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Community Context: Influence and Implications for School Leadership Preparation

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Introduction

Research on school leadership shows that principals can significantly impact student achievement by influencing classroom instruction, organizational conditions, community support and setting the teaching and learning conditions in schools (Marzano, Waters, & McNulty, 2004). Moreover, strong principals provide a multiplier effect that enables improvement initiatives to succeed (Manna, 2015). Yet each year, as many as 22% of current principals retire or leave their schools or the profession (U.S. Department of Education, 2014) requiring districts to either promote or hire new principals to fill vacancies (School Leaders Network, 2014). One in five principals working in schools in the 2011-12 school year left their school by the 2012-13 school year (Goldring and Taie 2014). Additional research shows that one out of every two principals is not retained beyond their third year of leading a school. School leaders who are retiring, transferring schools, or pursuing new opportunities within the education sector are not being replaced by enough qualified candidates (Policy & Advocacy Center-NASSP, 2017, p. 1). As a result, many school districts across the country report principal vacancies and a serious lack of qualified applicants to replace them. In addition, the demand for employment of principals is estimated to will grow 6 percent nationwide by the year 2022 due to population increases (Policy & Advocacy Center-NASSP, 2017, p.2). This surge in demand will increase the financial burden on districts since the cost to recruit, hire, prepare, mentor, and continue training principals can cost school districts between \$36,850 and \$303,000, with typical urban school districts spending \$75,000 per principal (Policy & Advocacy Center-NASSP, 2017, p. 2).

Where will the next iteration of school leaders come from? This is a concern in light of the demographic trends in the teaching profession in New York State, in particular, where more than 50,000 active state Teachers' Retirement System (TRS) members are older than 55, according to the New York State Teachers Retirement System (NYSTRS) annual report (2016, p. 116). Within the next five years, TRS projects more than one-third of the nearly 270,000 active members could be eligible to retire as the average age of teachers in the state is 48 (NYSUT Research and Educational Services, 2017). Eleven percent of New York teachers leave their school or profession annually (Carver-Thomas & Darling-Hammond, 2017). Those numbers go up for early career teachers and those working in high-poverty areas. About 55 percent cited professional frustrations, including standardized testing, administrators or too little autonomy (Carver-Thomas & Darling Hammond, 2017). Compounding the issue, since 2009–10, enrollment in teacher education programs in New York has decreased by roughly 49 percent, from more than 79,000 students to about 40,000 students in 2014–15 and an estimated 10 percent of New York teacher education graduates are leaving the state for employment elsewhere making recruitment of teachers, and therefore future school administrators, a looming crisis

(Gais, Backstrom, Malatras, & Park, 2018). Unfortunately, very little descriptive data is available regarding similar enrollment in leadership preparation programs in New York state making predictions about adequate numbers or qualified candidates nearly impossible. This is particularly difficult for high needs districts in rural and urban settings.

Although recent efforts have started to focus on the quality of principal preparation (Mendels, 2016), little attention has been paid to the challenges and experiences of principals given their community context. This is particularly concerning for rural schools which comprise more than half of all US districts, contain a third of all schools and a quarter of all students. This is important as approximately the same number of students attend rural schools as in the nation's urban areas (U.S. Department of Education, 2013).

Lavalley (2018) examined the state of America's rural schools noting that rural schools face many of the same challenges that urban schools do, but the solutions for those problems are often different for rural districts than urban districts. Three areas cited as common concerns between rural and urban districts were issues of poverty, the achievement gap and teacher recruitment and retention (Lavalley, 2018). Yet, despite the similarity of these major concerns, little attention has been paid to the needs of leadership preparation common between rural and urban settings in order to better understand opportunities for cross-boundary collaborations to strengthen the leadership pipeline in *all* communities and for *all* children. The looming crisis in the demographics of school leadership is real, and it is most acute in those settings at the extreme – in very sparsely populated, rural settings, as well as in densely populated urban environments, both areas typically characterized by concentrations of poverty and race that are not found in the more heterogeneous populations of suburban America.

Purpose

The purpose of this paper is to provide a research synthesis of substantive findings drawn from studies of K-12 educational leadership between 2013-2018 specific to the context of rural or urban settings. The goal of the research synthesis was to identify and elaborate on key trends identified by scholars who studied educational leadership to note similarities and differences facing educational leaders in these respective settings to better inform leadership preparation programs. The synthesis drew upon the relevant articles published in ten journals specializing in educational leadership.

The authors' experiences as leaders in K-12 organizations and current work in leadership preparation programs positions us to support connections between the knowledge base of effective school leadership practices and the context in which leaders of K-12 schools work. The goal of this synthesis is to continue aspects of Hallinger's (2016) exploration of a school's context to illuminate how an understanding of the context related to community, whether rural or urban, can assist in preparing school leaders to implement effective practices within their community settings. Questions that informed our review of the scholarship included the following:

1. What are the similarities and differences experienced by principals in rural and urban settings?

2. What do principals identify as needs, in order to be effective in their school setting?
3. Are there contextual features across rural and urban settings that, if explicitly addressed, will support principal dispositions through leadership preparation?

