



University faculty involved in both traditional and academy programs reflect on their experiences with the changing delivery format.

# Changing from Traditional Practice to a New Model for Preparing Future Leaders

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In dramatic departure from the traditional format of programs preparing building level leaders, in the last sixteen years the Educational Leadership Department in the College of Education at Kansas State University (KSU) has worked with eight different partners in designing and delivering site-based customized 30-hour master's degree programs in educational leadership to 19 individual cohorts. New programs scheduled to begin within the next two semesters will increase the number of individual cohorts to 21 and the number of different partners to 9.<sup>1</sup>

Since the first master's academies in 2000, the academy focus has moved from preparing candidates for principal positions to the broader vision of teacher leadership, recognizing that today's leadership relies on a team, not an individual.<sup>2</sup> Leadership skills are needed by those in both teacher and principal positions. Such a change to developing leadership capacity at the teacher level gave rise to requests for an ongoing series of teacher leadership academies within the same districts. Most often, academies are partnerships between the Educational Leadership Department and a single school district, but four have involved two (and in one case three) districts working together with the university to add synergy across districts to enhance learning about leadership.

Along with the shift to teacher leadership, academy participants are given the option of independently adding two traditional department courses to complete credit requirements for a state-issued building-level leaders' license. Honoring standards for accreditation of its preparation program and responsibility for student access to state licensure for leadership positions, the university grants successful completers a Master's Degree in Educational Leadership with the option of completing these two additional courses to meet requirements for a principal's license.

## The District and the University as Partners

The most significant difference between the traditional preparation programs and the partnership academy model is the new role for the school district – partnering with the university to prepare teachers to be leaders in that district. A true partnership begins by seeking new benefits from mutual interests and exploring potential commitments from those involved, not one entity working for “buy in” from the other. In the academy partnership, the role of the university also changed. Partner planning involves the university explaining how they could make one of its programs available to district students, staff, or community, and such arrangements brought benefits for both the university and the community. In the academy model, parties gain even greater benefit from building on each other’s ideas when creating something new for both partners. As experience has informed practice over the years, planning for a district/university academy has become an increasingly careful and purposeful process in order to maintain the character of the partnerships. The essence of planning is matching university leadership program requirements with the specific context of the district where the leadership will be put to use. Such emphasis on context makes each KSU/district academy unique, since districts face varying leadership challenges, even when the new academy is yet one more in a series of similar partnerships over time between the same university and the same district.

## Planning the University/District Master’s Academy Partnership

Whether planning a first-time KSU partnership academy or adding a new cohort to a series in the same district over time, planning begins with a description of the intent of the partnership and the degree to which the partnership

can be designed to address the specific, current needs and interests of the prospective district partner. Current and future priorities for leadership skills become the general theme of an academy. Theme examples have included improving student performance, adjusting to changing demographics and population shifts, changes in community culture, closing the achievement gap, etc. For educators, it is not unlike planning for a magnet school by embedding the applicable program standards and knowledge content into the designated context. Establishing the focus for leadership development skills means program completers will be ready to address the leadership challenges in the district where they are already located.

With the theme in place, planning continues by looking at the contributions each party will be able to bring to the partnership. The university pledges to entwine the district theme with national leadership standards to give students a quality preparation program that will prepare them as educational leaders and give them licensing options for informal and formal building leader positions. The Educational Leadership department agrees to provide designated faculty to work with the district and guide the academy process for the entire two years. Both the district and the university commit to working as partners in constructing and delivering a curriculum with supporting activities addressing the identified district theme and to providing support for students who will be engaged in the learning (See Figure 1).

## The Partner Role in Selecting Participants

Another significant difference in a partnership academy is the identification of participants. In traditional programs, individuals select leadership programs of varying nature on their own and proceed with little if any collaboration with or connection to a specific current or future assignment. The district often has no knowledge of which staff members are actively involved in graduate degree programs and is unlikely able to influence the quality or content of the preparation experiences. Selecting students for advanced graduate programming is a major departure from the traditional individual movement to master’s degree status for both the district and the university. Another difference is that those selected become a closed cohort that meets as a unit for the duration of the master’s program.

In the planning process for an academy, the purpose of the teacher leadership academy is endorsed by both partners: to develop the leadership skills of teachers selected by the district to participate, whether these individuals choose to pursue administrative credentials, positions at the building level outside the classroom, or to remain in the classroom. The partner district selects staff members to participate from those who have already demonstrated potential as leaders in their current positions. The district has substantial influence on the preparation experiences and can closely observe individual progress as leadership skills develop. The university and district partners agree on an application procedure and a selection process timeline. District needs guide the projected size of the cohort within a range of 12 to 24 students, although exceptions at both ends have been accepted.

