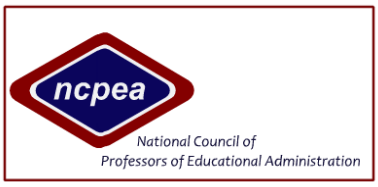
Superintendents' Perceptions of the Effectiveness of Newly Hired Principals

This manuscript has been peer-reviewed, accepted, and endorsed by the National Council of Professors of Educational Administration (NCPEA) as a significant contribution to the scholarship and practice of school administration and K-12 education.



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This study investigates the frequency of research-based leadership strategies utilized by newly hired school principals in the workplace. Public school superintendents in Indiana were asked to respond to two open-ended research questions. Through the use of content analysis, their comments were coded for the occurrence of effective leadership practices. The Educational Leadership Constituent Council (ELCC) standards were used as classification categories. The findings revealed that collaboration and skills in instruction, curriculum, and evaluation were the most frequently observed leadership skills. Management skills were identified as the area in greatest need of improvement, especially a noted lack of budgetary skills. The content analysis identified categories of responses in addition to the ELCC standards. Superintendents repeatedly commented on new principals' strong interpersonal skills and suggested that additional years of experience would enhance the principals' development of the most influential leadership skills.

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Introduction

In the last 50 years, researchers have provided ample evidence that effective school principals have a positive influence on student achievement and overall school success (Branch, Hanushek, & Rivkin, 2013; Leithwood, Seashore, Anderson, & Wahlstrom, 2004; Rice, 2010). Numerous studies have led to the identification of various leadership traits or behaviors that have been documented as contributing to school improvement (Marzano, Waters, & McNulty, 2005). Recognizing the importance of this research, the purpose of this study was to determine if Indiana's newly hired principals exhibited these effectiveness skills in their assigned schools. This assessment is based on the observations and opinions of the superintendent and centered on the Educational Leadership Constituent Council Standards (2011) for building-level leaders. In Indiana, a Master's degree comprised of a standards-based university administrative preparatory program, is required in order to receive a principal's license. This license is necessary for employment as a public school principal in the state (Indiana Department of Education, 2013).

Researchers recommend investigating the performance of new principals in relationship to shared standards for leadership preparation programs (Andenoro et al., 2013). The study that follows is a companion study to one completed by Boyland, Lehman, and Sriver (in press), which used quantitative data to assess the standards-based proficiency of newly hired principals. This study uses content analysis to further examine the behaviors of newly hired principals within the framework of the Educational Leadership Constituent Council (ELCC) Standards and research-based principles of effective leadership. The ELCC Standards focus on the following areas of leadership: vision, instructional program, management, collaboration, ethics, and political, social, economic, legal, and cultural contexts.

Background

In 1966 the US Department of Education commissioned James Coleman and several other scholars to conduct research on the topic of educational equality in the United States. A fundamental premise emerging from this study suggested that the primary determinants of academic success are a student's background and socioeconomic status. Coleman et al. wrote, "It is known that socioeconomic factors bear a strong relationship to academic achievement. When these factors are statistically controlled, however, it appears that differences between schools account for only a small fraction of differences in pupil achievement" (p. 21).

Soon thereafter, bureaucrats, educators, and researchers started questioning these findings in terms of the school's influence on student achievement and began subjecting the results of Coleman's study to intense scrutiny (Cain & Watts, 1970; Moynihan, 1968). The seeds of the effective schools reform era were sown in this reaction by initiating a search for the key elements of successful schools and ultimately validating the importance of specific school practices and the fundamental role of the principal.

Weber (1971) conducted one of the earliest studies designed to determine the characteristics of an effective school. He focused on reading programs in inner city schools and cited strong building leadership as one element of a successful school. Berman and McLaughlin (1978) found that educational innovations were more successful when supported by the building principal. In Brookover and Lezotte's (1979) analysis of

schools with improving student achievement, principals in improving schools were cited for their assertiveness in the role of instructional leader. As the decade concluded, Edmonds (1979) offered this compelling argument for the importance of the building principal:

> I want to end this discussion by noting as unequivocally as I can what seem to me the most tangible and indispensable characteristics of effective schools (a) they have strong administrative leadership without which the disparate elements of good schools can neither be brought together nor kept together, . . . (p. 22).

During a presentation in 1983, Finn declared, "First, schools make a difference in how much children learn. Second, principals make a difference in how effective schools are" (p. 3). In 1987, Cawelti wrote, "Research of effective schools has validated the vital role of principals in schools that consistently achieve above expectations" (p. 1). He identified four behavioral patterns of leaders: vision, organization developer, instructional support, and monitoring learning, deemed to be essential in improving school productivity.