Theoretical Framework

As members of leadership preparation departments, we are preparing aspiring leaders for roles in school districts spanning the rural, suburban and urban continuum of settings. Our interactions with program participants lead us to reconsider the normative standpoint and the difficulties of a “one size fits all” approach from which leadership preparation may be viewed especially in light of national and state licensure requirements. The implementation of the reform agenda and the call for transformational leadership influences our beliefs and thinking about meeting the needs of students in leadership preparation programs. Bandura’s (1977) Social Learning Theory provides a framework for our approach. This theory underpins our exploration of approaches to prepare students for all of the settings within which they hope to lead, and it supports our understanding of how the environmental context they currently work in influences their learning. As we explore how the rural and urban context impacts the characteristics and skill acquisition required of leaders and the subsequent professional support they may require, Mezirow’s Transformative Learning Theory (1994) takes a constructivist orientation that further deepens and extends our analysis. His major assumption is that “the way learners interpret and reinterpret their sense [of] experience is, central to making meaning and hence learning” (Mezirow, 1994, p. 222). This theory assumes that through task-oriented problem solving and communication with others, learning will occur.

Throughout the learning process specific actions will result in changes to social practices, institutions or systems (Mezirow, 1994). This has direct influence on our analysis and the implications for designing aspects of leadership preparation.

Methodology

The systematic approach used in this study is modeled after the study designed by Szeto, Lee and Hallinger (2015) whereby we used a three-phase process to first identify significant literature, used document analysis to extract substantive findings from each of the articles and then coded the findings in preparation for data analysis (Bowen, 2009). Synthesis of substantive findings was accomplished by cross-article comparative mapping as suggested by Voogt, Fisser, Roblin, Tondeur, and van Braak (2013) to note the frequency of focus on context (rural or urban) and identifying key themes in the literature noting similarities and differences based on the focus of the setting (rural or urban). Findings within the most robust themes were then synthesized and reported.

Data Sources

The study first identifies a body of relevant literature comprised of empirical, non-empirical and review/synthesis types of studies in a total of published research articles from ten journals using the following keywords: leadership, rural education, rural schools, urban schools, urban, urban education, challenges, successes, urban and rural schools. Additionally, the ten

journals delimited for this study were for those focused on educational leadership and leadership preparation coupled with journals whose core focus is the rural or urban context. Our search was demarcated by works published from 2013-2018 to capture the previous five years of work in the field.

We located the websites for the ten journals identified to read titles and abstracts of articles published between 2013-2018. Frequency counts of those articles that met our key word criteria were tabulated and can be found in Table 2. To assist in our collection and analysis of the data, we developed a chart in google documents so that we could summarize our information and share findings. In addition to article identification, the table included information on the study, its findings, and its implications for leadership preparation. The authors met several times to identify themes and patterns and clarify results. A summary of this chart can be found in Table 1 in Appendix A.

Results

The frequency counts displayed in Table 2 in Appendix B illustrate the ebb and flow in the research community of study and dialogue of educational leadership and community contexts. Journals devoted exclusively to either the rural or urban setting do not consistently publish scholarship on the role and influence of leadership related to community year-over-year. Further, five of the 72 articles counted included both contexts in their research design, findings, and discussion. This has implications for future exploration as well as for leadership preparation considerations that will be addressed further on in this writing.

The synthesis of identified research highlights the challenges facing K-12 educational leaders in both rural and urban settings in their quest for quality education in the twenty-first century. A variety of inter-related issues emerged. Analysis of the research from this period yielded the following robust themes: the challenges facing urban and rural educational leaders are similar, yet the root cause of those challenges may be different. The leadership practices and characteristics of successful principals is similar across rural and urban contexts; however, how a leader may use and adapt the practices and characteristics are based upon the leader's understanding of and responses to the community context in which the leader is working. In an environment of acceleration, the context of the school-community partnership is more important than ever to support both the economic as well as the social and cultural initiatives of a place. Retaining and recruiting personnel for both the urban and rural context are focus areas in the literature. And, finally, the need for ongoing support and professional development for all leaders was a prominent theme in the research studies reviewed. The professional development need areas were varied and connected to instructional leadership as well as management. Issues of cultural competence surfaced as an area of focus in the research in the quest for equity and social justice. Findings indicate attention to continuous improvement for leaders in all contexts is needed. We explore these interrelated issues in rural and urban contexts by first addressing the definitions at work in the research of rural and urban school leadership.

Definitions of Rural and Urban

The United States Census Bureau (2017) defines rural as any population, territory, or housing that is not in an urban area. Urban areas are defined as having populations of 50,000 or more and urban clusters have populations of 2,500-50,000 (United States Census Bureau, 2017). Definitions of urban and rural relate to population as well as geography and so the vision of farmland and unpaved roads are sometimes surfaced as rural images. Of special note when reviewing research on the rural context Greenough and Nelson (2015) offer additional differences in defining rural settings when the United States Department of Education is consulted. The National Center for Education Statistics classifies rural schools by their distance from a town or city. Rural subtypes are created from this measurement approach that include: Rural, Fringe; Rural, Distant; and Rural, Remote (Greenough & Nelson, 2015, p. 323). Thus, the variation among schools classified as rural increases. Schools categorized as rural can vary greatly from each other based upon their remoteness, their size of student enrollment, poverty and diversity of race/ethnicity (Greenough & Nelson, 2015). Depending upon the source for definitions attributed to the rural label the research reviewed varied as to what was considered a rural context.

