96-0903, a sweeping restructuring of the preparation of school principals and assistant principals that represented 10 years of effort from a broad coalition of stakeholders. The restructuring in Illinois was part of a movement nationwide to provide stronger training for principals in order to better equip them to direct instructional change and lead schools that produce high levels of student achievement. Prior to the reforms, many in the education field argued that principal preparation did not adequately prepare principals to lead schools that were successful in reaching high levels of student achievement (Bottoms & O’Neill, 2001; Finn & Broad, 2003; Levine, 2005). Principal preparation programs were seen as having an irrelevant curriculum, low admission and graduation standards, a weak faculty, inadequate clinical instruction, inappropriate degrees, and poor research (Levine, 2005). In part, this was due to the programs’ focus on the principal as school manager instead of the principal as instructional leader. Principals were traditionally seen as school managers whose job was supervisory and administrative in nature (e.g., ensuring that there were enough teachers in the classrooms and that the buses ran on time).

Over time, many in the educational field began to argue that in order to improve, schools need strong principals and that the principal is ultimately responsible for the school’s success, including in the area of student achievement. Bottoms and O’Neill (2001) argued that in order to lead schools that are organized to produce higher student achievement, school leaders needed to: “have comprehensive understanding of school and classroom practices that contribute to student achievement; know how to work with teachers and others to fashion and implement continuous student improvement; and now how to provide the necessary support for staff to carry out sound school, curriculum and instructional practices” (p. 8). Thus, future principals needed to have better, higher quality preparation prior to entering the field in order to enable them to be transformational instructional leaders (Bottoms & O’Neill, 2001; Finn & Broad, 2003; Levine, 2005).

Over the past two decades, many states have responded to the calls for better principal preparation. At the national level, the Interstate School Leaders Licensure Consortium (ISLLC) standards for educational leaders have been adopted or adapted by 46 states (Baker, Orr, & Young, 2007). However, many fewer states have implemented comprehensive redesigns of their principal preparation programs. Murphy, Moorman, and McCarthy (2008) examined six states with reform efforts from 1993-2005 and found significant shortfalls in their reform efforts, such as uneven implementation, lack of actionable theory, and weak curriculum focus and content.

In contrast, Illinois has been recognized for its innovative policy, winning, for example, the 2014 Frank Newman Award for State Innovation from the Education Commission of the States (Baron & Haller, 2014). Several other national groups (e.g., National Conference of State Legislators, Center for Enhancing Early Learning Outcomes) highlighted Illinois’ new policy, for example, citing “Illinois as the only state that has included early childhood content specifically in their licensure and accreditation processes” (Baron & Haller, 2014, p.3). In

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*The new policy represents a paradigm shift from “candidate as consumer” to “district as consumer” with the goal of improving student achievement.*

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addition, Illinois is also in the forefront with other states including Kentucky, Louisiana, Mississippi, and New York, with regard to requiring: (1) an extensive internship experience, (2) formal partnership with districts, and (3) early childhood topics for coursework (National Governors Association, 2013).

Illinois’ principal preparation redesign efforts were informed by prior research, as well as validated by more recent studies. Based on Leithwood, Louis, Anderson, and Wahlstrom’s (2004) review of quantitative and qualitative research: (1) school leadership is second only to classroom instruction in influencing student learning, and (2) the influence of good leadership is greater in schools that are in need of most reform. In a study of school leadership, Louis, Leithwood, Wahlstrom, Anderson, Michlin, and Mascall (2010) stated: “to date we have not found a single case of a school improving its student achievement record in the absence of talented leadership” (p. 9). Other studies have found that principals make a substantial impact on student achievement, in part by choosing school curricula, creating norms of school culture, and developing and managing teacher quality (Hallinger & Heck, 1998; Sebastian & Allensworth, 2013). In terms of principals as instructional leaders, Grissom, Loeb, and Master (2013) found that certain leadership behaviors, such as time spent on teaching coaching, evaluation, and developing the educational program predicted positive student achievement gains. Directly related to Illinois’ principal corps, Bowers and White (2014) found that principal training can have positive and measurable effects on school-level proficiency growth scores. Interestingly, principals cited internships and experience in a school as the most important aspect of their training to their school leadership practice (Militello, Gajda, & Bowers, 2009).

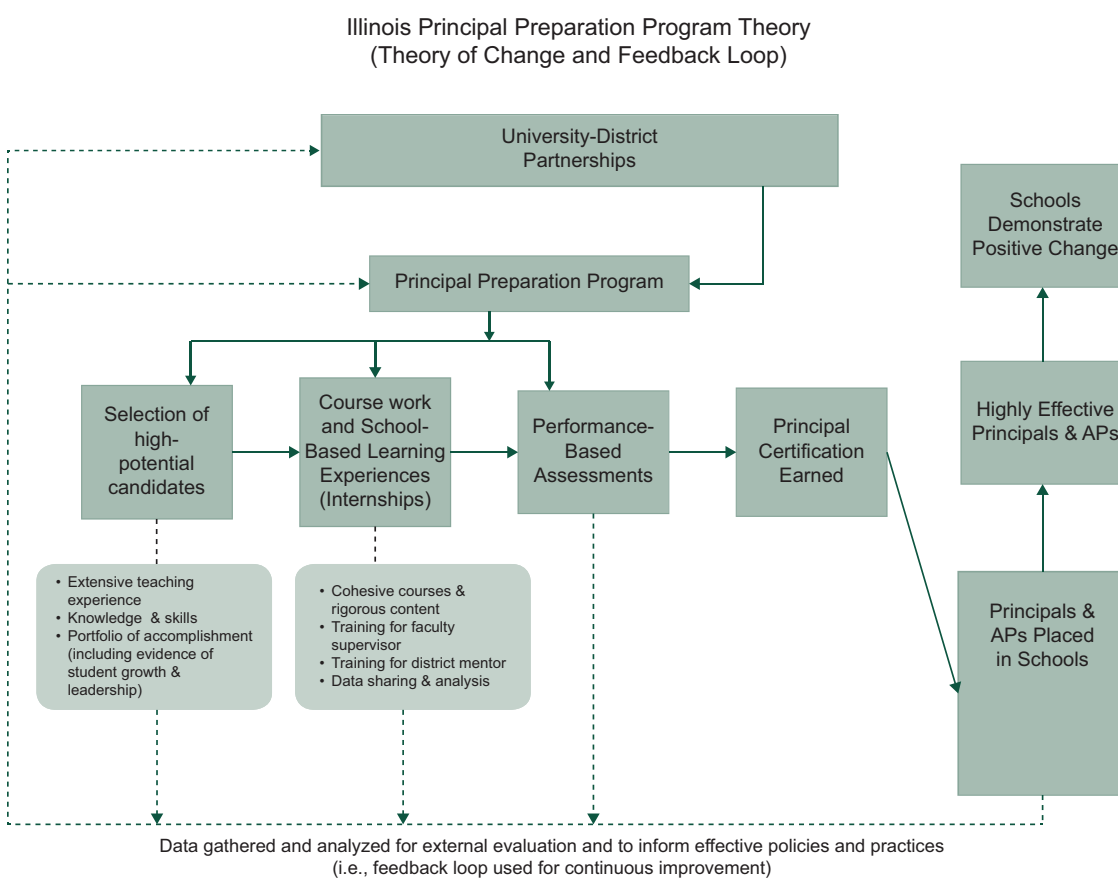
The redesign of the principal preparation in Illinois was intended to represent a paradigm shift from “candidate as consumer” to “district as consumer,” with the ultimate goal of improving student achievement. Under Illinois’ prior principal preparation regulations, educators could obtain a general administrative certificate (Type 75) to fulfill a wide range of goals—principal endorsement, middle leadership position (e.g., athletic director), salary increase—making it difficult to judge program success by anything aside from the number of degrees granted. In addition, admission standards varied and were unregulated, which created inconsistent quality across all programs.

Leadership from the Illinois Board of Higher Education (IBHE), the Illinois State Board of Education (ISBE), and the Center for the Study of Education Policy (CSEP) at Illinois State University, along with numerous other Illinois education policy individuals and organizations, provided the critical undergirding needed to accomplish the ambitious goal of reconstructing the preparation and training of Illinois’ P-12 school leaders. Efforts to improve principal preparation in Illinois were set in motion in 2001 when The Wallace Foundation provided a grant to CSEP to establish the Illinois State Action for Education Leadership Project (IL-SAELP). A wide array of Illinois education stakeholders from numerous advisory boards, task forces, and commissions contributed tremendous amounts of time and expertise to identify the critical elements necessary in principal preparation programs to ensure candidates receive training to make a positive impact on student achievement. The Commission on School Leader Preparation in Illinois Colleges and Universities developed the recommendations for the significant shift in improving principal preparation (*School Leader Preparation: A Blueprint for Change*, 2006), followed by the work

of the School Leader Taskforce to develop strategies for implementing the Commission’s recommendations (*Illinois School Leader Task Force Report to the Illinois General Assembly*, 2008). In 2008, the Leadership to Integrate the Learning Continuum (LINC) Advisory Group called attention to the gap between early learning and the K-12 system and recommended that the new principal endorsement be broadened to pre-K-12. The Wallace Foundation and the Robert R. McCormick Foundation also supported these efforts by funding some of the numerous groups to convene in order to formulate action plans and recommendations for developing and implementing the new policy.

The efforts culminated in June 2010 with the passage of Public Act 96-0903, creating the new principal endorsement, effective July 1, 2010. As of June 1, 2014, all principal preparation programs were required to meet the new requirements in order to continue operating. The theory of change evolved over a 10 year period (Figure 1) and identifies the critical elements of the new policy (CSEP Statewide Stakeholder meeting, October 2013). As noted, the feedback loop involves an external evaluation to inform effective policies and practices. Our study examining the initial implementation of the new policy lays the groundwork for the subsequent evaluation studies which will examine the impact of the new policy.

Figure 1. Illinois Principal Preparation Program



Source: PowerPoint presentation at Statewide Evaluation of the Illinois Principal Redesign Policies and Implementation meeting, October 28, 2013. Hosted by CSEP.