Milstein, Bobroff, and Restine (1991) emphasized the importance of the principal in school improvement, reporting that successful school reform requires, "… site-based administrators who have vision, beliefs, abilities, and energy required to lead others toward shared objectives" (p. 2). In synthesizing research on principal effectiveness, Hallinger and Heck (1998) agreed, concluding: "Schools that make a difference in student's learning are led by principals who make a significant and measurable contribution to the effectiveness of staff and in the learning of pupils in their charge" (p. 158).

As research efforts continued into the next decade, multiple studies contributed to the growing body of evidence linking school leadership with student achievement (Cowie & Crawford, 2007; Duke, Grogan, Tucker, & Heinecke, 2003; Tucker, Henig, & Salmonowicz, 2005). In 2004, Leithwood, Seashore, Anderson, and Wahlstrom reported that school leadership was second only to classroom instruction among the school-related factors that contributed to student learning. Marzano, Waters, and McNulty (2005) conducted a meta-analysis of 35 years of educational research and found a statistically significant relationship between principal effectiveness and student achievement, stating that, "… school leadership has a substantial effect on student achievement" (p. 12). A recent study conducted in Texas found that a highly effective principal raised the achievement of a typical student between two and seven months (Branch et al., 2013). Several other recent reports have substantiated the importance of principal effectiveness in regard to student achievement (Horng & Leob, 2010; The Wallace Foundation, 2013).

Guided by the belief that principals do make a difference, educational researchers turned their attention to attempting to determine which behaviors are most influential in the quest for school improvement. Acknowledging that there is a lack of consistency in the terminology used to describe effective behaviors, a typical list of effective leadership strategies includes: creating a vision, possessing integrity, knowing oneself, sharing success, developing leadership in others, utilizing effective problem solving skills, and understanding the organization and the forces that shape it (Bennis, 1989; Carnegie,

1936; Collins, 2001; Covey, 2004; Maxwell, 1998). An analysis of noteworthy studies in educational leadership yields a comparable list of effective leadership behaviors with some important additions. Specifically, effective school leaders must also be adept at creating a climate to promote learning; improving, monitoring, and evaluating instruction; demonstrating expertise in curriculum and assessment; making data-based decisions, and fostering community relationships (Langley & Jacobs, 2006; Leithwood et al., 2004; Marzano et al., 2005; National Association of Elementary School Principals, 2013; National Association of Secondary School Principals, 2013; The Wallace Foundation, 2013).

The challenge in identifying cause and effect relationships between specific elements of principal leadership and student achievement may be due to the complexity of the role. The value of a principal can manifest itself in multiple ways, both directly and indirectly. From their review of the research, Horng, Kalogrides, and Loeb (2009) proposed that a variety of school outcomes, may be influenced by the effectiveness of a principal who recruits and motivates quality teachers, identifies and articulates a school vision and goals, allocates resources efficiently, and develops instructional support structures. Rice (2010) found that the behaviors of skillful principals influenced several areas, including teacher satisfaction and parents' perceptions about the school, with the combined results contributing to improved student academic performance. Hallinger (2003) concluded that the importance of effective principal leadership in contributing to successful change was a consistent finding in the research on school improvement.

Without doubt schools are complex and dynamic organizations. The variables that influence the success of schools are numerous. In addition to effective school leadership, Shannon and Bylsma (2007) list clear and shared vision, high expectations for all students, collaboration and communication, alignment with state standards, frequently monitored learning and teaching, focused professional development, supportive learning environment, and a high level of community involvement as characteristics of a high performing school. Each variable contributes to, or detracts from, the effectiveness of the school. Multiple studies grounded in effective schools research have identified the building principal as a key variable in the operation of an effective school. Today, we can state with reasonable assurance that the performance of the building principal greatly influences student achievement and other variables that contribute to the success of a school.

Standards-Based Educator Preparation

There are several organizations and multiple assessment strategies that have served to create a baseline of standards and expectations for educator preparation. One such organization, the National Council for Accreditation of Teacher Education (NCATE) was founded in 1954 and has been pivotal in providing research-based benchmarks for quality teacher and administrator preparation programs in the United States. In 2013, NCATE and TEAC (Teacher Education Accreditation Council) merged to become CAEP (Council for the Accreditation of Educator Preparation). Nationwide, there are over 650 accredited institutions participating in CAEP as one measure of assurance that educator training programs are of satisfactory relevance and quality (CAEP, 2013).

