

REL Southwest Ask A REL Response

Principals

November 2021

Question:

What are effective programs for preparing new principals?

Response:

Thank you for the questions you submitted to our REL Reference Desk. We have prepared the following memo with research references to help answer your questions. 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 effective programs for preparing new principals.

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 sections with sources in each section in alphabetical order, not necessarily in order of relevance. We do not include sources that are not freely available to the requestor.

Research References

Alsbury, T. L., & Hackmann, D. G. (2006). Learning from experience: Initial findings of a mentoring/induction program for novice principals and superintendents. *Planning and Changing*, 37(3–4), 169–189. <https://eric.ed.gov/?id=EJ756222>. Retrieved from <https://files.eric.ed.gov/fulltext/EJ756222.pdf>.

From the ERIC abstract: “This article reports findings from formative assessments of one state's administrator mentoring and induction program during two years of program piloting in 2002/03 and 2003/04. The purpose of this evaluation research was to establish baseline data and to detect problem areas, so that changes could be made in subsequent years. More broadly, the study provides a window into successful components of an administrator mentoring program, according to these novice and experienced administrators. Theoretical perspectives on effective mentoring programs in educational

administration are first presented. Quantitative and qualitative data from two surveys of principal and superintendent mentors and their proteges are then presented and analyzed, including trends that arose from the data. The study concludes by presenting recommendations for the design and implementation of administrative mentoring programs of this type.”

- Crow, G. M., & Whiteman, R. S. (2016). Effective preparation program features: A literature review. *Journal of Research on Leadership Education*, 11(1), 120–148.
<https://eric.ed.gov/?id=EJ1100233>. Retrieved from
https://www.academia.edu/27678319/Effective_Preparation_Program_Features_A_Literature_Review.

From the ERIC abstract: “This article is a summary of a report prepared for the University Council for Educational Administration Program Improvement Project for the Wallace Foundation. This explores the research base for educational leadership preparation programs, specifically examining literature on program features. The review covers context, candidates, faculty, curriculum, design, delivery, pedagogy, internships, student assessment, mentoring and coaching, comprehensive leadership development, and program evaluation. In addition to summarizing the major findings in these program feature areas, the article provides a critical evaluation of the substantive and methodological gaps and future research directions.”

- Davis, S. H., & Darling-Hammond, L. (2012). Innovative principal preparation programs: What works and how we know. *Planning and Changing*, 43(1–2), 25–45.
<https://eric.ed.gov/?id=EJ977545>. Retrieved from
<https://files.eric.ed.gov/fulltext/EJ977545.pdf>.

From the ERIC abstract: “This article provides an overview of the contexts, the key features, and the evidentiary data—the criteria regarding candidates to engage in administrative work—for five innovative principal preparation programs. Short case studies and cross-case analysis of the sample programs are used to provide thorough descriptions. The five programs in fact share many characteristics and design structures that warrant close consideration, given each program's specifically measured success.”

- Dodson, R. L. (2014). Which field experiences best prepare future school leaders? An analysis of Kentucky’s principal preparation program. *Educational Research Quarterly*, 37(4), 41–56. <https://eric.ed.gov/?id=EJ1061927>

From the ERIC abstract: “This paper examines the effectiveness of field experiences in preparing school principals for the exigencies of the job. Current school principals throughout Kentucky were surveyed regarding their perceptions of the utility and comparative effectiveness of field experiences in the principal preparation program (PPP) each attended. Surveys were emailed to school principals across Kentucky; the response rate was 30% (263 of 900 principals). Most respondents completed field experiences as part of their PPPs, and they considered many of these field experiences to have been valuable learning tools. Of those who did not complete field experiences, nearly all agreed that they would have been better prepared for school leadership had they

performed field experiences. Current principals identified the most valuable field experiences to be those involving practical, hands-on, typical principal responsibilities (key words were leading, identifying, interviewing, and working). Least useful were observation-type experiences. This research finds clear support for augmenting use of two particular types of field experiences: (1) Budget and Finance and (2) Site-Based Decision Making. This research also shows the clear practical value of making field experiences an integral part of PPPs. In light of recent criticism that PPPs fail to adequately “ready” school principals, this research offers clear prescriptions for PPP improvement and highlights areas in which Kentucky’s PPPs succeed.”