Rural Context

The School-Community Relationships. Community-school relationships have been important since the inception of schooling and the focus on engaging family and the community is a priority of the School Reform Agenda. The school as the focal point for educational, social and cultural activity as well as economic activity in many communities was a theme that emerged in this literature set. Schafft (2016) argues that the rural school functions as the center of the community more so than in urban places and as such should be intimately involved in how the school is preparing qualified students to fulfill various roles and needs in the community. It is proposed that this engagement is about community development through the support of the local economy (Schafft, 2016). However, Scott & Ostler (2016) reported in their study of rural schools implementing the transformational model of school reform that leaders found implementing the reform model most challenging in the areas of ensuring high quality staff and engaging family and the community.

Despite the challenges of engagement reported, Preston and Barnes (2017) discuss findings that reveal the need for school principals to be school leaders and active community citizens in order to ensure success through the support of school resources, community involvement in their schools and student achievement (Preston & Barnes, 2017). School-community relationships are also forged as school leaders explain and enact policy mandates which may not be aligned with the community and school district's circumstances (Butler, 2014; Freie & Eppeley, 2014; Preston & Barnes, 2017). McHenry-Sorber (2014) demonstrates through a conflict situation how the complexity of school-community relationships in the rural setting can be fraught with factions forming along lines of class and values. The consolidation of power within social groups in rural communities may influence school decision-making.

These research studies illustrate the necessity as well as the complexity of the school-community relationship within the boundaries of rural communities. As Butler (2014) suggests,

rural school leaders are positioned to bridge the gap between education mandates and the community's needs. In fact, Surface and Theobald (2014) argue that a strong and positive relationship between a school and its rural community may be the significant key to the survival of both the school and its community.

Recruitment and Retention of Personnel. The most valuable resources in any school are its people—teachers *and* leaders. Attracting highly qualified candidates for teaching positions is a significant challenge for rural leaders (Preston, Jakubiec, & Kooymans, 2013). “This point is especially true in the subjects/areas of technology (Cullen, Brush, Frey, Hinshaw, & Warren, 2006), high school sciences, mathematics, and French immersion (Kitchenham & Chasteauneuf, 2010), special needs (Dykes, 2009; Pietsch & Williamson, 2009), and ESL (Abbott & Rossiter, 2011; Corez-Jiminez, 2012)” (Preston et al., 2013, p. 4). Rural areas are challenged to attract and retain strong talent due to the isolation of teachers who are often the only ones within their grade level or subject area, have multiple preparations sometimes across disciplines, and are separated by long distances from towns and schools that can provide a necessary professional network (Hargreaves, Parsley & Cox, 2015). When rural principals are compared to their urban counterparts the research suggests that rural principals often have a smaller staff to lead and with that smaller staff more importance and influence is placed upon the leader-teacher relationship in discussions of teacher retention (Preston et al., 2013). As Preston et al. (2013) conclude, retention of quality teachers may be inextricably bound to the quality of the school leader and his/her relationship with staff.

Research findings also illuminate the impact of the rural setting on school leaders who are also often more isolated and responsible for functions and roles that are broader than a single leadership position. Many rural leaders may also teach or are required to fill in more frequently as a substitute in various areas of district operations including buildings and grounds and transportation (Ashton & Duncan, 2013; Beesley & Clark, 2015; Cruzeiro & Boone, 2009). Recruiting and retaining quality school personnel and resources is not a new phenomenon. Because of the leader's central role in the school improvement process and the number of districts in the United States experiencing shortages of candidates the strategies to support recruitment and retention are surfacing as focus areas in all settings. Discussion of strategies within the rural setting are targeted to the specific factors that rural leaders face. Recruitment in rural areas is more challenging due to small candidate pools, limited salaries, and geographic isolation coupled with a lack of resources and access to leadership networks and mentors (Versland, 2013; Wood, Finch & Mirecki, 2013). Without the specialized roles at the district and building level, rural leaders need to hone different skill sets to meet the challenges and multiple responsibilities across the spectrum of tasks they engage in daily.

At the State policy level VanTuyle and Reeves (2014) have noted the disconnect between the criteria established for leadership preparation and the needs within rural communities. These divides mirror the recruitment and retention issues noted above. Once someone is in a leadership program, having access to internship opportunities and a connection to mentor leaders with successful experience working with specific student populations can be challenging (VanTuyle & Reeves, 2014). VanTuyle and Reeves (2014) note that “the culture of some rural communities ensures that locals are retained and promoted with little regard for their effectiveness as principals in deference to being stable members of the community” (p.115).

Solutions to these challenges has led to the development of “Grow Your Own” leadership programs where local school districts partner with local universities to develop leadership candidates from within the local schools (Versland, 2013; Wood, Finch & Mirecki, 2013). Wood et al. (2013) found that these have become a prominent method for recruitment and combined with a focus on positive school culture and climate and investment in professional development and mentoring, to retain leaders in the rural setting. These approaches begin to address some of the perceived factors related to personal, environmental or institutional factors identified by Hansen (2018) in her study of principals leaving rural schools. They also highlight the development of approaches to best meet the unique needs found in the rural context. Kamrath and Brunner (2014) surfaced insights about the perceptions of rural community members when exploring the high turnover rates of leadership in the superintendency. They uncovered that the community lacked understanding of the reasons for the turnover, were disconnected from their school district, and described leadership attributes that were contradictory (Kamrath & Brunner, 2014). These studies reveal that the complexity of place and lived experience in that place has significant implications for a leaders’ work in strengthening relationships with the school and community and that this has a direct impact on the recruitment and retention of high-quality teachers and leaders.