The goal of Illinois' new principal preparation policy is to ensure that the newly redesigned programs will “prepare individuals to be highly effective in leadership roles to improve teaching and learning and increase academic achievement and the development of all students” (Programs for the Preparation of Principals in Illinois, 2015). Under the new policy (see Table 1 for summary), candidates who complete a principal preparation program “obtain a principal endorsement on a Professional Educator License and are eligible to work as a principal or an assistant principal or in related or similar positions.” Under the new policy each program is required to:

- include partnerships with school districts in preparation program design and delivery;
- meet the Educational Leadership Policy Standards outlined by ISLLC;
- offer curricula that address student learning and school improvement and focus on
  - learning at all grade levels (pre-K through grade 12);
  - the role of instruction, curriculum, assessment and needs of the school or district in improving learning;
  - the Illinois Professional Teaching Standards (Standards for All Illinois Teachers, 2015);
  - learning needs of all students, including students with disabilities, English language learners, gifted students, students in early childhood programs; and,
  - collaborative relationships with all members of the school community;
- include a performance-based internship that enables the candidate to be exposed to and to participate in a variety of school leadership situations in settings that represent diverse economic and cultural conditions and involve interaction with various members of the school community;
- admit candidates who meet specified minimum requirements and are selected through an in-person interview process; and
- provide collaborative support for candidates from both faculty and mentor principals.



Table 1. Summarizes Public Act 96-0903

<b>Program requirements</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Programs must partner with one or more public or nonpublic school districts.</li> <li>• Mentors and faculty supervisors that support candidates' progress through their internships must receive training.</li> <li>• A program evaluation process must be specified including the role of each partner in making improvements based on the results of the evaluation.</li> </ul>
<b>Coursework requirements</b>	<p>Each program must offer curricula that addresses student learning and school improvement and focuses on:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Learning at all grade levels (pre-K through grade 12)</li> <li>• The role of instruction (with an emphasis on literacy and numeracy), curriculum, assessment and needs of the school or district in improving learning</li> <li>• The Illinois Professional Teaching Standards (23 Ill. Adm. Code 24 Standards for All Illinois Teachers)</li> <li>• Learning needs of all students, including students with disabilities, English language learners, gifted students, students in early childhood programs</li> <li>• Collaborative relationships with all members of the school community (e.g., parents, school board members, local school councils or other governing councils, community partners)</li> </ul>
<b>Internship requirements</b>	<p>Internships must be conducted at one or more public/nonpublic schools.</p> <p>In support of the internship, programs must provide both a faculty supervisor and a mentor that each meet certain requirements. The supervisor and mentor collaborate with site mentors to assess candidates' performance.</p> <p>Internships must include the following:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Engagement with instruction at all grade levels pre-K through grade 12</li> <li>• Observation of the hiring, supervision, and evaluation of teachers and staff and creation of a professional development plan for teachers</li> <li>• Participation in leadership opportunities to demonstrate the candidate meets the required Southern Regional Education Board (SREB) competencies and Interstate School Leaders Licensure Consortium (ISLLC) standards</li> <li>• Working directly with a mentor</li> <li>• Taking the lead in specific tasks related to meeting the critical success factors and essential competencies</li> </ul>
<b>Candidate selection</b>	<p>Candidate selection must include an in-person interview with at least two of the program's full-time faculty members. Candidates must discuss the contents of their portfolio and complete an on-site written response to a scenario presented by the interviewers.</p> <p>In addition, candidates must:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Hold a valid and current Illinois teaching certificate</li> <li>• Pass/have passed the test of basic skills</li> <li>• Submit a portfolio that presents evidence of the candidates' teaching achievements, including evidence of two years of their students' growth</li> </ul>

Note. Information summarized from Public Act 96-0903 (2010). Retrieved from: <http://www.ilga.gov/legislation/publicacts/fulltext.asp?Name=096-0903>. Programs for the Preparation of Principals in Illinois, 2015. Retrieved from <http://www.isbe.net/rules/archive/pdfs/30ARK.pdf>

Baron and Haller (2014) provide a detailed history of the efforts over the past 14 years by numerous stakeholders and constituent groups to develop and continually shape Illinois' new policy for principal preparation. The timeline below provides some highlights described in their review of these efforts (Table 2). Of note, new legislation was passed in August and December 2014 which reflects the ongoing review of the new policy as implementation issues arise and adjustments are made to address concerns raised by programs and districts.

As of the beginning of this study, 26 programs statewide had been approved under the new requirements. Eight programs were approved between April and June 2012 (AY '11-'12) and the remaining 18 were approved from September 2012 through August 2013 (AY '12-'13). Two additional programs were approved in June and September 2015. Several from the initial round of approved programs graduated their first cohorts in June and December 2014, while many of the more recently approved programs graduated their first cohorts in May 2015.

Table 2. *Timeline of Illinois Principal Preparation Reform*

2001	Illinois State Action for Education Leadership Project (SAELP) created to improve principal preparation in Illinois.
2004	Center for School Education Policy (CSEP) issued <i>Leadership for Learning: Strengthening Policies on Education Leadership on Behalf of Illinois Schools</i> report.
2007	House Joint Resolution 66 directs Illinois Leadership Development Task Force, jointly appointed by ISBE, IBHE, and the Office of the Governor, to recommend steps for implementing improvements to principal preparation in Illinois.
2008	<i>Illinois School Leader Task Force Report</i> issued.
2009	Leadership to Integrate the Learning Continuum (LINC) released <i>Building a Seamless Learning Continuum: The Role of Leadership in Bridging the Gaps Between Early Childhood and K-12 Education Systems</i> .
July 2010	Public Act 96-0903 legislation is effective creating new principal endorsement.
March 2012	Principal Preparation Review Panel established.
September 2012	New principal candidates may only be admitted to preparation programs that have been approved under the new rules.
June 2014	All preparation programs must be approved under new program rules to continue operating.
August 2014	Public Act 098-0872 legislation is effective allowing educators with Type 73 certificate to enroll in principal preparation programs; expires June 30, 2019.
September 2014	Illinois School Leadership Advisory Council convened to develop a statewide five-year action plan to support school leader preparation efforts and document impact on school performance. Final report to be released Fall 2015.
December 2014	Public Act 098-1147 legislation is effective allowing those with out-of-state teaching licenses to enroll in principal preparation programs.

## Goals of Research Study

The goals of the current mixed methods study—the Illinois Principal Preparation Implementation Review Project (I-PREP)—are to describe how the new policy is being implemented, to learn which aspects of the implementation have been challenging and why they present challenges, and to see how programs are addressing challenges and realizing improvements in the preparation of their candidates. The overall study includes three phases:

1. Statewide Scan of Early Implementation to learn how program representatives and stakeholders view the new policy, to learn what changes they expected to occur with the policy, and to learn what potential barriers they foresee might impede their vision of success (conducted fall 2014).
2. Site Visits with 12 out of the 26 (see Footnote 1) approved programs and their district partners to gather in depth information about the implementation process, catalysts and challenges to change, and resources needed (being conducted spring and fall 2015).
3. Statewide Online Survey of preparation programs to determine how well the information gathered from site visits generalizes statewide to all of the 26 (see Footnote 1) programs (to be conducted fall 2015).

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*The study's goals are to describe the policy's implementation, learning about benefits and how programs are addressing challenges.*

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To inform our work, we convened a project Advisory Board comprising of 24 key decision-makers from organizations that can influence change at the program level (e.g., higher education programs) or at the state policy level (see Appendix A for list of members). In September 2014, we met with the Advisory Board at Illinois State University and presented our study plans. The members provided feedback on our current and planned activities, interview protocols, and selection criteria for site visits. In mid-September 2015, we convened a virtual meeting with the Advisory Board members for recommendations for the upcoming fall 2015 online survey. We will reconvene the group once again in early spring 2016 to gather feedback on our study results and recommendations.

This report presents our findings from the first phase of the study, the statewide scan of stakeholders. The scan entailed telephone interviews conducted in November 2014-January 2015 with 23 representatives from the principal preparation programs and 22 other key policy stakeholders. Questions addressed a variety of topics, including the interviewees' perceptions of the new policy's goals and potential benefits, barriers that they foresee potentially impeding the success of the new policy, their expectations for the short- and long-term impacts of the new policy, and their judgments of the progress of implementation of the newly approved programs. For more information about the methods of the study, refer to Appendix B at the end of this report.

The statewide scan study provides policymakers and stakeholders with an understanding of the experiences and concerns of principal preparation programs and their district partners across the state as they implement these new regulations. Preliminary results from this scan study informed the work of the Illinois School Leadership Advisory Council (ISLAC), which is charged with developing a five-year strategic action plan to support school leader

preparation efforts currently in place and documenting their effects on school performance statewide. Convened by ISBE and IBHE, the ISLAC is comprised of approximately 50 representatives from professional organizations, P-12 education, private and public universities, special interest groups, the Illinois General Assembly, ISBE, and IBHE.

## Findings

Overall, program representatives and statewide stakeholders were largely familiar with and positive about the goals of the policy and had an overall positive view of its future impact on leaders and schools. However, some believed the redesign overstepped the need for statewide reform and that more limited policy changes would have been sufficient to address the issues. Regarding current implementation, respondents indicated they believe that the policy is bringing about many of the benefits it was intended to produce and improving the quality of principal preparation in Illinois. However, many respondents—both program representatives and statewide stakeholders—indicated that there are several challenges to successfully implementing the new policy. Many stakeholders expressed optimism about the future of principal preparation in Illinois; however, one widespread concern was conveyed regarding lower enrollments in principal preparation programs and the potential to eventually lead to a narrowing of the principal pipeline and shortages of qualified candidates.

In this section of the report, we first describe what the respondents see as the goals of the new policy. Then, we look at the broad picture of respondents' overall perceptions of the new policy. We then dig deeper into how respondents think about the current implementation of the new policy in terms of benefits and challenges. Finally, we examine what respondents see as the future outlook of the policy.

