Literature Synthesis

Preparing School Leaders for Every Student's Learning

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Table of Contents

Purpose and Scope 5

Outcomes of Successful Leader Preparation 7

Leadership for Direction, Alignment, and Commitment 9

Direction 9

Alignment 11

Commitment 14

Usefulness of the Direction-Alignment-Commitment Lens 16

Implications and Challenges for Structuring Leader Preparation 16

Structures Supporting Development of Leadership Expertise 17

New Pathways Into School Leadership Positions 18

Preparing Leaders for Multiple Roles 19

The Evidence for Structuring Leadership Development 24

Confronting Limits of Research-Based Knowledge 25

How Individuals Build Expertise for Leadership 27

Problem-Based Learning 28

Structured Reflection 30

Structures Supporting Development of Leadership Expertise 31

Extended Internships 32

District-University Partnerships 34

Candidate Selection 35

Supporting Structures and Strategies 37

Cohort Models 37

Induction Programs for New Administrators 37
Levers for Program Improvement 38
Individual Requirements 40
Program Approval Strategies 43
Program Incentives and Capacity Building 45
Deregulation and Competition Strategies 47
Conclusion 48
References 50

With 95% of students with disabilities receiving instruction in general education settings for some portion of the school day (U.S. Department of Education, 2012), educating students with disabilities has become an important dimension in the improvement of schools in the United States. Recent federal policies, including the Individuals With Disabilities Education Act (IDEA, 2004) and the No Child Left Behind Act of 2001 (NCLB, 2008), have reshaped the responsibilities of both principals and local special education administrators (LSEAs) and have called into question the practices used to prepare these professionals for their contemporary roles. For this paper, we examined the preparation and development of educational leadership and administration personnel who guide the learning of students with disabilities in their schools and districts. We framed this analysis for the Center for Collaboration for Effective Educator Development, Accountability, and Reform (CEEDAR) Center within the CEEDAR Center's overall goal of improving preparation programs so that new educators are ready to provide universally designed core instruction and multi-tiered instruction that can help all students, including students with disabilities, meet college- and career-ready standards.

Purpose and Scope

Our aim was to provide a synthesis of contemporary literature related to how professionals can structure educational leadership programs to support the development of new school leaders and highlight research-based opportunities for program improvement. To provide a foundation for our discussion of structures in preparation programs, we began with an overview of the leadership needed to support the learning of all students. Program structures and strategies are important when they support development of capabilities for enacting such leadership. We then described leadership roles that appear critical for all students to successfully learn and reviewed evidence on how program structures and strategies influence preparation

outcomes. We concluded with a set of opportunities for action that policymakers may use to leverage program improvements that are consistent with the research.

We focused our analysis on both school principals and LSEAs. Although responsibilities in the two roles differ, candidates in many states receive preparation for both positions in the same programs. Of course, leadership for educating students comes from many individuals, and throughout this document, we use the term *educational leaders* to refer to administrators holding formal positional leadership roles at the school or district levels. Although teachers typically join with principals in leading learning at the school level, we interchangeably use the terms *school leader* and *school principal* as we discuss opportunities for improving formal leadership preparation. Although individuals in these roles have differing responsibilities (i.e., the principal's first-level line responsibility is quite different from the central office support LSEAs provide), candidates in many states receive preparation for these roles in the same programs. Once on the job, principals and LSEAs both lead from the middle, developing strategies that align with district priorities and policies while accommodating and supporting leadership among teachers, other staff members, and families.

Although many contemporary leadership programs combine the development of individual leaders, such as principals and LSEAs, with a simultaneous focus on developing shared leadership throughout an organization (Day & Harrison, 2007), we narrowly focused this analysis on the preparation of individuals for formal leadership roles. Further, while primarily addressing how organized programs support leader development, we recognized that improvements in school-leader effectiveness also significantly depend on a much longer process that begins well before and extends well beyond formal preparation (McCauley, Van Velsor, & Ruderman, 2010). Thus, we emphasized that both formal programs and job-based development

contribute to school leadership and that improvements in both of these leadership development components could result in better school outcomes for all students, including those with disabilities.

Outcomes of Successful Leader Preparation

Efforts to improve the structure of leadership preparation naturally begin with what effective leaders must be able to do in order for their schools to succeed (Sykes, King, & Patrick, 2002). Successful practice is frequently analyzed to define curriculum content that is critical for preparation programs (e.g., Southern Regional Education Board, 2007), and the CEEDAR Center staff has commissioned a separate paper (i.e., Billingsley, McLeskey, & Crockett, 2014) to address curriculum content for leader preparation. This review and these recommendations address needed capabilities and curriculum content only to the extent necessary for identifying useful programmatic structures and strategies. Program structure and strategy naturally reflect the capabilities school leaders need; they also respond to contextual factors that influence the exercise of effective leadership and create both opportunities and limitations for emerging leaders' learning.

Like much about education, the nature of effective leadership practice is contested territory (Cheney, Davis, Garrett, & Holleran, 2010; Hargreaves & Fink, 2006; Hess, 2013; Theoharis, 2009). Nevertheless, recent research underlies a broad consensus that leadership influences student learning in indirect ways that are mediated by school social conditions and are influenced by many different individuals who share leadership within schools. These understandings are evident in contemporary discussion about preparation standards (Boscardin, 2011; Council for Exceptional Children [CEC], 2009; Council of Chief State School Officers [CCSSO], 2008); curriculum content (Boscardin & Lashley, 2012); leader assessment (Goldring,

Porter, Murphy, Elliott, & Cravens, 2009); and recommendations for effective practice (Louis, Leithwood, Walstrom, & Anderson, 2010; Robinson, Hohepa, & Lloyd, 2009).

The core message from this recent research is that although school leaders do exert significant influence on student-learning outcomes, these effects are mediated by a variety of societal factors, teacher capabilities, structures, and social conditions in schools (e.g., Hallinger & Heck, 1996; Heck, 2010; Heck & Hallinger, 2009). In other words, successful school leadership is seldom about a leader's direct intervention with students. Instead, it depends more on leadership practices that affect the social context in which teachers and students work. Because many members of school communities affect school conditions, it is not surprising that among administrators, teachers, students, and families, leadership in the most effective schools is widely shared (Leithwood & Mascall, 2008).

In education, these findings have called attention to the ways in which leadership is and can be distributed throughout a school or district in order to achieve goals for student learning (Camburn, Rowan, & Taylor, 2003; Spillane, 2006). The findings also highlight changes in the practices of principals and other administrators who orchestrate leadership that occurs throughout schools (Portin et al., 2009). For example, leadership continually emerges from the actions of different individuals and the interactions among individuals and groups in a school, but the overall outcome may not result in coherent and meaningful progress toward organizational goals (Temperley, 2010). Consequently, the work of individual school leaders can be usefully understood in the context of shared leadership—what the collective leadership in a school needs to accomplish and how individual leaders ensure that shared leadership has the needed results.

Drath and colleagues (2008) provided a useful lens for analyzing the results of shared leadership: Whatever the leadership source, organizations succeed when shared leadership fosters (a) direction, (b) alignment, and (c) commitment (DAC). These three outcomes are the means by which organizations achieve their goals. From this perspective, new leaders become school ready when they can foster DAC using whatever leadership resources are available from the principal's repertoire, the organization's routines, and the shared leadership of teachers, students, families, community partners, and other staff members. For the following section, we used these three leadership outcomes to organize our observations about critical leadership capabilities and challenges, which provided the foundation for our discussion of structures and strategies that can help preparation programs produce school-ready leaders.

Leadership for Direction, Alignment, and Commitment

Direction

Drath and colleagues (2008) referred to the leadership outcome of direction as a reasonable level of agreement in the collective about the aim, mission, vision, or goal of the collective's shared work. Agreement about direction means more than knowing and understanding the collective's mission or goals. It also means assenting to the value of the direction. In a collective in which members have produced direction, there is a shared understanding of the aim and broad agreement on the value of that aim (p. 647). Educational leadership literature recognizes highly similar concepts. The process of establishing a school's mission and vision are prominent in standards for preparation programs (CCSSO, 2008) as well as in empirical analyses of successful practice (Goldring et al., 2009; Louis et al., 2010; Robinson et al., 2009; Waters, Marzano, & McNulty, 2003).