Professional Development for Leaders. To ensure school improvement, school leaders must have support and opportunities for continuous growth and improvement as they encounter the problems and challenges associated with place. As Klar and Brewer (2013) found in their research of three middle school principals who successfully implemented the Comprehensive School Reform model in their schools. These three principals focused on similar areas of need and utilized a similar set of leadership practices; the principals adapted those practices to suit the community contexts in which they were leading. Unique forms of professional development may be needed to suit the rural circumstance of these leaders. The impact of providing professional development was noted in a study conducted by Miller, Goddard, Kim, Jacob, Goddard and Schroeder (2016) where principals of rural schools reported that participating in the professional development increased their knowledge in identified areas. The focus for professional development in rural areas is as varied in the literature as in the myriad rural settings that leaders work. Preston et al. (2013) noted particular topics for professional development from their review including: school community partnerships, self-awareness programs, mentoring, student English as a Second Language (ESL) needs, grant writing, funding issues, professional networking to include diverse viewpoints, and strategies for attracting and retaining high quality teachers.

Communities may influence the focus on topics related to social justice in some areas of the country more so than others. Albritton, Huffman, and McClellan (2017) demonstrated the need to explore social justice issues and research in their findings within the context of both internal and external (community) resistance as important to ensuring leaders are equipped to advocate for the social-emotional and behavioral needs of all students. Their study pointed to both the professional development focus on social justice issues within in-service programs as well as pre-service leadership preparation (Albritton et al., 2017). This theme was extended to rural school superintendents in an investigation of social justice leadership conducted by Maxwell, Locke, and Scheurich (2014) who noted a variety of strategies including seeking out mentors to support social justice-oriented leadership. The findings of Bishop and McClellan

(2016) suggest that leaders' awareness and resistance to personal bias is an important focus for development in order to create socially just school cultures. In instructional leadership, Stewart and Matthews (2015) noted that the professional development needs of small school principals differed from those of medium-sized schools due in part to the fact that nearly 30% of the small school principals also served as teachers therefore reducing the time they had to collaborate with and mentor teachers. The rural context influences the content of and the venues in which professional development occur for leaders. Supporting leaders as they move through various career stages is vital to their own growth as well as the vitality and stability of the schools and districts they lead.

Urban Context

The Role of School-Community Partnership. Most recently research has documented the significant importance of the relationship between urban schools and their local communities (Epstein, 2001; Schutz, 2006; Valli, Stefanski, & Jacobson, 2014; Wilcox, Angelis, Baker, & Lawson, 2014). Indeed, the relationship between the school and community is a complex one especially within the large bureaucratic institutions that constitute urban schools within large cities. One of the challenges is that in an urban setting you may have one school that is comprised of many communities within a condensed setting. Such as a high school which may serve more than one neighborhood, housing pattern and transportation network. Thus, establishing a relationship between a school and community has multiple overlapping systems for the leader in an urban setting to navigate.

Green (2018) focused on how urban school principals connect school reform with community improvement. In this work he examines principal leadership where school reform was linked to improving community conditions. Drawing upon the conceptual framework of the principalship as a community-wide practice (Green & Gooden, 2014; Ishimaru, 2013; Khalifa, 2012; Miller, Wills, & Scanlan, 2013; Scanlan & Johnson, 2015). Green (2018) illuminates the promise of previous research in this case study showing the success of the principal's use of intentional strategies for community partnership. Connecting the school's culture to community revitalization projects was a critical component to this work. Particularly noteworthy from the Green (2018) study is how leveraging the social capital of the position of principal was key to brokering relationships with community-based organizations in the neighborhood. As a broker, the principal established strategic partnerships with a variety of organizations that yielded significant school reform initiatives, as a result.

The expectation of the school leader to address a broad range of issues outside of the educational setting is increasing. Terosky (2014) in her multi case study of eighteen NYC principals, found that principals identified executing community -based services without sufficient support or preparation as a significant hardship as services once provided by other institutions such as hospitals, public agencies, community organizations, and organized religions are increasingly becoming the responsibility of schools. Although research has shown a positive impact of community-school engagement, balancing the demands between instructional leadership and community-based management is an area of particular pressure for principals in urban settings.

Recruitment and Retention of Personnel. Staffing is an enormous challenge facing urban schools and attracting and retaining teachers is a complex issue. Dolph (2017) found that low salaries, working conditions and finding qualified candidates are of particular concern facing urban schools. The unique context created by the conditions of poverty contribute to this challenge. Dolph (2017) found that principals in low-socioeconomic communities in California have been asked to improve their schools despite being six times more likely to have underqualified teachers than their affluent counterparts. Shortage areas in mathematics, science and special education are well documented concerns with reports that students are twice as likely to not have certified teachers in mathematics in urban schools as non-urban schools. Other findings in the Dolph (2017) study show that urban schools have a greater percentage of students in English Language Learner programs than non-urban (14% compared to 8.5% in non-urban schools) making recruitment of teachers of English as a second Language an increasing priority (p. 366). Thus, attending to the recruitment and retention of personnel is a significant area of focus for school leaders in urban settings.

