

## REL Southwest Ask A REL Response

Principals

June 2018

### Question:

*Provide a citation or two for What Works Clearinghouse (WWC) studies that have promising evidence on principal preparation.*

### Response:

Thank you for the question you submitted to our REL Reference Desk. We have prepared the following memo with research references to help answer your question. For each reference, we provide an abstract, excerpt, or summary written by the study's author or publisher. Following an established Regional Educational Laboratory (REL) Southwest research protocol, we conducted a search for research reports as well as descriptive study articles on promising evidence on principal preparation from the What Works Clearinghouse (WWC).

We have not evaluated the quality of references and the resources provided in this response. We offer them only for your reference. Also, we searched the references in the response from the most commonly used resources of research, but they are not comprehensive, and other relevant references and resources may exist. References provided are listed in alphabetical order, not necessarily in order of relevance. We do not include sources that are not freely available to the requestor.

### Research References

Corcoran, S. P., Schwartz, A. E., & Weinstein, M. (2012). Training your own: The impact of New York City's aspiring principals program on student achievement. *Educational Evaluation and Policy Analysis*, 34(2), 232–253. <https://eric.ed.gov/?id=EJ963425>

*From the ERIC abstract:* “The New York City Leadership Academy represents a unique experiment by a large urban school district to train and develop its own school leaders. Its 14-month Aspiring Principals Program (APP) selects and prepares aspiring principals to lead low-performing schools. This study provides the first systematic evaluation of achievement in APP-staffed schools after 3 or more years. We examine differences between APP principals and those advancing through other routes, the extent to which APP graduates serve and remain in schools, and their relative performance in mathematics and English language arts. On balance, we find that APP principals

performed about as well as other new principals. If anything, they narrowed the gap with comparison schools in English language arts but lagged behind in mathematics.”

*From the WWC:* “Meets WWC standards with reservations because it uses a quasi-experimental design in which the analytic intervention and comparison groups satisfy the baseline equivalence requirement.” <https://ies.ed.gov/ncee/wwc/study/81639>

Gates, S. M., Hamilton, L. S., Martorell, P., Burkhauser, S., Heaton, P., Pierson, A., et al. (2014). *Preparing principals to raise student achievement: Implementation and effects of the new leaders program in ten districts*. Research Report. Santa Monica, CA: RAND Corporation. <https://eric.ed.gov/?id=ED561152>

*From the ERIC abstract:* “New Leaders is a nonprofit organization with a mission to ensure high academic achievement for all students by developing outstanding school leaders to serve in urban schools. Its premise is that a combination of preparation and improved working conditions for principals, especially greater autonomy, would lead to improved student outcomes. Its approach involves both preparing principals and partnering with school districts and charter management organizations (CMOs) to improve the conditions in which its highly trained principals work. As part of the partnerships, New Leaders agrees to provide carefully selected and trained principals who can be placed in schools that need principals and to provide coaching and other support after those principals are placed. The districts and CMOs agree to establish working conditions that support, rather than hinder, the principals’ efforts to improve student outcomes. This report describes how the New Leaders program was implemented in partner districts, and it provides evidence of the effect that New Leaders has on student achievement.”

*From the WWC:* “Meets WWC standards with reservations because it uses a quasi-experimental design in which the analytic intervention and comparison groups satisfy the baseline equivalence requirement.” <https://ies.ed.gov/ncee/wwc/Study/81428>

Orr, M. T., & Orphanos, S. (2011). How graduate-level preparation influences the effectiveness of school leaders: A comparison of the outcomes of exemplary and conventional leadership preparation programs for principals. *Educational Administration Quarterly*, 47(1), 18–70. <https://eric.ed.gov/?id=EJ911182>

*From the ERIC abstract:* “Purpose: This study attempted to determine the influence of exemplary leadership preparation on what principals learn about leadership, their use of effective leadership practices, and how their practices influence school improvement and the school's learning climate. The authors also investigated how the frequency of effective leadership practices related to the strength of district support and the extent of school problems and student poverty. Finally, the authors examined the contribution of exemplary leadership preparation to variations in school improvement progress and school effectiveness climate. Research Design: The study, using survey research conducted in 2005, compared 65 principals who had graduated from one of four selected exemplary leadership preparation programs to a national sample of 111 principals. The

authors used structural equation modeling to find the best fit. Findings: Participation in an exemplary leadership preparation program was significantly associated with learning about effective leadership and engaging in these practices, particularly where stronger preparation program and internship quality existed. Frequent use of effective leadership practices was positively associated with school improvement progress and school effectiveness climate. Taken together, exemplary leadership preparation had a positive but mediated influence on variations in school improvement progress and school effectiveness climate; the relationship was even stronger when focusing on preparation program and internship quality measures. Conclusions: Faculty investments in preparation program and internship quality will positively contribute to the leadership knowledge of graduates and their leadership practices and school improvement progress. These results yield significant implications for policy makers, universities, and other providers of leadership preparation.”

