

An Analysis of the Aspiring Principal Preparation Programs Provided by Florida School Districts

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Boca Raton

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by Florida School Districts*

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ABSTRACT

The purpose of the study was to identify the basis of the aspiring principal preparation program (APPP) components Florida school districts provide to their aspiring principals and their relationship, if any, to the state and ISLLC Standards. A total of 50 school districts in Florida participated in this study. The research was guided by the following questions: To what extent do the Florida school districts provide a formal APPP to their current assistant principals? (b) Upon what are the formal APPPs for current assistant principals based: the Florida Principal Competencies (FPCs), the Interstate School Leaders Licensure Consortium (ISLLC) Standards, or another source? (c) To what extent do the school district APPPs in the 67 Florida districts have component requirements that include professional development, mentoring, and a performance-based experience? and (d) Are there differences among the APPP components provided by Florida school districts of various sizes?

The findings of the study were found through an examination of quantitative and qualitative data that were collected from the Florida Aspiring Principal Program Assessment (FLAPPA) survey and the school districts' APPP brochures located on their websites. This study supported the following conclusions: (a) 75% of the school districts in Florida do provide an APPP for their aspiring principals, (b) the FPCs and the ISLLC Standards are a part of the bases of the components found in APPPs provided by Florida school districts, (c) Florida school districts do provide APPPs that include components of a mentor principal, a performance-based experience, and professional development, (d) very large-sized school districts with a population over 100 thousand students contained the largest percentage of standards-based components in

the APPP; small-sized school districts with a population of under 7 thousand students contained the least percentage of standards-based components in the APPP, (e) school districts in Florida recognized the need to modify and were in the process of modifying their APPPs according to the new Florida leadership standards, especially the component of technology, and (f) a lack of funding, time, and assessment were identified as APPP weaknesses and components in need of improvement.

Recommendations of this study included: (a) further research on Florida school districts redesign of their APPP components to identify whether or not the components are based upon the new Florida Leadership Standards, especially technology; and the ISLLC educational standards; and (b) further research on Florida school districts providing a mentor principal and support team; professional development, and a performance-based experience to their current assistant principals who participate in an APPP, thus ensuring best practices in the APPP and improving the quality of their future principals.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

We have much to learn from jazz-band leaders, for jazz, like leadership, combines the unpredictability of the future with the gifts of individuals.

Max De Pree, 1992, from Leadership Jazz

I share with you, my family, friends, and colleagues, one of my favorite quotes. To my husband Kari, son Alex, daughter Katie, and mother Jill, many thanks for your patience, tolerance, and support. To my committee members, Chair Dr. Rosemarye Taylor, Dr. William Bozeman, Dr. Sue Mahan, Dr. Douglas Magann, and Dr. Tary Wallace, many thanks for your encouragement, expertise, and advice. To my doctoral program cohort fellows, many thanks for the laughs and may the wind be always at your back.

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CHAPTER 1

ASPIRING PRINCIPAL PREPARATION PROGRAMS

Introduction

School system leaders and the larger community clearly recognize that adequately educating principals and those aspiring to be principals for their changing and expanding roles and responsibilities is perhaps the single most important task facing the school district. Without a highly trained, competent corps of school-based leaders -- efforts to improve educational outcomes for students are doomed to failure (Shipman, Topps, & Murphy, 1998, p.20).

In July 2001, the Florida Legislature in Florida Statute 231.0861(2) reduced the certification and aspiring principal preparation requirements needed to obtain school principal licensure. The purpose of the study was to identify which aspiring principal preparation programs (APPPs) administered by Florida school districts provided a formal APPP to their current assistant principals based upon the Florida Principal Competencies (FPCs), the Interstate School Leaders Licensure Consortium Standards (ISLLC), or another source. Professional development, mentoring, and performance-based experiences were included in the study as components of best practice found in a literature review of school district provided APPPs.

The Florida Perspective on Aspiring Principal Preparation Programs

Florida statute 231.087 mandated three laws that were in effect prior to July 2001. Florida statute 231.087(3) mandated the Florida Council on Educational Management (FCEM) to:

Identify those competencies which characterize high-performing principals and other managers in the public schools of this state.

Validate through scientific research the identified competencies.

Identify the training processes required for school managers to acquire the identified competencies and to develop training materials, which cannot be obtained from existing sources.

Identify the procedures necessary to develop and implement a program of competency certification for school managers.