Changes in economic, social, and demographic conditions have always had a significant impact on principals' practices and have generated pressure for corresponding changes in preparation (Luegg, Buckley, Firestone, & Garner, 2001). Two such contextual factors appear particularly important for understanding recent agendas for change in the preparation of educational leaders. First, setting direction in schools is closely linked to expectations for what students should learn. Thus, shifts in assumptions about what an increasingly globalized economy requires of future citizens and workers greatly affect guiding visions for schools (Grubb & Lazerson, 2004). In the United States and many other countries, this has translated into content standards that emphasize more advanced academic learning and policies that require almost universal achievement without disparities among student groups. Related student-learning assessments effectively transfer authority for an expanding portion of a school's direction setting from local constituents to state and federal policymakers. Second, these expectations for higher and more equitable achievement have simultaneously occurred with shifts in community diversity. Worldwide immigration and sharper wealth disparities have led to markedly new levels of diversity in many school communities. This diversity challenges school leaders to forge workable agreements about school direction despite different, often opposing, and strongly held views about the role and purpose of schooling.

Achieving shared direction for the education of students with disabilities presents challenges. Recent shifts in federal and state education policies, from compliance with procedures to accountability for college- and career-ready outcomes for students with disabilities, have disrupted traditional expectations and patterns of practice in schools and across districts. As a result, setting direction for quality education for these students can be difficult to achieve as educators struggle to revise the way they think about and evaluate their work.

The lack of shared values or understandings about pursuing success for all learners is among the special challenges in setting direction. Also, broad agreement about what constitutes equitable educational attainment for students with disabilities (e.g., improved scores on assessments, higher graduation rates, better postsecondary opportunities; McLaughlin, Smith, & Wilkinson, 2012) is also missing. Additional issues include school and district leaders ill prepared to advocate for students with disabilities (Lynch, 2012; Pazey & Cole, 2013) and the lack of system-wide direction toward equity exemplified by the marginalization of students with disabilities and other struggling learners in inclusive learning environments.

Achieving agreement on school purpose is clearly difficult when considered from the perspective of supporting all students' learning. Agreement requires deep understandings of policy-based learning goals and community priorities for learning beyond the required curriculum and knowledge of alternative ways to achieve school goals for those who do not progress as expected in the typical curriculum. It also requires the interpersonal expertise to lead local deliberations and reach agreements about priorities for individual students and the school as a whole.

Alignment

For Drath and colleagues (2008), alignment referred to "the organization and coordination of knowledge and work" (p. 647) in an organization. Leaders can achieve alignment through a variety of means, including formal structures and informal adjustments. When leadership is successful in bringing about alignment, "the work of individuals and groups is generally coherent with the work of other individuals and groups" (p. 647). Similar concepts, including capabilities for maintaining a school culture conducive to student learning and managing operations and resources to support a safe and effective learning environment (CCSSO

2008), appear in standards for educating school leaders. Alignment encompasses two leadership functions frequently cited as important in educational leadership: (a) building the human capacity to accomplish needed work and (b) creating the culture and structures that support and coordinate instruction. Robinson, Lloyd, and Rowe (2008), for example, highlighted building capacity in a meta-analysis in which they found that promoting and participating in teacher learning and development accounted for more variance in student-learning outcomes than in any other leadership practice. Louis and colleagues (2010) identified teacher working conditions—another aspect of alignment—as the most significant way in which principals influence student outcomes. Similar concepts appear in standards for educating school leaders; these standards include maintaining a school culture conducive to student learning and managing operations and resources to support a safe and effective learning environment (CCSSO, 2008).

The task of successfully creating alignment in schools is evolving in relation to several contextual factors with parallel pressures for change in leadership preparation programs. As federal and state policies have raised standards for student learning and have made schools the focal points of accountability for achieving these standards, school leaders are increasingly expected to have instructional expertise and be able to lead instructional improvements through staff selection, observation, evaluation, assistance, and professional development (PD). These activities are often shared with teacher leaders, but the expectation that principals will possess expertise for instructional leadership creates significant pressures for timely change in preparation programs (e.g., Elmore, 2000; Roza, Celio, Harvey, & Wishon, 2003).

Achieving alignment in relation to students with disabilities presents challenges for school leaders. Shifts from separate to shared responsibilities in teaching challenging content to all students—and expecting them to learn it—blurs the line between general and special

education. Especially important, it compels educators to work differently. Aligning personnel to work in flexible and responsive ways is a major challenge for school leaders. They must overcome the limited shared understandings about the ways in which a disability can affect learning as well as the lack of broad agreement about how to use differentiated and effective instructional practices in teaching academic content to widely diverse learners (Brownell, Sindelar, Kiely, & Danielson, 2010). Additional challenges include the complexities of planning, budgeting, supporting, evaluating, and rewarding personnel for shared performance in advancing the achievement of struggling learners, especially those with disabilities. Related challenges include retaining effective special education teachers and developing their knowledge and skills (Billingsley, 2011). The collaborative structure of special education poses another issue because alignment for positive outcomes extends by policy to increasing the abilities of all educational personnel to productively engage with parents of students with disabilities and community agencies (Harry, 2012; Shoho & Barnett, 2010). Further, each of these challenges becomes more formidable in the absence of system-wide approaches, including building leadership teams that can oversee consistent implementation of focused initiatives and monitor agreed-upon practices (Thurlow, Quenemoen, & Lazarus, 2012).

Popular notions of alignment in schools involve establishing agreement about instructional programs or methods and then tightly aligning capacity, structures, and routines around implementation of those programs. However, experience in a wide variety of organizations that seek to avoid failure suggests a different approach. These so-called *high-reliability organizations* frequently build capacity in more than one operating mode and shift from one approach to another in response to early warnings of impending failure (Bellamy, 2011; Bigley & Roberts, 2001). In schools, similar concepts have emerged from efforts to create

multi-tiered system of supports (MTSS) to ensure quick customization of instruction and intervention for students experiencing difficulties (Fuchs, Fuchs, & Compton, 2012). Here, the leadership challenges are to avoid rigid alignment that is inadequate to address context variations, sustain capacity to intervene using multiple approaches, and build collective support for what often appears as opposing approaches to instruction and intervention.

Commitment

Drath and colleagues (2008) defined commitment as the "willingness of individual members to subsume their own efforts and benefits within the collective effort and benefit . . . . In a collective that has produced commitment, members allow others to make demands on their time and energy" (p. 647). Research on school leadership shows several related capabilities and practices. Louis and colleagues (2010) found that principals' practices designed to increase teachers' motivation accounted for a significant portion of the variance in student achievement. Related standards for preparing educational leaders include capabilities for collaborating with family and community members and acting with integrity, fairness, and strong ethics (CCSSO, 2008).

Competing commitments among school professionals, families, and community members complicate leaders' efforts to motivate coordinated action toward school goals even when there is general agreement with a school's overall direction. Professional identification with disciplines, subject areas, or population groups often results in commitments that compete with a school's vision and strategy because individuals set their personal and professional priorities. In some schools, the recent transfer of decision making about curriculum goals and student expectations to state and federal levels reduces opportunities for participation; the result is fewer opportunities to exercise the local deliberation that could produce shared commitment. In other

schools, building collective motivation is made more difficult by the tendency for individuals to withdraw from civic discussions that often accompany an increase in community diversity, which makes it more difficult to build motivation through involvement in decision making (Putnam & Feldstein, 2003). Translating agreement with a school's direction into collective responsibility and shared commitment clearly requires increasingly sophisticated skills for personal and civic leadership.

