Mentoring Job-Embedded Principal Residents

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Abstract

This qualitative pilot case study explored the partnership between a school district and a university that focused on access of authentic contexts to develop instructional leadership competencies gleaned in a job-embedded aspiring principal residency program. The participants of the study included six candidates along with their corresponding mentor principals and two faculty coaches from the partnering university. Themes from data analysis revealed required constructs for quality faculty coaching and principal candidate learning needed to impact teaching and learning in schools during principal residency preparation. The study also revealed on-going faculty coaching framed through authentic engagement of campus needs lead to exponential learning and preparation of candidates.

1. Introduction

Principal preparation programs continue to be part of the educational reform conversation and serve as a gateway to the profession. They play an important role in the development and production of future K-12 administrators who must adapt to a rapidly changing school environment. Davis and Darling-Hammond (2012) argued that Race to the Top, Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA), and other reform developments in educational research underscore the imperative for greater clarity and accuracy regarding the attributes and qualities of preparation programs and their effects with school leaders, teachers, and students. ESSA acknowledges the relationship of school principals to school improvement and calls for effective instruction allowing states and districts to use federal funds for evidence-based activities, strategies and interventions targeting school principals and other school leaders (Herman, Gates, Chavez- Herrerias, & Harris, 2016). Leithwood, Seashore-Louis, Anderson, & Wahlstrom, (2004) concluded through their review of literature in the *Learning from Leadership Project: How Leadership Influences Student Learning,* that principals are second only to teachers as the most important school-level determinant of student achievement.

As reforms address high stakes accountability and the changing educational contexts, scholars continue to question traditional approaches to prepare current school leaders (Cowie & Crawford, 2007; Darling-Hammond, LaPointe, Meyerson, & Orr, 2007; Horng, Klasik & Loeb, 2010). Leithwood et al. (2004) implied that both school and district size provide a rich body of evidence about the relevance to the accountability of leaders guiding organization with such features as geographical location (i.e., urban, suburban, rural) and level of schooling (i.e., elementary, secondary). These organizational and geographic features along with issues of equityand social justice in schools, changing demographics, poverty, and systemic inequities, have important implications for universities and colleges as they re-envision programs and are chargedwith producing school leaders who can effectively lead in diverse school contexts.

To address practices that deter effective principal preparation, our university established a partnership with a school district to create a 15-month job-embedded Principal Fellows (PF) Residency Program. A pilot program was developed consisting of a joint selection of participants, job-embedded coursework delivered within a Professional Learning Community (PLC) virtual setting, a fifteen (15) month residency with a principal mentor, one to one faculty coaching, and rubric based-competency development through video capture. University faculty members serve asthe instructor for the classes as well as the Faculty Coaches. Creating a one-on-one space for the

principal intern and the faculty coach is intentional since sometimes their needs to be an opportunity for the intern to reflect on their experiences in a confidential manner with their faculty coach. During the residency program, each faculty coach and mentor converse weekly by phone and conducts site-visits at least two times per semester.

The 15-month pilot residency partnership provided faculty learning, collaboration, and trust-building with school district partners, which were the catalyst for the successful acquisition of a Supporting Effective Educator Development (SEED) federal grant. This opportunity provided the research and development to improve the principal preparation redesign and examine the pioneering efforts to launch a statewide cohort of aspiring PF candidates in full residency. The program and curriculum were redesigned by the educational leadership faculty into a just-in-time curriculum, creating a highly selective and collaborative selection process, to implement the job-embedded and competency-based Principal Fellows Program. The university-district partnership aimed to produce school leaders that were job-ready and could address and meet the current needs of schools using job-embedded training, virtual instructional coaching, and competency-based assessments guided by the Professional Standards for Educational Leaders and the Texas Principal Standards outlined in the Texas Administrative Code.

This study highlights the experiences of a university-district partnership and the job-embedded principal preparation residency program as a non-traditional effort to improve student achievement and re-envision the educational leadership program. The significance of the study provides a foundational framework to guide principal preparation programs in implementing an authentic, job-embedded residency program with a just-in-time curriculum. The study aims to provide a mentorship framework for preparing aspiring principals while serving as an intern in a job-embedded residency program. The following research questions guided this study:

1. In what ways are universities supporting districts in the production and preparation of highly qualified, job-ready future school administrators?