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### Goals of the new policy:

- increase program rigor
  - increase selection criteria, and
  - provide more authentic experiences.
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### Understanding of the Goals of the New Policy

Most interviewees' understood the original intent of the new policy and their responses are in line with the policy's goals of preparing "individuals to be highly effective in leadership roles to improve teaching and learning and increase academic achievement and the development of all students" (Programs for the Preparation of Principals in Illinois, 2015). When asked about the goals of the policy, the majority of those interviewed stated they believed the new policy was put into place to achieve the following: (1) increase the rigor of preparation and training so that principal candidates were being better prepared for their jobs as principals; (2) establish more selective admissions criteria so that those admitted were committed to becoming a principal (as opposed to other administrative positions or to move up the salary scale); and, (3) provide authentic experiences that better reflect what principals actually do on a daily basis. Two program representatives described the goals in this way:

*The goals of the policy are to increase the pedagogy of administrators for the principalship, and to increase their skills, knowledge base, and help them understand the importance of being an instructional leader as a principal.*

*I think they wanted to get more rigor into the principal preparation program so that candidates would be better prepared, they'd have better experiences and be ready for taking on administrative roles.*

Approximately half of those interviewed specified the new policy was created to focus principal preparation programs more on instructional leadership and school improvement than previous programs. In addition, half of the respondents noted one reason for the new

policy was to ensure that candidates have experiences in all grade-level settings (including pre-K), as well as experience working with diverse populations and inclusive settings. A policy stakeholder remarked:

*I really think the overriding goal is to ensure that individuals who wish to work in the role as a principal have the skills, knowledge, and dispositions to be that instructional leader, be that instructional coach, be that person that is able to look at district improvement plans, school improvement plans and say, “This is what we need to do to help our kids achieve.”*

A current principal candidate interviewed discussed her experience:

*I think actual hands-on experience in the field, for a prolonged period of time and in a number of different environments, is one of the big goals. I think the redesigned program, at least in my history with it, provides a nice overview of many different areas in leadership that someone might encounter.*

Several respondents commented they believed a reason for the new policy related to ensuring increased accountability within and between programs, in addition to meeting federal regulations for Race to the Top funding requirements:

*The policy was created to strengthen the preparation program for principals in the state of Illinois, and I think probably to come into compliance with a lot of federal rules and regulations for funding from Race-To-The-Top monies. (Program representative)*

*I think it’s because of the negative light that public education in general has been placed in, by both media and individual people, in terms of the blame that gets pushed onto public education about society’s woes. And I think part of this was pressure from the legislative side saying, “Well, it’s the school’s fault, and we’re going fix it.” (Stakeholder)*

*At its core, a strong desire on the part of lots of stakeholders to address the varying forms of the achievement gap that exists in Illinois, in terms of school leadership. (Stakeholder)*

## Perceptions of Policy Goals, Current Implementation, and Future Outlook

When we examined the broad picture of respondents’ overall perceptions of the new policy, we found that most program and stakeholder interviewees were positive about the goals of the policy and generally agreed, in theory, with its objectives. Interviewees were more mixed in their opinion about the policy’s current implementation. While roughly equal percentages of program and stakeholders view the current implementation positively, more program representatives hold negative views of the practical implementation of the policy. Overall, most interviewees held a positive outlook about the future of the policy.

As can be seen in Figure 2,<sup>3</sup> the large majority of program and stakeholder interviewees were positive about their Views of the Policy Goals and generally agreed, in theory, with its objectives:

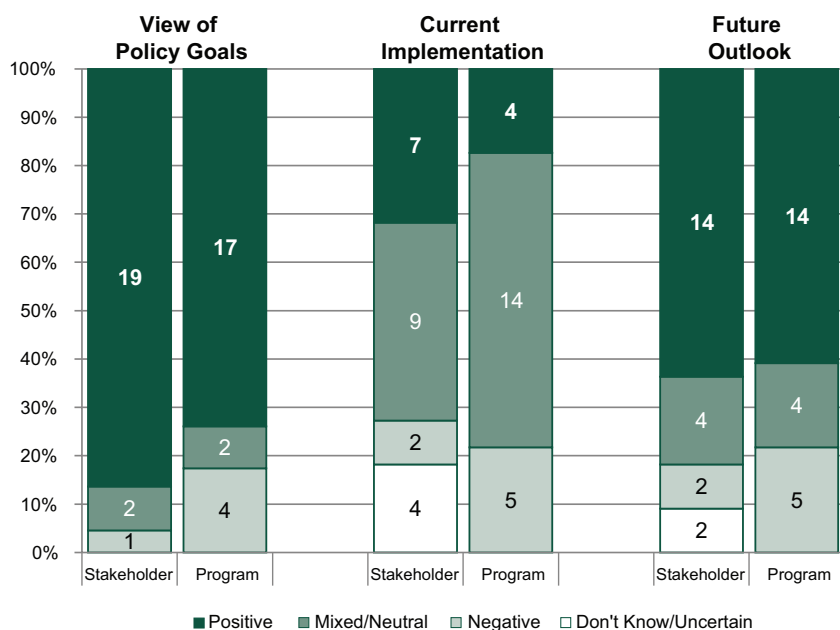
*[The policy] is great. Generally, I think it's what we need. I just do. I think the role is so important. Number one, for those schools and for the school districts that we're serving, we need to make sure that the preparation of principals is adequately meeting the needs of the students we're serving and of the principals themselves. (Program representative)*

*I think it's appropriate. I think that by raising some standards and having our higher ed institutions taking a look at their programs and making sure that they're aligned to standards, and also having the opportunity to connect with local school districts that I think that we're on the road to making those kinds of improvements in Illinois. (Stakeholder)*

The few negative perspectives, primarily from program representatives, about the underlying purpose of the new policy, often attributed the policy push to political agendas. As the following program representative states it, “Well, my opinion is that I think sometimes we get tied to trends or we get tied to initiatives put in place [...] I think it's very hard for a one-size-fits-all. That's why it seems very frustrating to try to build.” A different program representative adds to this top-down resistance idea by saying, “Well, we're doing fine. I wouldn't say that we're following all the rules and regulations to the 't.' I think they're over-bureaucratic and overreaching for a research-run institution to be honest.”

A large majority of interviewees were positive about their views of the policy goals.

Figure 2. Overall Perception of New Policy By Respondent Category



<sup>3</sup> This figure represents the respondents' overall perceptions of the new policy on three dimensions: Views of Policy Goals, Current Implementation, and Future Outlook. Each respondent's perceptions of the policy on each of the dimensions were categorized as positive, mixed/neutral, negative, or don't know/uncertain for each of the three dimensions. The responses of program representatives and other stakeholders were separated out since the different types of respondents could have very different perceptions of the policy given their differing levels of experience with the policy implementation. See Appendix B for more details.



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*Interviewees' opinions were more mixed regarding current implementation.*

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Views regarding the Current Implementation of the new policy vary more, with more interviewees conveying mixed or neutral opinions. This likely reflects the complexity in implementing the new policy, with some aspects of the policy going well, whereas others are creating challenges. Perhaps unsurprisingly, more program representatives than stakeholders hold negative views in terms of the practical implementation currently taking place—the program representatives come face-to-face with challenges implementing the new requirements, as will be discussed later. However, roughly equal percentages of program representatives and stakeholders view the current implementation positively. One program representative commented:

*The goal was to make sure that people were coming out prepared to work out in the various schools, and I do think that that's a grand idea and I think it could've been done better.*

A stakeholder remarked:

*So it's good and well intentioned to try to make sure that we have the best superintendents, best principals, best teachers, everybody has mentors, the evaluation process is going great, the continuing education is fine. But if there are no dollars behind it then how do you really know what you're putting in place is going to work.*

For others, both program representatives and stakeholders, policy implementation has been a rewarding process:

*I think it's getting better every day, to be honest with you [...] we really are seeing the process evolve into a really fluid system and procedure. We get better, I think, with each group of students, each course we teach. And, now that we've gone—the two of us have gone through the admissions process, because it was just a couple weeks ago that we were able to interview all the students. Two weeks before that, they had their written assessment. And, then we've been working with them all semester long putting together their portfolio. So, this was the first group that we got the chance to go through the entire process together. And, we really feel good about this group and think that it will continue to get better. (Program representative)*

*[The difference with the new policy is] pretty obvious. It's authentic. It's instructional. It's PK-12. You have to deal with ELL. There are experiences that you have to have that are truly related to the work. It's no more "man in the summer school" program. It's no more handling the cafeteria or the playground, all of that junk, or writing a paper and BS-ing your professor. This is authentic work. [...] I think it's more structured around what's important. [...] I think it's picking up speed. [...] We're in 2.0 version now. (Stakeholder)*

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*Most interviewees held a positive outlook about the future of the policy.*

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More individuals describe the Future Outlook of the new policy positively, although not quite as positively as the goals of the policy. Again, program representatives and stakeholders equally expressed positive expectations about the principal preparation programs. However, some program representatives were more doubtful about the success of the new policy in future.

Most interviewees are hopeful that the policy will have positive impacts on the future:

*I think the biggest impact it's going to have is it's going to improve student learning in schools in measurable ways. As we get principals who understand how to do this, who are prepared in these programs and out in the field, the student work improvement is unavoidable. (Program representative)*

*[In the future,] I'd like to believe that these principals move buildings well. I'd like to see improved student outcomes, test scores, college rates, attendance rates; after college—we don't do a very good job with that either in this state. (Stakeholder)*

Meanwhile, this stakeholder echoes many of the concerns heard, being that the future impact is where most of the concern should be focused:

*So I don't know if I'm like being far too philosophical here. But I worry. But I really worry. We're doing what we think is the right thing to do to care about our staff who are going through these programs. To be able to retain them and to find jobs for them when they finish their program. Okay. But what about the rest of the state? Will there be enough qualified principals to fill the vacancies that will exist? Someone at the state level has to be paying attention to this.*

## Current Implementation: Benefits

The statewide partners and stakeholders generally indicated that the new policy has been beneficial through creating better, higher quality principal preparation in Illinois. Overall, respondents indicated the new policy has been beneficial in five main areas: (1) more rigorous programs and selection of candidates; (2) more authentic and practical principal preparation; (3) better preparation to work with all students; (4) deeper, more collaborative partnerships between programs and districts; and, (5) consistently high standards statewide.

### *More Rigorous Programs and Selection of Candidates*

Many respondents stated that one of the primary benefits of the new policy is that it has led to more rigorous programs and higher quality candidates, primarily through more demanding coursework and internships, as well as higher selectivity of candidates. First, many respondents mentioned that the curriculum and coursework in the new programs are more challenging and are aligned to high standards (the ISLLC standards and the SREB critical success factors). This increased rigor was generally seen as a positive aspect of the new policy, even among those respondents who were not entirely favorable about the redesign. One stakeholder who had a number of concerns about the policy said, “On the positive side, there has been a ratcheting-up of the rigor of the curriculum, so I see that as being good.” The increased rigor of the programs was ultimately seen as providing better preparation for the principalship. Another stakeholder stated, “I think the main goal [of the new policy] is better prepared principals, and so increasing the rigor [of the program] ... is a great idea.”

Second, many respondents indicated that new policy led to an increase in the strength of the internship, both in terms of the range and relevance of activities the candidates need to complete as well as the number of hours necessary to complete the internship activities. Although the new policy does not require a specific number of hours for the internship, the majority of the respondents indicated that the internship is longer under the new policy than it had been prior to the policy.