In addition to the issues related to teacher recruitment, Beesley and Clark (2015) note the considerable challenge in urban settings to also recruit and retain principals. “The dearth of U.S. principals is particularly pressing in districts perceived to have challenging working conditions, such as large populations of impoverished or minority students, low per-pupil expenditures, and below-average academic achievement” (Beesley & Clark, 2015, p. 1). Contributing factors to retention found in their study include differences in the perception of influence over curriculum and budget (Beesley & Clark, 2015). Rural principals indicated that they had greater influence over determining curriculum in their schools than did nonrural principals. However, nonrural principals indicated that they had a greater influence than nonrural ones over determining how the school budget would be spent, a finding we did not see in previous literature. Rural and nonrural principals did not differ significantly in their perceptions of overall autonomy (Beesley & Clark, 2015).

Professional Development for Leaders. Leadership preparation for the urban setting needs to incorporate authentic experiences in order for aspiring leaders to hone the skills required for change and cultural leadership as it relates to the implementation of reforms, organizational culture and instructional improvement (Dolph, 2017). It is not enough to know about leadership practices, there must be opportunity to apply this in community specific context (Klar & Brewer, 2013).

Based on findings from a review of literature on leadership preparation for social justice, Miller and Martin (2015) concluded that the lack of social justice preparation; either in their preparatory programs or in professional development opportunities was significantly lacking in urban principal preparation. “There is a significant disconnect between a leader’s perceived responsibility to close the achievement gap through high expectations and data-driven instruction; and their lack of awareness and inability to identify the biases, assumptions, and inequities that may be perpetuating the very gap they are attempting to close” (Miller & Martin, 2015, p. 21). Yet because the existing review of literature overwhelmingly point to the significant impact of context, it is clear that additional professional development is necessary for practicing leaders in order to effectively navigate instructional demands, work environment

challenges such as under resourced schools and under certified staff, and to leverage community resources as agents of change.

The ability to assess and restructure school resources to support inclusive programming, maximize resources and staff expertise, or develop programs that foster collaboration and culturally relevant pedagogies is essential for school leaders in any setting. There is a clear need for professional development to enhance the school leader's ability to competently assess issues of inequity in order to "make issues of race, class, gender, disability, sexual orientation, and other historically and currently marginalizing conditions in the United States central to their advocacy, leadership practice, and vision" (Theoharis, 2007, p. 223).

Implications for Leadership Preparation

While each educational leadership preparation program is unique, many contain similar elements. Most are university-based and organized around courses that prepare students for administrative licensure within a degree program. In some cases, students who already have master's degrees are able to gain licensure by taking a certain set of courses. Most programs include components of practice, such as internships or field-based learning experiences, and are commonly divided into two distinct components: instructional leadership coursework and internship (Hess & Kelly, 2005; Jackson & Kelley, 2002; Milstein & Krueger, 1997). Within the coursework, many programs emphasize case studies, problem-based learning (PBL), and hands-on learning experiences (McCarthy, 1999; Milstein & Krueger, 1997).

It is therefore critical to consider cross-boundary training for leadership candidates in program design, course content and field experiences. Possible considerations may be to course content, authentic projects, and skill building experiences to address not only the *what* of leadership change or school-community partnerships but also to explore more deeply *how* leadership change is enacted or how school-community partnerships are fostered and sustained (Green, 2018; Klar & Brewer, 2013). Providing an opportunity to more deeply understand the relationship a school has with its community in order to spur community improvement and better reflect the local context in the programming opportunities offered to students in that unique setting is also a consideration (Green, 2018; Schafft, 2016). As a result of this review and synthesis we have questions about preparing our aspiring leaders not only for the challenges when the setting is new but also for further research focused on those who remain in their roles long-term. What are the implications for continuing their professional growth and maintaining the expanded worldview necessary for programming and decision-making? Lastly, deepening self-reflection and analysis in the context of social justice research will bolster leadership and advocacy for students when there is internal or external resistance within the school, district or community (Albritton et al., 2017; Maxwell et al., 2014).

As members of leader preparation programs, how do we support navigating the variety of contexts to forge opportunities for cross-boundary work and also differentiate to meet our students needs when they may or may not have background experience in one or more of the contexts? There appears to be an untapped arena of collaboration for researchers and clinicians to problem-solve issues of mutual concern in the rural and urban context. Lessons learned and perceptions of lived experience in these respective communities might serve to inform and

provoke innovations for the benefit of students in both contexts. As we review the curriculum and the authentic tasks designed for aspiring leaders in our programs, we need to embed contextual dynamics for students to consider and problem-solve within case studies and simulations of the real-world work with which they will engage. Perhaps these intentional steps will serve to bridge both the skill and dispositional work within our preparation programs and research agendas in order to graduate leaders who are poised to achieve the leadership standards.

Significance

This study illustrates the critical need for more cross boundary research to break out of the prescribed silos that have been defining research, policy and practice over the past decade. Understanding the similarities and differences experienced by school leaders in both urban and rural contexts enriches our understanding of the everyday challenges to better inform leadership preparation. The educational reform agenda, especially as it relates to leadership preparation, has almost exclusively focused on preparation for leaders in urban settings. As a result, funding and policy have likewise been earmarked to address perceived high needs specific to urban settings and research of urban leadership preparation. Our cross analysis demonstrates that high quality leadership preparation will benefit from an integrative framework that is not an either/or but rather, an also/and approach. Our research points to the need for substantially more attention at professional conferences for cross boundary panels, papers and keynote addresses as well as a need for professional journals to model cross boundary research, publication and advocacy efforts to better understand the commonality of concerns across social justice issues presented in our findings. The common ground is where the solutions need to occur. Preparing educational leaders for contextual challenges to be addressed will provide continuity and sustained leadership for all settings. Continued collaboration as allies and advocates for, and with, one another is our best hope.

