Redesigning a Principal Preparation Program: A Continuous Improvement Model

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Abstract

The paper describes a mixed methods approach to the process of redesigning a principal preparation program. A qualitative approach was used to gather data from superintendents within the geographic area using a focused group approach, whereas, quantitative data, were gathered through a survey of program graduates with questions aligned to the three domains of the TExES examination for principal certification. Texas universities that offered principal preparation programs were studied and analyzed as a backdrop to the study. The superintendent responses identified various strengths and weaknesses in the delivery of the program. The graduate survey results indicated low satisfaction ratings in principal preparation in the three domains as the program currently exists. The study proposes a model for redesigning principal preparation programs based on the findings.

1 NCPEA Publications

NOTE: This manuscript has been peer-reviewed, accepted, and is endorsed by the National Council of Professors of Educational Administration (NCPEA) as a significant contribution to the scholarship and practice of education administration. In addition to publication in the International Journal of Educational Leadership Preparation,[1] Volume 7, Number 3 (Winter 2012), ISSN 2155-9635, this manuscript exists in the Connexions Content Commons as an Open Education Resource

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(OER). Formatted and edited by Theodore Creighton, Virginia Tech; Brad Bizzell, Radford University; and Janet Tareilo, Stephen F. Austin State University. The assignment of topic editor and double-blind reviews are managed by Editor, Linda Lemasters, George Washington University. The IJELP is indexed in the Education Resources Information Center (ERIC), sponsored by the United States Department of Education under Contract No. ED-04-CO-0005.

2 Sumario en español

El papel describe un métodos mezclados se acercan al proceso de volver a diseñar un principal programa de preparación. Un enfoque cualitativo fue utilizado para reunir los datos de supervisores dentro del área geográfica que utiliza un enfoque enfocado del grupo, mientras que, los datos cuantitativos, fueron reunidos por una inspección de egresados de programa con preguntas alineadas a los tres dominios del examen de TExES para principal certificación. Las universidades de Tejas que ofrecieron principales programas de preparación fueron estudiadas y fueron analizadas como un fondo al estudio. Las respuestas del supervisor identificaron varias fuerzas y las debilidades en la entrega del programa. La inspección graduada resulta calificaciones bajas indicados de satisfacción en principal preparación en los tres dominios como el programa existe actualmente. El estudio propone un modelo para volver a diseña principales programas de preparación se basaron en las conclusiones.

NOTE: Esta es una traducción por computadora de la página web original. Se suministra como información general y no debe considerarse completa ni exacta.

3 Introduction

In the United States, researchers in the field of educational leadership have declared that the quality of leadership provided by school and district leaders is highly dependent on the quality of their leadership preparation experiences (Baker, Orr, & Young , 2007; Archer, 2005; Azzam, 2005; Hess & Kelly, 2005a). Over the last five years, according to Michelle Young, Director of the University Council of Educational Administration (UCEA), researchers in the field of educational leadership have made tremendous progress in understanding the features of university-based leadership preparation programs that are associated with effective leadership practice. Hence, increasing numbers of educational leadership programs, particularly those in UCEA institutions, are engaged in restructuring programs to reflect these new research findings and to create programs more efficacious for the leaders they prepare.

Thus, the impetus for the review of a principal preparation program at a university in Texas ensued. The program's faculty became engaged in a review and redesign of its program to align it to the most recent findings in principal preparation literature and best practices across the nation. This challenge of reviewing and redesigning the existing principal preparation program was not addressed in a vacuum but in partnership with public school districts that believed the talent pool of emerging leaders was shrinking and that most lacked the foundation to address public schools in high needs areas. The goal was to prepare leaders to have both the knowledge-based foundation and the corresponding practical field-based experiences. The belief was that by meeting this goal, the program would help the new leaders to easily integrate into the school's operations in the areas of curriculum and instruction, school budget, school operations, community relations and federal, state and local educational standards. Moreover, the added emphasis on student achievement and high-stakes testing necessitate effective and quality leadership preparation programs at the university level to introduce change in leadership preparation programs.

4 Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this mixed methods study was to use (1) superintendents' perceptions of program effectiveness, (2) graduates' perceptions of leadership preparedness, and (3) an analysis of other programs' profiles

to review and redesign a principal preparation program in its efforts to better prepare leaders for the future. This study shares the redesign process and a framework based on UCEA's suggested practices for quality leadership preparation.