Many respondents indicated that the internship experiences the candidates participate in under the new policy are more robust, rigorous, and extensive than was the case prior to the policy. One program representative stated:

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*Candidates entering the program are more committed to becoming a principal.*

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*[Prior to the new policy,] the internship...had an hours requirement attached to it... Students needed to write to the standards with their internship activities, but it was very broad. I mean, there was a lot of flexibility in terms of what they could do for those hours. And a lot of them did things that were...learning parts of the principal's job, more of the management parts. And they also were doing some things that were more substantive, but it just wasn't with the same depth that they're doing it now. The internship is very, very, very different now... What they're doing now is much more involved.*

Third, many of the statewide partners and stakeholders indicated that the new policy has led to a more rigorous selection process of candidates entering the programs and, thus, the enrollment of higher quality, more committed candidates. These respondents indicated that the educators who are enrolled in principal preparation programs under the new policy truly want to become principals, which was not always the case previously. This is in large part due to the move away from a general administrative certification (Type 75) toward a specific principal endorsement, as well as the increased rigor and requirements of the program and selection process. For example, under the new policy, candidates must demonstrate several years of accomplished classroom instruction, including demonstrating two years of student growth and learning within the last five years, in order to be admitted to programs. One program representative stated:

*I think the type and level of candidate that is now being admitted to the program is stronger than the previous ones. The new program is so complex and so detailed...that some people don't apply and those who do apply have to go through a rigorous process from testing to interviews to 15 other items to get in the program. So I think the quality of the candidate has increased.*

Because of these new requirements, the students who enter the programs do so with higher levels of preparation and a true interest in becoming quality school administrators. Several respondents indicated that having smaller cohorts with higher quality candidates allows faculty to work more closely with each candidate, which provides a better training experience. At the same time, many respondents also expressed concern that higher selectivity is leading to a significant decrease in enrollment. This concern is addressed in the Challenges and Concerns section of this report (see page 28).

### ***More Authentic and Practical Principal Preparation***

According to many respondents, another one of the key benefits of the new policy is that principal preparation is more authentic and practical than was the case under the previous policy. One of the primary ways in which the new programs provide more authentic and practical preparation for candidates is through the new internship requirements. Many respondents said that the new internship experiences provide candidates with a more accurate taste of what it is like to be a principal. One program representative stated, "Some of the bigger differences [between the old and new programs] are around ensuring authentic and varied experiences of candidates before they become principals; that our internships are robust; that they're tied to the actual work of what a principal will do in the role." Another program representative highlighted how the new policy has led to a shifting emphasis from leadership theory to leadership practice, stating:

*[The new policy is] significantly transforming our expectations for clinical experience of principal preparation programs. You cannot learn to lead by reading about it. And yet our programs were largely based on that presumption. And have been roundly criticized for that... What we're seeing in this new legislation is a much increased attention to the quality of the clinical experience or the field experience that people are having so that they can learn to lead by leading and getting appropriate feedback on that.*

Over half of those interviewed perceived that principal candidates going through the new programs will be “much better prepared leaders” than prior principal candidates, in large part due to the authentic, practical training they are receiving. Many of these respondents indicated that, under the new policy, programs are providing better principal preparation by increasing their focus on instructional leadership and school improvement, rather than just school management. They indicated that candidates trained in the new programs will be better prepared to evaluate teachers and assist teachers in data-driven decision-making, understand how to improve climate (e.g., keep good teachers, encourage parent involvement), and will be able to hit the ground running once they become principals.

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*New internship experiences provide a more accurate picture of being a principal.*

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### ***Better Preparation to Work with All Students***

Many respondents asserted that another one of the primary benefits of the new policy is that the newly designed programs provide better preparation for candidates to work with all students from pre-K through grade 12, including early childhood students, English language learners (ELL), and students with disabilities. Many respondents found it beneficial that the internships in the redesigned programs are varied and diverse and require candidates to have deep experiences with all students. One respondent talked about the positive aspects of these experiences:

*I do believe that the internship you have as a candidate, you really have to cover all the way from the zero to three, to all the way to twelfth grade and beyond... You have to cover children with special needs, English learners. You've got to go to each program... It's different [from the previous internship] because before one could just go to elementary school if that's where they were and then they would be able to do the internship there... I think that's something that... is going to make our principal candidates more attuned with, more informed in terms of understanding what instructional leadership is.*

Another program representative discussed how having to work with students across the pre-K through grade 12 continuum helps to broaden and deepen principal candidates' perspectives:

*I think we have a wide range of individuals that, like I said before, come into this program within their own track or within their own subject level or grade level or high school and, “I'm only going to be a high school administrator” versus elementary or whatever. I think the incorporation of some of these other areas and the experiences they need through the internship has broadened their perspectives and certainly given us access to other opportunities of building those relationships with the school district and with those communities that serve those kids. So, it's actually been a pretty positive opportunity, especially with the internship.*

Thus, several respondents indicated that the new internship experiences with all types of students are not only encouraging principal candidates to grow in their knowledge of diverse student populations but also helping to better prepare candidates to take on the role of being principals and instructional leaders.

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New internship experiences are diverse and require candidates to have deep experiences with all students.

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Many respondents singled out the benefits of the new policy's requirement for training in early childhood education in particular. One program representative stated:

*[The new policy's] emphasis on all candidates having experiences in early childhood, special education, and ELL settings, I think, is hugely significant. The growing body of evidence around what quality early learning and care experiences can mean for the development, the health, the well-being, the learning of young children over the course of their lives well into adulthood speaks very loudly, I think, about the importance of all educators knowing something about early learning. But school leaders in particular, regardless of the setting they're in, I think should be well prepared to support quality early learning and care in their schools and their districts, whatever that means in their settings, because the benefits are... just really profound. So I think all school leaders need to be prepared—have some understanding of that and, if for no other reason, come away knowing how... a quality early learning program can benefit what happens in the high school setting down the road.*

It should also be noted here that some respondents did not find this aspect of the policy to be particularly helpful, and their concerns are summarized in the Challenges and Concerns (see page 28) section of this report.

Almost half the respondents indicated that a positive aspect of the new programs is that content regarding special populations (i.e., early childhood students, ELL, and special education) is now embedded throughout the coursework and curriculum and integrated into programs in a much more deliberate manner. One program representative stated:

*What I think was a definite plus [of the new policy] was the emphasis on special education, ELL, and early childhood. Not that we didn't address those in the old program, but not to the degree we are now. And now we're making sure we have placements working with those teachers... I think that's been the biggest plus: the inclusion of all of our kids, and requiring our candidates to have those experiences, and also embedding those [components] in our courses.*

Many respondents found it beneficial that a lot of the new programs have embedded and integrated early childhood, ELL, and special education components throughout their coursework and curriculum instead of, as one program representative said, having “one ‘junkier’ course that has everything...but the kitchen sink in it.”

### **Deeper, More Collaborative Partnerships**

According to many respondents, another substantial benefit of the new policy is that partnerships between programs and districts or other community partners are deeper and more collaborative than was the case under the previous policy. Several program representatives found it beneficial that schools and their partners are now more involved in the principal preparation process, in particular through helping to shape candidates' internship experiences. One program representative stated:

*I think it has deepened our partnership with the district and allowed for conversations and partnership in a way that we didn't have before particularly around the residency, around the selection of mentor principals. How do we support mentor principals? How do we think about candidates getting these varied experiences throughout the year? That has been really helpful.*



Another program representative added that having districts more actively involved in and aware of the training process has made the districts more invested in the program and the candidates:

*I guess the other piece is really to form those close partnerships with the districts, and that's something that we've really enjoyed with the internship. We're working a lot more closely with the districts and the administrators there. They're aware of what's going on. They are more aware now because of the training module that we go through with them. They understand, and I really feel as if the mentors are extremely invested in our interns. And, it's just really been a great relationship.*

Many district partners indicated that the districts are finding the new partnerships beneficial since they are able to help shape the content to which candidates are exposed. One respondent who works with several districts stated:

*I think local districts sort of like the opportunity to be able to have those conversations and... to be able to help influence what the program might look like, and just have a closer relationship with the university to be able to make sure that the candidates that they're receiving are ones that are ready to hit the ground running... and are able to really kind of customize programs a bit to their need. So I'm hearing positive feedback through local districts.*

Many of the district partners are also looking at the enhanced school-district partnerships as a way to facilitate professional development for their educators who show promise, and to build a pipeline of qualified candidates within the district who are ready to step into principal vacancies. One district partner stated:

*[As a school district], you have to build your partnerships with colleges and universities. You build that and you know exactly who of your staff are going [to which programs]. Okay. And so that you can leverage what they are doing... So it's that identification of who's interested in becoming an administrative leader, i.e., principal. And that if you have that type of relationship with these colleges and universities, then you're able to leverage [that] relationship and help those people grow. And if you pay attention to these people that are going through the program, they will stay with you because they see their career path with you.*

In this way, some district partners are utilizing the closer partnerships with programs to, as one district partner put it, “create a pipeline of good people” who can move into administrative positions within their district.

### **Consistently High Standards Statewide**

The final primary benefit of the new policy identified by several respondents is that it works to ensure that all principal preparation programs in Illinois are comparable in terms of the quality of the program, the components they provide, and the experiences in which their candidates participate. This means that candidates attending different principal trainings in different universities and programs across the state experience a similar level of quality and similar course content and internship experiences. One program representative stated:

*I also think it's allowed for better quality control, regardless of who's teaching the courses, or what university program you're in. I think candidates are going to come out with very similar experiences now regardless of where they are, because [the new policy is] clear in terms*

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*Partnerships are enabling some districts to build a pipeline of qualified candidates.*

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*of what experiences that they need to have. I feel like we have a lot more direction, specific requirements. [In] our interactions with other university people, it does seem like what they're doing is very similar to what we're doing [and] is similar to what the next person is doing.*

Ultimately, the new policy is viewed as holding higher education programs accountable for the training they provide to potential principals and for raising expectations for the preparation of school leaders.

## Current Implementation: Challenges and Concerns

The challenges and concerns described below fall mainly into three areas: (1) reduced enrollment; (2) resource issues for programs, districts, and candidates; and (3) other concerns over policy requirements. These distinctions are intended merely for organizational purposes; in reality, they are all interrelated. For example, selection requirements affect enrollment, reduced enrollment means fewer resources for programs, and handling increased requirements involves resources of staff and funding. In this section, we will examine those issues respondents identified as currently affecting the preparation of principals. Some of these may also have further implications for the future. For example, today's enrollment affects tomorrow's pipeline. In the section that follows, Future Outlook on the Policy, we will discuss long-term issues.

### Concerns About Reduced Enrollments

Nearly all redesigned programs expressed concern about reduced enrollments. In our interviews, some program representatives reported that their numbers had begun to rebound while others remained concerned. Respondents suggested many possible reasons for this drop and for continued recruitment challenges. These reasons ranged from those with presumably short-term effects—such as an expected retrenchment of inflated enrollment in the final years of the general administration programs—to more complex challenges such as new admission requirements that may continue to depress enrollment.