2. In what ways are university faculty coaches providing effective mentorship for aspiring principals to address the complexities of daily issues in their schools?

2. Theoretical Framework

McKenzie et al. (2008), in discussing leadership preparation programs, identified the need for leaders to possess "a critical consciousness about social justice," and knowledge of "inclusive practices," to maximize student learning (p. 128). To this end, the framework of this study is tied to the ideals of promoting democracy and social equity through instruction practices. These practices include instructional techniques and partnerships that bring about positive change through effective leadership. Shields (2010) explored transformative leadership theory studying two school principals that "turned their schools around" by "making them more inclusive, socially just, and academically successful" (p. 560). The principal preparation program in this pilot study seeks to promote just this; and therefore, can be directly tied to this exploration. Weiner (1986) outlined that transformative leadership was grounded in Pablo Friere's (1970) work in studying democratic platforms in promoting social justice. Bass's (2003) transactional leadership and Quantz's (1991) transformational leadership were the precursors of Shield's transformative leadership which she stated has the "most promise and potential to meet both the academic and the social justice needs of complex, diverse, and beleaguered education systems" because it attends to "moral" and "ethical" issues in leadership and the power struggle that is inherent in the social system (p. 565). The principal interns in this study are required to complete an equity audit that challenges the power relationships and exposes the inequities in the existing system. The interns are then required to study the possible causes of these inequities, which can lead to transformative instructional practices. Shields (2012) advanced the theory of transformative leadership by connecting it directly to the work of school leaders, assessing its potential in practice to offer a more inclusive, equitable, and deeply democratic conception of education. In the quest for re-envisioning principal preparation as a collaborative, collegial practice, transformative leadership frames this pilot study as it guides the practice of educational leaders who want to affect both educational and broader social change. Transformative leadership recognizes the need to begin with critical reflection and analysis and then move through enlightened understanding to action. The job-embedded and competency-based efforts, combined with strong university-district partnerships, form the basis of the Principal Fellows Program. Transformative leadership most closely provides the framework regarding the collaborative university-based program and its interaction with real-world actions to produces the measurable best job-ready practitioner. Transformative Leadership Theory promotes the "social betterment" and the "reshaping of knowledge and belief structures" which is what the principal interns complete through the equity audit, the leadership of two teachers and the study of students (Shields, 2010, p. 560).

3. Literature Review

Research has suggested the top two variables impacting student achievement are the quality of teachers and the quality of the principal (Grissom & Loeb, 2011; Hallinger, 2011; McKibben, 2013; Papa, Lankford, & Wyckoff, 2002; Rampey, Gloria, & Donahue, 2009). Effective principals help establish a school culture of trust, grounded in meaningful professional development with supportive structures where both teachers and students continuously learn (Youngs & King, 2003). Conversely, ineffective principals and principal turnover are related to a school culture of day-to- day survival, frequent restarting of school improvement initiatives due to principal turnover, and teacher-cynicism (DeVita, Colvin, Darling-Hammond, & Haycock, 2007). As mentioned above, principals share a strong impact on the quality of learning in their school. Mendels and Mitgang (2013) provide two objectives to improve school leadership: (1) building a pipeline of new principals who are ready to tackle the most underperforming schools, and (2) fully supporting those leaders, especially during their novice years. Building a strong pipeline of new principal entails adopting high-quality leadership standards, applying district pressure on training providers to improve the relevance of their programs, hiring the right people, and attracting strong leaders to struggling schools (p. 22).

A key pillar in improving student achievement is the leadership of the principal. According to Hull (2012), principals are second only to teachers in their impact on student achievement and a highly effective principal can increase his or her students' scores up to 10 percentile points on standardized tests in just one year. In addition, principals in low-achieving or high poverty, minority schools tend to have a greater impact on student outcomes than principals at less challenging schools. Principals also have a positive effect on the retention of effective teachers. Being an instructional leader is a hallmark of effective principals. Effective principals are more likely to provide their teachers with the support and motivation to be effective teachers.