5 Significance of the Study

Increasing numbers of educational leadership programs, particularly those in UCEA institutions, are engaged in restructuring programs to reflect new research findings and to create programs more efficacious for the leaders they prepare. However, Baker, Orr, and Young (2007) ascertain that the multitude of preparation programs currently available have no means of evaluating how well they are accomplishing their goals due to the lack of data and support for program improvement. The theoretical framework proposed in this study can serve as a model for quality principal preparation for institutions of higher education. In addition, as programs are held accountable for the success rates of their graduates on state certification exams, this study provides university faculty of principal preparation programs with a process to follow in incorporating research and standards into their programs. Finally, the results of the study are significant to department faculty, to researchers, and to educational leaders to demonstrate the importance of stakeholder input into the process of producing effective school leaders.

6 Theoretical Framework

The theoretical framework for the research was based on features of effective principal preparation practices as described by UCEA (2011). These effective practices are comprised of six features which include: (1) a rigorous recruitment and selection of students; (2) a strong curriculum focus on instruction and school improvement; (3) a coherent curriculum that is tightly integrated with fieldwork; (4) active-learning strategies; (5) quality internships; and (6) a knowledgeable faculty (Baker et al., 2007; Darling-Hammond, LaPointe, Meyerson, Orr, Cohen, 2007). The researchers of this study have created a model of these features to depict how they are interrelated for the purpose of the study.

6.1 Model for Interrelated Components for Quality Principal Preparation

The model, titled Model for Interrelated Components for Quality Principal Preparation is illustrated in Figure 1.

SC = Strong Curriculum
CC = Coherent Curriculum
QI = Quality Internship
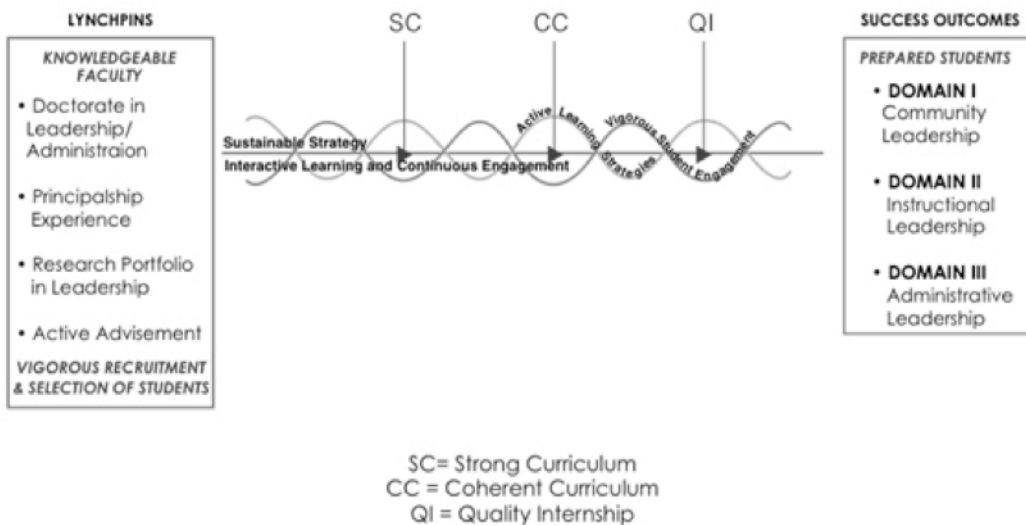
Figure 1. Model for Interrelated Components for Quality Principal Preparation

Figure 1 depicts Knowledgeable Faculty and Vigorous Recruitment and Selection as the lynchpins of the Model for Interrelated Components for Quality Principal Preparation. The descriptors of a Knowledgeable Faculty include, but are not limited to, a doctorate degree in leadership/administration, principalship experience, a demonstrated research portfolio in leadership and active advisement. Interactive Learning and Continuous Engagement are the sustaining variables composed of Vigorous Student Engagement and Active Learning Strategies. The two latter variables are interwoven throughout the model to generate student success as an outcome of a quality principal preparation program. The variable Vigorous Recruitment and Selection necessitates that the faculty engage in strategies to recruit qualified candidates into the program and then assess the candidates for acceptance into the program. The variables of Strong Curriculum, Coherent Curriculum and Quality Internship are variables that are constant in the model. Strong Curriculum indicates that instruction and school improvement are taught within the curricula. Moreover, Coherent Curriculum is tightly interrelated with fieldwork in the program. Lastly, Quality Internship requires university field supervisors with principalship experience, assignment to experienced principal mentors in the school, and the requirement that interns use authentic and relevant data as they develop and practice their leadership skills. These features relate to the latest research on principal preparation programs and the changes that are necessary to redesign and improve leadership programs.