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*New admission requirements and a more focused program for principals and assistant principals were cited as reasons for fewer candidates.*

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Although not often stated as such, many people seemed to assume one reason for the drop in enrollment was that redesigned programs were created to prepare principals and assistant principals rather than provide a general administrative endorsement, thus limiting the pool of interested educators or the marketability of the credential. Another reason several people mentioned was that many likely candidates rushed to complete Type 75 programs before the redesign took effect, anticipating that the new programs would be more difficult both to enter and to complete. This, participants suggest, likely created a natural depression in numbers. In fact, according to official reports, the number of educators completing a Type 75 certificate did peak just prior to the opening of new programs, between 2009 and 2011 (Summary of Educator Supply and Demand Report, 2014).

New admissions requirements were often cited as a reason for fewer candidates seeking to enroll in redesigned programs. These now include a face-to-face interview and an extensive portfolio containing, among other things, letters of recommendation from the applicant's principal or superintendent and evidence of student growth. Both interviews and letters of recommendation were mentioned as intimidating to certain applicants. However, portfolios were most frequently described as an obstacle to potential candidates. While some suggest applicants' apprehensions over the portfolio and providing evidence of student



growth is simply the result of a lack of understanding that could be assuaged with better communication, others consider these requirements an unnecessary burden:

*This e-portfolio...teachers get so frightened about the admissions requirements that they have to show evidence of student growth and learning...It's really just having them understand, "Oh, no, you have this. Let's secure the things that you have...evidence of student performance." So, I think just the communication about the changes to the policy and what it really means on a practical level. I know it's frightened people away.*

*Overkill also is the portfolio that is required for the students to get into the program. It's just absolutely burdensome for the student. It's a lot of work for them to get into the programs.*

Some participants were particularly concerned that admissions hurdles had gone too far to ensure selectivity and would reduce racial diversity and possibly gender diversity among candidates and subsequently in the principal pool. Such concerns were voiced by a handful of respondents but across a range of different stakeholders. One program representative pointed out that this comes right when school districts are being encouraged to hire more minority candidates:

*My concern is that we are constricting the pool of potential candidates...with regards to the diversity issue...I think that there can be a lot of folks that can be lost with that shrinkage of the pool. I'm concerned with the amount of work that people have to do to make application—with regards to, even, getting an interview.*

*I am concerned that because it has become so much more costly and so much more time intensive, especially for the internship part, that we would have fewer students of color, that we would have fewer women, that it would be more of a white male old boys' club.*

Other requirements also seemed unclear to potential candidates. One often-cited issue was confusion over the time required to complete internships. Several people mentioned that many teachers are discouraged from applying to the program because they believe—for the most part, incorrectly—that they need to take a year off to complete the internship. A number of program staff expressed frustration that this belief persists. For example, one program representative said, “There’s still people, including superintendents, that have believed the internship is year-long and you had to leave your teaching position... So that’s a challenge.” And another explains, “There’s still a myth out there that we keep squelching—there are still people that think they have to do a full-year internship and leave their classroom position. So a lot of those people are not applying to the programs. That’s a problem.”

In addition, a few respondents also expressed concern that there is a growing perception that the principal job is no longer worth the investment of preparation. One former principal who thought the job rewarding, bemoaned the fact that she thought perceptions had changed. “I think we also just made it look like it’s really not a fun job to be a principal.” Another participant referred to the challenge of the admissions process, saying “It’s so difficult that even the people that we want to be entering into the profession might find it difficult to do so or just flat out not worth it especially when they look at the demands of the profession after you get through the preparation process.”

Two frequent complaints regarding policy-related admission requirements, however, have since been addressed. First, the policy originally required applicants to hold Illinois teacher certification, so out-of-state applicants had to obtain certification in Illinois before being admitted into preparation programs. This, respondents pointed out, was both arduous and costly and posed a significant recruitment issue, particularly for programs near state borders. This issue was addressed at the end of 2014 in Public Act 098-1147. The other policy requirement that limited the candidate pool was that individuals with Type 73 credentials (i.e. counselors, nurses) were not eligible to enroll in redesigned principal preparation programs. However, rules permitting Type 73 certificate holders to enroll were revised in March 2014 and related legislation was passed the following May 2014, with a June 30, 2019 expiration date to allow time to consider if adjustments are needed.

### *Resource Limitations Were Felt At Every Level: Programs, Districts, and Candidates*

Another set of challenges involves the time and resources required to meet policy demands. These challenges are felt at the program, district, and principal candidate levels. Programs are deeply affected by the reductions in enrollment discussed above. Many talk about providing “more program for fewer tuition dollars.” Districts, previously more tangentially involved in principal preparation, now provide staff time to work with program partners and face increased investment in candidates, particularly during internships. Finally, respondents report that candidates’ costs have risen at a time when many districts cannot reimburse them for seeking leadership training.

In discussing the resource challenges faced by programs, one stakeholder reflected on the tension between quality and quantity, “The cost of running these programs is higher, done well. And with fewer candidates paying tuition, that is an issue that is going to need to be resolved.” Yet, not everyone considered this a poor tradeoff. One policymaker expressed some concern about a potential shortage, particularly in some locales in the state, but believed producing higher quality candidates should take priority:

*I think definitely the numbers are down of people entering into these programs. And I don't know that that's necessarily a bad thing. I think it's probably a positive and maybe a challenge down the road, but the positive thing for me is that, okay, well, maybe we're actually getting people who want to be principals. And then they're getting the kind of training that they need—so, that's a good thing.*

Running programs costs more, say respondents, because demands on staff are greater to fulfill higher standards of preparation:

*To do this kind of work that requires clinical supervision is more expensive than work that just requires classroom learning with poorly paid adjunct professors. This is a more expensive proposition. You get what you pay for in professional preparation. (Program representative)*

Another respondent described a concern voiced by several others that universities must decide if the new design makes financial sense for their institutions, a process that might result in fewer programs statewide:

*[Universities are] losing students in programs and they have to make decisions as to whether or not they're even going to provide the program based on some of those numbers economically, especially if some of the state support for higher education continues to dwindle. Lately there's been that concern. You have to prioritize the resources you have, and if these programs continue to be at such low enrollment, some universities may not invest in them. (Stakeholder)*

Exacerbating the challenge of providing more extensive preparation without an increase in resources, are the cutbacks state-supported universities have experienced over the last few years, not only in terms of dollars but in terms of faculty positions. Furthermore, staffing cuts at the State Board of Education have limited ISBE's ability to facilitate and advise programs and districts. As one of our participants said, "Everybody's doing what they can, but [ISBE] cut a lot of people back so they don't have the capacity right now to communicate [with the public] or to communicate back with us."

School districts are also called upon to do more under the new policy and invest more directly in their future leaders. Staff time and dollars are necessary to work with programs, provide internship placements and mentors that fulfill new requirements, find substitutes for their candidates to participate in internships while working, and complete considerable paperwork.

The internship, in particular, requires many new resources. Only a few districts and/or programs are able to pay candidates for a full-year, full-time internship, while others pay for substitutes to cover for candidates who keep their jobs during the internship period. A program representative described the need for districts to invest in candidates by providing substitutes so that they are able to profit by internship opportunities:

*A district might make a commitment of several thousand dollars for a candidate to provide relief time for them to experience some of the more critical things. And that is not much of a commitment, especially if they are in favor of that candidate, help collect that candidate because they want them staying in the district. But that all falls back again on... those partners better be involved in wanting these candidates or why should they invest in them?*

Given this level of increased effort for programs and districts, many respondents believe that the State of Illinois is not providing the money to assist the kind of work that needs to be done to successfully implement the new policy. One participant pointed out that school districts used to provide tuition reimbursement to support leadership development. She notes that now districts and states do not have the capacity to provide this and costs for educators to pursue preparation on their own are extremely high. "So we are in a state that is not even paying its current bills, let alone leading for future; and we have built these wonderful programs, but in an economy that can't support them."

Many respondents also discussed concern regarding the burden placed on candidates as one of the new policy's biggest challenges. Just under a third of the respondents discussed the challenges of out-of-pocket costs for the candidates, most notably the cost of the Growth Through Learning training and assessment that are required as part of Illinois' teacher evaluation reform initiative. Program staff reported struggling to keep tuition costs down for candidates in the face of fewer students and reduced budgets:

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*Interviewees identified increased costs associated with a more extensive program, need for new resources, and candidates' out-of-pocket costs as a challenge.*

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*The classes all of a sudden got outrageous because you've got the \$650.00 for the evaluation training. You've got the \$300.00 for the eight-hour test, and it's gotten a lot more expensive on top of just the college tuition to start out with.*

*That's one of the challenges. School is very expensive...How do we increase our enrollment and get our numbers up and maintain the quality of what we offer? We need some help. I think that is one of our biggest challenges right now.*

### Number and Specificity of Requirements Creates Challenges

The requirements themselves were challenging in several ways. In an effort to ensure the consistency of principal preparation across programs, the new policy increased the number of requirements and included many specifics with regard to the experiences that must be included in the internship, the competencies that must be documented, and the qualifications of internship mentors and faculty advisors. Internships are especially demanding in that they are the juncture where these sets of requirements combine with the addition of prescribed experiences with specific student populations (students with disabilities, ELL students, gifted students, students in early childhood programs, and grades pre-K through 12). Some respondents feel the overall effect is to reduce program and districts' ability to be unique, innovative, or responsive to their own contexts or candidates.

Many of the challenges with specific rules or regulations came in the areas of the internship and mentors and faculty supervisors. As described in Table 1, the new policy requires that interns be supported by both a principal mentor and a faculty supervisor, whose duties and qualifications are specified in the policy. About a third of the respondents stated that they were concerned that these requirements have limited the pool of qualified personnel to serve in these positions. Because faculty supervisors must “observe, evaluate, and provide feedback to each candidate about the candidate’s performance,” this workload may fall in the hands of fewer qualified faculty members. As one program representative said, “We only have three professors that can do the [supervision of] interns instead of having seven that can do interns. And so it’s a huge load on the three people doing those interns.” Similarly, mentors are required to work with no more than three candidates at a time (raised from two) and to have two or more years of experience as a “successful” principal (Baron & Haller, 2014). Evidence of “success” includes student growth data from two of the previous five years and formal evaluations or letters of recommendation. Furthermore, as this respondent points out, it’s not just a matter of finding the right mentor but a sufficient number of mentors in the right environments:

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*Some interviewees expressed concern that the increased requirements limited their ability to meet their local needs.*

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*From a challenge standpoint, the biggest challenge... has been around the mentor principal. Making sure you've got a good pool that also meets the criteria of the state. The rules have changed a bit to actually relax it some. [This district] is asking for a lot of mentor principals in any given year. Having a robust [mentor] pool will always be...[although] we hope it won't always be...a challenge. It's got to be a worse challenge in some of the rural districts where you have fewer schools to work with. (Program representative)*

This respondent continues to say that it is both the mentor and the school that need to be considered: “[The placement needs to be] a great environment for a candidate to learn and grow.”