Figure 1 | **District/University Partner Contributions to a Teacher Leadership Academy**

| District Contributions   | University Contributions  |
|--|---|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Identify local needs and select academy focus</li> <li>Partner with the university in planning and delivering curriculum and activities and in assessing academy progress</li> <li>Determine participation criteria, open applications, and select participants</li> <li>Provide support, such as books, supplies, meeting space, or others of district choice</li> <li>Assign and support mentors</li> </ul> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Align academy focus with national leadership standards</li> <li>Partner with the district in planning and delivering curriculum and activities and in assessing academy progress</li> <li>Make sure participants meet Graduate School admission requirements with license options</li> <li>Provide faculty to guide enrollment process and facilitate the two-year program</li> <li>Support mentor training</li> </ul> |

Figure 2 | **Planning Timeline for District/University Partnership Academy**

| What  | When | Who   |
|---|------|---|
| Academy preplanning   |      | University and district leaders meet to discuss district needs, possible themes, recruitment strategies, application preferences, meeting locations, scheduling, etc. |
| Announcement of new academy   |      | District announces new academy to staff and shares announcements with university contacts   |
| Applications out  |      | District distributes applications and provides copy to university contacts  |
| Applications due  |      | District reviews applications and prepares list of proposed participants subject to screening regarding university graduate school requirements                       |
| Announcement of new class   |      | District announces list after university staff screening  |
| Materials ordered   |      | University provides ordering information to district for items selected by planning committee   |
| Planning Committee meeting (to be scheduled as needed or to be shared through technology) |      | Agenda: Confirm student list, finalize materials list, confirm topics and delivery resources  |
| First class session   |      | University staff, district staff determine by planning committee discussion   |

See Figure 2 for a typical timeline for planning a district/university partnership academy.

Although current technology offers good options for announcing the new opportunity to staff and inviting applications, the university designs a brochure or flyer to be distributed within the district. Information included is planned and agreed upon collaboratively, but the university makes sure all necessary notifications and university required branding is in place. Districts typically use the master copy to distribute widely both hard copies and e-files. It might be worthwhile to note that actual dates of academy class periods are included on the distributed information so that the expected attendance at class sessions is clear early in

the process. Applications are generally online to facilitate communication, making transmission from district to university staff easy.

Specific eligibility requirements for applicants are coestablished by the partners. The district may wish to impose certain requirements related to the theme or to other interests. For example, the district might choose to give preference to teachers with three or more years of district experience or to those with designated service records as teacher leaders at the building or on district teacher committees. At times, nontraditional students such as school nurses, district office staff, early childhood providers, and others, apply and are accepted. In our experience, these students have been successful academy members and have gone on to increasing responsibilities as leaders in their fields. Districts have various incentives and strategies for attracting applicants, especially those they believe bring the greatest future leadership potential. The most effective incentive is that tap on the shoulder from a respected supervisor saying, "You should do this. You are a potential leader."

For the most part, the university requires only that a participant be selected by the district and can be accepted for admission to the university graduate school. Given that the applicants are teachers licensed by the State Department of Education, such a limitation has not created an obstacle for any student. Once the district has selected the applicants they wish to sponsor in the cohort, the university reviews the applications and transcripts for graduate school admission. It is not unusual for a selected student to enter with some accumulated credits or even a previously earned master's in another area (i.e., special education, counseling, curriculum and instruction). University policy is followed related to transferring credits into a degree program.

### **The Partner Role in Building the Curriculum**

The role of the district partner continues as a collaboratively customized curriculum is outlined to address the theme selected for the upcoming leadership preparation program. Those involved in preplanning of the academy (or others added as decided by the partners) now become the Academy Planning Committee, charged throughout the two years with maintaining the balance between the theory and practice components of the partnership and supporting the successful professional growth of the participants. The first task is to confirm topics to be studied and to consider options for materials to address them. Points of performance assessment will be planned so academy instructors can periodically share evidence of student professional skills growth with the planners. Academy Planning Committee members are an essential connection between academy activities and leadership efforts in the district. The Planning Committee is the link between the academy and current district priorities, a critical feature in the rapidly-changing world in which schools operate.

From the first academy planning that began in 1999, the Interstate School Leader Licensure Consortium (ISLLC) standards (CCSSO, 2008) have been the backbone of leadership development content, merging the leadership

theory with the authenticity of the challenges today's leaders face in their schools. Other structural standards underlying curriculum development include the College of Education Conceptual Framework (2016), the Kansas State Board of Education leadership standards (2016) that underlie licensing at the various levels, and the 21 responsibilities of leaders (Waters & Cameron, 2007) from McREL research. The academy curriculum is built on that structure to parallel real life, where leaders daily call on skills and knowledge from all areas to manage routines and address eventful challenges.