Grissom, J. A., Mitani, H., & Woo, D. S. (2019). Principal preparation programs and principal outcomes. *Educational Administration Quarterly*, 55(1), 73–115.
<https://eric.ed.gov/?id=EJ1201546>

From the ERIC abstract: “Purpose: Concerns about variation in the quality of preservice preparation provided by many university-based principal preparation programs (PPPs) has led to calls to use outcomes of program graduates to hold PPPs accountable. Little research, however, has assessed the degree to which different outcomes for PPP graduates in fact vary systematically by program. Research Methods: Using administrative data from Tennessee, we link approximately a decade’s worth of PPP graduates to their schools, licensure examination scores, and multiple measures of job performance in their first 3 years as principals, including supervisors’ practice ratings on the state evaluation system, teacher and assistant principal ratings of school leadership on a statewide survey, and measures of student achievement growth. We use which PPP a principal completed to predict these outcomes using a regression approach with different sets of covariates. Findings: Although we are able to associate PPPs with high and low principal performance, we find that programs’ rankings vary by outcome measure, and we are unable to identify PPPs that perform consistently well or poorly across outcomes. Moreover, we find that Tennessee PPPs vary substantially in the characteristics of the schools into which their principals are hired and that taking these characteristics into account is important in ordering PPPs based on outcomes. In addition, even over a fairly long time frame, some programs produce too few graduates who later become school leaders to allow for reliable estimates. Implications: Although the use of graduates’ outcomes to differentiate PPPs holds promise, the methodological challenges to drawing valid and reliable conclusions about PPPs from graduates’ job outcomes are substantial. Policymakers and researchers may arrive at very different assessments of which PPPs are successful depending on which outcomes are chosen and what modeling approaches are employed.”

REL Southwest Note: To access the full article, click on “Direct link” on the ERIC page linked from this entry.

Herrmann, M., Clark, M., James-Burdumy, S., Tuttle, C., Kautz, T., Knechtel, V., Dotter, D., Wuisin, C. S., & Deke, J. (2019). *The effects of a principal professional development program focused on instructional leadership* (NCEE 2020-0002). U.S. Department of Education, Institute of Education Sciences, National Center for Education Evaluation and Regional Assistance. <https://eric.ed.gov/?id=ED599489>

From the ERIC abstract: “Helping principals improve their leadership practices is a common use of federal funds and one way to improve instruction and student achievement. This study sought to better understand the effectiveness of an intensive principal professional development program focused primarily on helping principals conduct structured observations of teachers’ classroom instruction and provide targeted feedback based on those observations. The report found that the program did not change principal practices as intended or improve students’ achievement. However, improvements in some of the targeted principal practices were positively associated with improved student achievement. Attention on how to change these practices might be a potential avenue for improving the program.”

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>. Retrieved from <https://www.academia.edu/5086907>.

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.”

Pannell, S., & Sergi-McBrayer, J. (2020). An examination of the impact of educational leadership field experience structure on instructional leadership preparedness. *International Journal of Educational Leadership Preparation*, 15(1), 92–106. <https://eric.ed.gov/?id=EJ1254569>

From the ERIC abstract: “This pilot study investigated the relationship between principal preparation program (PPP) field experience structure and principal instructional leadership preparedness as measured by state certification exams and state-wide student assessment results. The researchers sought to determine if a statistically significant difference existed in principal certification examination scores between principals who completed part-time practicums while maintaining their classroom teaching duties and principals who completed a year-long, full-time internship as part of their PPP. Further, the researchers sought to determine the impact on school-wide student achievement scores for both groups of principals during their first year in a principalship. Findings indicated a statistically significant difference in median state leadership licensure examination scores between the two groups, with internship principals (IP) scoring significantly higher than practicum principals (PP). Other findings indicated, both, PPs and IPs positively impacted SA levels in their first year as principal with schools led by PPs making higher gains in school-wide student achievement scores and schools led by IPs meeting school-wide growth, as measured by the state accountability model, at a higher rate. These findings may aid key constituents in re-envisioning the structure of their current field experiences and re-examining preparation practices to explore innovative methods to prepare school leaders who are trained for the complexity of today’s principal role.”