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Appendix A

Table 1. Review of Research on Rural and Urban Issues Facing K-12 Leaders 2013-2018

Author, Title	Publisher	Findings
Albritton, S., Huffman, S. and McClellan, R. <i>A study of rural high school principals' perceptions as social justice leaders</i>	Administrative Issues Journal: Connecting Education, Practice, and Research (2017)	The findings of this multi-site case study in rural settings demonstrated that principals' conceptions of diversity and social justice did not always include all students and more specifically LGBTQ students.
Ashton, B., & Duncan, H.E. <i>A beginning rural principal's toolkit: A guide for success</i>	The Rural Educator (2013)	This article explored the challenges and skills needed to assume a leadership role as a new principal within the rural context. It provided guidance for the creation of an entry plan built upon research studies that identified the needs and demands of rural principals.
Augustine-Shaw, D. <i>Developing leadership capacity in new rural school district leaders: The Kansas educational leadership institute</i>	The Rural Educator (2016)	This paper highlights the components of the Kansas Educational Leadership Institute (KELI) that support new superintendents in rural contexts who often have principal responsibilities. KELI offers mentoring and induction for new superintendents and principals with special consideration for the complexities of rural communities.
Bauer, S. & Silver, L. <i>The impact of job isolation on new principals' sense of efficacy, job satisfaction, burnout and persistence</i>	Journal of Educational Administration (2018)	The setting of this research is one state in the southeast. This study shows that there is a relationship between self-efficacy, burnout, job satisfaction, and intention to leave and the role of isolation as a precursor.

Beesley, A.D. & Clark, T.F. <i>How rural and nonrural principals differ in high plains U.S. states</i>	Peabody Journal of Education (2015)	Data for this quantitative study was from the 2007-08 SASS and 2008-09 PFS. Analysis provides a snapshot of conditions of 483 rural principals in a 7-state region (ND, SD, NE, KS, WY, CO). Findings indicate no significant differences in years of experience; nonrural principals were more likely to achieve a post-master's degree; rural schools had a higher percentage of male principals, and a significantly lower percentage of minority principals than nonrural schools. Nonrural principals reported a greater number of required contract days than did rural principals. Rural principals report greater influence over curriculum in their school than their nonrural counterparts. Rural principals believe they have less autonomy than nonrural principals over their school budget. In this analysis perception of autonomy was a significant predictor of retention for principals in the rural setting.
Bishop, H. N. & McClellan, R. L. <i>Resisting social justice: Rural school principals' perceptions of LGBTQ students</i>	Journal of School Leadership (2016)	The findings from this qualitative study suggest that leaders upheld community values by exhibiting their own biases toward LGBTQ students.
Butler, T.A. <i>School leadership in the 21st century: Leading in the age of reform</i>	Peabody Journal of Education (2014)	This paper focuses on the Common Core movement as a reflection of historical tensions in rural communities over power and privilege. The author reports that the hard work of alignment and writing curriculum is complete but the CCLS creates work for educational leaders as they devote time to public relations and educating the community and the Board of Education. The reform initiatives around accountability have greater impact on rural schools-data collection and management and teacher evaluation-which do not reflect the true needs of rural schools.
Corbett, M. <i>The ambivalence of community: A critical analysis of rural education's oldest trope</i>	Peabody Journal of Education (2014)	The author challenges the stereotypic definitions of rural community and addresses the complexity in defining community within a rural setting-there are competing narratives. The author critiques rural imagery and suggests the need to develop conceptions of community based upon the complexity of our current conditions not historic understandings.

Dolph, D. <i>Challenges and opportunities for school improvement: recommendations for urban school principals</i>	Education and Urban Society (2017)	This article outlines the seven common challenges facing urban educational settings, the four common school reform models implemented, and the three characteristics of strong, effective leaders in the urban setting. The three characteristics: 1. Principal as Instructional leader; 2. Principal awareness of school culture and its relationship to school success; and 3. Change leadership were explored
Freie, C. & Eppley, K. <i>Putting Foucault to work: Understanding power in a rural school</i>	Peabody Journal of Education (2014)	In this case study the power relations of a rural school and community in the midst of closure/consolidation for creation of a charter school are explored using the work of Michael Foucault. They argue that focusing on a best-practice model ignores the complexities of the context (place and politics) and that best practices should involve the broader network of disciplinary practices that consider student outcomes and the complex power environments of schools.
Green, T. <i>School as community, community as school: Examining principal leadership for urban school reform and community development</i>	Education and Urban Society (2018)	Through semi-structured interviews coupled with a document review, the research question pursued was: What principal actions support urban high school reform along with community development? Findings suggest that the principal positioned the school to be a power broker in the community, linked the school culture to community improvement projects, and connected instruction to community circumstances.
Greenough, R. & Nelson, S.R. <i>Recognizing the variety of rural schools</i>	Peabody Journal of Education (2015)	This discussion outlines the challenges in defining rural contexts through a review of both the governmental classification systems as well as the National Center for Education Statistics. They encourage researchers to compare the demographics of schools/districts in studies to the characteristics of all schools/districts classified as rural due to the large differences among rural schools/districts.