Planning includes considering how topics encountered can be applied in practice at an appropriate level, how application experiences can be merged with further class study, then reapplied in field experiences at increasing depths throughout the two years. This is another significant departure from the traditional program where the delivery pattern consists of discrete courses with content set aside at the completion of a semester and application delayed until a limited practicum at program end.

While not required, it has been the practice for district partners to provide students with all the books used in the academy over the entire two years. This incentive for enrollment helps alleviate the financial burden of an advanced degree on the student and adds efficiency to the acquisition process. Books, selected in hard copy, paperback, or electronic form, become the property of the students, building a professional library of resources for future use. Those delivering instruction can expect students to have access to all materials throughout the two years, which is an advantage in an integrated, spiraling curriculum environment.

Instead of traditional college course textbooks, a more eclectic collection of professional publications is selected to deliver the integrated, spiraling curriculum in the partnership academies. Classroom study and field experiences are designed to pull from research and practice the latest and most authentic information related to leadership for the academy theme and application in today's schools. Approximately 20 book titles are collaboratively selected by the district/university planning committee. Authors include noted contemporary practitioners as well as recognized researchers in the profession. While individual titles vary across academies (even in the same district over time), foundation topics are continued or are purposefully redirected to best address current district and professional context. Materials are selected based on compatibility with district initiatives and cultures, and with professional development activities. Authors' works frequently selected for academy materials lists include Deal, Fullan, Marzano, Lambert, Hord, Danielson, and others.

### **Immediate and Ongoing Merger of Theory and Practice**

Further separation of the university/district partnership from the traditional preparation is the immediate merger of theory and practice. An active partnership between a university and the district, combined with an integrated, spiraling curriculum design, makes it possible for aspiring leaders to put to use immediately in their own professional context what they are learning in the classroom. This

immediate, authentic application of new skills is equally important to the learning mission of the academy. The Academy Planning Committee prepares guidelines for ongoing field experiences that allow students to put theory into practice in the context of their own district. Planners identify certain field experiences most important to development of the leadership skills needed in the district. These required leadership activities range from observations meant to broaden understanding of the reach of district programming, to required participation on various task forces, committees, or service units, to strengthen the foundation on which professional growth can continue.

One of the contributions required of a district partner is to assign each academy participant a mentor who is a current leadership position holder (usually the principal of the academy student). Mentors guide the growth in performance as the integrated, spiraling curriculum is extended to increasing levels of application of leadership skills. Academy project assignments require applying theory learned in the learner's work environment where the student and the district benefit from the application of both knowledge and human capital to address district priorities. Planners establish guidelines and expectations for mentor assignments and mentor training.

Each academy is planned with purpose and care following the general outline reviewed in this article. Many decisions must be made by the planning committee composed of both district and university representatives before the first class session begins. The details of planning illustrate dramatically the structural differences between the partnership academy model and the traditional preparation program.

### **The University/District Academy Partnership: A Closer Look**

The core staffing model for the partnership academy consists of a member of the university department faculty and a representative of the partner school district (the District Academy Liaison) who is qualified to serve in the role of university adjunct. While separately both positions are common in university staffing patterns, in a partnership academy the pair functions as a coteaching team. The two remain with the cohort group throughout the entire two-year period and are responsible for implementing the curriculum and observing the university program requirements.

The university faculty member is appointed by the department chair as part of the department work load and the district liaison is employed by the department to serve in the capacity of an adjunct faculty member during the length of the academy. Selection of the position holder is based on recommendations from the partner district. It is through the unique collaboration on curriculum decisions and delivery of instruction that the goals and interests of both partners are met while a clear focus on quality leadership preparation for students is maintained.



## **Working with the District Liaison**

The relationship between the university faculty member and the district liaison constitutes a critical difference between a traditional program and the partnership academy model.<sup>3</sup> Both serve on the Academy Planning Committee and are responsible for communications with their respective colleagues at the university and within the district. The district liaison keeps the district leaders and stakeholders in the district informed of the academy's progress, while garnering input to assure that the district's goals are continually in focus. From the beginning the district liaison and university faculty members establish clear communication about the priorities of the district in building leadership capacity. In districts that have partnered with the university on multiple teacher leadership academies, the district liaison plays an important role in the process for recruitment and selection of future teacher leaders in the district.