Historically, principal preparation programs did not engage students in instructional leadership practices. Former principal certification exams were founded on managerial concepts instead of competencies which focus on instructional leadership. Inadvertently, principal preparation programs lacked in preparing instructional leaders and instead prepared students to handle the schools' books, buses, or bottoms (discipline). Today, state education agencies (SEAs) are answering ESSA's call to prepare instructionally sound educational leaders by organizing grants that require collaborative partnerships between SEA's, local education agencies (LEAs) and principal preparation programs. State grants such as the Texas Education Agency (TEA) Principal Preparation Grant encourages LEA's to partner with university preparation programs like the one describes in this study to provide a residency approach to learning that embeds leadership development skills as the forefront of the curriculum to prepare students for TEA's newly developed Principal as Instructional Leader exam.

3.1 Every Student Succeeds Act

ESSA's general provisions with Title II- Preparing, Training, and Recruiting High Quality Teachers, Principals, or other School Leaders requires SEAs and LEAs to increase the number of principals who are effective in improving student academic achievement and to provide low-income and minority students greater access to effective teachers, principals and other school leaders. ESSA's intent is to help SEA's and LEA's reform or improve principal or other school leader preparation programs through residency programs for aspiring leaders. University preparation programs are partnering with TEA and Texas LEA's to provide a 15 month residency program that equips aspiring leaders with the knowledge, skills, and mindset to improve student achievement for all students by incorporating a job-embedded leadership curriculum designed to meet the needs of low-income, minority, and special population students.

3.2 Preparation Programs

Unfortunately, similar to the teacher challenges, less-experienced, less-qualified principals are more likely to lead low-achieving and high poverty schools (Hess & Kelly, 2007; Hull, 2012). Hess and Kelly (2007) conducted a comprehensive assessment of what aspiring principals are taught using a national sample of 31 preparation programs and found that principals currently receive limited training in the use of data, research, technology, the hiring or termination of personnel, and evaluating personnel in a systematic way. Furthermore, Mitgang (2012) implied that preparation programs have been unselective in their admissions process and poorly connected school realities.

Research in the field of educational leadership continues to critique and simultaneously challenge the rigor, quality, and advancement of aspiring school leader development in university- based leadership preparation including curricular coherence that promotes shared beliefs within an organization (Darling-Hammond, LaPointe, Meyerson, Orr, & Cohen, 2007). Furthermore, to better understand the complexity of school leadership preparation, research in the field of educational leadership asserts that various school and

district contexts influence leadership learning and future research on the type of candidates that enter leadership programs (Crow & Whiteman, 2016). The accountability for all students to achieve in a demographically changing country places school leadership in the spotlight. All aspects of the school leadership issue—the art and the science of principal leadership, as well as the policy and regulatory frameworks in support of a state's capacity to recruit, prepare, and retain its educational leadership workforce—are on the table and are being scrutinized (Hale & Moorman, 2003).

Universities and other organizations seek to recruit the best educators for principal preparation. Goodlad (1985) argued that universities must have access to schools for using the best practices to prepare better teachers, counselors, special educators, and administrators. This access has prompted laboratory schools, school-university partnerships, and other collaborative efforts between public schools and universities. There has been an emphasis on collaboration within schools, between schools and universities and, recently, a shift to an emphasis on collaboration between schools and across systems (McLaughlin & Black-Hawkins, 2007; Furlong, Barton, Miles, Whiting, & Whitty, 2000). Scholars further clarify that in successful school-university partnerships the agenda must be specific enough to bind participants in a common enterprise but general enough to allow for individuality and creativity (Sirotnik & Goodlad, 1988; Watson & Fullan, 1992).

Wentworth, Carranza, and Stipek (2016) conducted a study between the university and school districts and found a need for shared ownership in developing the course curriculum and implied that universities need to have research skills along with a deep understanding of the practical part of leading schools.

3.3 Mentorship

In the same vein, Walsh and Backe (2013) emphasized the shift where schools are in the driver's seat to form school-university partnerships and suggested that this opportunity gives universities sound research to apply real-world contexts. Collaboration, communication, and ongoing mentorship create this type of ongoing authentic learning environment. When there is a diverse combination of thought in real-world environments, it can create a true understanding that is not mutually exclusive.