Another comment illustrates districts' challenges, not only in providing candidates with mentors, but also in establishing a network of mentors sufficient to supply their ongoing demand for new leaders:

*If you have a fairly decent turnover—if you have new principals... If I have only a fraction, half of those available to be principal mentors, and even maybe even less than half, that's rough. And my ideal at this point is that I would like to see out of my staff at least three to four certified staff entering a program every year. Because I'm able to then continue to help them grow and create opportunities for them when they're finishing the program. (Stakeholder)*

In addition to a qualifying mentor and an appropriate school, internships also require the inclusion of the experiences relating to the pre-K through grade 12 continuum and early childhood, ELL, and special education student populations. This was particularly challenging in rural areas due to the limited availability of such student populations in nearby districts. For example, one district had trouble finding an internship placement that had both early childhood students and an experienced principal, yet they found a creative solution:

*We have one early childhood center and that principal was new. So she technically, by law, could not be a principal mentor. So we could have an overall mentor, principal mentor, but then we have for certain pieces of it to give that broad experience and really go get that true development and experience across different levels. We created it that way and it fell right into conjunction with the way the program has been outlined.*

The inclusion of exposure to all grades and special populations as part of principal preparation and internships was viewed by some as beneficial, leading to more intentional and higher quality experiences for all candidates in those areas. Others considered it an unnecessary, or at least over-emphasized, requirement that is difficult to incorporate in some places. Further, several respondents (both program representatives and stakeholders) indicated that they did not think it necessary for all candidates to have in-depth experiences across the entire pre-K through 12 continuum, because some candidates already know they want to serve as principals at a particular level or have extensive prior experience in a particular area (e.g., secondary):

*And so I think one of the downfalls is the early childhood piece because if you take a middle school or high school principal, I'm not saying they don't need to know anything about early childhood, but I'm saying to give it so much weight that it has to be embedded in practically every course taught takes away from too many other critical issues that they're going to need to spend time with. So I think that's the biggest downfall. (Stakeholder)*

Complying with a larger number of specific requirements led some stakeholders to feel their ability to differentiate program experiences either for their district or their candidates was compromised. One program representative described this as “being treated like a cog... interchangeable parts.” Some believe the “one-size-fits-all” approach results in a tendency to see preparation as a series of boxes to check. Similarly, being required to cover certain material may cause programs to cut other topics they also consider important. Given the expense for candidates, programs are very hesitant to add more courses than necessary. As one participant reports, given the increased focus on instructional leadership, she sees less variation in the courses they offer. “We actually cut out our school finance class. We probably would like to have it back in, except, you know, we have to be credit-sensitive. It's not part of the law, it's not required anywhere.”



This program found other ways to incorporate the management areas they considered essential into the internship experiences instead of coursework. However, it points to a weakness of requirements where resources are limited, that is, there is the potential for only what is required to be included. A related concern is that requirement specificity incentivized programs to move from providing future principals with the tools to meet a range of challenges to instead focusing on narrow tasks that do not translate into broader skills. As one program representative puts it:

*An example would be this is how you fill out the state school improvement form. [Rather than] when you're thinking of school improvement within your building or within the district, what are some considerations? What are some philosophical considerations? If this is your philosophy, how do you make sure that that plays out both in how you spend your money, how you allocate resources, what do you value? Those kinds of issues.*

Though the goal of the requirements of statewide consistency in preparation quality was seen as a benefit, one stakeholder suggested an alternative to many rules and regulations would be to evaluate program outcomes more strictly. “I think [programs would] rather be evaluated than micromanaged during the process.”

Some respondents also saw this lack of differentiation from the district’s point of view:

*I think if we can do anything right in this state, what we need to do is treat each district like a district. Just like we should teach every child like its own child. One [district] started here, one started there. (Stakeholder)*

Some respondents had an issue with the policy requiring everyone to receive training for all special populations despite a district’s student composition. One respondent suggested it might be better to require those serving in certain contexts to have specific training:

*That’s just indicative of us thinking, ‘Well everybody’s got to know everything,’ well that’s just not the case. (Stakeholder)*

One requirement produced a number of complaints from districts and was recently addressed through revised ISBE rules. Previously, the new policy did not allow principals prepared outside the state of Illinois to hold leadership positions in the state without first being endorsed by an approved Illinois preparation program. Programs were unsure how to endorse an individual they had not prepared and districts expressed concern that this reduced their hiring pool.

Complaints regarding the number of requirements and lack of room for individualization were also often found in respondents’ discussion of internship experiences:

*On the internship level, that is much more intense and I’m going to say it’s almost unwieldy in the requirements that are being set forth. Not only in what we’re asking the students to do, but in documenting that and finding a way to document it. (Program representative)*

*And so, part of it is being able to provide the flexibility for the people who are going through the programs, and look at those people as individuals. And if that individual already has a lot of high school experience, why are we continuing to make them do a ton of high school experience? Why not weight it so that they have to do 60 percent of their experiences in*

*junior high or elementary or early childhood, and then 40 percent in the environment that they're more familiar with? (Stakeholder)*

While the issues described here—enrollment, resources, and requirements—were part of our participants' current experiences of the new policy, we also asked them to think about the impact they expected the policy to have five to ten years in the future. The next section describes these responses, which include a mixture of some themes from both the benefits and challenges discussion.

## Future Outlook on the Policy

Most of the statewide partners and stakeholders had a positive outlook on the short- and long-term impacts of the new policy; although, many were concerned that there could be a shortage of principals in the future. Overall, respondents anticipated four primary short- and long-term impacts of the new policy: (1) better prepared leaders and more successful schools; (2) a narrowing of the principal pipeline; (3) challenges with program sustainability; and (4) more practical, applied principal preparation.

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*Most interviewees had a positive outlook on the impact of the new policy; although some expressed concerns about a narrowing pipeline.*

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### *Better Prepared Leaders and More Successful Schools*

The majority of respondents, both stakeholders and program representatives, indicated they believed that the redesigned principal preparation programs would ultimately create better prepared school leaders. One stakeholder said:

*We hope that the programs will produce school leaders who are even better prepared to do the work that's needed today, and part of that work, I believe, is engaging. The effective school leader is one who knows how to engage teacher leaders, community leaders, constituents, families obviously being chief among them, in making schools caring, safe places that support all children in really having meaningful learning experiences, and learning experiences that help them achieve.*

Many respondents anticipated that the new principals will be able to lead teachers in their instructional improvement efforts. One stakeholder said, "I'm hoping that...[the new principals] have better ideas around how adults learn and work and are attached to some of those things around the five essentials." A program representative commented:

*I think [the principals trained under the new programs] are going to be stronger instructional leaders. I think they're going to be better prepared to evaluate teachers. I think they're going to be better prepared to be leaders in helping teachers look at data and use data to inform decisions.*

Several respondents hoped that the new principals' enhanced leadership would ultimately produce improved student achievement and more successful schools. One program representative said, "Hopefully, the impact [of the new policy] will be better prepared leaders that will leave better schools for students and teachers tomorrow." One stakeholder stated:

*I'd really love to—and expect, really—to see that we will [have] principals that ... have great knowledge about student learning and about teaching; that have an understanding about the data and its impact; that are able to use technology to help support their understanding of all this; that [are] leading schools based on student work and not on...just the technical*



*work; that really get deep into the adaptive work of leadership. We'll see improved student achievement.*

For some, the greatest potential impact of the policy is to create principals who will work to ensure, as one stakeholder put it, that all children will be “successful once they graduate, [will reach] their fullest potential, [and will] become real, productive citizens.”

Several respondents indicated they thought that the new policy would not only create better school leaders at the principal level, but would also ultimately improve leadership at the superintendent level. One stakeholder stated:

*I think we're going to have a really exciting core of leaders out there, and hopefully we're looking at a bigger vision here, and not just the principalship, but hopefully they become superintendents.*

Over time, the new policy has the potential to improve leadership at all levels of the educational system since some of the principals trained in the new programs will move up into district administration and/or superintendencies. In addition, Illinois' preparation for superintendents is currently being redesigned to meeting higher standards. The new program standards have been recently developed and signed into law (Endorsement for Superintendent, 2015), with rule development and program redesign currently underway.

### *Narrowing of the Principal Pipeline*

Nearly three-fourths of the respondents mentioned concerns that the new policy would ultimately shrink the pipeline of qualified candidates for principal positions. As was discussed in the Challenges and Concerns section of this report, many respondents are concerned that enrollment numbers are down in many of the new programs. Thus, many respondents fear that the new programs will not graduate enough people to fill open principal positions, thereby creating a shortage of principal candidates in the not-too-distant future. One program representative said:

*I think [the new policy] significantly decreases the number of qualified applicants for leadership positions. My fear is that ten years from now, the state will have to scramble and we will just be in a crunch time to certify people to serve as principals...I am worried about that.*

Some respondents are particularly concerned that the narrowing of the principal pipeline will lead to a less racially and ethnically diverse pool of principal candidates. One stakeholder said, “My concern is that we are constricting the pool of potential candidates at a level that is going to make it very difficult [to hire and place diverse candidates]...That's a real problem for me with regards to the diversity issue.”