The university faculty member and the district liaison determine details of delivery of curriculum, following the outlines established by the district Academy Planning Committee. A sequential instructional outline is developed to guide delivery of the integrated, spiraling curriculum content and to reinforce alignment with state and national leadership standards. They distribute instructional duties among themselves to best address topics established for the academy study and may bring in presenters to enhance topics of study, or they may arrange for a content expert to assist as a "guest instructor" to add depth to certain topics. They interweave district experts to illustrate how knowledge concepts are applied in the real work in the district.

Details are finalized for assigning the list of required activities for students to participate in over the two-year program to increase and expose them to leadership activities in the district. Examples of required activities worked into the academy calendar include attending a state or local board meeting, an administrative team or district curriculum meeting, a community leadership forum such as a legislative or city council meeting, an affiliated agency such as truancy or student hearing boards, or a construction or facility meeting. Logistical items (location of class session, calendar dates, and other specifics related to district operations) are coordinated by the liaison to ensure efficiency in the classroom experience. The faculty member is generally responsible for the university's online course management software and coordinates pertinent communication with students about enrollment and other university information.

The district liaison uses the district connection to provide support in helping students navigate special project assignments tailored to the student's interest and a specific goal of the school or district. The liaison ensures proper communication is maintained with district personnel as projects are proposed and carried out. In many cases, these projects serve as program improvement pilots and often are implemented later at full scale in the district. Because they emerge out of current continuous improvement plans, students find academy assignments of great value to learning, and useful efforts to accomplish current professional goals

in the district. These connections are not likely to be as consistently strong in the traditional preparation model.

Districts often present a special end-of-program recognition ceremony to celebrate the accomplishments and hard work of academy students, bringing together students and academy staff with representatives of the board of education, superintendent, and university department chair to support and acknowledge the positive learning outcomes of the university/district academy partnership. Opportunities to celebrate offer a much deserved honor and celebration of hard work and noteworthy contributions achieved over the course of the two-year program.

## **Differences in Academy and Traditional Course Instruction**

Differentiating instructional methods, merging theory and practice, and reflective inquiry are often predicated as requirements of effective instructional goals in educational leadership programs. Because the relationship with the same students and in the same district environment continues over an extended period of time, the opportunities for instructors to plan for connecting concepts across content areas and to engage in interrelated conversations, infuse collaboration, and practice deep inquiry are greater than in the traditional program. Students are observed to change behaviors in their work assignments during the academy study. As they build confidence and increase familiarity of leadership examples from reading and peer discussion, they ask more questions in their site-based teacher leadership roles, and report increased involvement in leadership opportunities not previously explored.<sup>4</sup> Academy instructors can be flexible to respond to topics of interest that emerge from active learning. During the final semester of the academy, students deliver a presentation of their projects, highlighting the purpose, involved stakeholders, benefit, and results, along with potential follow-up activities.

## **Collaborative Mentor Support**

In the partnership academy, mentors are active participants in the professional growth of future leaders. A mentor is assigned by the district to each student to assist individuals throughout the academy period in developing an understanding of the roles and responsibilities of a school leader and to discuss important topics or assignments with the student. The district liaison supports, meets with, and provides training and guidance to mentors. Mentors, usually principals in the district, report that as they interact with academy students they themselves consider different angles and perspectives in effective decision-making. The alignment between topics explored in theory and actualized in the individual school setting is powerful. One example is the topic of Professional Learning Communities (PLCs), a structured model of collaboration used in schools. Academy students report working with mentors to impact the effectiveness of school PLCs as a result of increased knowledge and confidence, sharing new ideas with fellow teachers to increase productivity and focused use of time in PLCs. Students report they feel "empowered" to make a difference as a result of

their learning. The mentor continues assistance to students as they integrate course content, such as needs assessments and survey design, in carrying forth special projects.

### **Building Professional Networks**

Academy students value the opportunity to interact with district teachers from different levels and content areas, even in their own buildings, as they construct a better understanding of life beyond the four walls of their classroom. It is surprising how little teachers know about the larger programs in the district and what makes them work. Students repeatedly share this as a highlight of academy class sessions and that they “look forward to coming to class.” The purposeful collaboration incorporated in face-to-face classroom instruction is one of the most valued components of the academy model voiced by students. Academies fill a need for making connections between members of the district and as a result, districts comment on positive changes in district culture resulting from a series of academy cohorts. This is not likely to emerge as a benefit from the patterns of a traditional program.