High quality preparatory programs are grounded in the implementation of pertinent and rigorous standards. For school leadership training programs, the Educational Leadership Constituent Council (ELCC, 2011) or the Interstate School Leaders Licensure Consortium (ISLLC, 2008) are the national standards commonly adopted (CCSSO, 2012; ELCC, 2011). Of the four major Indiana universities offering principal training, all follow ELCC Standards, which requires a rigorous curriculum with a clinical internship under the supervision of a university supervisor and onsite mentor. ELCC Standards are considered Indiana's primary standards for principal preparation, serving accreditation purposes and also guiding best practice.

Theoretical Framework

There is a growing body of empirical evidence supporting the link between principal effectiveness and student achievement, which provides the theoretical framework for this study (Leithwood et al., 2004; Marzano et al., 2005; Rice, 2010). In Indiana, the ELCC Standards are the formally adopted standards by the major universities for principal preparation programs. Research shows that certain skills, knowledge, and behaviors, as outlined in the ELCC Standards, are known to increase student achievement (Young & Mawhinney, 2012). However, in Indiana, there is a research deficit in the area of new principals, meaning that no recent studies could be found examining the performance of principals in their first, second, and third years in the position. Our theoretical framework, which links principal effectiveness with student achievement, prompts the question; do recently hired school principals demonstrate the skills, behaviors, and knowledge as outlined in the ELCC Standards? Currently, very little is known about the performance of Indiana's new school leaders after they finish their required university preparation, providing the catalyst for this study.

Purpose

The ELCC Standards provide a research-based framework for university school leadership preparation programs. Empirical research thoroughly and consistently supports the ELCC Standards as foundational in developing leadership effectiveness, as documented by noted educational leaders and scholars like Michelle Young, Hanne Mawhinney, Dianne Taylor, Margaret Orr, Diana Pounder, Gary Crow, and Pamela Tucker (as cited in Young & Mawhinney, 2012). However, in Indiana, although candidates are being prepared using the ELCC Standards, there is a lack of follow-up on candidates to determine their effectiveness once they are hired as principals. Researchers recommend exploration of shared standards for preparation programs in order to develop a deeper understanding of leadership education outcomes (Andenoro et al., 2013). Accordingly, our purpose was to assess the effectiveness of recently hired principals by comparing their performance with the ELCC Standards. Our investigation sought to determine if newly hired principals, those in their first, second or third year, demonstrated the knowledge, skills, and behaviors identified as necessary contributors to school improvement.

Methodology

Survey methodology was deemed most appropriate for exploring our research questions. Surveys are recommended as an economical and efficient method of collecting data from a large sample (Scholls & Smith, 1999). We sought feedback directly from Indiana's 289 public school superintendents because these are the individuals responsible for the hiring and evaluation of principals.

Survey Instrument and Participant Selection

A three-part electronic survey was developed for use in this study. The research team developed the survey instrument using the ELCC Standards and specific questions regarding new principals' strengths or areas for improvement, which were derived from our research questions. Prior to gathering data, a six-member panel consisting of university faculty, superintendents, and principals with experience in survey development vetted the instrument and submitted feedback regarding face and content validity. Based on the panel's feedback, several revisions were made to wording and sequencing, which improved the survey's clarity and focus. The survey was then pilot tested using a similar panel consisting of former school superintendents, principals, and university faculty members who suggested no additional revisions. The survey was administered using the platform Qualtrics (www.qualtrics.com) and emailed to each of the 289 Indiana superintendents in the spring of 2013.

The first section of the survey gathered basic demographic information about the school to which the new principal was assigned including the school's grade levels, population characteristics, and type of school community (rural, suburban, or urban). In the second section of the survey, superintendents were asked to rate the effectiveness of the new principal using the six categories of the ELCC Standards as assessment criteria. In this section of the survey there were 33 forced choice items designed to gather the superintendent's perceptions about the new principal's effectiveness.

The third section of the survey served as the source of data for this study. In this section of the survey, superintendents were asked the two following research questions:

1. What strengths does this newly hired principal possess that makes him/her a highly effective building leader?
2. In what areas does this newly hired principal need to improve his/her level of effectiveness?