Interactive Learning, Continuous Engagement, and Quality Internships. Numerous researchers maintain that one critical component of an exemplary principal preparation program is inclusion of field-based experiences in the program (Creighton, 2005; Lauder, 2000; Reames, 2010). However, simply increasing the amount of time spent in the field is not sufficient to create an effective principal; the activities must be of high quality, relevant to the future leader's responsibilities, and well structured (Bizzell & Creighton, 2010). Kersten, Trybus, and White (2009) suggest aligning the activities to professional standards. Such standards may be derived from state or organizational policy. Field-experience activities have the greatest impact when incorporated continuously throughout the program, based on course content (Darling-Hammond et al., 2007). Darling-Hammond, et al. also stipulate that exemplary program field-based activities help interns construct new knowledge, facilitate opportunities for deep reflection, and help interns link theory to practice by using concrete real-world experiences within the school and community.

To add to the discourse, a 2006 survey by Public Agenda, a nonprofit research organization that reports public opinion and public policy issues, found that nearly two-thirds of principals felt that typical graduate leadership programs "are out of touch" with today's realities. Principal preparation programs place too much emphasize on lectures and theory and not enough on application (Martin & Papa, 2008). The Southern Regional Education Board (2005) states that, "traditional models of training principals are still out of sync with the challenges faced by today's leaders" (p. 3). Therefore, it is prudent that principal preparation programs become more innovative and include extensive authentic coursework and field experiences (Orr, 2006).

Curriculum Focus on Instruction and School Improvement. Because of the great emphasis on continuous increase of student achievement and school improvement, there is much debate whether leadership preparation programs have stayed abreast of the changing demands of the field. Several studies have documented the lack of principal preparedness (Archer, 2005; Azzam, 2005; Hess & Kelly, 2005a). In a 2003 survey, 67% of the principals revealed that leadership training in schools of education did not prepare them for their role as instructional leaders (Farkas, Johnson, & Duffett, 2003). Again in 2007, 69% of the principals shared the same sentiment (Darling-Hammond et al., 2007).

The accountability requirements, both at the state and national level, with the No Child Left Behind legislation, also place tremendous pressure on principals to improve student achievement. In this era of high stakes testing, the role of the principal has developed into one of an instructional leader (DiPaola & Hoy, 2008; Marzano, Waters, & McNulty, 2005). This new principal role is more defined in the area of instructional leadership which includes expertise in instruction, curriculum, assessment, data analysis, and data-driven decision-making.

Domains of the Texas Standards. The Texas Examination for Educator Standards (TExES) is a comprehensive criterion-referenced test based on areas of leadership known as domains. The three domains in

the principal framework consist of school-community leadership, instructional leadership, and administrative leadership. Each domain consists of competencies and those competencies are further divided into skill sets specific to each competency. Forty-four percent of these Texas standards for principal certification are in the area of instructional leadership, reflecting the importance of this component for principals (Texas State Board for Educator Certification, 2012). Texas is also one of the states where the Interstate School Leaders Licensure Consortium (ISLLC) standards served as a guide for creating the principal standards and competencies for certification (Texas State Board for Educator Certification, 2012).

The Texas State Board for Educator Certification (SBEC) compiles all the results of the exams and reports the passing rates to higher education institutions. The standard expectation for an institution to remain accredited is currently 80%. Therefore, university principal preparation programs must align the curriculum to address all the standards.

Using the Model for Interrelated Components for Quality Principal Preparation, this study focused on the following research questions to guide the researchers in obtaining information about a principal preparation program. The results are organized around the three research questions of the study: (1) What curriculum requirements do Texas leadership programs require for effective principal preparation?; (2) What are the strengths and weakness of a university's leadership program as determined by stakeholders of the program?; and (3) What process does a university leadership program follow to redesign its curriculum based on stakeholder input and current research? The research questions were based on the Desired Outcomes of the model.

7 Methods and Procedures

The study was a mixed methods study, using quantitative and qualitative measures to aid in the triangulation of data. Qualitative data were collected through focus group sessions with one group of participants and through an analysis of the institutional profiles of Texas universities, whereas quantitative data were collected from graduates' survey responses.