Continuing changes in policy and practice require that all stakeholders collectively commit themselves to equitable educational attainment for all learners as framed by academic content standards. While addressing the learning needs of students with disabilities, the leadership challenge is to nurture such mutual commitment until it is strong enough to survive personal disagreement, conflict, and confusion about the feasibility of achieving equitable education. Moreover, that commitment must include a willingness to put in the time and energy necessary to bring about the desired outcomes.

Engaging stakeholders in decision making is central to establishing joint ownership for the education of students with special needs, and measuring progress toward key goals is critical for defining student success and obtaining commitment to effective instruction (Deshler & Cornett, 2012). The basic challenge is to secure sufficient commitment through moral purpose, personal relationships, organizational routines, and other strategies, all based on the exercise of social justice leadership that is ever mindful of the marginalization of groups of students. This commitment includes instructional leadership driven by data and research-based practices with a record of having a substantive impact on the achievement of individual students with disabilities and others who struggle to learn.

Usefulness of the Direction-Alignment-Commitment Lens

The combined concepts of DAC appear to provide a useful framework for understanding what successful school leaders do to meet student learning goals. The DAC lens offers a pragmatic, functional perspective that emphasizes leadership outcomes without defining either specific leadership practices or sources of leadership that may be influential in any given setting. Instead, DAC situates the practice of principals and LSEAs in a context of continually shared leadership in which the responsibility of formal leaders is to monitor overall leadership and organizational outcomes and apply their individual leadership practices to improve the results of overall shared leadership in the school. Mumford, Zaccaro, Harding, Jacobs, and Fleishman (2000) viewed this adaptive, day-to-day leadership as a form of complex social problem solving. In effect, this daily problem solving is a micro version of creating DAC: Leaders observe emerging events in the school to identify focused improvement opportunities (i.e., direction); develop theories of action that accommodate various constraints (i.e., alignment); and motivate action for implementation (i.e., commitment).

Implications and Challenges for Structuring Leader Preparation

As is clear from the above discussion, educational leaders need wide-ranging capabilities to ensure sufficient levels of DAC to support the learning of all students. For example, to achieve direction that supports all students' learning, school leaders need personal values and skills for interpersonal influence to establish a shared vision for inclusive education. Achieving alignment requires expertise for leading instruction, building capacity for the instruction of all students, monitoring instructional progress, and creating structures for responding to instructional difficulties. To achieve commitment, leaders need interpersonal, political, and

organizational skills to motivate members of the school community to spend the extra effort required to respond to challenging learning problems and educate all students well.

These school leadership capabilities have long been conceptualized using theory and research on expertise, which highlights the complexity of the needed skills as well as the ongoing need to diagnose emerging situations and then determine how leaders' knowledge can best be applied (e.g., Leithwood & Steinbach, 1995). New understandings of school leadership as a shared process add further complexity. Principals are expected to achieve student learning results regardless of the extent to which the school's existing shared leadership contributes to or detracts from coherent DAC. Consequently, a major goal of leadership preparation should be to develop a sufficiently deep and broad repertoire of strategies associated with each of the three leadership outcomes. This would include helping candidates develop adaptive expertise (Lin, Schwartz, & Bransford, 2007) to identify leadership strategies appropriate for highly varied and constantly evolving school conditions.

Structures Supporting Development of Leadership Expertise

Research and theory on the development of expertise—and adaptive expertise—for leadership provide a useful foundation for identifying structures and strategies for preparation. It is understood that such expertise develops over extended periods of time through individual effort and deliberate practice (Ericsson, Krampe, & Tech-Romer, 1993). For example, Ericsson and Charmes (1994) concluded that about 10,000 hr are needed to develop expertise for any given domain. Similarly, Kotter (1988) argued that it takes about 10 years for most individuals to develop skills required for top leadership positions. Because development of leadership expertise depends on individual effort and commitment to sustain repeated engagement with challenging tasks (Ohlott, 2004), leadership development also depends on individual factors that

sustain prospective leaders' motivation for additional work, including supportive values and leadership identities (Lord & Hall, 2005). Therefore, developing the wide-ranging and adaptive expertise needed for school leadership depends on structures and strategies that provide sufficient time for learning, opportunities for sustained practice with progressively difficult tasks, and support for the values and commitments that underlie continued candidate motivation (e.g., Van Velsor, McCauley, & Ruderman, 2010).

From this perspective, formal programs for preparing leaders represent a relatively small part—albeit a potentially vital part—of a much larger and longer leader development process. Consequently, analysis and improvement of educational leadership programs seem most likely to succeed if considered in this larger context. Instead of simply asking how leadership programs alone can produce new leaders, the key question becomes: How can formal leadership programs support, augment, and assess the results of ongoing leader development that occurs on the job?

New Pathways Into School Leadership Positions

A second implication arising from the demands of contemporary shared school leadership relates to the opportunities that emerging leaders have to develop needed expertise. As previously mentioned, the need for expert knowledge of instruction and high-level ability to influence instructional quality through interactions with other adults provides critical core expertise for school leadership and underlies the critical task of achieving alignment around instructional improvements. Like other areas of expertise, these instructional and interpersonal leadership skills take a generous amount of time to develop—far more, the research suggests, than what is available in typical administrator preparation. One important implication for program structure, therefore, is to more closely link formal preparation to extended, on-the-job opportunities for developing these critical skills. Most conventional leadership trajectories

conceptualize this extended learning as occurring after formal preparation and during mentoring and induction programs for new principals (e.g., Hitt, Tucker, & Young, 2012). An alternative that is receiving increasing attention is the possibility of more deliberately preparing school-based teacher leaders so that candidates enter formal administrator programs with high levels of instructional leadership expertise (Bellamy & Portin, 2011). However the leadership pathway is conceptualized, alternatives are critical for expanding leadership preparation to include the time and opportunity needed to develop instructional leadership expertise.

Preparing Leaders for Multiple Roles

A third challenging implication of the shared nature of school leadership is that leader preparation cannot be limited to any single role. Leadership that supports the learning of all students naturally comes from many members of the school community with contributions from general and special education teachers, principals, and other school and district administrators all providing important internal leadership for learning. Although our charge was to focus on the preparation of principals and other positional leaders, we recognized the critical role that teacher leadership can play in schools that support learning for all students (Knight, 2011; Lieberman & Miller, 2008), and we included in a later section the possibilities for greater integration between teacher leadership and administrator preparation. When considered from the perspective of adequate support for students with disabilities, current circumstances highlight several challenges for both principals and LSEAs.

Importance of principal leadership. A modest body of research suggests that the principal's role has expanded in recent years to include tasks traditionally managed by LSEAs in providing district-wide DAC in delivering specialized services. These expanded responsibilities include working with parents as partners in addressing complex learning needs; attending

students' individualized education program (IEP) meetings; evaluating the performance of special education teachers; implementing discipline procedures; and cultivating physically, instructionally, and emotionally supportive learning environments responsive to the needs of a diversity of students (Boscardin, 2005; DiPaola, Tschannen-Moran, & Walther-Thomas, 2004; Lynch, 2012). Policies that direct ethical and legal decisions toward individually appropriate services and instruction to support achievement at high levels (Crockett, 2013; Pazey & Cole, 2013; Thurlow et al., 2012) govern some of these tasks. Research in supporting alignment and commitment through PD and the design of workplaces in which special educators can use their knowledge and skills in teaching specially designed and intensive lessons (Brownell, Billingsley, McLeskey, & Sindelar, 2012) guides other tasks (e.g., targeting achievement gains, distributing resources, retaining quality teachers). Knowledge derived from descriptive and survey research and theoretical or interpretive commentaries rather than empirical studies (Crockett, 2011) primarily informs leadership for students with disabilities. As a result, there is limited evidence regarding the knowledge, beliefs, and practices of effective leaders or their preparation for leading special education.