Several respondents indicated that the numbers of principal candidates in the principal pipeline was not only a long-term concern, but perceived the decreased enrollments as a current problem, despite the fact that only a few of the newly designed programs have graduated their first cohorts of candidates in December 2014 . One program representative said:

*[The new policy has] impacted the...number of candidates we have [in our programs]. Therefore, it has impacted the number of candidates for positions in the state. And we're already getting very qualified feedback from our K-12 partners out there that their pool of candidates for principal position is probably the weakest they've had in a number of years; weakest in the term of number of individuals.*

Many respondents stated that they believed that the constriction of candidates in the principal pipeline would have differential impacts on urban, suburban, and rural districts and that rural districts would be the most negatively impacted. One stakeholder stated:

*I think it'll continually erode the number of principal candidates that are available to take positions, especially in rural schools first, urban schools next. Suburban wealthy schools are always going to be able to get by, but that's not the majority of schools in Illinois. The majority of schools in Illinois are rural and urban, and they're going to have troubles.*

Many respondents mentioned they are not overly concerned about shortages in the principal pipeline since there are sufficient Type 75 certificate holders currently in the system. One stakeholder stated:

*I know there's a fear of the shortage of administrators, and I don't see that happening. If it does happen, it's not because of this policy. It's because the lack of people that want to be a principal, because there's 43,000 Type 75 holders right now out there.*

However, other respondents commented that it would not make sense to rely on the Type 75 holders to fill many of the principal vacancies in the state. One stakeholder stated:

*So we've really got to think about [creating an adequate principal pipeline] and address that because if we just don't have enough people we got a real problem and that's a real issue. I know people will make statements like, "Well, if you look at the data, there's currently 45,000 active [Type 75 certificate holders] out there." Well, you have to immediately cut that in half because half of those people really aren't even interested in the [principal] position. There's probably a significant number of those people are retired now but they keep their certificates active. And then you have to start looking geographically do you have enough around the state that are interested. And then you also deal with the quality issues. So we have to be really carefully just to hang our hat on those that have already been prepared.*

### Challenges with Program Sustainability

Several respondents indicated that they were concerned about the sustainability of the changes brought about by the new policy. These respondents expressed that program improvements might erode over time due to lack of district support and potential drift back to the status quo. They highlighted that it may be difficult for leaders trained in the new programs to lead in the new way while working within an old system. One stakeholder said, "You can't have these new instructional leaders if they are supervised and evaluated by superintendents that don't have that same vision or training." Another stakeholder added, "You train the people up a certain way, then you send them out in the field and that's not at all what they're encountering. Will all the efforts be undone by supervisors and such?" Thus, the way in which the current system is set up may undermine the training new principals have received.

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Concerns were raised about sustaining the high level of needed resources into the future.

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Respondents also expressed concerns about whether or not the new policy would be sustainable over time due to inadequate enrollment numbers in several programs, inadequate resources, and the challenging requirements of the new policy. Many of these concerns were outlined in the Challenges and Concerns section of this report, but it is worth noting that some respondents found these concerns potentially formidable enough to undermine the sustainability of the new policy.

Several respondents questioned whether or not districts and programs will be able to sustain the high level of resources they have put into principal preparation in the future. One stakeholder stated:

*This is not an inexpensive process and program. And when the grant funding is no longer available, how is it going to be sustainable and maintainable? And, is it scalable?*

Several respondents—primarily stakeholders and policymakers—talked about the need for evaluations to track what is working and where support is needed in order to preserve gains that have been made. One stakeholder stated:

*I think people are going to say, ‘Oh, the internship isn’t working; it’s too long; it’s too complex. We’re scaring people away.’ I’m worried that people are going to, without enough evidence, want to chip away at [the new policy].*

Another stakeholder described seeing this trend repeatedly in education reforms:

*I think what happens so often is we implement a policy, and it’s hard to do, and you’ve got your naysayers, and then they can turn the tide and reverse the policy. So the field is caught in this constant pendulum. And so then often they just feel like, ‘Oh, this is just the next thing that’s coming, and if we just hunker down, it’ll go away.’ So I think just that’s what we need to worry about is not getting caught up in that, just really looking at the intent of this, and monitoring this, too. If there are parts [of the policy] that [are] not working, we really need to address that. But if there are parts that [are] working, we really need to enforce and emphasize that even more.*

Thus, several respondents asserted the belief that the implementation and impact of the new policy must be studied in order for it to be both sustained and improved upon.

### ***A Shift from Academic to More Practical, Applied Principal Preparation***

Several respondents asserted that the changes to the principal preparation programs could mark the beginning of an overall shift to more practitioner-oriented and less theoretical principal preparation. One program representative said, “I think more of the work over the next 10 years will be outside the college classroom; more of it will be on-site [in] schools.” Another program representative added that the new policy would “change how graduate schools are run...It’s going to be only professional as opposed to academic preparation.”

These respondents indicated that the changes could have a ripple effect of decreasing the role of universities in principal training and increasing the role of practitioner-led training from districts. One program representative stated:

*[Ten years from now,] I think the universities will probably be playing less of a role [in principal preparation], especially four year institutions, as we move that far down the line. We'll be playing a lesser role in the endorsement licensing certification of school administrators at that time.*

The respondents also anticipated changes in faculty role and composition. One stakeholder stated:

*I think the other thing is that professors have to change, and I think they will. I think there's too much that the State of Illinois has done to change teacher prep and principal prep and expectations for students, showing evidence of student growth. I think professors will die out in the form that we're living right now if it's that traditional, 'This is my class; I teach it on campus and that's all I do.' [That kind of professor] won't exist anymore.*

Thus, many of the respondents indicated that principal preparation would be much more practical and less academic and that more of the training would take place in schools and districts as opposed to academic universities.

## Implications

Illinois' statewide redesign of principal preparation programs included several innovative components and created more consistent standards statewide. Based on interviews we conducted with 23 program representatives and 22 key stakeholders, we find most participants believe principal preparation in Illinois has been improved through the new policy changes. Interviewees generally indicated that the candidate selection process programs themselves are more rigorous; that performance-based internships offer a more extensive and authentic training experience; that candidates are better prepared to work with and support all students, including early childhood students, ELL, and students with special needs; that partnerships between programs and school districts are deeper and more collaborative; and that there are consistently high standards for all principal preparation programs statewide.

At the same time, respondents described current implementation challenges and some concerns for the future. Many of these challenges and concerns are the flipside or potentially unintended consequences of changes otherwise considered beneficial. Greater program selectivity and focusing administrative programs to training principals and assistant principals has led to reduced enrollments, strained resources, and increased staff effort to meet new standards and navigate and document complex requirements. In this section we look at the broader policy implications for the principal pipeline and districts.

### Principal Pipeline

In terms of the principal pipeline, the new policy imposed a much finer filter, as intended by the recommendations of the Commission on School Leader Preparation. Rather than obtaining a general administrative certificate, applicable to many levels of leadership, principal preparation is now restricted to those seeking to be principals and assistant principals. Furthermore, admission criteria and procedures are far more rigorous. As described in the Current Implementation: Benefits section of this report, more consistent, specialized, and intensive training for these positions and higher standards were considered beneficial. Yet these changes have stirred a debate over whether or not recent restructuring will eventually lead to a shortage of candidates in the principal pipeline, as well as a shortage in other middle-level administrative positions.

Concern over a narrowed pipeline was widespread among our participants. The majority of the program representatives and statewide stakeholders we interviewed expressed concern that the new policy could have a negative impact on the principal pipeline in terms of both numbers and racial and gender diversity of candidates. Respondents' reasons for concern included admission criteria, extensive admission portfolios, and higher costs for candidates. Some studies have shown that increased academic requirements resulted in less racial diversity of teacher candidates (DeAngelis & Presley, 2007; Memory, Coleman, & Watkins, 2003). Therefore, it may be likely that increased admission requirements for principal preparation programs may negatively impact diversity of candidates. Furthermore, participants expressed concern that rural districts will be hardest hit by shortages.

On the other hand, several respondents indicated that the principal pipeline may not be as negatively affected as many anticipate. They contend that although the newly redesigned programs may enroll fewer candidates, the actual number of graduates prepared and intending to seek a principalship is likely to match that of the previous general certificate program since many educators pursued the Type 75 certificate for reasons other than becoming a principal. Thus, they believe the net gain of potential principals is likely to be equal, with the added bonus of a more focused training program and better prepared candidates for principal positions, therefore, fulfilling the intention of the new policy based on the work of the Commission and School Leader Task Force. Regarding the shortage of principals in the near future, many feel that the abundance of current Type 75 certificate holders will provide enough candidates to fill principal vacancies if the initial cohorts under the new policy do not provide enough candidates to meet the need. Given that some programs are experiencing a rebound in enrollments while others are not, it will be important to monitor program admissions and completions to determine the extent to which newly designed programs are able to supply enough candidates to match the demand for principals. Additionally, since the intentions of current Type 75 certificate holders are unknown, further studies examining those who are more likely to pursue a principalship in the near future are needed to help determine a more accurate picture of whether or not a shortage in principals is on the horizon.

Relying on Type 75 candidates to fill principal vacancies, however, also concerns some respondents. First, under the old policy, educators were encouraged to pursue the credential simply as a way to move up on the pay scale. Second, Type 75 certificate holders are not evenly distributed across the state, but tend to be clustered in suburban and urban areas. Thus, relying on certificate holders to fill principal vacancies could lead to a shortage in rural areas. Finally, several stakeholders pointed out that one of the primary reasons the redesign came about was that preparation under Type 75 certificate programs was inconsistent and, in many cases, inadequate for principal preparation. Thus, it seems incongruous with the goals of the redesign to encourage districts across the state to rely on these certificate holders to fill the gap between the number of principal vacancies and the number of newly trained principal candidates.

Another issue related to the principal pipeline, raised by several respondents, was whether the shift from a model that produced more candidates with broader training to a model producing fewer candidates with more defined and intense training, will mean a decrease in available programs throughout the state, particularly in rural areas. Interviewees noted the uncertainty of state and university commitments to financially sustain smaller programs. Given that teachers tend to work in schools close to where they grew up (Boyd, Lankford, Loeb, & Wyckoff, 2005), it stands to reason that principal labor markets are similarly structured. Therefore, it will be critical to monitor the location and number of available principal preparation programs to determine if the new policy causes too much contraction in the supply of programs, particularly in regions of the state with fewer principal training options.



## Districts

Deeper and more collaborative partnerships between districts and preparation programs were seen as a goal of this legislation and a benefit many respondents identified. However, this is a new role for many districts in an often resource-strapped, high-accountability environment. While district partnerships vary in the level of district involvement, from participating in dialogues with programs about district needs and concerns to sharing the design and monitoring of internship experiences, this role requires district interest, resources, and capacity.

Beyond financial costs, as our interviews indicate, there are other potential disincentives for districts to work with preparation programs. Under the new policy, although programs are required to partner with districts, districts are not required to partner with programs. Some districts may find it too cost prohibitive and time-intensive to enter into a partnership with one or more programs. Also, given the current state of accountability across the country, it is unclear whether or not participating in the principal preparation process is beneficial to superintendents, principals, and/or teachers since assessment data is being used to judge educators' performance on multiple levels. Thus, for example, having long-term substitute teachers covering the classrooms of principal candidates who are doing their internships could negatively impact the assessment data of the candidate as well as the principal and school.

On the positive side, our participants also report that organized and well-planned partnerships can provide a promising pathway to increase the number of principal candidates and decrease the likelihood of potential shortages in the pipeline. Some districts are actively working to identify high quality educators who are ready to step into leadership roles; encouraging those educators to apply and enter into the partnering program(s); working with the principal candidates and their programs to develop high quality internship experiences; and then helping the graduates to find positions as administrators within the district. Although this strategy may be difficult for smaller districts to put in place, it might be possible for either nearby smaller districts to partner together and/or regional education offices to step in and help to support this model of active partnership.