7.1 Data Collection and Measures

Review of Other Texas University Programs.To prepare for the possible redesign of the current leadership preparation program we reviewed the institutional profiles of 42 Texas colleges and universities. We searched for the presence of educational leadership preparation programs of study; specifically, a principal preparation program. If such a program existed, various components of the program were noted, such as the number of hours to complete a master's degree, length of internship, course content, certification requirements, and use of cohort groups. Ten universities were then selected based on demographics most similar to our university for further review of their programs. Our intent was to develop a program that would increase our graduates' passing rate on the state certification exam, while still meeting the local communities' need for campus leaders and the graduate students' need for program accessibility. We planned to include, but not necessarily limit, the courses to those provided by other exemplary programs to meet this goal.

The courses in the selected programs were listed and tallied based on program titles and descriptions. Courses that did not appear in our program were noted, as were those courses which appeared in our program, but not in the other programs. The list of most frequently occurring courses was compared to the courses included in our program. The intent was to determine how aligned our course offerings were to those of similar universities who had better passing rates on the state's certification exam.

Superintendent Focus Groups. In addition to reviewing the programs of study of ten specific universities, the researchers utilized a focus group session to collect data from local superintendents in the review of its leadership preparation program. Qualitative data were collected from the sixteen superintendents, as the faculty recognized that any program redesign should include local stakeholder perspectives on how well the program prepared the graduates to execute their responsibilities as effective campus leaders.

The superintendents answered three open-ended questions which allowed them maximum freedom to provide feedback for the review process. The superintendents reflected on the questions individually at their

tables before sharing their responses with the group and the researchers. Their responses were posted on charts to look for similarities and to provide a venue for additional comments or explanations. Patterns emerged from the responses and were noted by the researchers.

Graduate Surveys. Recognizing the graduate students as the most important stakeholders of the program and crucial to its redesign, their perspectives were requested in a Likert-scale survey. We developed the survey of twenty-one questions based on the Texas Examination of Educators' Standards (TExES) domains and competencies for the principalship. After developing the survey, it was field-tested with a group of our program graduates to ensure validity. An open-ended question was added to the survey after the field test to allow the participants to add any comments they deemed important for principal preparation. The survey used a four point Likert scale ranging from Strongly Agree to Strongly Disagree to indicate the quality of principal preparation. Frequency distributions were tabulated per item and per domain.

The population of study included 315 graduates of the principal preparation program of the past three years, of which approximately one-third responded. Of the total respondents 71 were female, 24 were male, 26 were administrators, and 59 were teachers. A frequency distribution of the responses was compiled. The following section provides the results of the data gathered.

8 Results

A summary of the university principal preparation program before redesign is important to the context of this study. Currently, students at this university who are interested in becoming certified as principals must first acquire a master of education degree in educational leadership. Completion of this 36-hour degree allows students to pursue principal certification, which consists of nine additional hours. Therefore, students, in reality must complete a 45-hour program before applying for certification. The content in the master's courses has remained the same for the past three decades. Beyond the degree and principal certification, graduates must also expend additional costs to receive training and certification to acquire the credentials to evaluate school teachers.

8.1 Review of Profiles

The review of the Texas university profiles helped to answer the first and third research question of the study. Upon completion of the institutional profile reviews, universities with similar demographics and higher passing results on the state exam were selected for in-depth study, with the intent of identifying gaps in our content coverage and incorporating courses during redesign to meet state curriculum standards. The following paragraph summarizes the finding from this review.

Institutional profiles revealed that eleven of the forty-two universities offered 36-hour master's programs in principal preparation including certification. The remaining programs varied in the number of hours, ranging from 37 to 60 hours. Our university had a 36-hour master's program excluding certification courses. The review also indicated that approximately three-fourths of the universities offered similar content in their preparation courses. Common content included educational law, instructional leadership, curriculum and instruction, organizational leadership, community leadership, data analysis, and leadership for change. Other common content included ethics, budgeting, human resources, self-awareness, and certification in Instructional Leadership Development (ILD) and the Professional Development and Appraisal System (PDAS). Our program lacked content in the latter five areas.

The profile review also showed that inclusion of principal certification within the master's degree was practiced by approximately one-third of the reviewed university programs. The remaining programs offered principal certification after completion of the master's degree, including our university program. In addition, more than half of the programs required three hours of internship for principal certification as practiced at our university, with the remainder of the programs requiring six or more hours. Finally, slightly more than one-fourth of the universities, including our university, used the cohort model to progress students through their coursework. The profile review revealed the need to revise our program's coursework to include essential content to meet state curriculum standards.