Studies encompass perspectives of social justice, school management, and instructional improvement on topics that include leaders' attitudes toward the inclusion of students with disabilities (C. Barnett & Monda-Amaya, 1998; Cook, Semmel, & Gerber, 1999; Praisner, 2003); knowledge of special education law and current issues (Davidson & Algozzine, 2002; Pazey & Cole, 2013; Wakeman, Browder, Flowers, & Ahlgrim-Delzell, 2006); preparation for and enactment of instructional leadership for special education (Lasky & Karge, 2006; Lynch, 2012; McHatton, Boyer, Shaunessey, & Terry, 2010; Provost, Boscardin, & Wells, 2010); and inclusive school reform (Burch, Theoharis, & Rauscher, 2010; Hoppey & McLeskey, 2013;

Salisbury & McGregor, 2002). Conclusions are often based on findings of inadequate practices and insufficient preparation for effective leadership, with few studies providing sufficiently rich data to explain how leaders enacted reforms to address the effective education of students with complex needs (Burch et al., 2010).

Some studies, however, do contain good examples of how knowledge can be applied to real-world problems in inclusive schools. Evidence suggests, for example, that leaders with greater knowledge of and experience with special education are more likely to provide DAC by reflecting on situations in their schools and the implications of their leadership practices for a diversity of students and their teachers (Burch et al., 2010; Hoppey & McLeskey, 2013; Wakeman et al., 2006). In a qualitative study examining the practices of elementary principals in leading comprehensive school reforms, Burch and colleagues (2010) noted that those who were most successful were knowledgeable about restructuring service delivery in ways that "maximize human and financial resources for schools' most vulnerable students" (p. 355). In a survey assessing the special education knowledge of administrators from all 50 states and the District of Columbia, Wakeman and colleagues (2006) observed that principals who reported knowing more about special education also reported being more actively involved with specialized programming. Knowledgeable leaders reported regularly meeting with special education teachers to learn about distinctive features of various disabilities and successful ways to teach students. Knowledge of relevant laws and students' complex educational needs was also associated with effective provision of resources. In these studies, leadership practices linked with greater knowledge about special education included (a) purposefully reflecting on practical and personal experiences, (b) more in-depth understanding of disability-related needs,

(c) providing resources for effective instructional practices, and (d) participating with parents and professionals in decisions about specially designed programs and services.

Grounding principal preparation in the realities of practice is especially important for students with disabilities and other diverse learners who remain underserved because what leaders know and believe about these students' education can influence both student achievement and school improvement (Burch et al., 2010). In reviewing related literature, however, Lynch (2012) highlighted a discrepancy between preparation and practice, with principals spending 75% more time on special education tasks in recent years but receiving no more formal instruction about leading special education in 2010 than in 1980. There is some evidence that providing aspiring leaders with preparation in specific areas such as special education law and program management helps leaders feel more confident in carrying out their responsibilities (Lasky & Karge, 2006). To reach the ultimate goal of making college and career readiness a reality for all learners, however, current policies require leaders to support general and special educators who provide collaborative, high-quality, content-area instruction; understand how certain disabilities can affect academic learning; and use effective practices shown to have a meaningful impact on the educational experiences of students with and at risk for developing disabilities (Brownell et al., 2010; Cook & Tankersley, 2013).

Of special concern is the need to develop new understandings about how well principals are prepared to support this high-quality instruction (Burdette, 2010) and about the impact on students and teachers of including relevant topics in leadership preparation programs. Although there is an established need for the development of this expertise, little is known about how to best prepare leaders who have a clear understanding of the different ways in which children learn and how to increase stakeholders' sensitivities to diversity and effectiveness in educating all

students. We also need to know more about preparing leaders capable of redesigning their schools to address teaching and learning, creating and maintaining orderly learning environments, closely working with parents, and collaborating with partners outside the school to support student learning (Crockett, 2012; Orr, 2011; Osterman & Hafner, 2009). How educational leaders learn to carry out their responsibilities in the context of inclusive schools with a depth of understanding about diversity and disability and the need to collaborate with others in addressing complex individual differences may be the most important factors influencing what teachers do to deliver equitable and effective special education.

Importance of local special education administrators. Viewed from an inclusive perspective, the goal of special education is "to minimize the impact of disability and maximize the opportunities for children with disabilities to participate in general education in their natural community" (Hehir, 2005, p. 49). Improving outcomes depends on the expertise of school and district personnel to recognize and appropriately respond to the complex learning needs of students with disabilities. Both research and policy emphasize the critical role of principals in providing leadership for special education in their schools (Thurlow et al., 2012). However, as with many aspects of school functioning, effective leadership for special education typically requires more specialized expertise than can be provided by principals or within the school communities. Emerging evidence suggests that students' academic achievement improves when district leaders execute their responsibilities by setting direction and building alignment and commitment toward high-quality instruction for all learners across school districts (Deshler & Cornett, 2012; Marzano & Waters, 2009; Zavadsky, 2009).

Among personnel with system-wide responsibilities, LSEAs are well positioned to be key forces in supporting effective instruction. LSEAs have primary responsibility for supporting

students with disabilities and their families in ways that are ethically driven, educationally productive, and legally correct (Council of Administrators of Special Education [CASE], 2010). LSEAs serve as advocates for students from a diversity of cultural and linguistic backgrounds. They also monitor and ensure compliance with disability policies intended to protect students from discrimination and secure an equitable education. LSEAs provide further leadership to foster effective instructional and behavioral interventions, use of assistive technologies (AT), and positive relationships with parents and professionals in schools and community agencies. Additional responsibilities include collaborating with others to solve complex problems, making data-based decisions, and managing fiscal and human resources to better align the delivery of inclusive instruction across schools. LSEAs are expected to vertically share their expertise with school leaders and horizontally share their expertise with district colleagues in order to span the disciplinary boundaries throughout the school system (Crockett, 2011; Goor, 1995; Lashley & Boscardin, 2003; Pazey & Yates, 2012).

The role of LSEAs is evolving in tandem with changing conceptions of the responsibilities of central office administrators in learning-focused school districts (Honig, Copland, Rainey, Lorton, & Newton, 2010). District administrators are increasingly assuming the consultant role to help principals create positive learning environments in their schools. This new responsibility should allow LSEAs to exert even stronger influence on the quality of instruction and assist in creating supportive learning environments for all students.

The Evidence for Structuring Leadership Development

Leadership development programs are difficult to study. Successful development should ultimately impact the performance of the organizations led by those served by the programs, but outcomes are difficult to measure and typically occur well after the program has ended. Not

surprisingly, research on the impact of development tends to focus on more immediate outcomes. Reviews and meta-analyses show, for example, that such programs can have a significant impact on participants' knowledge and skills and lesser, but also important, effects on later supervisory behavior (Burke & Day, 1986; Collins & Holton III, 2004). However, theory and research seldom provide strong linkages between such leader behaviors and ultimate organizational outcomes, so simply using the strategies taught in development programs may not be sufficient for leaders to reach organizational goals.

Confronting Limits of Research-Based Knowledge

Addressing this challenge, researchers studying principal preparation have used a variety of designs to model the anticipated influence of leadership strategies on student learning by identifying mediators and moderators of leadership impact. Heck and Hallinger (e.g., Hallinger & Heck, 1996; Heck & Hallinger, 2009) provided critical empirical support for these models, and this support underlies a new generation of studies on leadership impacts. However, difficulties remain when these models are extended to the study of leader development. The excellent study of principal preparation outcomes by Orr and Orphanos (2011) provided a useful example. Orr and Orphanos compared exemplary and typical development programs and analyzed impacts throughout a chain of impact from participation in preparation to ultimate performance of schools led by program graduates. However, a natural confounding occurred between participant and program characteristics—selective admissions (i.e., the ability to enroll candidates with superior preparation and experience) was one of the studied features of exemplary programs. As we have described below, for example, access to an extended, fully paid internship is considered an important quality feature in principal preparation. However, it seems likely that programs that have the resources to offer these opportunities will also attract

better qualified applicants and select candidates from among a wider pool than programs that do not have the resources to offer these opportunities. As a result, it is difficult to determine whether candidate characteristics or program strategies were responsible for long-term leadership outcomes. Although some have viewed this natural confounding as a weakness unique to principal preparation (Levine, 2005), research on leadership development across many contexts shares the same confounding of candidate characteristics and program strategies (Pfeffer & Fong, 2002).