Reed, C. J., & Llanes, J. R. (2010). Raising standards for tomorrow’s principals: Negotiating state requirements, faculty interests, district needs, and best practices. *Journal of Research on Leadership Education*, 5(12.3), 391–417. <https://eric.ed.gov/?id=EJ913596>

From the ERIC abstract: “Many states are mandating reforms in university-sponsored principal preparation programs, but faculty and school system personnel often have concerns about the prescriptive nature of state mandates related to these reforms. Auburn University served as one of four pilot principal preparation program redesigns in Alabama, a process that took over two years. Redesign efforts involved negotiating state requirements, faculty needs and research interests, school district needs and interests, best practices, and common sense. The re-design was developed and is being implemented in partnership with seven school districts. In this article we interrogate the issues, challenges, and successes faced throughout one university’s principal preparation program redesign process, offering reflections, insights, and lessons learned for others currently engaged or soon to be negotiating competing agendas for how they should prepare principals.”

Sutcher, L., Podolsky, A., & Espinoza, D. (2017). *Supporting principals’ learning: Key features of effective programs*. Learning Policy Institute. <https://eric.ed.gov/?id=ED606829>

From the ERIC abstract: “Developing excellent principals who can set direction, develop people, redesign organizations, and lead instruction requires a system of high-quality preparation and professional development. This paper summarizes the elements of high-quality principal preparation and professional development programs that have been associated with positive school outcomes, ranging from student achievement, to staff and student perceptions of school climate, to principal efficacy and retention. To illustrate

how these elements work together to develop strong principals, the paper also includes descriptions of four programs that have been found to produce effective principals.”

Additional Organizations to Consult

American Association of Colleges for Teacher Education (AACTE) – <https://aacte.org/>

From the website: “The American Association of Colleges for Teacher Education (AACTE) is the leading voice on educator preparation. AACTE represents more than 800 postsecondary institutions with educator preparation programs dedicated to high-quality, evidence-based preparation that assures educators are ready to teach all learners.”

REL Southwest Note: The website’s page on principal preparation has information on a principal preparation program initiative podcast, as well as links to webinars and other school leadership resources: <https://aacte.org/programs-and-services/principal-preparation/>.

National Association of Secondary School Principals (NASSP) – <https://www.nassp.org/>

From the website: “The National Association of Secondary School Principals (NASSP) is the leading organization of and voice for middle level principals, high school principals, and other school leaders across the United States. NASSP seeks to transform education through school leadership, recognizing that the fulfillment of each student’s potential relies on great leaders in every school committed to the success of each student.”

REL Southwest Note: The website’s page on principal training has links to “Tools to Improve Your School,” “Career Development,” “Top Issues in Education,” and other areas: <https://www.nassp.org/top-issues-in-education/position-statements/principal-training/>.

Methods

Keywords and Search Strings

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

- [(“effective” AND “administrator”) AND (“education” OR “preparation”)]
- [(“instructional leadership” OR “principal”) AND (“preparation”)]
- [“principal” AND (“preparation” OR “models”)]
- [(“leadership effectiveness” OR “effective leaders”)]

Databases and Resources

We searched [ERIC](#) for relevant, peer-reviewed research references. ERIC is a free online library of more than 1.8 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 2006 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, correlational studies, descriptive data analyses, literature reviews, mixed methods analyses, and so forth; (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.