Over the past decade, a federal legislative push from several U.S. states was undertaken to focus on training for new school principals (Archer, 2006; Aaron, 2010). For example, former Illinois Governor Blagojevich signed legislation for all new principals in the state to be provided mentorship. Other states have been fueled with grant opportunities provided by the Wallace Foundation to improve the effectiveness of school leaders. Lovely (2004) discussed in her article that university preparation programs are not the sole factor in training aspiring principals for the day-to-day challenges. Lovely asserts there are unprecedented demands that occur in a "spur-of the-moment" fashion and principals often must act quickly. Hall (2008) states that new principals are often thrown into a "sink or swim" job environment and suggest that having a well-designed mentor program would be a strategy in ensuring success for incoming principals. Bloom, Castagna, and Warren (2003) reiterate that principals need continuous support and professional development and imply that principals having a coach or mentor is key. However, there is limited research on how university faculty members serve as effective coaches or mentors. The research primarily focuses on mentorship provided from within the school leadership team in the school district.

Research has also suggested what behaviors are most effective in establishing an effective mentor-mentee relationship. Bloom et al. (2003) provides the following list they deem effective behaviors for mentors to have:

- asking probing questions,
- provide honest feedback,
- listen,
- analyze decisions,
- propose alternative viewpoints,
- encourage independence,
- foster lifelong learning, and
- offer caring support (p. 451- 452).

As mentioned above, the Wallace Foundation has placed a fresh urgency on addressing the chronic weaknesses of principal training programs with a $47 million initiative to build evidence on how universities can shape effective principals (Wallace, 2016). Extending from previous research, the Wallace Foundation (2016) reported five themes that hinder effective principal preparation programs:

- District leaders are largely dissatisfied with the quality of principal preparation programs, and many universities believe that their programs have room for improvement.
- Strong university-district partnerships are essential to high-quality preparation but are far from

universal.

- The course of study at preparation programs does not always reflect principals' real jobs.
- Some university policies and practices can hinder change.
- States have authority to play a role in improving principal preparation, but many are not using this power as effectively as possible (p. 5).

These five themes identify characteristics of principal preparation programs that create leaders who lack the initiatives, background, and support structures to enhance the learning environment. An example of an effective partnership is the Ritchie Fellows Program for School Leaders. It is a partnership between Denver University Morgridge College of Education and Denver Public schools, which has evolved over the last decade. The Ritchie program immerses students in graduate-level coursework and project-based learning focused on innovation, the use of data, and values-based leadership, along with a fulltime, one-year internship (http://careers.dpsk12.org/school-leaders/pathways-to-school-leadership/du-morgridge-college-of- education). Similarly, ESSA defines school leader residency programs—a type of preparation program—as school-based, with one year of learning and leading in an authentic school setting, as well as, concurrent evidence-based coursework and mentoring from an effective principal (Herman, Gates, Chavez-Herrerias, & Harris, 2016). Research has implied that there is a need for strong mentor support for new principals; however, there is a lack of empirical research on the impact of mentorship provided by university faculty to coach or mentor aspiring principals serving in a job-embedded principal preparation residency program.

This study utilized both the Ritchie Fellows Partnership in Denver and the ESSA residency program definition as the framework to launch a job-embedded residency program to develop school leaders through a school to university partnership. This study aims to provide insight on the effectiveness of mentorship provided by principal mentors and university faculty coaches.

4. Methods

This qualitative pilot study was conducted through a partnership with a school district in Texas. The higher-level administrative leaders from the school district selected principals to serve as the mentor principals for the selected Principal Fellows. Even though the school district selected the mentor principals, the university faculty coaches recommended to the school district to select mentors that exhibited strong instructional practices, a willingness to mentor and to allow the principal fellow to be in a leaner-stance, and evidence that the principal could lead a campus to improve student achievement and build teacher capacity. For the selection of the principal fellow candidates, the district invited selected participants from the central office and principal recommendations to apply for the PF program. The school district had 100% authority on selecting the principal fellow candidates for the pilot study. Furthermore, upon successful completion of the university's program requirements and passing the state of Texas certification principal exam, the PFs would then become certified Texas Principals for any PK-12 level.

The participants in this study included six PFs, the six corresponding mentor principals, and two educational leadership faculty coaches. As mentioned above, the administrative team of the partnering district selected the teachers who were interested in the internship opportunity. Once the PFs were selected, the district assigned them to their mentor principal and to a campus within the district other than the campus they previously served as a teacher. From the university, faculty within the educational leadership program served as coaches for the PFs and liaisons between the district and university.