*From the WWC:* “Does not meet WWC standards because the measures of effectiveness cannot be attributed solely to the intervention.” <https://ies.ed.gov/ncee/wwc/study/81462>

*WWC Quick Review of the report “The New York City Aspiring Principals Program: A School-Level Evaluation.”* (2010). Washington, DC: Institute of Education Sciences, What Works Clearinghouse. <https://eric.ed.gov/?id=ED508440>

*From the ERIC abstract:* “‘The New York City Aspiring Principals Program: A School-Level Evaluation’ examined whether schools with novice principals trained through the Aspiring Principals Program had higher student achievement than schools led by other novice principals. The study included schools in New York City led by principals who were hired in 2004 or 2005 and had served as principal for three consecutive years. The analysis included 86 schools that were assigned a principal trained through the program and 319 schools whose principals did not participate in the program. The research described in this report is not consistent with What Works Clearinghouse (WWC) evidence standards. WWC cautions that the schools to which principals trained through the Aspiring Principals Program were assigned were substantially lower achieving in math and English and had different racial/ethnic compositions than comparison schools before the placement of novice principals. Although the study authors control for these pre-existing differences in their analysis, other differences between the schools could influence changes in student test scores. As a result, the study’s findings cannot be attributed with confidence to the Aspiring Principals Program. [The following study is the focus of this ‘Quick Review’: Corcoran, S. P., Schwartz, A. E., & Weinstein, M. (August 2009). ‘The New York City Aspiring Principals Program: A school-level evaluation.’ New York, NY: Institute for Education and Social Policy, New York University.]”

*From the WWC:* “[The New York City Aspiring Principals Program: A school-level evaluation] [m]eets WWC standards with reservations.” <https://ies.ed.gov/ncee/wwc/Study/67287>

## Additional Organization to Consult

What Works Clearinghouse - <http://ies.ed.gov/ncee/wwc/>

*From the website:* “The What Works Clearinghouse (WWC) was established in 2002 as an initiative of the Institute for Education Sciences (IES) at the U.S. Department of Education. The WWC is administered by the National Center for Education Evaluation within the IES. The goal of the WWC is to be a resource for informed educational decision-making. To reach this goal, the WWC identifies studies that provide credible and reliable evidence of the effectiveness of a given practice, program, or policy (referred to as ‘interventions’) and disseminates summary information and reports on the WWC website.”

## Methods

### Keywords and Search Strings

The following keywords and search strings were used to search the reference databases and other sources:

- Administrator education
- Administrator preparation
- Instructional leadership preparation
- Leadership effectiveness
- Effective leaders
- Effective principal preparation
- Preparation models
- Principal preparation

### Databases and Resources

We searched ERIC for relevant, peer-reviewed research references. ERIC is a free online library of more than 1.6 million citations of education research sponsored by the Institute of Education Sciences (IES). Additionally, we searched the What Works Clearinghouse.

### Reference Search and Selection Criteria

When we were searching and reviewing resources, we considered the following criteria:

- *Date of the publication:* References and resources published from 2003 to present, were included in the search and review.
- *Search priorities of reference sources:* Search priority is given to study reports, briefs, and other documents that are published and/or reviewed by IES and other federal or federally funded organizations, academic databases, including ERIC, EBSCO databases, JSTOR database, PsychInfo, PsychArticle, and Google Scholar.

- *Methodology*: The following methodological priorities/considerations were given in the review and selection of the references: (a) study types—randomized control trials, quasi-experiments, surveys, descriptive data analyses, literature reviews, policy briefs, and so forth, generally in this order; (b) target population, samples (representativeness of the target population, sample size, volunteered or randomly selected, and so forth), study duration, and so forth; and (c) limitations, generalizability of the findings and conclusions, and so forth.

---

This memorandum is one in a series of quick-turnaround responses to specific questions posed by stakeholders in the Southwest Region (Arkansas, Louisiana, New Mexico, Oklahoma, and Texas), which is served by the Regional Educational Laboratory (REL) Southwest at AIR. This memorandum was prepared by REL Southwest under a contract with the U.S. Department of Education’s Institute of Education Sciences (IES), Contract ED-IES-91990018C0002, administered by AIR. Its content does not necessarily reflect the views or policies of IES or the U.S. Department of Education nor does mention of trade names, commercial products, or organizations imply endorsement by the U.S. Government.