Following Institutional Review Board approval, all 289 public school superintendents in Indiana were invited to participate in the study. In May of 2013, an introductory email with the survey link was sent to all superintendents, asking them to complete a survey for each principal hired who had completed a university leadership preparation program since 2009. The survey responses were anonymous and no identifying information was requested. From a total of 289, 53 usable surveys were returned, yielding a response rate of 17%, which is considered acceptable for electronic surveys (Sheehan, 2001). The

survey responses were anonymous and no identifying information was requested. If identifying information was voluntarily provided it was not maintained.

Data Analysis

A content analysis of the responses to the two research questions listed above was conducted following the principles outlined by Guba and Lincoln (1981) and Holsti (1969). The general research process is defined as, "Content analysis is any technique for making inferences by objectively and systematically identifying specified characteristics of messages" (Holsti, 1969, p. 14).

Coding data is a key function in content analysis research. In this study, the ELCC Standards were used as the content analysis categories because they afforded alignment with the research questions and a functional and systematic focus for investigation. Since most responses were in the form of one or several sentences, a single word or theme was selected as the recording unit. Coding reliability was achieved by using multiple reviewers and applying the Kappa Statistic to measure interrater reliability. The team of reviewers met to decide upon the following coding rules: definition of research problem in terms of categories, coding unit, and coding enumeration (Holsti, 1969). After agreement was reached on the coding requirements, each reviewer worked independently, and used the same printed set of the ELCC Standards for reference. The results of the coding process were submitted to the authors for compilation.

Since more than one reviewer was utilized in this research, there was a need to assess interrater reliability. The kappa statistic was selected as the measure of reliability (See Table 1).

Table 1
Interpretation of Kappa

	Poor	Slight	Fair	Moderate	Substantial	Almost Perfect
Kappa	0.00	0.20	0.40	0.60	0.80	1.00

Kappa	Agreement
< 0	Less than chance agreement
0.01-0.20	Slight agreement
0.21-0.40	Fair agreement
0.41-0.60	Moderate agreement
0.61-0.80	Substantial Agreement
0.81-0.99	Almost perfect agreement

The importance of this statistic is that it represents how frequently the data analyzed by the coders are assigned to the same category. According to Carletta (1996), Kappa is widely accepted, is interpretable, and allows for different results to be compared. It is typically used to assess the degree to which two or more raters agree when assigning data to categories. Kappa provides a numerical rating of the degree to which observers agree when evaluating the same item. There are various scales used to describe the level of agreement for kappa values. The one used in this study is derived from Viera and Garrett (2005).

Results

In the spring of 2013, Indiana public school superintendents were asked to complete a survey on the effectiveness of each new school principal hired in their districts. There were a total of 53 usable surveys returned for analysis; however, 15 of the new administrators were assigned to positions at the district level. Our focus for this report was specifically building-level leaders. Therefore, we will be reporting on the 37 responses from superintendents regarding new building-level administrators. Of these 37 building-level leaders, 51.4% (n = 19) were identified as principals, 43.2% (n = 16) as assistant principals, and 5.4% (n = 2) as "other building-level administrative" positions. Because 35 of the 37 building-level leaders were assistant principals or principals, we refer to the group as "principals." All of the principals whose performance is reported on were in their first, second, or third years in the positions.

Demographic Profile of Principals' Schools

Superintendents were asked to provide demographic information about the schools where the new principals were assigned. The grade levels of the principals' schools were evenly divided with 48.6% (n = 18) being elementary or intermediate-level schools, and 48.6% (n = 18) being middle or high schools. There was one school (2.7%) that housed all grades levels, K-12. Most of the schools, 91.4% (n = 34) enrolled 20% or less minority students, with 5.4% (n = 2) enrolling 21 - 40% minority students, and one school (2.7%) enrolling 61 - 80% minority students. The percentage of students qualifying for free or reduced meals indicated that 5.4% (n = 2) of the schools had less than 20% qualifying, 51.4% (n = 19) had 21 - 40% qualifying, 32.4% (n = 12) had 41 - 60% of students qualifying, and 10.8% (n = 4) had 61% or above qualifying for meal assistance. The last demographic question was on community type, revealing that the majority of the schools were in rural areas at 78.4% (n = 29), with suburban at 16.2% (n = 6), and urban at 5.4% (n = 2). In general, the demographics of the schools and communities presented an accurate representation of Indiana in terms of typical population distributions and characteristics (U.S. Census Bureau, 2013). For the most part, Indiana is a rural state, with only 16 areas classified as "large urban" (Indiana State Government, 2009).

Analysis of Responses to Open Ended Questions – Standards

In response to the first research question, which asked superintendents to cite the ELCC standard areas in which newly hired principals were more effective, all six categories were mentioned (See Table 2).