Districts will now be able to also send their promising teacher leaders to programs offering a Teacher Leadership Endorsement (Programs for the Preparation of Principals in Illinois, 2014). As of June 2015, 20 teacher leader programs have been approved (ISBE, 2015). Such programs provide an alternate training path for educators who may not immediately aspire to a principal position and fill in some of the gaps left by eliminating the general administrative certificate. It remains to be seen whether or not these two levels of endorsement will provide sufficient training for various levels of school leadership and how districts will work with teacher leader programs. In our upcoming I-PREP report based on in-depth studies of 12 preparation programs and their districts partners, we will further explore how program/district partnerships may help districts fill leadership positions.

## Conclusions and Next Steps

Although there are concerns about the new policy's implementation—particularly involving the restricted pipeline, stretched resources, and “one-size-fits-all” approach—and many of the stakeholders emphasize the need for evaluations of both programs and other policy impacts to avoid unintended consequences, the majority of program representatives and statewide stakeholders indicated that they support the goals of the new policy and have a positive outlook on its impact in the future of principal preparation in Illinois. Most believe that the redesigned principal preparation programs will ultimately create better prepared school principals as well as improved student achievement and more successful schools. Many program representatives and stakeholders groups such as ISLAC and the LINC Advisory Council, are working together to find solutions to the challenges and make plans for furthering the work. Additionally, CSEP is currently implementing a U.S. Department of Education five-year grant (Illinois Partnerships Advance Rigorous Training: IL-PART) to collaborate with three university and district partner teams to examine factors and mechanisms needed for effective partnerships and to evaluate the outcomes of two principal internship models. These research endeavors, along with continued conversations and work of statewide stakeholder groups, will help inform decisions regarding any improvements in the policy. The potential envisioned by policy proponents is great, and many hope that with continued work—including measuring intended outcomes and monitoring unintended negative impacts—principal preparation in Illinois will reach this potential.

Lastly, the remaining activities for this study, namely the site visits and survey with program representatives, will be carried out this fall 2015. The results from these activities will add to our understanding of the successes and challenges of the policy's implementation, particularly in terms of the extent these were experienced by all of the principal preparation programs. Our final report due in summer 2016 will integrate the findings from the scan, site visits and survey to provide research-based insights in how to improve the policy and its implementation.

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## Appendix A

### I-PREP Advisory Board

#### Principal Preparation Policy

- Lisa Hood, Center of Study Education Policy (CSEP)
- Lindsay Alvis Cochrane, Robert R. McCormick Foundation
- Ed Pauly, The Wallace Foundation
- Jason Helfer, Illinois State Board of Education (ISBE)
- Representative Linda Chapa LaVia, Illinois legislator

#### Higher Education

- Stephanie Bernotiet, Illinois Board of Higher Education (IBHE)
- Steve Tozer, Urban Education Leadership Program
- Maggie Blinn DiNovi, New Leaders
- Maureen Kincaid, North Central College
- Paul Zavitowsky, University of Chicago
- Jim Rosborg, Illinois Council of Professors of Education Administration (ICPEA)
- Maureen Gillette, Illinois Association of Deans of Public Colleges of Education (IADPCE)

#### Principals

- Jason Leahy, Illinois Principals Association (IPA)

#### School Districts/Boards

- Rich Voltz, Illinois Association of School Administrators (IASA)
- Roger Eddy, Illinois Association of School Boards (IASB)
- Diane Rutledge, Large Unit District Association (LUDA)
- Mark Twomey, Association of Illinois Rural & Small Schools (IARSS)
- Herschel, Hanna, Blooming School District

#### Early Childhood

- Theresa Hawley, Governor's Office of Early Childhood
- Elliot Regenstein, Ounce of Prevention
- Teri, Talan, McCormick Center for Early Childhood Leadership (CECL)

#### Special Representatives

- Robin Steans, Advance Illinois
- Audrey Soglin, P20 Committee on Teacher/Leader Effectiveness

## Appendix B

### Study Methodology

Telephone interviews for the stakeholder scan were conducted between November 2014 and January 2015. Based on recommendations from our project Advisory Board and researchers from the Center for the Study of Education Policy (CSEP), we identified 50 Illinois education stakeholders, including one representative from each of the 26<sup>i</sup> approved principal preparation programs to be invited for an interview. Others in the interview pool candidates included individuals from state education policy groups, state education agencies, professional education organizations, regional offices of education, and partnering school districts. We also contacted individuals with specific knowledge about early childhood education, English Language Learners, and special education, as well as a current principal candidate in one of the approved programs. While time and budget constraints limited our interview pool to 50 individuals, the responses from this first phase of the study were intended to provide an initial scan of the perceptions and experiences of the approved programs and other key stakeholders. In addition, findings from the scan were used to inform the preparation for in-depth site visits with 12 of the 26 approved programs and will be used to develop the online survey of representatives from all of the approved programs.

Stakeholder scan participants were contacted through email and offered an incentive of a \$25 Amazon gift card for participation. Interview questions were informed by recommendations from the CSEP Symposium in October 2013, feedback from the project Advisory Committee, and in consultation with CSEP researchers. Questions addressed a variety of topics, including the interviewees' perceptions of the new policy's goals and potential benefits, barriers that they foresee potentially impeding the success of the new policy, their expectations for the short- and long-term impacts of the new policy, and their judgments of the progress of implementation of the newly approved programs. Scan questions also focused particularly on partnerships and early childhood/special education/English language learners components (see Appendix C for the interview protocol).

Each telephone interview was audio recorded with the consent of the participant and lasted approximately 45 to 60 minutes. Interviews were transcribed and scrubbed of any identifiers (e.g., names, university references) before data coding and analysis. For the qualitative analysis, members of the research team read each interview in its entirety and identified the top three to five themes that arose in the interview. Qualitative software was then used to code the interviews based on the larger themes identified in the first reading of the interviews. The larger themes were then divided into subcategories to identify nuances of the larger topic and the interviews were recoded using these subcategories. The larger themes and subcategories were reviewed for completeness and used to identify the general factors that stakeholders identified as being important about new policy, including the potential benefits and challenges of the new policies. Due to the nature of qualitative analyses, we typically do not use counts or percentages to describe our findings, but rather we identify themes from the responses that were raised by many individuals or by a few individuals with a key point (either positive or negative) that is critical to understanding the issues.

<sup>i</sup>Two additional programs were approved in June and September 2015.



Table B.1 describes the participants in the telephone interviews by category (program representative or stakeholder). Overall, we completed 45 of 50 interviews, and achieved representative participation from each of the different categories of stakeholders. Non-respondents typically stated lack of time as the reason for their inability to complete the telephone interview.

Table B.1. *Respondents from Statewide Scan*

	# invited	# completed	% completed
<b>Principal Prep Program Representatives</b>	26	23	88%
<b>Stakeholders</b>	24	22	92%
K-12 District or ROE	8	7	
Professional Education Organizations	6	6	
Education Policy	4	4	
Education Policy - EC, ELL, Special Education	3	2	
State Education Agency	2	2	
Principal Candidate	1	1	
<b>Total</b>	<b>50</b>	<b>45</b>	<b>90%</b>

To capture stakeholders' overall perceptions of the new principal preparation policy in theory, in current practice (i.e., implementation), and for the long-term future outlook of the policy (i.e., future implementation and impact), we rated their interview responses into global categories: "Policy Goals," "Current Implementation," and "Future Outlook," respectively. Considering a stakeholder's opinion in these three different dimensions allowed us to capture and emphasize that these are distinct ways that opinions of the policy can be perceived that may or may not be consonant across the board for the interviewee. To accomplish this, each interview transcript was read in its entirety by a researcher and major points raised by the interviewee were documented in an interview summary form and assigned a rating: (1) Positive, (2) Mixed/Neutral, (3) Negative, or (4) Don't Know/Uncertain in terms of one of the three dimensions. Ratings were tabulated for every interview for each of the three dimensions for program and stakeholder interviewees separately to compare across groups. We separated out program representatives and other stakeholders since they could have very different perceptions of the policy given their differing levels of experience with the policy implementation. Definitions for the rating categories are as follows:

- **Positive:** reflects interviewee who is completely positive or when the interviewee is mostly positive (perceives only a few problems) about the policy
- **Mixed/Neutral:** reflects interviewee who shared a balanced emphasis on positives and negatives, as well as when interviewee was relatively neutral or lacked a strong opinion about the policy
- **Negative:** reflects interviewee who is completely negative or when the interviewee is mostly negative (perceives only a few advantages) about the policy
- **Don't Know/Uncertain:** reflects interviewee who expressed their lack of knowledge about or limited exposure to the policy, its current status of implementation, or its potential impact.

## Appendix C

### Statewide Scan Interview Protocol

#### I. BACKGROUND

- 1) What is your current position?
- 2) How long have you been in this position?
- 3) Briefly, what did you do prior to your current position?

#### II. KNOWLEDGE OF NEW PRINCIPAL PREP PROGRAM POLICY

- 1) Based on your knowledge of the new principal prep program policy:
  - a. Why do you think the policy was created?
  - b. What is your view of the goals of the policy?
  - c. What are the biggest differences between the new policy and the former policy?

#### III. EXPERIENCES WITH NEW PRINCIPAL PREP PROGRAM POLICY

- 1) What has been your role in relation to the new principal prep program policy?
- 2) How has the implementation gone?

##### **For Districts & Principal Prep Programs:**

- 3) Tell me about the process your program/district has gone through to implement the new principal prep program policy.
  - a. Where are you in the redesign process?
  - b. Who has been involved in the program redesign?
  - c. How does the new program differ from the one previously in place?
  - d. What has changed most significantly with the new redesign?
- 4) How is the partnership between your program/district and the district/program working?

##### ASK EVERYONE

- 5) What has been your experience with the principal preparation program redesign with the new focus on principal training with early education, special education, and English-language learners?

#### IV. OPINION ABOUT NEW POLICY

- 1) What is your opinion of the new principal prep policy? (Keep very general, then follow-up with Strengths and Challenges.)
- 2) What are the policy's greatest potential strengths?
- 3) What are the policy's greatest potential challenges?
  - a. What is needed to overcome [X CHALLENGE]? (Ask for each challenge identified.)
- 4) What is needed for the new policy to be successfully implemented?

#### V. EXPECTATIONS

- 1) How do you think principal preparation programs will change due to the new policy?
- 2) What impact will the new principal prep policy have in the short-term (1-3 years)?
- 3) What impact will the new principal prep policy have in the long-term (10 years and beyond)?

#### VI. CLOSING - Thank you very much for your time. Is there anything else you would like to mention before we finish?





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