Another difficulty in using current research to guide structural improvements in preparation programs relates to level of scale in the variables studied. For example, we have shown below that frequent feedback and individual reflection on performance of difficult assignments is associated with gains in leader knowledge. Research also provides clear guidelines for associated pedagogical strategies such as protocols for reflection and multiple sources of feedback. However, identifying the program structures that support these practices often relies more on logical analysis than on empirical support. We can reason, for example, that lengthy internships are important because they can be structured to ensure individually challenging experiences and feedback from well-qualified mentors. However, we can also imagine that such structures alone are insufficient unless participants take advantage of the possibilities they create for effective learning.

Further difficulties exist when the focus is on preparation of school leaders whose schools are effective for all students, including those with disabilities. Outcome measures used in even the most convincing research on leadership's impact on learning have relied on average performance of students on large-scale assessments. We do not know whether the leadership methods that account for variability in these averages would also be influential with students

with disabilities and others who experience significant difficulty learning. Research on high-reliability organizations—those that seek to avoid failure by paying particular attention to early warnings—cautions against generalizing these findings. Much of this research suggests that the leadership needed to avoid failure can be qualitatively different from leadership used to improve general performance (Bellamy, 2011; Weick, Sutcliffe, & Obstfeld, 1999).

How Individuals Build Expertise for Leadership

Pedagogies that support the development of expertise have been studied across a variety of contexts and have been applied in a growing body of research on the development of expertise for leadership. This research provides broad support for a presumption that rather than reflecting stable individual traits, important leadership skills can be learned. This learning, however, like other areas of expertise development, occurs over an extended time with job-based experiences and individual self-development as major contributing factors. Also, like development of expertise in other areas, development of leadership requires sustained, deliberate practice, often through a series of individually challenging job assignments with success in each task requiring new learning.

Situational and pedagogical factors, such as access to performance feedback and social support, affect learning from these challenging experiences (DeRue & Wellman, 2009; Dragoni, Tesluk, Russell, & Oh, 2009; McCauley, Ruderman, Ohlott, & Morrow, 1994). The dimensions of individual self-development, including sustained motivation, a learning orientation while confronting challenging situations, and structured reflection on prior work (Anseel, Lievens, & Schollaert, 2009; DeRue, Nahrgang, Hollenbeck, & Workman, 2012; Ellis & Davidi, 2005), are similarly important.

Further, for individuals with front-line leadership responsibility, structured knowledge and technical expertise in the organization's core work are critical complements to more general leadership skills (Katz, 1955; Mumford et al., 2000). In education, a similar conclusion is evident in long-standing advocacy for principals to have skills for instructional leadership (Elmore, 2000; Fink & Markholt, 2011; Hallinger, 2005; Murphy, Elliot, Goldring, & Porter, 2007), suggesting that leadership development in education should centrally focus on building skills for instruction, learning, assessment, and student motivation, in addition to the general skills needed for organizational management and community engagement.

Research on how individuals develop expertise for leadership provides a useful backdrop for consideration of the more limited research base on pedagogies used in educational leadership preparation programs. Two strategies with particular relevance to the broader research on leadership preparation are problem-based learning (PBL) and structured reflection.

Problem-Based Learning

Given the central role of sustained, deliberate practice in building expertise, it is not surprising that research on leadership preparation inside and outside of education suggests a critical need for programs to connect with problems and situations of practice. For example, Orr and Orphanos (2011) used a structural equation model to examine the effectiveness of various elements of exemplary principal preparation programs, and they found program quality and internship quality—measured, in large part, by candidates' reports of their opportunities to practice the work in context—to have a stronger impact than program type on the frequency of effective leadership practices.

PBL and related pedagogies offer one approach to supporting this practice. Primarily focusing on medical education, Boshuizen (2009) described problem-based approaches as

"integrated, planned, and geared toward the actual encountered problems of the field involved, focusing on the competencies required for continued professional success as defined by the needs of the community served" (p. 380). From the perspective of educational leadership, Copland (2000) argued that the "complexity of dilemmas . . . and the vast array of problems" (p. 586) that face school leaders require close attention to the non-routine, ill-structured, and contingent situations that principals regularly face each day. The PBL approach is designed to build skills for addressing these problems by making the problems themselves—and the inductive reasoning used to address them—the primary pedagogical tools. As an example of PBL, Copland described a situation in which a teacher approached a principal and demanded the removal of a misbehaving student from his class. In this case, the principal had to reconcile the teacher's account of the situation, the principal's prior knowledge of the teacher's interactions with students, potential reframes for the problem, and each participant's vision for school improvement. Such problem solving requires situated cognition (i.e., using prior knowledge, encoding new knowledge based on context, and elaborating on learned information), and this process occurs outside the preparatory classroom.

In Copland's (2000) study, 18 principal candidates who were evaluated on a post-test problem-solving assessment did progressively better as they were exposed to additional PBL experiences. The case for PBL, drawn from medical education, may be more intuitive. Essentially, principals must be able to "understand, frame, and solve problems they encounter in practice" (p. 601). Similar results were reported in a variety of PBL qualitative studies and program evaluation reports, which consistently noted impact on candidates' abilities in framing and analyzing practical problems and self-reports of applying these skills in later practice

(e.g., Acker-Hocevar, Pisapia, & Coukos-Semmel, 2002; Chrispeels & Martin, 1998; Muth, Martin, & Murphy, 1994).

A variety of related strategies for organizing learning experiences around either actual or simulated problems of practice, including case-based teaching, action learning, simulations, and action research, have been reported in the educational leadership literature. Although important differences exist among these pedagogies, each can offer practice with challenging problems similar to those highlighted in research on the development of expertise for leadership (Taylor, Cordeiro, & Chrispeels, 2009).

Overall, findings on the results of problem-based pedagogies in educational leader preparation are consistent with those in medicine, a field in which considerably more research is available. As Boshuizen (2009) noted in his review of research and meta-analyses, problem-based approaches generally result in higher performance in skills and skill-related assessments with some documentation of superior performance in later professional practice. Although the problems that can be addressed in a formal preparation program are only a fraction of the series of progressively challenging job assignments through which leaders develop expertise on the job (Ohlott, 2004), carefully structured PBL experiences can align preparation programs with this longer leader development process and ensure that principal and LSEA candidates experience deliberate practice with difficult school leadership problems.

Structured Reflection

Tasks requiring individual reflection on problems and contexts of practice provide a complementary strategy for building expertise in the context of leadership preparation programs. Consistent with research in other leadership development contexts, reflection tasks in educational leadership typically ask candidates to take the perspective of both engaged performer and

detached critic in making sense of leadership experiences (Osterman & Kottkamp, 2004). Although research on learning outcomes is limited, evidence suggests that some candidates develop skills for deep reflection and report new ways of thinking about and responding to problem situations (e.g., Kottkamp & Silverberg, 1999). For example, Brown, Smith, and Hall (2012) found that reflection periods in the programs they studied included both individual and small group formats and were characterized by a strong sense of structure and regularity (e.g., meetings usually took place weekly or even daily). Brown and colleagues' observation of the benefits of such reflection is consistent with research on the development of expertise (Anseel et al., 2009) and the ability to articulate personal values guiding school leadership (Brown, 2006).

Structures Supporting Development of Leadership Expertise

Preparation program structures such as the length and nature of the internship, relative roles of universities and school districts, admission criteria, and other components create the context within which effective pedagogies and strategies for individual self-development are used. Designing such structures is an important part of the collective work of program faculties, and because structures are somewhat amenable to external requirements, their design is also a frequent target of policymakers and external reformers. However, structures enable, but do not ensure, the use of effective leadership development practices. It is not surprising, then, that there is very little evidence to link particular structures to program outcomes. Nevertheless, extensive descriptive and case study literature supports a professional consensus about some useful program structures; this consensus is now expressed in standards for accreditation of leadership programs (National Policy Board for Educational Administration, 2011). We have highlighted below a few of these structures that appear to provide the greatest opportunities to use pedagogies that are supported in research on development of expertise for leadership.