Table 2
Frequency of superintendents' comments noting principals' strengths

Std	Description	n	%	Kappa	z	P
1	Vision	20	9.3%	0.36	1.87	0.061
2	Culture and Inst Program	64	29.9%	0.72	8.42	0.000
3	Management	41	19.2%	0.32	2.76	0.006
4	Collaboration	67	31.3%	0.67	7.79	0.000
5	Integrity, Fairness, and Ethics	15	7.0%	-0.04	-0.18	0.857
6	Pol, Soc, Econ, Legal & Cul	7	3.3%	0.23	0.47	0.638

Note. n = number of comments received from superintendents

Standard four, the education leader applies knowledge that promotes the success of every student by collaborating with faculty and community members, was the most frequently cited (n = 67, % = 31.3). Examples of comments typical of this category include, "He creates a very positive climate for students and parents," and ". . . ability to work with teachers on their level, relates well to the community, trusts employees to do the jobs she gives them." The kappa statistic for this standard is 0.67 which classifies the interrater reliability as having substantial agreement.

Behaviors aligned with standard two, the education leader applies knowledge that promotes the success of every student by sustaining a school culture and instructional program conducive to student learning, was the second most often cited (n = 64, % = 29.9) category. Typical remarks associated with this category include, "Ability to analyze data, ability to identify appropriate strategies, create a culture of high expectations, strong disciplinarian," and "knowledgeable in instructional leadership and evaluation." The kappa statistic for this standard is 0.72 which classifies the interrater reliability as having substantial agreement.

Standard three, the education leader promotes the success of every student through monitoring and evaluating the school management and operational systems, was mentioned in nearly one-fifth (n = 42, % = 19.2) of the responses. Superintendents routinely described these behaviors in the following manner, "project management, logistics" and "operations skills." The kappa statistic for this standard is 0.32 which classifies the interrater reliability as having fair agreement.

Of the remaining three standards, one, five, and six, all were mentioned less than 10% of the time. This of course is not meant to suggest that the newly hired principals do not possess these traits, but simply that their superintendents may have observed other behaviors more frequently. The kappa statistics for standards one (0.36) and six (0.23) suggested fair agreement among the coders. There was less than chance agreement for standard five.

The second research question asked superintendents to suggest areas in which the newly hired principals needed to improve their level of effectiveness. Similar to the responses to the identification of strengths, areas for improvement included all six standards categories. By far the most frequently cited area in need of improvement was related to standard three (n = 49, % = 30.6), management (See Table 3).

Table 3
Frequency of superintendents' comments noting areas for principals' improvement

Std	Description	n	%	Kappa	z	P
1	Vision	18	11.3%	0.36	1.87	0.061
2	Culture and Inst Program	31	19.4%	0.72	8.42	0.000
3	Management	49	30.6%	0.32	2.76	0.006
4	Collaboration	32	20.0%	0.67	7.79	0.000
5	Integrity, Fairness, and Ethics	4	2.5%	-0.04	-0.18	0.857
6	Pol, Soc, Econ, Legal & Cul	26	16.3%	0.23	0.47	0.638

Note. n = number of comments received from superintendents

Over thirty percent of the superintendents commented that newly hired principals needed to improve in this area. Of the 49 coded responses under the heading of standard three, 28.6% described the newly hired principal as needing to improve in time management. Nearly one-fourth, 24.5%, of the respondents identified limited skills in school finance and budgets among new hires. Approximately one-fifth, 20.4%, of the recently employed principals needed to improve their communication skills. The kappa statistic for this standard is 0.32 which classifies the interrater reliability as having fair agreement.

A nearly equal number of suggestions to improve leadership behaviors classified under standards two (n = 31, % = 19.4) and four (n = 32, % = 20%) comprised the second tier of areas for improvement. With regard to standard two, superintendents routinely remarked about the principal's inability to effectively evaluate teachers, a lack of recognition of good teaching, and a lack of familiarity with academic standards. The kappa statistic for this standard is 0.72 which classifies the interrater reliability as having substantial agreement.

The need to improve the skills described in standard six (n = 26, % = 16.3), an education leader promotes the success of every student by evaluating the potential moral

and legal consequences of decision making in the school, merits a comment in this discussion. Over 25% of the statements noting the need to improve were related to an understanding of the law. Slightly less than 25% of the suggestions for improvement centered on the need to acquire a better understanding of the political environments that influence schools. The kappa statistic for this standard is 0.23 which classifies the interrater reliability as having fair agreement.