The research strategy used in this study was a qualitative case study examining all three groups described above. A case study was chosen to analyze a phenomenon in its natural setting (Creswell, 2014). Using a case study provided the researcher with a rich narrative context that

described in detail the phenomenon (i.e., the job-embedded experience of the intern) that was occurring. More specifically, an empirical lens was utilized to explore the uniqueness of the job-embedded residency program and provide a reflection of the involved participants' perspective (Stake, 1995; Gall, Gall, & Borg, 2007). Yazan (2015) revealed characteristics of a case study in referencing Stake's case study designs and she lists an empirical characteristic as "basing their study on their observations in the field" (p. 148). Over the 15-month job-embedded experience, PFs were monitored and observed by the university coaches and received ongoing support. Through this process the Faculty Coaches were able to reflect on these observations. Two main types of data that were collected in the PFs program to confirm the progress.

The first type included documented observations of the PFs' interactions and experiences in their schools. The documentation included reflective conversations between faculty coach and PFs, faculty field notes, journaling, and weekly conferencing. By using various forms for data collection points, the PFs were provided a vehicle for sharing their views, experiences, and challenges, which over a yearlong collaboration with the faculty coach created a strong and often confidential relationship between the faculty coach and the PF. As Creswell (2014) posits, this lack of refrain could present themes the PFs may have felt uncomfortable sharing such as

sensitive information the PF only felt comfortable sharing with their coach.   After site visits were conducted, the faculty coaches reconvened and collectively analyzed the field notes to find patternsand trends from the experience of the PFs.

To build on the data collected through field notes, conversations were facilitated between mentor principals, PFs, and the faculty themselves throughout the school year. Besides traveling to each of the PFs' campuses, conversations with participants were established through email, phone calls, and virtual networking. Not only was this a way to collect in-depth information on the phenomena that were occurring, but it was vital in developing and maintaining a collaborative, effective bond between the PF and his or her mentor principal. During this stage, the university and district partners were able to develop meaningful roles and responsibilities for both the PF and the mentor. As an advantage, university faculty had these outlined roles and responsibilities to allow the PF to avoid the trap of specific, time-consuming tasks, such as acting as the full-time disciplinarian or serving as the campus testing coordinator. Instead, the roles and responsibilities established were specifically geared toward growing the PF in all areas that aligned with the Professional Standards of Educational Leaders (PSEL) and the Texas principal standards outlined by the Texas Administrative Code. The second main type of data that was collected was the principal fellows' artifacts such as their equity audits and Pre-Conference, Observation, and Post-conference (POP) data. Skrla, Scheurich, Garcia, and Nolly (2004) reconceptualizes equity audits as being a systematic examination of the school to identify and address any inequities that may exist. One example of an inequity in a school is the misappropriation of discipline referrals of a minority that makes up less percentage of the student demographics but tend to have the largest percentage of discipline referrals in a school. The PFs conducted equity audits to identify and address any inequities from student achievement data, programmatic data, and teacher data (Skrla et al., 2004). The POP cycle evidence provided data on the performance of each principal fellow to coach and grow the teachers they were working with. This form of data allowed the faculty coaches to monitor and provide feedback to the intern so they could ultimately build teacher capacity; therefore, teachers were able to improve student outcomes in their classroom.

Data collected from field notes and student artifacts (e.g., equity audits) were analyzed through an open-coding process conducted by hand-coding (Creswell, 2014). From this data process, the researchers searched for patterns and trends from the data collected. The trends and patterns that emerged provided the groundwork for the principal preparation program to refine their curriculum and pedagogy to continue to provide a 15-month job-embedded principal residency internship program.

5. Findings

This educational leadership preparation program study presents qualitative findings by educational faculty from a large, state-funded university who led the Principal Fellows Program in collaboration with a school district. The participants in this qualitative case study design spent two years of job-embedded learning and coaching. Participants included two educational leadership faculty coaches, six PFs and their corresponding six mentor principals from a school district in thestate of Texas. The PFs and mentor principals in schools focused on four key platforms:

1. Competency-based and job-embedded school turnaround work centred on the improvement of core content areas.
2. Development of human capital through instructional coaching with action plans.
3. Improvement of teacher content and pedagogy.
4. The impact on student achievement to meet state standards.