8.2 Superintendent's Focus Group

Quite distinct themes surfaced in the superintendents' responses to the three focus group questions presented to them, which aided in answering the first and second research questions of the study. The results are presented in two sections based on the research questions of the study.

Strengths. The superintendents identified specific leadership strengths of the university program's graduates. Patterns emerged suggesting that current graduates knew the local population and its culture, were innovative thinkers, knew curriculum well, knew how to use data, and knew how to implement delivery models for special programs at their campuses. One superintendent stated, "this university's graduates understand students, like their financial circumstances. They are familiar with bilingual education. They can identify curriculum needs and can lead planning with teachers."

Knowing the needs of local populations helps in differentiating instruction. Differentiating instruction based on students' needs is important for school change and to increase student achievement (Glickman, 2002; Marzano, 2007; Schmoker, 2006). Understanding the impact of the local population and responding to cultural practices aids in helping students feel a sense of belonging and acceptance (Glickman, Gordon, & Ross-Gordon, 2009). "The graduates are familiar with the experiences of the students in our districts because many of them came from these same areas. They are culturally knowledgeable and culturally sensitive," stated one superintendent, while another added, "They have awareness of the needs and strengths of the local population. They are culture cognizant."

The use of data in decision making is imperative if school leaders truly want to improve student achievement. By analyzing various types of data, such as performance scores, demographics, delivery of instruction, and school processes, schools can make better decisions to meet the students' needs (Bernhardt, 2009). The superintendents felt the university graduates were adept in analyzing data, as evidenced by the following comment, "The students are data-aware and are familiar with data disaggregation. They are technology savvy and can create graphs and reports as decision makers."

Weaknesses. The superintendents also voiced leadership skills that graduates needed to further develop while enrolled in the principal preparation program. Their responses produced the following themes as needs:

- Increase personal leadership skills, such as exhibiting assertiveness;
- Know how to address parents;
- Apply their knowledge to work situations;
- Understand and know accountability systems;
- Know budget preparation;
- Know and use current best practices; and
- Know how to evaluate and develop teachers.

Effective principals are assertive and use their communication skills in working with teachers and the community to reach the school's goals and vision (Glickman, 2002; Marzano et al., 2005; Strong, Richard, & Catano, 2007). Members of the focus group stated that "We need them (the graduates) to show personal assertiveness" and "They need to develop a strong grip with student discipline management." Participants at one table wrote, "They need persistence and assertiveness. They need counseling skills in addressing concerns with staff and parents."

Not only does a principal need to be an instructional leader, he or she is expected to possess managerial skills. One of those very important skills is the development of the budget. Principals need to adhere to budget planning and allocations based on student data analysis of state assessment results for regular and special populations of the school. The superintendents suggested more emphasis on this skill. One response was, "The graduates need to balance management and instructional leadership needs. They need to be strong in both. Like budget preparation and staff development needs." Another response echoed the sentiment, with "They need more work in budget preparation and the whole process."

School principals must ensure every child is receiving good instruction from an effective teacher. Most school districts in Texas use the Professional Development and Appraisal System (PDAS) for this purpose. Principals conduct observations, then, use this instrument to guide teachers through professional development and improvement. The participating superintendents related that the graduates should "show consistency

in evaluations and PDAS." The superintendents suggested "follow-up and documentation, and growth plans for teachers" as part of the preparation program.

Additional Concerns. The superintendents had various concerns regarding the university's class meeting schedules, stating that the superintendents' greatest priority and that of the graduates is always the success of the districts' children. They suggested flexibility and options when classes met to accommodate the graduate students' employment responsibilities; for example, having classes meet all day on Saturdays, or meeting on Friday afternoons and Saturday mornings to maximize learning time in the courses taken. In addition, they stated that weekday classes should begin later than the current schedule of 4:30 p.m. They felt that beginning classes after 5:00 p.m. and before 6:30 p.m. would provide students with less stress and perhaps better attendance due to commuting time and family responsibilities. Our university is largely a commuter school, where the majority of educational administration graduate students teach at local schools and attend the university after working hours. Because the majority of students commute daily to the university and the program is scheduled for students to enroll in classes as cohorts, the superintendents also felt that meeting at the cohorts' districts would benefit the students logistically, as well as encourage communication and collaboration between the districts and the university.