Analysis of Responses to Open Ended Questions – Other Performance Measures

During the content analysis it became apparent that a number of comments were not aligned with the six ELCC Standards but still merited consideration. To accommodate a review of these data, the coders collaborated on the development of other categories that appeared in the analysis then followed the content analysis protocols described above to further derive frequently cited suggestions from survey respondents. This process yielded four categories: interpersonal skills, personal traits/attitude, experience, and miscellaneous. To be consistent with the data classified according to the standards, the other categories were divided into areas of strength and those in need of improvement.

Superintendents listed interpersonal skills as a strength in more than 50% (n = 29, % = 55.9) of the responses assigned to this category. Descriptive phrases such as, "has a positive attitude and personality that connects with kids, teachers, and parents," "people skills," and "excellent judgment," were routinely found in written responses. The kappa statistic for this standard is 0.36 which classifies the interrater reliability as having fair agreement. Closely associated with interpersonal skills is the second most often cited catergory, personal traits/skills. The distinction was made because these comments depicted a different attribute. Of the 13 comments assigned to this category, 61.5% complimented the new hire as "dedicated" or having a strong work ethic. Being a good listener or having an eagerness to learn were other informative remarks. The kappa statistic for this category is 0.72 which classifies the interrater reliability as having substantial agreement. The data reported as other measures of the strengths of newly hired principals appear below in Table 4.

Table 4
Frequency of superintendents' comments noting principals' strengths

#	Description	n	%	Kappa	z	P
1	Interpersonal Skills	29	55.9%	0.36	1.87	0.061
2	Personal Traits/Attitude	13	25.0%	0.72	8.42	0.000
3	Experience	0	0.0%	0.32	2.76	0.006
4	Miscellaneous	10	19.2%	0.67	7.79	0.000

Note. n = number of comments received from superintendents

Other Performance Measures

In the categories listed as other measures, areas of needed principal improvement, there is only one item of note. From the comments submitted by the superintendents, experience will be the key to more effective performance. Repeatedly the phase, "more experience" was cited in response to the research question.

In this context, more experience referred to longevity in the role as opposed to a broader range of tasks or responsibilities on the job. There were some instances in which this term was associated with "confidence," but the message of gaining experience was clear in an overwhelming number (n = 25, % = 64.1) of responses. The kappa statistic for this category is 0.32 which classifies the interrater reliability as having fair agreement (See Table 5).

Table 5
Frequency of superintendents' comments noting areas for principals' improvement

#	Description	n	%	Kappa	z	P
1	Interpersonal Skills	3	7.7%	0.36	1.87	0.061
2	Personal Traits/Attitude	4	10.3%	0.72	8.42	0.000
3	Experience	25	64.1%	0.32	2.76	0.006
4	Miscellaneous	7	17.9%	0.67	7.79	0.000

Note. n = number of comments received from superintendents

Summary and Discussion

The overarching goal of this study was to determine if newly hired principals are demonstrating the skills and behaviors research has identified as necessary ingredients for school improvement. A synthesis of these skills and behaviors typically includes: creating a vision, developing leadership in others, utilizing effective problem-solving strategies, promoting a climate for learning, evaluating and improving instruction, making data-based decisions, and forging strong community relationships. These factors are closely aligned with the ELCC Standards, which guide administrator preparation programs in over 650 universities throughout the nation. The findings contained in this study are equally important for university administrator preparation programs to prompt an assessment of curriculum and training strategies. There is evidence from this study that effective leadership practices are being utilized by newly hired principals.

A summary of the results depicts a contrast of the leadership traits and practices public school superintendents identified as effective and those in need of improvement while observing the performance of newly hired principals. These data provide evidence that all categories of standards-based leadership practices were observed under job conditions. It is also apparent that these practices are being employed with varying frequencies. The data document areas of strength with regard to the utilization of

effective leadership practices. The data also suggest areas where the use of these practices should be improved. A summary of the data is illustrated in *Figure 1.*