The participants spanned the K-12 spectrum in years of experience and expertise. The five themes which emerged described below encapsulate educational leadership faculty learning in the joint development of Principal Fellows.

What is in School District Policies is not Always Practiced: Through job-embedded partnerships and closer examination of district and campus leadership practices and school policies, the university-school partnerships revealed inequities and policy issues for students, teachers, and communities caused by school decision-making. The PFs completed equity audits on their schools,utilized student programmatic data which was utilized to present to principal mentors and faculty to shape action around selected policies in their assigned schools.

Uncovering status quo practices together as university-school partners: The principal mentors were charged with utilizing their daily instructional leadership decision-making to support the job-embedded and competency-based development of the PF in the most complex of school contexts, the principalship. The district partner recommended principal mentors that would help guide and develop the PF throughout the program year. These mentors supported and brought life to life the learning and selection criteria established by the university-district partnership. Immersion with the principal mentors and their attention to instruction, campus culture,

campus climate, and support of students throughout the day impacted and shaped PFs exponentially. The PFs' learning included administrator and teacher interactions, which exemplified types of growth and fixed mindsets. Faculty coaches and principal mentors who supported the PFs were charged with finding research-based practices for solutions and ultimately to challenge status quo practices in their assigned schools.

The Ongoing Development of Job-Embedded Competencies: Educational Leadership faculty, principal partners, and PFs met to examine the current demands of school accountability by utilizing forms of data. To improve instruction and student achievement, the Principal Fellows Program conducted an orientation meeting and scheduled learning sessions for the mentor principals. Also, PFs were trained through virtual coaching sessions to frame student growth and progress through pre-conferences with teachers. Scoring classroom observations against the Texas Teacher and Support System (T-TESS) evaluation rubric and conducting post conferences with teachers on the mastery of the lesson provided reciprocal learning and data necessary to establish consensus at department and grade level meetings led by the PFs concerning coaching. The feedback loops provided by faculty not only improved the PFs' instructional coaching competencies but impacted pedagogy and ultimately student progress. Principal Fellows were rated on their performance in delivering the pre-conference and post-conference, and the data revealed the ratings did improve from the beginning of the job-embedded internship to the end of the program. PFs also collected data from their assigned two teacher's student progress to see if there was improvement in student achievement.

Re-imaging the principal internship: The reality for aspiring administrators is that many could not quit teaching to have a job-embedded experience which truly helps the educator understand the accountability landscape of the principalship. Designing a job-embedded experience for the district and university-supported candidates created a leadership pipeline in the participating district and sent a message of investment in the development of human capital to the district organization. In developing this human capital, there developed a need to address the social context of transitioning to the principal position, the Interns were coached by the university faculty about how to deal with the political nuances associated with the inherent nature of competition in the workplace.

Just-In-Time Curriculum and Faculty Support: For faculty entrenched in teaching a semester-long brick and mortar university leadership course, challenges and opportunities came with leading a 15-month job-embedded PFs experience. The growth occurred through the scaffolding of learning topics that supported the PSEL and the Texas principal standards and was directly applicable to competency-based shaping and the daily work as a principal. Coursework was flipped to adjust for just in time learning which led to a realignment of the curriculum and rethinking of how to deliver course work to students in resident.

6. Discussion

The transformative work of improving principal preparation programs in concert with the school district and other partners has produced graduates who can address the use of data for equity, improve instruction and student achievement, and develop human capital through instructional coaching. Furthermore, this study examined university-school partnerships and the collaborative efforts of educational leadership faculty to produce job-ready principal graduates. To truly transform the internship experience for aspiring principals, the study examined the learning of faculty collaborating with school district administrators to pioneer an increasingly unique university to a school partnership model, the *Principal Fellows Program* that promises to become an easily transportable, highly effective prototype to use across the state. The results obtained from this study related to improvements in principal competencies which translated to student achievement outcomes that can greatly inform the future direction of district and university partnerships tailoring skill-based professional development for administrators. The collaborative efforts to address status quo practices in schools through the principal internship produced graduates and mentors who use data for equity, to improve instruction and student achievement, and to develop human capital through instructional coaching while using state and national rubrics to evaluate and grow teachers in a systematic way.