Develop the policies and procedures necessary to adopt and implement a compensation program for school manager which is based on successful performance of the identified competencies, and

Develop and approve guidelines for the approval of school district training programs used for the certification of principals (Florida Department of Education [FLDOE], 1999, p. 112).

Nineteen Florida principal competencies were identified by the FCEM and were part of the training requirements to obtain principal certification. “The Florida Principal Competencies were developed to identify the leadership skills Florida principals should possess in order to be successful” (Owens, 2003, p. 24).

Florida Statute 231.087(4) created the Florida Academy for School Leaders (FASL). The purpose of the FASL was to “provide in-service training for school managers for the purpose of upgrading the quality of management at all levels of the public school system in the state” (FLDOE, 1999, p. 112). The FASL was charged with conducting training institutes on current needs and problems of school managers at all levels.

Florida Statute 231.087(5) mandated the district management-training program. The statute allowed each school board:

To submit to the commissioner a proposed program designed to train district administrators and school-based managers, including assistant principals, and persons who are potential candidates for employment in such administrative positions, in the

competencies which have been identified by the Florida Council on Educational Management as being necessary for effective school management (FLDOE, 1999, p.112).

On July 1, 2001, the Florida statutes reduced the mandated criteria required for principal preparation and certification. Chapter 1012 of the K-20 education code, School Community Professional Development Act 1012.98 (5)(a) stated, “the Department of Education shall provide a system for the recruitment, preparation, and professional development of school administrative personnel” (FLDOE, 2002c, p.2). The code allowed for an alternative means for the preparation of school administrative personnel that could be designed and provided by the school districts. The district administrative preparation programs would still “require approval of the Department of Education” (FLDOE, 2002c, p.472). The change in legislation gave the districts greater flexibility in the selection, hiring and training of their principals.

According to the Florida code, Archer (2002a) reported that “districts can now set their own minimum requirements for filling such positions, hiring as principals candidates who lack the state’s traditional school-administration credentials” (May 15, p.22). To recruit more principals, “the legislature decided that any proven professional manager could apply to be a principal; the standard school leadership certification no longer was required” (Alan, 2002, p.122).

Florida Statute Chapter 1012 of the 2002 K-20 education code made Florida one of the least restrictive states for administrator licensing. “Under the new legislation, the state education department would continue to offer administrator credentials to individuals who applied, but the districts would no longer be obligated to hire only those who held them” (Archer, 2002a, p.23).

Fryer, Superintendent of Florida's Duval County School District, in opposition to the new legislation stated, "district leaders and school leaders need different kinds of skills" (Archer, 2002a, p. 3). Fryer pointed out that instructional leaders have to be principals who are experts on instruction.

If participation in a formalized standards-based principal preparation program with the goal of developing leadership skills was mandated by statute and helped to increase the quality of a principal candidate (Anderson, 1988; FLDOE, 1999), then there was a need to discover if the school districts were continuing to provide APPPs based on the FPCs and/or the ISLLC Standards. Graham, past Florida Governor and President of the Education Commission of the States wrote, "It is well known that effective and efficient management of schools requires a blend of skills, experiences, and academic background, rarely provided through baccalaureate or graduate programs in education" (Patterson, 1983, p. 19).

Since June 30, 2003, a team of Florida educators and community members have been working on developing a new set of principal leadership standards based upon the old state FPCs, the ISLLC Standards, NCATE, ISTE (International Society for Technology in Education, 2001), and the National Association of Elementary School Principals (NAESP) standards. Their results were recommended to the Council of Educational Change in collaboration with the Florida Board of Education who prepared the draft of the ten new Principal Leadership Standards (Appendix I). The new Principal Leadership Standards are described in more detail in Chapter 2.

The National Perspective on Aspiring Principal Preparation Programs

In 1987, the National Commission on Excellence in Educational Administration had recommended that “administrative preparation programs should be like those in professional schools which emphasize theoretical and clinical knowledge, applied research, and supervised practice” (Green, 2001, p.1). Shibles (1988) wrote, “Dramatic changes are needed in programs to prepare school administrators if they are to lead their schools and faculties rather than just manage them” (p. 1). Shibles goes on to state that preparation programs in schools, colleges, and departments of education do not respond to calls for change in preparing school administrators for professional leadership functions.

Shibles (1988), cited three reports that recommended changes in administrator training: the report of the National Commission on Excellence in Educational Administration, Leaders for America’s Schools (1987); The Governor’s 1991 Report on Education, Time for Results (National Governor’s Association, 1986); and the Southern Regional Education Board report, Effective School Principals (1986). According to Shibles, part of the reports “focused upon state-level education regulations and the processes to improve preparation programs” (p.8). Shibles suggested “public school systems should provide incentives to potential leaders to enter preparation programs” (p.12).