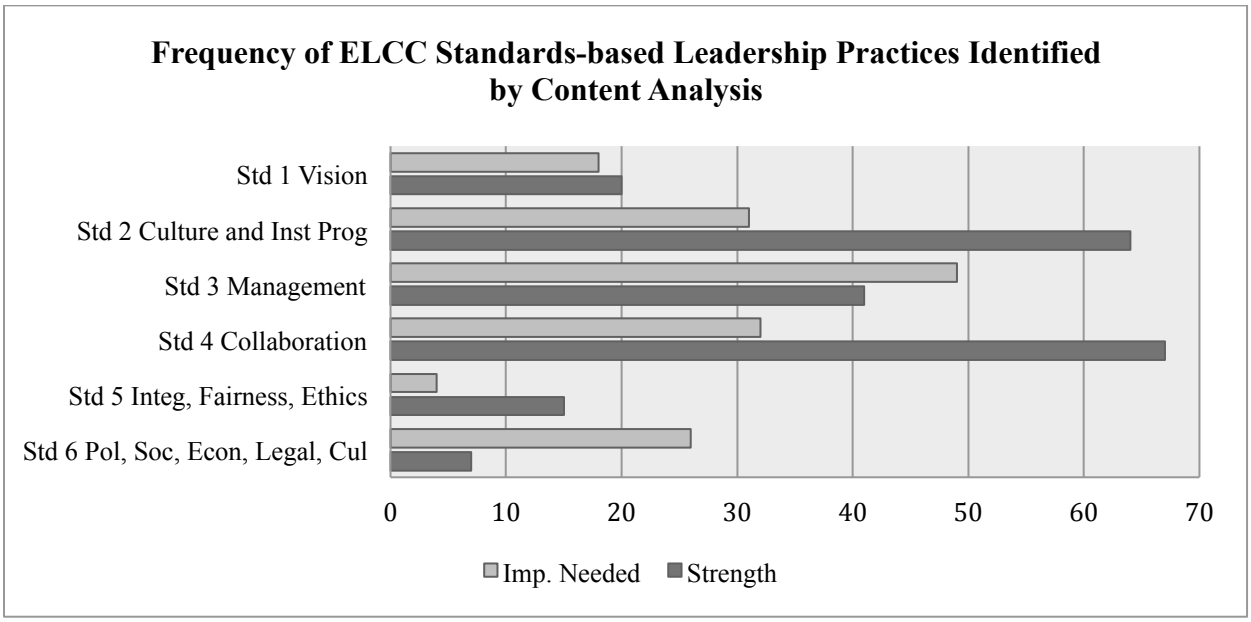

Figure 1

One of the more encouraging results is that principals were more frequently cited for demonstrating practices associated with improving student achievement. Specifically, utilizing leadership strategies related to standards two and four were identified more often than the remaining standards. Both categories are aligned with strategies known to positively influence school performance; monitoring and evaluating instruction, and fostering community relationships (Clifford, Behrstock, & Fetters, 2012; National Association of Secondary School Principals, 2013; The Wallace Foundation, 2013). These findings are related to the first research question.

Behaviors classified under standard four were identified as strengths of newly hired principals more than any other trait (n = 67). This standard is described as promoting the success of students by collaborating with faculty and community members. There were also some suggestions for improvement under this heading (n = 32) but the descriptions of collaboration as a strength more than doubled the number of remarks about needing improvement. The second most often (n = 64) mentioned category described behaviors grouped under standard two. This standard is characterized by the development of a rigorous curricular program and supervision of instruction. Comments identified as describing this standard as a strength of newly hired principals also doubled the number of observations indicating a need for improvement. It is important to note that for the content analysis of these factors, the interrater reliability kappa statistic was in the substantial agreement range for all four classifications.

Responses depicting skills related to standard three, monitoring and evaluating the school management and operational systems, routinely (n = 41) identified these behaviors as an area of strength. Comments such as having organizational and management skills

and being detail oriented were typical descriptive phrases. However, the need to improve management skills received the greatest number of needs improvement comments (n = 49) of any standard. This difference of nearly 20% is due primarily to the superintendents' assessment that newly hired principals need to improve in the areas of budging and school finance. The interrater reliability range for both measures was in the fair agreement range.

The content analysis identified a nearly equal number of classifications as strengths (n = 20) and needs improvement (n = 18) under standard one, vision. Some principals were viewed as visionary; others were described as being limited in their ability to effectively plan for school improvement. The kappa statistic for these measures placed the interrater reliability in the fair agreement range.

Regarding standard five, which deals with fairness and integrity of administrative actions, the acknowledgement of this characteristic as a strength surpassed it being a weakness by a count of nearly four to one. It is important to note here that just because the concept of fairness and integrity was less frequently cited overall by superintendents, it should not be viewed as less evident or unimportant. Our companion study found that newly hired principals bordered on performing at a distinguished level when ethical behavior was considered (Boyland et al., in press). The need to improve in the political, social, economic, legal, and cultural areas yielded the highest percentage disparity when compared to contexts in which these behaviors were viewed as strengths. Limitations in this area centered on a lack of proficiency in the political arena and in dealing with legal matters.