Extended Internships

An extended internship period, frequently involving full-time work during an entire school year, has been reported for many years as a key feature of innovative educational leadership preparation programs (Kelly & Shaw, 2009; Milstein, 1993; New Leaders for New Schools, 2009). Case studies and reviews of exemplary practice highlight several purposes for such an internship, including development of practical knowledge and skills, learning strategies for school improvement, demonstrating value commitments affecting leadership, understanding the role of a school administrator, and developing career commitments to leadership roles (B. G. Barnett, Copeland, & Shoho, 2009).

When considered as a way to enable the use of effective pedagogies and self-development strategies, extended internships offer opportunities for candidates to experience a large number and great variety of challenging assignments, receive feedback from university and school mentors, and reflect on their performance in leadership situations. Of course, even a full-year internship provides only a small fraction of the opportunities for deliberate practice that the literature suggests is needed for development of leadership expertise. Consequently, internships may also be usefully considered in a longer career context, with systematic provision of leadership experiences on the job both before and after formal preparation.

Descriptive research shows that current internship experiences typically require far less time in practice settings (B. G. Barnett et al., 2009) and often lack significant exposure to important challenges of practice (Fry, Bottoms, & O'Neill, 2005). Fry and colleagues (2005) found that only 15% of programs require principals to participate in task forces on literacy and numeracy, and just a few more require activities such as leading teachers in developing good instructional practice or creating assessments. Thus, without simultaneous attention to the

pedagogies noted above, simply participating in an internship may contribute little to the needed development of leadership expertise.

In a recent example of case-study methods, Ringler, Rouse, and Clair (2012) examined assessments used by a university-based educational leadership program that culminated in a year-long internship. Well-designed preparation programs, they argued, include extensive mentored internships that integrate theory and practice through a series of hands-on experiences. This program, because of its location and student composition, expressly focused on regional needs such as rural education and student groups with linguistic and socioeconomic diversity. Further, program design included integration of the state's pre-service standards, particularly during the internship. Even with this extended internship, participants in part-time programs with full-time jobs as classroom teachers practiced six of seven standards more frequently than their full-time student counterparts, suggesting that more time spent in schools gave candidates more opportunities than more time spent in course work to learn the program's standards.

A significant body of case studies and program descriptions supports the value of extended internships. Preparation programs that provide sufficient time and resources for internships to offer challenging work connected to classroom practices can develop candidates' skills for creating DAC in schools, especially around visions that focus on improving outcomes for vulnerable students (Fry et al., 2005). Effectively leading to benefit students with disabilities requires early and frequent exposure to the academic and social contexts in which their education takes place, combined with extensive practice adapting real-world curricula and instructional practices to meet student needs.

District-University Partnerships

Partnerships between school districts and universities offer a second enabling structure that can facilitate the use of effective program practices. In general, such partnerships involve joint decision making and collaborative action among university faculty and district administrators so that areas such as candidate admissions, curriculum design, internship configurations, and candidate assessment are jointly managed (Goodlad, 1994). The literature highlights several potential benefits, including curriculum content that is more practical and relevant to district goals, opportunities to develop within-district communities of practice (CoP) as groups of candidates work together, and better selection of candidates based on district administrators' knowledge of applicants' prior career successes (Grogan, Bredson, Sherman, Preis, & Beaty, 2009; Orr, King, & La Pointe, 2010). Including districts in the program design and implementation process provides a valuable source of expertise for preparation programs. Viewing these stakeholders as connected not by lines of authority but as nested within each other's systems (Brooks, Havard, Tatum, & Patrick, 2010) facilitates nesting of the preparation program in the local context that it serves. This allows the preparation program to continually adapt to district needs and priorities while also enabling districts to fashion coherent job-based leadership development strategies that begin before formal preparation and continue after program completion. Also, because most principals receive their preparation in programs located close to their schools and those they will eventually lead, local school administrators possess unique insights on the learning problems, organizational challenges, and demographic complexities that candidates will confront in their actual work.

Considered from the perspective of the conditions and pedagogies that support development of expertise for leadership, partnerships appear to offer important opportunities

associated with candidate selection and ongoing support of graduates so that formal preparation can be more deliberately situated in a long-term process of individual practice with progressively challenging leadership responsibilities as teachers, teacher leaders, and beginning administrators. Partnerships also appear to offer opportunities to align and enrich feedback to candidates from both university and district mentors.

As a recent example, Cowan and Hensley (2012) examined a partnership among rural and remote South Dakota school districts and local preparation programs. Participant districts were in the state's most rural areas or on or near Native American reservations. Schools were identified for improvement in reading, math, or both, with the majority of the schools located in the three poorest counties in the United States. The authors identified several program features designed in collaboration with the district, including recruitment strategies, instructor selection, curricular content, a year-long internship, and course evaluation. In this instance, it is clear that district needs were sufficiently influential to allow the districts to "grow their own leaders" (p. 193). Program development also encouraged a dialogue comparing professional standards and the district's goals. In the course of preparing 68 new principals, the program expanded from the capacity of 60 currently serving principals and facilitated greater alignment between district, state, and national goals.

Candidate Selection

Because formal leader preparation represents only a small portion of the sustained deliberate practice through which individuals develop expertise for leadership, it is reasonable to expect that candidate selection could contribute to the quality of new leaders. Although not separately evaluated, such admissions selectivity is characteristic of many programs that are

highlighted as exemplary; therefore, selectivity enjoys much the same level of empirical support as partnerships and extended internships.

Proponents of higher admissions standards advocate a wide variety of academic and experiential criteria, including test scores, grade point averages, and prior teaching or leadership experience (Browne-Ferrigno & Muth, 2009). In the programs Browne-Ferrigno and Shoho (2004) reviewed, a robust selection process combined alternative assessments, such as writing samples and interviews, with higher standards on traditional admissions criteria. Role conceptualization played a key role in admissions, and selection strategies included nomination by superintendents, heavy use of reference letters, videotaped interviews, and selection by a panel unaffiliated with the college.

When considered from the perspective of effective practices for developing expertise, perhaps the most significant criterion is prior success in teacher leadership roles in which candidates have documented expertise in helping their colleagues improve instruction (Browne-Ferrigno & Muth, 2004). For example, Bellamy and Portin (2011) described a principal preparation program at the University of Washington Bothell that deliberately recruits candidates who already have experience as teacher leaders with released time for supporting other teachers' instruction. The program offers incentives to those with extensive experience and provides additional time in the early stages of the program for candidates to hone teacher-leader expertise prior to other parts of the program. Such a selection process ensures that formal preparation systematically builds on job-based leadership development with a focus on core skills for leading instruction.

Supporting Structures and Strategies

Although significant case study evidence supports extended internships, district-university partnerships, and selective admissions as most likely to enable development of expertise, other practices offer methods for enhancing program effectiveness, particularly when used in support of extended internships and close partnerships with districts. Two widely reported examples are as follows.

Cohort Models

Research on the use of cohorts in preparation programs shows mixed results (Grogan et al., 2009). As with other program design features, cohorts provide the opportunity to reinforce positive elements of learning as long as they align with other positive program design elements. Cohorts of students provide candidates with opportunities to collaborate on the sharing and construction of knowledge while also facilitating the deepening of knowledge in a social context. Cohorts can follow candidates into practice, creating leadership groups that can improve communication about leadership practice. LaPointe Davis, and Cohen (2007) described a cohort component as part of a larger program design, creating a "culture of inquiry, interpersonal trust, and mutual support" (p. 18). The cohort structure can also reinforce PBL by emphasizing the ability of graduates to work together in groups.