The University Council for Educational Administration and the National Board for Educational Administration, both university based programs, encouraged a redesigning of principal preparation programs to address the changing role of the school leader from the manager of the school, to the expanded role as an instructional leader. The improvement of pre-service and in-service principal preparation became part of the reform agenda (Donohue, 1995, p. 66).

In 1998, the National Association of Elementary School Principals (NAESP) and the National Association of Secondary School Principals (NASSP) asked the Educational Research Service (ERS) to conduct a study to identify the problems associated with the lack of high-quality persons available to school districts to fill their principal vacancies. After a literature review and national survey sent to superintendents and other central office administrators across the county, ERS affirmed the “anecdotal information that there is a shortage of qualified candidates for principal vacancies in the United States” (NAESP, 1988, p.5).

School districts were contacted by ERS and questioned about their programs to develop candidates for the principalship. One of the questions asked by ERS was “Does your district have an aspiring principals program to recruit and prepare candidates for these positions from among current district staff?” (NAESP, 1988, p.8).

The results of the ERS study found that few of the school districts surveyed had an aspiring principals preparation program. The researchers also found that “it was more likely for an urban district to have a principal preparation program than a rural or suburban district” (NAESP, 1988, p.10). The data showed that a quarter of the total districts had an APPP and half of the urban districts reported providing a program. Several recommendations were made in the ERS report including the need for more study about school districts that are currently providing APPPs to their own candidates.

According to Goodlad (1983) in A Place Called School, “there should be a continuous district-wide effort to identify employees with leadership potential. Districts must be willing to make an investment to pay off in the future” (as cited in NAESP, 1988, p.6).

Tirozzi, Executive Director of the National Association of Secondary School Principals, thought that there was a need to do a much better job in the A PPPs across the country. Tirozzi believed that not only is there a need to give principals more course content, but also a need to provide for viable intensive internships in schools so the principals can learn to become leaders. He stated “we can not just turn people loose and expect them to be instant successes” (as cited in Borja, 2001b, p. A1).

Borja (2001a) presented another contributing factor to the crisis in school leadership. Borja believed that the principal shortage was not because there were not enough qualified people to step up to the plate. Nearly 50 percent of all teachers had a master’s degree, but fewer “wanted to take on the added responsibilities of a job that had become more stressful, time-consuming and frustrating” (p. A1). According to Borja, along with the projected shortage of highly qualified school administrators in the country, school districts were also dealing with many other issues including high stakes accountability, principal certification, and teacher shortages.

Bishop (2003), of the Baltimore Sun Newspaper, reported that Mary Cary, Assistant State Superintendent for Leadership Development in the state of Maryland, felt that the portion of the principal’s duties unrelated to instructional leadership needed to be reduced. “Anne Arundel County is working to clarify the role of principals and take away some of their non-instructional, building-management burdens, and increase staff development opportunities through an Aspiring Administrator program” (Bishop, 2003, p.2).

Rosa (2003b), senior research fellow at the Center on Reinventing Public Education, found that for many school districts with a fairly stable supply of principal candidates, quality of candidates was the issue, not quantity. The problem was the need to distribute principals from school districts with an overabundance of candidates to districts with fewer applicants. Rosa stated that, “not surprisingly, districts with the fewest applicants are typically those with high poverty, higher concentrations of poor and minority students, low per-pupil expenditures, and low principal salaries” (Rosa, 2003a, p. 2). Rosa recommended that, “school districts should consider redefining the principal position and its necessary qualifications, experimenting with alternative leadership arrangements” (Rosa, 2003a, p.2).

Fitzgerald, director of education programs for the Wallace-Reader’s Digest Fund, stated that many factors have contributed to a crisis in school leadership:

There is a looming job-vacancy problem because so many administrators are near retirement age, reluctance by educators to enter administration because of increasing pressure to produce academic results, insufficient pay and respect, and little preparation for the complex financial and political challenges of running a school or a school district (Gewertz, 2000, p. 15).

Petzko, Clark, Valentine, Hackman, Nori, and Lucas (2002), found in a study on middle level principals that there was a “compelling mandate for enhanced recruitment, high-quality administrator preparation programs, on-the-job training programs, and professional development for current and future middle level principals” (p.7). Petzko et al. recommended that, “school district personnel who are sincere about shaping the preparation of leaders must ensure that middle level assistant principalship positions provide extensive professional development for aspiring principals” (p.8).