A review of the other categories identified through content analysis generated two noteworthy factors. In the distillation of other strengths, twenty-nine comments, almost three times as many as the second most mentioned category, were recorded as interpersonal skills. The notion of being able to develop positive working relationships with members of the faculty, community, and student body remains an integral factor in school leadership (Langley & Jacobs, 2006).

The analysis of the need for improvement categories under the other heading also identified one dominant response. Nearly 65% of the comments suggested that newly hired administrators would improve with experience. This is a logical conclusion but prompts a number of important considerations, including two key questions. First, can newly hired principals be better prepared so that the progression of skills from novice to proficient can be accelerated? Second, can we count on the mentors currently in the field to provide proper guidance?

Implications and Recommendations for Practice

Research clearly documents that effective school principals play an important role in improving student achievement. At the same time, there are criticisms of university preparatory programs responsible for training principals. For example, Cowie and Crawford (2007) called principal preparation programs an "act of faith" (p. 129). Levine, a strong critic of university administrator preparation programs, referred to them as "... the weakest of all the programs at the nation's education schools" (2005, p. 13). Hess and Kelly stated, "Because preparation of principals has not kept pace with changes in

the larger world of schooling, graduates of principal preparation programs have been left ill equipped for the challenges and opportunities posed by an era of accountability" (2005, p. 40). These and other reports challenging the quality and relevance of university principal preparation programs raise questions regarding how well new principals function once they are on the job.

Consequently, the outcomes of this study create implications for practice and research because our results document standards-based areas in which new principals, per their superintendents, were perceived as effective. Our results suggest that university preparatory programs in Indiana, at least to the extent measured by our instrument and per the ELCC Standards, are preparing candidates for the real-world of leadership as seen through the eyes of their superintendents. In addition, many of the areas that superintendents reported as strengths for new principals, for example, collaboration with faculty and the community, supervision of instruction, and development of rigorous programs, are directly related to areas necessary in establishing conditions for improving student achievement.

Limitations

This study has several limitations. One limitation is that the survey response rate was only 17% of the superintendents in the state. Although this is considered acceptable for electronic survey research, it limits the generalizability of results. Therefore, the reader is advised to view these results as exploratory.

Another limitation is that the survey was conducted only in Indiana. It seems logical that there is some similarity throughout the nation in the challenges facing new administrators in their first administrative assignment. Certainly other authors have enumerated these challenges from a universal perspective, but this study does not presently contain evidence to extend this assumption beyond state boundaries.

Need for Further Research

The results of this study were encouraging because superintendents largely reported that newly hired principals were demonstrating behaviors and skills aligned with effective leadership practices (Kaplan, Owings, & Nunnery, 2005; Marzano et al., 2005). Nevertheless, there is a call for further research. The goal of using national standards in the development of administrator preparation programs is to create a framework for designing curricula better aligned to the challenges a novice administrator will face on the job (Hambrick-Hill, Tucker, & Young, 2012). University preparation programs should explore means by which knowledge and skills acquired in the classroom can be more effectively transferred to the workplace (Barnett, 2005). To accomplish these goals, studies designed to assess the effectiveness of new principals should directly capture their voices, needs, and opinions regarding their own performance and preparation. These data should then be used for programmatic and curricular planning at the university level, and also to provide supportive assistance and resources.

In addition, further studies encompassing wider geographic areas and using larger sample sizes are necessary in order to better understand the preparatory needs of new

school leaders and their additional needs for professional development and support once they become principals, as well as to monitor their effectiveness after they have been on the job for several years. Since a conspicuous number of superintendents' remarked that additional years of experience was what newly hired principals needed to improve, it would be interesting to test this assumption.

The induction of the novice administrator into the profession is also in need of further study. The chance meeting with a superintendent or the routinely scheduled districtwide administrators' meeting is not sufficient for the professional development required for today's principals to make a difference in the lives of the students being served. According to Kearney (2010) induction programs should be standards-based, including coaching, and collect data to document the effectiveness of the newly hired principal. Each of these strategies has the potential to improve the likelihood that novice principals will more readily demonstrate effective leadership behaviors.

In summary, this study provided evidence that effective leadership practices are being utilized in Indiana. The ongoing question is, of course, can these strategies become pervasively employed in all schools by every school leader?

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