Flexibility in the delivery of instruction was also thought to benefit students' schedules. In this case, the flexibility was in combining face-to-face and online courses. Our department currently provides the majority of its classes in traditional face-to-face classroom format. Several reduced-seating classes have been developed to allow students some autonomy in choosing their preferred learning setting. As in the public school setting, differentiation allows instructors to meet the needs of more students.

The superintendents suggested increasing the amount of time in field-based strategies within the program's coursework. The literature on principal preparation recommends the use of field-based strategies within the schools and school systems to prepare future leaders for real-world problems (Orr, 2006; Reames, 2010; UCEA, 2011), such as developing a plan to increase student achievement or working with a teacher to improve the delivery of instruction. Reames (2010) writes that, "There must be organizational commitment from all parties to include the voices from the field in instruction, intern experiences, and maintenance and evaluation of the program" (p. 447).

8.3 Graduate Survey Responses

In response to the first and second research questions, we also analyzed the survey responses of the program graduates to questions aligned to the three domains of the TExES. We assigned the responses into four categories: Strongly Agree, Agree, Disagree, and Strongly Disagree. High percentages in the Strongly Agree category would indicate robust student satisfaction with the level of preparation in the three domains. Agree responses were interpreted as marginal satisfaction with the preparation program. Disagree and Strongly Disagree responses would convey dissatisfaction with the level of preparation in the three domains.

Frequency Distributions. Tables 1-3 summarize the results of the survey responses per item and per domain. The results indicate a wide discrepancy in student opinions regarding how well the competencies were addressed by the program as indicated by the Likert scale of Strongly Agree, Agree, Disagree, and Strongly Disagree. Of the 21 survey items, data indicating satisfaction with the program was conveyed through the "Strongly Agree" responses, which ranged between 34% and 68%. The "Agree" category responses, which also indicated some satisfaction with the program, ranged between 23% and 41%. Dissatisfaction with the program was confirmed through the "Strongly Disagree" responses, which ranged from 3% to 7%, and through the "Disagree" responses, which ranged from 1% to 21%. The highest means in Domain I, School Community Leadership and Domain II, Instructional Leadership, were Strongly Agree with means of 56% and 52% respectively. Domain III, Administrative Leadership, resulted with means of 40% for both Strongly Agree and Agree.

The resulting data from the survey indicates a high percentage of combined Strongly Agree and Agree responses. However, we proposed an 80% response rate in the Strongly Agree category. The 80% rate reflects the state standard for program accountability purposes. Based on this assumption, none of the domains or individual items met the proposed standard. The highest scoring domain in the Strongly Agree responses

was Domain I with a mean of 56%. Domain II, followed with a 51% overall rating, and Domain III, was last, with an overall 40% mean in Strongly Agree.

Data also indicated dissatisfaction in all three domains as evidenced within the Disagree and Strongly Disagree categories. We proposed 10% or less as acceptable in these combined categories. None of the domains achieved the researchers' standard of 10% or less. Results can be viewed in Table 1, Table 2, and Table 3.

Table 1

Percent Frequency Distributions Indicating To What Degree Graduates Felt the Leadership Program Prepared Them in the Given State Assessment Domains and Competencies (n = 864)

Domain and Competency Description	% Strongly Agree	% Agree	%Disagree	% Strongly Disagree
DOMAIN I: School Community Leadership				
Ethical Behavior	63	30	1	7
Advocate for Children	68	23	3	6
Understands Community Culture	60	31	2	6
Confident of Soft Skills	56	32	5	6
Verbal Communication Skills	55	34	5	6
Written Communication Skills	54	29	9	7
Public School Law	47	39	10	4
Innovative Thinker	52	33	12	3
TExES Preparation	50	31	17	3
Domain I Mean	**56%**	**29%**	**7%**	**6%**

Table 2

Percent Frequency Distributions Indicating To What Degree Graduates Felt the Leadership Program Prepared Them in the Given State Assessment Domains and Competencies n = 768

Domain and Competency Description	% Strongly Agree	% Agree	%Disagree	% Strongly Disagree
DOMAIN II: Instructional Leadership				
Data-Driven Decision Maker	53	31	9	6
Campus Improvement Planning	49	32	13	6
Research and Best Practices	65	30	7	6
Staff Development	65	33	6	6
Curriculum & Instruction Leader	50	39	4	7
Hire, Staff, & Evaluate Personnel	51	33	12	4
Advanced Technology Skills	46	35	14	5
Student Code of Conduct	50	31	17	3
Domain II Mean	**51%**	**33%**	**10%**	**6%**