Statement of the Problem

Prior to July 2001, all school districts in the state of Florida were mandated by Florida statute 231.087(3) to include the 19 principal competencies developed by the Florida Council on Educational Management (FCEM) as part of a state approved Human Resource Management Development (HRMD) APPP (FLDOE, 2002a). The problem was the new legislation mandated after 2001 reduced the criteria needed to obtain school principal certification and reduced the requirements needed to satisfy an APPP. The new statute allowed Florida school districts to hire employees to serve as school principals who had no educational leadership experience and who had not fulfilled requirements of an HRMD approved APPP.

The purposes of the study were to identify the basis of the required APPP components Florida school districts provide to their aspiring principals and their relationship, if any, to the state and the ISLLC standards. The research questions were designed to: (a) identify which school districts in the state of Florida provide an APPP for their current assistant principals; (b) determine if the required program components were based upon the FPCs, the ISLLC Standards, or another source; (c) determine if professional development, mentoring, and a performance-based experience were included as components of the APPP; and (d) determine if the percentage of components included in each APPP differ according to school district size.

Research Questions

The following questions guided the research:

1. To what extent do the Florida school districts provide a formal APPP to their current assistant principals?

2. Upon what are the formal APPPs for current assistant principals based: the Florida Principal Competencies, the Interstate School Leaders Licensure Consortium's Standards, or another source?

3. To what extent do the school district APPPs in the 67 Florida districts have component requirements that include professional development, mentoring, and a performance-based experience?

4. Are there differences among the APPP components provided by Florida school districts of different sizes?

Definition of Terms

These definitions are offered in this chapter, as they may be useful to the reader in understanding the terms used within the literature review contained in Chapter 2.

Aspiring Principal: a current assistant principal.

Aspiring Principal Preparation Program (APPP): a formal school district provided HRMD principal preparation program based upon competencies and standards.

Consortium: a group of smaller sized school districts that set policies and procedures together as a single entity.

Florida Principal Preparation Assessment (FLAPPA): a survey developed to gather data about the APPP components provided by Florida school districts for their aspiring principals.

Florida Principal Competencies (FPCs): the 19 job targets that must be mastered by principals in Florida (Croghan & Lake, 1984). See Appendix A.

Interstate School Leaders Licensure Consortium (ISLLC): a nationwide organization comprised of public officials who head departments of elementary and secondary education in the 50 states, the District of Columbia, the Department of Defense Education Activity, and five extra state jurisdictions.

Interstate School Leaders Licensure Consortium Standards: a common core of standards that can be used to inform program instructional content, as well as assessment tools for awarding new principal licensure, and advanced certification. The Interstate School Leaders Licensure Consortium has developed six standards that focus on the knowledge, performance, and disposition of school leaders (Green, 2001). See Appendix B.

Mentor Principal: a high performing principal selected to work with the participants in a district provided aspiring principal preparation program in order to provide coaching and guidance on an on-going basis.

Performance-Based Requirements: on-the-job experiences or an internship completed by the aspiring principal as part of the aspiring principal program.

Professional Development: coursework or in-service opportunities specifically focused upon developing leadership skills.

Research Design

Combined quantitative and qualitative methods and procedures were used in this study. A descriptive approach using logical analysis and a modified triangulation method was employed.

The data sources included the Florida Aspiring Principal Preparation Assessment (FLAPPA) survey and the Florida school district's Aspiring Principal Preparation Program (APPP) documentation. The triangulation process helped to ensure the validity of the data by corroborating survey responses and reducing the possibility of researcher biases (Gay & Airasian, 2000; Nitko, 2004; Popham, 2000).

Study Participants

The study was comprised of the sample of HRMD employees who were responsible for the APPPs in the Florida 67 school districts. The participants were identified in the employee listings found in the Florida Education Directory by Florida Association of School Administrators, 2003-2004 School Year (Florida Association of School Administrators (FASA), 2003). The criteria for selection of the HRMD employee responsible for the APPP were: (a) the HRMD employee who administered the APPP in their school district; (b) the employee who was recommended by the HRMD contact person to be the most knowledgeable about the APPP curriculum; or (c) the employee who was responsible for the coordination of the professional development, mentoring, and performance-based experiences for the school district APPP.

Instrumentation

The Survey

The instrument was designed from a literature review of best practices found in APPPs. The development and construction of the FLAPPA survey (Appendix D) had three phases: the