Hallinger, P. <i>Bringing context out of the shadows of leadership</i>	Educational Management Administration & Leadership (2016)	This analysis serves to explore the development of theory and findings related to adaptation of leadership practices to different school contexts. It highlights how research has either ignored or minimized the effects of context on leadership. The author encourages the field to explore new ways to learn how successful leaders respond and adapt to different contexts
Hansen, C. <i>Why rural principals leave</i>	The Rural Educator (2018)	This qualitative study examined the factors that influenced six principals leaving their rural school in Minnesota. The perceived factors were grouped into personal, institutional and environmental factors.
Johnson, J. & Howley, C. B. <i>Contemporary education policy and rural schools: A critical policy analysis</i>	Peabody Journal of Education (2015)	This paper analyzes federal policies (RTT, SIG, REAP) as deployed in rural schools. The authors view rural schools as places with differences that create challenges, strengths and opportunities that need to be considered. Their perspective is policy is formed by people with metropolitan backgrounds and a dominant group perspective. The analysis indicates these approaches are not compatible with rural contexts. Recommendations include: 1. Be frugal; 2. Organize to press for policy changes with a real purpose; 3. Avoid fads and conventional thinking.
Kamrath, B. & Brunner, C.C. <i>Blind spots: Small rural communities and high turnover in the superintendency</i>	Journal of School Leadership (2014)	Rural community perceptions of high superintendency turnover is explored. Community perceived high turnover as negative and believed the cause was financial pressures, community resistance to educational trends and bias against minorities and/or “outsiders”. Community members expressed a fait accompli approach and portrayed themselves as victims even when they were in control of some conditions related to the superintendent hiring process.

Klar, H.W. and Brewer, C. A. <i>Successful leadership in high-needs schools: An examination of core leadership practices enacted in challenging contexts</i>	Journal of Education Administration (2013)	Three middle school principals implemented the Comprehensive School Reform model successfully in their schools. All of the principals focused on setting the direction, developing people, redesigning the organization, and managing the instructional program. Despite similar levels of poverty and the leaders' utilization of a similar set of leadership practices the research suggests that the principals adapted some of their practices to suit the community contexts in which they were leading.
Kruse, R. A., & Krumm, B. L. <i>Becoming a principal: Access factors for females</i>	The Rural Educator (2016)	A case study approach guided by Standpoint Theory was used to identify factors influencing access to Oklahoma's secondary school principalship for 4 female principals.
Maxwell, G. M., Locke, L.A., & Scheurich, J.J. <i>The rural social justice leader: An exploratory profile in resilience</i>	Journal of School Leadership (2014)	Exploration of 5 rural superintendents social justice leadership led to creation of a profile for the rural leader capable of strong social justice-oriented leadership
McHenry-Sorber, E. <i>The power of competing narratives: A new interpretation of rural school-community relations</i>	Peabody Journal of Education (2014)	Using a case study approach with grounded theory, this study focuses on contract negotiations in a rural town. The author argues that the conflicts between the teachers and community over the teachers' contract stemmed from already present conflicts in the community connected to class and competing values about the purpose of schooling and the work of teachers. Both narratives were connected to the larger forces found in the national conversation about educational reform. Conflicts at the macro level, played out at the micro level may lead to the destabilization of rural schools and their communities.
Miller, C. M., & Martin, B.N. <i>Principal preparedness for leading in demographically changing schools: Where is the social justice training?</i>	Educational Management Administration & Leadership (2015)	In this study school leaders talked about their principal preparation programs where they learned the strategies and approaches to achieving academic success with students from urban schools or schools that are changing demographically. However, the researchers noted that an undergirding of social justice preparation was missing from the discourse.

Miller, J. M., Goddard, R.D. Kim, M., Jacob, R., Goddard, Y., & Schroeder, P. <i>Can professional development improve school leadership? Results from a randomized control trial assessing the impact of McREL's Balanced Leadership Program on principals in rural Michigan</i>	Educational Administration Quarterly (2016)	This multiyear, quantitative study of principals in rural Michigan showed that principals who received the PD program reported growth on most program outcomes and were more likely to report growth on broad school-level outcomes than on areas that involved working directly with teachers. Principals reported more growth in their knowledge in identified areas than in their involvement in those areas.
Preston, J. and Barnes, K.E.R. <i>Successful leadership in schools: Cultivating collaboration.</i>	The Rural Educator. (2017)	This piece was a companion to the literature review conducted by Preston, Jakubiec, & Kooymans (2013) and accessed 40 research studies. The review focused on the professional competencies and personal qualities commonly associated with successful leadership in rural schools. The authors found no research directly linking a successful rural principal to student achievement.
Richardson, J.W., Imig, S., & Ndoeye, A. <i>Developing culturally aware school leaders: Measuring the impact of an international internship using the MGUDS</i>	Educational Administration Quarterly (2013)	This mixed methods study collected quantitative data via survey of both the intervention and control group and qualitative data were gathered via interview of the intervention group. The intervention group developed an appreciation for diversity over the experience and it broadened their perspectives and awareness of diversity.
Sanchez, J. E., Usinger, J., Thornton, B.W., & Sparkman, W.E. <i>I'm paying the time for someone else's crime: Principals and core teachers at rural middle schools under chronic academic stress</i>	The Rural Educator (2017)	Interviews were conducted within the context of school improvement within six Middle Schools to explore how principals and teacher leaders perceived increased academic expectations. Findings revealed that interpretations were misaligned; there was an ongoing focus on what was wrong with the school; and principals felt that they were alone in the process.
Schafft, K. A. <i>Rural education as rural development: Understanding the rural school-community well-being linkage in a 21st-century policy context</i>	Peabody Journal of Education (2016)	This paper discusses the critical role the rural school plays in various aspects of community life. It explores research and the current policy context where trends in national policy do not account for the rural context and may, in fact, serve to separate the school from the communities in which they are embedded and intended to serve.