Induction Programs for New Administrators

Mentoring during a principal's first few years on the job can ease the transition to supervisory responsibilities and provide critical opportunities for acculturation to the school leadership profession. In a study of new principals engaged in transitioning from teaching to the principalship, Browne-Ferrigno (2003) found that a shift in mindset about the nature of work was a critical component of that adjustment. Direct work with school administrators during

preparation was the most helpful experience identified by early career leaders. However, Browne-Ferrigno's work with leaders suggests that the process of becoming a principal extends both before and after the licensure process. Ehrich, Hansford, and Tennent (2004) concluded from an examination of mentoring across the professions that the potential benefits are not automatic; additional research and significant resources are needed to optimize benefits from mentoring programs.

In each case, these practices and strategies are frequently listed among recommended features of high-quality preparation programs (Jackson & Kelley, 2002; Kelley & Shaw, 2009). However, just as is the case with larger structural features like extended internships and partnerships, the case for inclusion in a program improvement agenda is, in the end, based more on analysis of conditions that support effective pedagogy, professional consensus, and experience than on prior research.

Levers for Program Improvement

In this section, we have recommended practices, structures, and policies designed to improve the capacity of leader preparation programs to address the education of all students, including those with disabilities. Data are limited regarding the direct connection between strategies for improving preparation programs and improvements in the programs themselves—in fact, credible evaluation studies demonstrate that compliance with state requirements often leads to little substantive program change (Murphy, Moorman, & McCarthy, 2008). However, we drew from evidence on strategies for building expertise needed to lead related to DAC as well as from the contention that policy recommendations should be derived from evidence on effective existing structures in preparation programs. Recognizing that there

can be no one road map for success in all states or programs, we have instead offered practical suggestions for state consideration in conjunction with program improvement efforts.

Calls for improving leadership programs in education are almost as old as the programs themselves (Achilles, 1994). Many strategies have been attempted to stimulate these changes, variously led by professional associations (National Policy Board for Educational Administration, 1989); state policymakers (Sanders & Simpson, 2005); philanthropic foundations (e.g., Broad Foundation [http://broadeducation.org/index.html], Wallace Foundation, 2012); and school districts (Zubrzycki, 2013). Many case studies and reports feature these efforts, but little

cross-program research is available to provide an empirical basis for selecting among program-improvement levers. Despite these efforts, internal and external critics continue to challenge the high variability in quality features (i.e., extended internships, district-university partnerships, and PBL) across programs as well as in the outcomes their graduates achieve. Many excellent examples of program redesign and improvement are readily available (e.g., Presley & Hesbol, 2012), but efforts to leverage large-scale improvement have produced, at best, mixed results (Young, 2013).

Whatever the source of reform pressure, efforts to improve the quality of leadership preparation typically engage a few key leverage points to stimulate change. These include (a) individual requirements for certification or licensure, (b) requirements for preparation program approval, (c) incentives and operational supports for program components and capacity-building strategies, and (d) competition and deregulation strategies. For the following section, we examined evidence associated with each of these leverage points and highlighted experience and data that may assist in its strategic use for program improvement.

Individual Requirements

While establishing requirements for program entry, initial and continuing state certification or licensure, and criteria for evaluating performance, states and other entities seek to influence preparation programs by ensuring that all leadership candidates meet defined standards for knowledge and experience. Many states require, for example, that admission to university-based leadership preparation is limited to candidates with teaching experience. They may also require that the programs evaluate candidate learning in relation to content standards and, further, that the programs require independent assessment of skills prior to certification. As administrators launch their careers, additional requirements often specify continuing PD, progression through tiered certification systems, and criteria for evaluating performance. Because the content standards underlying these requirements are typically based on the work of professional associations, individual requirements often reflect a combination of professional and policymaker influence in defining the underlying goals of preparation and highlighting gaps in existing training opportunities.

Content standards developed largely by professional groups are widely used across states (CCSSO, 2008). At the same time, important policy choices affect these requirements. For example, to ensure that principals have sufficient experience to supervise teachers' work, a state may choose to require extensive teaching experience prior to program entry or may remove such requirements in an effort to create a larger pool of applicants with general managerial capabilities. A sampling of recent policy advocacy in this area includes recommendations to require prospective principals to demonstrate skills for student instruction and adult leadership (Hitt et al., 2012), requiring student-learning outcomes as one aspect of principal evaluation and

continuing certification (New Leaders, 2013) and raising criteria for candidates to satisfy licensing standards (Southern Regional Education Board, 2007).

Changes in content standards—what administrative candidates need to know before state certification/licensure—have prominently figured into several state-wide requirements for redesigning preparation programs. Positive examples of changes in response to new requirements for individual certification do exist (e.g., Kochan & Reames, 2013), but there is wide variability in the extent to which meaningful program changes occur (Murphy et al., 2008). Based on a review of program changes in 54 universities across six states, Murphy and colleagues (2008) concluded that new content requirements did not necessarily result in coherent and readily implemented theories of action for principal performance nor, in many institutions, did they lead to substantive change in the pre-existing curriculum. Nevertheless, licensing requirements still constitute a foundational structure for much of administrator preparation, and they offer one potentially useful means of improving program capacity.

Opportunities for action. Building on guidance from the Wallace Foundation (2012), states can begin the process of making meaningful changes by reviewing and revising state policies and leadership standards, defining the roles of educational leaders to reflect current realities, and providing high-quality PD to ensure that leaders can implement educational programs that are both legally correct and educationally useful in providing evidence-based academic instruction in supportive learning environments to students with disabilities. Requirements can also be strengthened for the selective hiring of well-prepared candidates and for evaluating and supporting their leadership in making decisions that affect the education of vulnerable learners.

States may also investigate strategies for requiring additional content preparation related to leading instruction for students with disabilities. This can be accomplished by revising certification or endorsement requirements for principals and local administrators of LSEAs or establishing PD requirements that must be met to maintain up to date certification. A separate CEEDAR Center publication, *Principal Leadership: Moving Toward Inclusive and High-Achieving Schools for Students With Disabilities* (Billingsley et al., 2014), addresses content to include in strengthening principal leadership related to students with disabilities and in well-developed standards for special education administrative leadership positions (CEC, 2009) provides guidance for such initiatives.

Lynch (2012) reported that only eight states include special education requirements for principal certification, and Boscardin, Weir, and Kusek (2010) reported that 18 states have no certification requirements for LSEAs. In these states, the only requirement for filling an LSEA position is a general principal or administrator license. Such generic preparation is unlikely to be sufficient for either principals or LSEAs given that (a) conventional principal preparation typically pays minimal attention to students with disabilities (Angelle & Bilton, 2009; Garrison-Wade, Sobel, & Fulmer, 2007; Sirotnik & Kimball, 1994), and (b) prior experience requirements for admission to these programs do not typically include work with any particular student group. As recently documented in the state of Washington (Washington Professional Educator Standards Board, 2012), this can result in a significant number of administrators with neither academic preparation nor experience in special education or related services. Of course, licensing standards build capacity best when there is sufficient demand and resources for corresponding preparation programs. Consequently, in states of differing sizes and with inconsistent resources, the in-depth knowledge and experience that educational administrators

need may be variously structured as requirements for licensure or advanced certification within 2 to 3 years after appointment or as mandated criteria for performance evaluation.

Program Approval Strategies

States use initial and continuing approval of administrator preparation programs to ensure alignment with licensing standards and capacity to meet other state requirements. Although state requirements vary, in addition to the content licensing standards discussed above, requirements often stipulate internship length, faculty experience, systems to assess candidate progress and outcomes, and organizational resources. In many cases, state program approval is closely linked to similar procedures for professional accreditation; in others, accreditation remains voluntary. Over the past decade, several states have used program approval as a lever for program reform, with requirements for state-wide program redesign of administrator preparation often on short time frames. In each case, external reviews of the revised program as a precondition for continued operation (Phillips, 2013) followed a period of institutional self-study and program revision. In their analyses of the results of such mandated program redesign, Murphy and colleagues (2008) and Young (2013) identified wide variability in resulting program quality when quality features such as those described above served as the standard of comparison. In addition, Young pointed out variability in state capacity to manage oversight of such redesign efforts, with rapid policy changes and reduced state education agency (SEA) budgets. Murphy and colleagues (2008) highlighted faculty capacity and typical university norms of faculty independence as limiting factors in many institutions.