7. Implications

Four implications were revealed from the data analysis process. The pilot study included financial support that provided students with financial benefits for waived tuition and fees and half the funding for their salary during the internship. Having benefits of financial assistance was important to not only the interns but to the planning of the budget components for the SEED grant funding that would allow for more PF cohorts to receive similar benefits. Looking further ahead, and aware the SEED grant was expected to expire the fall of 2019, the university faculty was left to develop and implement a hybrid model that will sustain this effective principal preparation program to continue school-university partnerships by growing much needed effective aspiring principals. The implications of losing a funding source will affect how universities and school districts collaborate to provide a similar principal preparation experience without SEED funding. Future work will include discussions with university officials to locate and align available monies for supporting embedded interns. Additionally,

discussions with partner school districts will focus on their ability to provide monies for salaries and support. Current Memorandums of Understanding (MOUs) between the university and districts will address these changes.

A second implication from this study is the need to continue shaping and molding the bond between mentor principals and the PF. Findings further revealed there can be political nuances from within or outside of the school district; therefore, the support of mentor principals is vital for PFs by taking precautionary measures, including possible political misconceptions, and formal and informal misconceptions related to social contracts. PFs are also subject to many forms of stress. They can be viewed as a "catch-all" position or just another administrative position for the principal to use at will. This approach is in direct opposition to the preferred and necessary "learning stance" PFs need for a well-rounded internship. Tuning the roles and responsibilities of the mentor principal, establishing protocols for coaching, and addressing a mentoring culture lead to a more conducive learning and leading environment. Another implication from the study is that a just-in-time curriculum requires active monitoring and adjusting whenever necessary. The faculty coaches will closely observe and coach each FP in individual sessions. These coaching sessions will be on a weekly rotation. One week online or on the phone individually with the primary university coach will occur in a logistically flexible way. In the second week, the PFs will connect virtually as a group with the university coaches in a three-hour reserved time slot. In addition to those two types of communication, the faculty coaches will continue to travel to the PFs' campuses to conduct face-to-face, meaningful conversations. As far as the group learning sessions are concerned, the collaborative setting will utilize the newly installed virtual networking system housed by the university. The technology provides for the ultimate experience of real-time video sharing, live conversation, file sharing, instant chatting, small-group breakouts, and other unique functions to enhance the learning experience.

Lastly, regarding program improvement, this pilot study also indicates that a weeklong summer institute is needed to prepare the Principal Fellows for the journey they will embark upon. The summer institute will cover a plethora of information that was deemed necessary by this study's findings which include such topics as special population requirements, Texas Accountability Intervention System (TAIS) framework, Professional Learning Communities (PLC) framework, and policies and procedures required by districts and campuses. To address teaching and learning, each PF will complete an equity audit on their campus to review data that reveals shortcomings, which will be addressed to meet student needs. The summer institute will cover the district's instructional rubric. It will also inform and teach Fellows the aspects of T-TESS and T-PPESS (Texas Principal Evaluation and Support System) that the majority of school districts have adopted for their appraisal instruments. Furthermore, the summer institute will focus on the T-TESS instructional rubric. More specifically, the cohort will see the alignment of the T-PESS rubric with the national principal standards, Texas principal standards, and the principal competencies outlined by the principal certification exam.

8. Summary

The six PFs in the pilot study alongside the mentorship of their principal and coaching from educational leadership faculty were able to grow teachers by providing platforms to effect change and improve student achievement. The six PFs served a total of 2,548 students and 170 teachers. The next cohort of 13 to start the first year of the SEED grant as described earlier will serve approximately 11,123 students and 1,251 teachers. As the principal preparation program continues to grow and be refined, synchronization of the school-university partnership between school districts and their leadership has the potential to affect students and school districts through a proven, research-based program such as this is encouraging. The University Principal Fellows Program provides insight for faculty learning and ongoing opportunities to support school and university partnerships. Capitalizing on individual strengths of stakeholders and collaboration of institutions allows for synergistic operational support to prepare principals who are job-ready and prepared to lead.

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