Table 3

Percent Frequency Distributions Indicating To What Degree Graduates Felt the Leadership Program Prepared Them in the Given State Assessment Domains and Competencies n = 384

Domain and Competency Description	% Strongly Agree	% Agree	%Disagree	% Strongly Disagree
DOMAIN III: Administrative Leadership				
State & Federal Accountability	46	41	9	4
School Safety & Crisis Management	43	39	14	3
Management of Physical Plant	35	40	21	4
School Budgeting	34	40	20	7
Domain III Mean	**40%**	**40%**	**16%**	**5%**

8.4 Alignment of Coursework to TExES Competencies

Once program courses were agreed upon by faculty, a final step included aligning the coursework to the competencies of the state TExES exam, which incorporates ISLLC standards. Each course was analyzed for content coverage to align with individual competencies, thereby ensuring accountability for coverage of all competencies through specific coursework and benchmarks. The intent was that as professors prepared for instruction they would be cognizant of their responsibility to teach the assigned competencies by including them in their syllabi.

9 Conclusions and Recommendations

In this study, the researchers used mixed method approaches in a process to review and redesign its principal preparation program. Based on the study of the profiles of the 42 Texas Universities' principal preparation programs, the number of hours required for graduation from our program was not aligned with the current trend of other successful Texas programs. Superintendent feedback about the current program revealed

strengths of the university program in the areas of cultural pedagogy, instructional leadership and data driven decision making. Weaknesses of the program were exposed by the study of the Texas university profile findings and the superintendent feedback in which it was apparent that the current program lacked a focused and coherent curriculum in the areas of budgeting, ethics, human resources, self awareness and ILD/PDAS teacher evaluation and development. Moreover, the survey garnering the opinion of program graduates of the past three years, determined low satisfaction of preparation in all three domains of the TExES assessment. Lastly, the researchers recognized evidence of non-alignment with the UCEA Conceptual Framework features for effective principal preparation programs in the areas of: (1) a coherent curriculum that is tightly integrated with fieldwork; (2) active-learning strategies; and (3) quality internship.

The merging of all data suggested that our university should incorporate research-based features into the principal preparation program to positively impact the quality of its program graduates. Those features are found in the Model for Interrelated Components for Quality Principal Preparation (Figure 1). As a result, the need to align course curriculum and program requirements to the TExES principal competencies became evident.

The growing body of empirical evidence demonstrates that the quality of leadership provided by school and district leaders is highly dependent on the quality of their preparation experiences (Baker et al., 2007). The findings called for the following changes to improve and redesign our principal preparation program.

1. A 36-hour Masters in Educational Administration inclusive of principal certification and ILD/PDAS certification was developed.
2. The program was redesigned using the findings of the study and the results of the review using UCEA's theoretical framework for producing quality principal preparation programs. More authentic field experiences, including local school data were incorporated into the courses in order to help students see the relationship between the coursework and real job experiences. New courses were added to include content in budgeting, personnel, and ethics. Courses with duplicated content were deleted from the program. All coursework was aligned to TExES standards.
3. Class meeting schedules were modified to begin later in the afternoon to accommodate the graduate students' working schedules in the local school districts. Some classes were made available off campus and/or in a reduced seating format for the same reason.
4. Follow-up studies will be conducted every 2-3 years for program evaluation and continuous improvement.
5. Further studies will be conducted to determine correlation between the results of the state exams and the graduates' perceptions of the principal preparation program
6. A continuous and collaborative relationship will be sustained between school leaders and principal preparation faculty to produce evidence-based practices for principal preparation programs.

Although the purpose of principal preparation programs is to prepare students to function successfully in their chosen careers as school principals, this objective may not be reached by all students. Students, who are not adequately prepared for this career, represent the failure of the preparation programs to provide the knowledge, skills, and competencies needed to successfully fulfill their role as a practicing principal. This study proved to be invaluable to the educational leadership department as it attempted to improve its principal preparation program and coursework to meet the goals of retaining, engaging, and developing quality principals. A new process for program review was developed and follow-up studies are scheduled. More importantly, the findings of the study forced department faculty to re-imagine and restructure the way in which it prepares school principals in partnership with public schools.

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