Scott, C., & Ostler, N. <i>Reshaping rural schools in the Northwest Region: Lessons from federal School Improvement Grant implementation</i>	U.S. Department of Education, Institute of Education Sciences, National Center for Education Evaluation and Regional Assistance, Regional Educational Laboratory Northwest (2016)	The report shares the results of a nationwide survey of principals in rural settings who led schools designated as in need of improvement and used the transformation model under the federal School Improvement Grant (SIG) program. It revealed only 5% of principals fully implementing all of the transformational strategies and 32% partially implemented the strategies. The more technical assistance received by the principal the more strategies were reported to be fully implemented. Rural principals reported the most challenge in engaging families and the community and ensuring high-quality staff.
Stewart, C. and Matthews, J. <i>The lone ranger in rural education: The small rural school principal and professional development</i>	The Rural Educator (2015)	This study used survey research methodology to examine principal perceptions of their preparedness to meet the requirements of the new State of Utah teaching and leadership standards. The principals in the study reported knowing more about the teacher evaluation standards than they did about the educational leadership standards. Small school principals had different needs and practices than did the medium school principals. Nearly 30% of the small school principals also served as teachers therefore, reducing the time they had to mentor and collaborate with teachers.
Sturgis, K., Shiflett, B., & Tanner, T. <i>Do leaders' experience and concentration area influence school performance?</i>	Administrative Issues Journal (2017)	This quantitative study examining leaders in small, high poverty, high minority schools in urban areas of Texas. Findings indicate that having two or more years of experience at the same school had a significant impact on the academic rating of a school while the concentration area of the leader did not have a significant impact on the overall academic school rating.
Surface, J.L. & Theobald, P. <i>The rural school leadership dilemma</i>	Peabody Journal of Education (2014)	In this essay the authors explore the historical roots for stereotypes of rural school professionals. They also trace the latest research on rural school student performance. The dilemma they focus on is when should school leaders speak up in the face of rural denigration.

VanTuyle, V. and Reeves, A. <i>"Forgottonia"? The status of rural schools in Illinois' principal preparation reform</i>	NCPEA International Journal of Educational Leadership Preparation (2014)	This study focused on rural, western Illinois. The concern explored was the reform of principal preparation and the needs of rural schools and students in the state that are not considered. The issues highlighted include: Access to programs as well as a qualifying internship site with a successful building principal, required experience with specific student populations and, the paradigm shift in new roles and responsibilities for mentor principals.
Versland, T. M. <i>Principal efficacy: Implications for rural 'grow your own' leadership programs</i>	The Rural Educator (2013)	The data reported in this study emerged from a larger mixed methods study on self-efficacy and "grow your own" leadership programs. Interviews were conducted with 3 principals, 3 teacher colleagues of the principals and 2 university faculty members who acted as program supervisors. The findings suggest that "grow your own" programs in rural settings may lead to a loss of self-efficacy for the leader.
Wood, J.N., Finch, K., & Mirecki, R.M. <i>If we can get you, how can we keep you? Problems with recruiting and retaining rural administrators</i>	The Rural Educator (2013)	This survey research explored reports by Midwest superintendents of recruitment and retention strategies as well as factors influencing the loss or retention of quality administrators in rural areas.

Appendix B
Table 2. Frequency of Relevant Publications in Ten Educational Leadership Journals

Journal	2013		2014		2015		2016		2017		2018 (July)		No. Published Articles	
	Rural	Urban	Rural	Urban	Rural	Urban	Rural	Urban	Rural	Urban	Rural	Urban	Rural	Urban
Administrative Issues Journal: Connecting Education, Practice, and Research	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	2	1	0	0	3	1
Education and Urban Society	0	1	0	2	0	1	0	0	0	1	0	2	0	7
Educational Administration Quarterly	<i>1^a</i>	2	0	2	0	2	1	0	0	0	0	0	2	6
Educational Management Administration and Leadership	0	0	0	0	0	0	<i>1</i>	<i>1</i>	0	0	0	1	1	2
International Journal of Educational Management	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1
Journal of Educational Administration	1	0	1	0	0	0	0	2	0	3	0	0	2	5
The Journal of School Leadership	0	3	5	0	0	2	1	1	0	0	0	0	6	6
NCPEA International Journal of Leadership Preparation ^b	0	1	1	1	0	0	1	0	0	0	-	-	2	2
Peabody Journal of Education	0	0	5	0	4	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	10	0
The Rural Educator	3	0	0	0	0	0	2	0	2	0	1	0	8	0
Totals	6	8	12	5	4	5	7	4	4	5	1	3	34	38

^a Numbers in italics indicate article(s) that include both rural and urban contexts.

^b 2018 publication unavailable at the time of this study