Emerging program-approval processes place more emphasis than traditional program approval standards do on outcomes. One outcome is the impact that program graduates have on student learning, but measurement and logistical challenges continue to limit application of

assessment. Both professional and national accrediting organizations now seek to strengthen data for program evaluation. The University Council for Educational Administration (UCEA) offers a set of standard instruments for use in program assessment, with accumulation of data across institutions for benchmarking and analysis (Orr, Young, & Roher, n.d.). The Council for the Accreditation of Educator Preparation (CAEP, 2013a, 2013b) also gives priority to using state longitudinal data systems to support continual improvement in preparation programs.

Opportunities for action. One potentially fruitful approach to considering how program approval may leverage change follows from the understanding that educational leadership development is a long-term process, much of which occurs on the job outside of formal preparation programs. From this perspective, an important function of a preparation program is gatekeeping, or ensuring that candidates admitted are only those who demonstrate successful completion of an extended period of development and expertise-building related to both instruction and adult learning. Establishing new requirements for how programs conduct initial selection and document candidates' expertise prior to program entry, for example, may accomplish this.

Similar opportunities for leverage through program approval relate to the length and quality of field experiences and internships. Perhaps the best documented program feature influencing later leadership success is the opportunity for a paid, full-time, full-year internship that simultaneously occurs with course work. Although simply requiring such internships would have significant resource implications, the potential impact makes it worthwhile for states to investigate strategies that would make longer internships feasible for preparation programs and enable internships in varied settings that address different student-learning challenges. In combination with licensing standards that require knowledge of special education, a longer

internship could provide opportunities for deliberate practice on problems of practice in leading inclusive education.

Program Incentives and Capacity Building

As an alternative or in addition to requirements that uniformly apply to all programs in a state, incentive and capacity strategies may be used to create opportunities for improvement for those who wish to participate or compete for special opportunities. For example, CoPs have emerged in conjunction with the UCEA's efforts to improve program evaluation (Kottkamp, 2011) as well as among recipients of the U.S. Department of Education's grants in the Special Education Personnel Preparation Program Redesign and School Leadership programs. Alternatively, states often create incentives with funding for particular program elements. In the state of Washington, for example, state funding is provided for substitute days for principal interns, with grants awarded upon competitive review of individual candidate applications. This, in turn, enables the state to require internships that last considerably longer than the average 300 hr documented by B. G. Barnett and colleagues (2009).

Another important capacity-building approach responds to concerns about faculty capacity in many programs by supporting development and use of modules designed to be incorporated into classes and internships across programs (e.g., Southern Regional Education Board, n.d.; Smith & Tyler, 2011). Grant programs from federal and foundation sources provide yet another approach that could challenge programs to develop innovative strategies that can successfully compete for funding.

The research literature offers evidence that, as with other levers, these strategies have been effective in some situations. For example, networking across institutions engaged in program improvement efforts is supported in a variety of case studies (e.g., Milstein, 1993;

Sirotnik, 2001), and many reports of changes in individual programs indicate that external grant funding can provide important leverage for reform.

Opportunities for action. Although the result of incentive and capacity-building strategies typically do not affect all programs in a state, they do help to set visible benchmarks that can influence expectations and can produce strategies and resources that others can use. With this limitation in mind, possible strategies are as follows:

- Expanding grant programs can lead to innovation in leadership preparation. Possibilities include expansion of U.S. Department of Education's School Leadership Program, greater emphasis on LSEA preparation in the Office of Special Education Program's (OSEP) personnel preparation grant program, and collaborations between states and foundations that can encourage more targeted program reforms.
- The teacher salary structure in many states incentivizes participation in leadership preparation even for those who have no intention of seeking administrative positions. As many have now observed (e.g., CCSSO, 2012), finding ways to reduce these incentives may allow states to concentrate resources on a smaller number of candidates, thereby enabling stronger selection criteria and more effective internships.
- Continuing to invest in developing and sustaining CoPs among preparation programs is important. Faculty collaboration and resource sharing offer special opportunities for improvement in LSEA preparation because programs in any single location are unlikely to have enrollments large enough to sustain university budgets for the full range of faculty expertise needed for a comprehensive LSEA program.
- Reflecting the importance of systematic development of leadership expertise before entry into formal administrator preparation programs, a particularly promising

approach is to invest in the early development of leadership skills among accomplished special education teachers and related service providers. In this way, a state could ensure a robust pipeline of emerging leaders with specific knowledge of effective strategies for including students with disabilities in the general education curriculum. Such investment could involve, for example, PD programs for emerging leaders, funding to support CoPs among teacher leaders, or teacher leader certifications that articulate with requirements for administrator licensing.

Deregulation and Competition Strategies

Through deregulation and competition, states allow administrator preparation to be conducted outside of approved college of education programs by private organizations, school districts, and other colleges or departments in universities. Many of these strategies also eliminate educational experience requirements for candidates in order to broaden the pool of qualified applicants.

Case studies and quantitative studies have shown that some of these alternative programs have achieved strong positive results, including supporting the development of a coherent theory of leadership in district-based programs (Orr et al., 2010); achieving high placement rates and comparably strong results in hard-to-staff schools (Burkhauser, Gates, Hamilton, & Ikemoto, 2012); and increasing diversity in cohorts of aspiring principals (Cheney et al., 2010). However, as with other levers for change, evidence of impact is limited to individual programs and examples of excellence. It is not clear whether the competitive environment that one may hope would emerge from such strategies has resulted in overall improvement in a state's leadership preparation.

Opportunities for action. A significant opportunity in alternative programs is the potential for districts and their leadership partners to develop integrated leadership pathways that extend from accomplished teaching through teacher leadership and into school and district administrative positions. Such approaches need not be limited to the time frames or structures of traditional preparation, which opens possibilities for longer-term support for expertise development, job-embedded leadership programs, and simultaneous development of individual and shared leadership for instructional improvement (Bellamy & Portin, 2011; Turnbull, Riley, Arcaira, Anderson, & MacFarlane, 2013). Similarly, a focus on creating job-embedded leadership opportunities for effective special education teachers and related services providers could help to cultivate a new generation of aspiring principals and LSEAs with the knowledge and experience to create inclusive schools that work for all students.

Conclusion

Calls for improvement in leadership preparation programs have intensified in tandem with new expectations for local school leadership. However, although the research shows that significant changes in preparation programs are possible, a major implication we drew from the professional literature is that getting the new and effective leaders whom schools need will require more than just changing formal preparation. By framing leadership development as a much longer process of job-based development of expertise for leadership, current theory and research reinforce some existing priorities for change while also pointing to new possibilities for improvement. We have emphasized opportunities that link formal preparation more closely to practice, deliberately position formal preparation to ensure that leadership preparation resources focus on emerging leaders who have invested the effort required for job-based development, and more systematically and deliberately support the early development of leadership capabilities by

teachers and related service providers—and all school staff—well before formal leadership preparation typically begins.

In conclusion, local educational leaders have pivotal roles. They work at the intersection of high standards for student learning, new expectations for practically universal proficiency, increasing student diversity, and school-level accountability for results. To succeed, principals must, from their very first day on the job, create a vision and direction that meaningfully includes all students, align capabilities and resources around that vision, and motivate the many members of a school community to work together. Just as every principal needs the ability to frame and pursue a deliberately inclusive vision for student achievement, the diversity of student characteristics and needs in today's schools requires more specialized leadership. Local leadership for education that includes students with disabilities also depends on contributions from someone in addition to the principal—typically a LSEA with expert knowledge of policies that govern and research that guides effective special education and related services. The greater the commitment to inclusive schooling, the greater the need for specialized expertise that is poised to help schools respond to whatever learning problems emerge as students confront challenging academic expectations.

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