### **Alignment with Leadership Standards**

The scope of interrelationships between topics in the academy model is broad and occurs naturally. Students see patterns of leadership in practice. The ability for academy instructors to integrate and spiral back to leadership topics, refer to state and national standards important to leadership preparation, and weave impactful and emerging resources and research in the area of educational leadership, is possible through the fluid and dynamic nature of the model design occurring over the two-year cohort program. The various resource materials in the academy, which focus on core leadership values such as the ISLLC standards and the McREL 21 leadership responsibilities, emphasize the consistency of leadership constructs and create a connectedness less likely to be as evident from a study of the traditional discrete course textbooks.

### **A Continual Lens on Student Progress**

Although traditional course instructors have valid practices for assessing student progress, distinct assessment patterns emerge in the academy model. Assessing academy student progress can be a much more holistic ongoing process, involving constant reflection by instructors and students alike. Regular feedback from students is obtained and considered by the district liaison and university faculty member with a critical eye on improvement, meeting the needs of students, the district goals and expectations, and the university standards for excellence. Connections can be made between demonstration of academic knowledge and skillful application. The academy model can focus on assisting each student in overall growth, understanding, and development of leadership skills. Instructors can provide ongoing formative assessment and advisement while checking for student understanding over a two-year time frame through practice and feedback on assignments, projects, and assessments.

Students in the academy model self-reflect on personal growth throughout the two-year program on the ISLLC (2008) standards for leadership. This is recorded at the beginning, midpoint, and end of the two-year program in areas of student knowledge, performance, and dispositions, and allows students the ability to self-assess along their journey, reflecting on growth and understanding related to the governing leadership standards. To exemplify this program strength, a review of self-assessment data from four teacher leadership academies showcased changes in the way students viewed themselves in their knowledge, beliefs, and performances as leaders. Upon completion of the two-year academy, students consistently reported higher levels of self-efficacy related to their confidence, capability, and competence in leadership roles in the school setting with 97% of the student self-assessment ratings being at a proficient level or above across all six leadership standards (Augustine-Shaw & Devin, 2014).

Another similar self-assessment conducted by students in the academy model is the Rubric of Emerging Teacher Leadership, in Linda Lambert’s *Leadership Capacity for Lasting School Improvement* (2003). A similar method is employed for students to self-reflect at the beginning, midpoint, and end of the academy. Students can visualize their growth and consider individual leadership development aligned with Lambert’s four quadrants for building leadership capacity at the school and district level. These self-assessment tools are often difficult to incorporate in the traditional course structure where students enter classes at different points and instructors do not have a clear time to introduce and have students complete these reflective practices.

In the academy partnership the mentor considers the overall growth of the student and completes a field supervisor evaluation for the ongoing field experience over the two years. In the traditional course sequence, a practicum is taken as a separate course, usually toward the end of the program. In the academy, field experiences are interwoven throughout the program with continual opportunities to discuss decision-making, current issues, student projects, and consideration of pertinent reading as mentors often receive and read the same books as students in the class, offering additional reflection and interaction on the topic.

The culminating master’s exam for either the traditional or academy model at the university is a portfolio with extensive entries, artifacts, and written narratives to highlight the learning of the student. While in each environment students may be expected to begin to work on the portfolio as early as the first semester, the support for making this happen is not consistent in the traditional program because courses are taken from multiple instructors. Too often the portfolio becomes an end-of-program assignment requiring the student to look back over time. In the academy, students have the advantage of being exposed to required elements of the portfolio through purposeful introduction, submitting samples and receiving feedback as they learn about the skills that will lead to portfolio contributions. Students receive feedback on the artifacts and a selected portion of the written narrative section to guide their continued work on

the portfolio at the midpoint of the academy program. The continual application and collaboration, problem solving and critical thinking, allows for a rich portfolio product that exemplifies the strengths of the academy instructional model; an integrated spiral curriculum weaving new knowledge, immersion in leadership experiences, and an interrelationship of the standards applied to leadership behaviors.

University faculty often note that portfolios from students in the traditional track, although of high quality, do not possess the same level of integrated and comprehensive understanding of leadership domains and merging of theory to practice. That is a reflection on the system and the nature of the preparation program, not of the students in the traditional program.

### **Impact on Licensure and Accreditation**

Many states require a standardized licensure test designed specifically for building-level leaders. Kansas is one of those states with a required examination for candidates seeking the building-level initial license. This exam measures entry-level and standards-relevant knowledge important for competent professional practice. In brief, students in the Kansas State University preparation program taking the license exam met or exceeded the cut score in overwhelmingly successful rates. Recent accreditation reports filed by the department indicate a clear picture of exemplary learning outcomes of students in the university preparation program with 100% of students meeting a proficient level across five of the six leadership standards and a high pass rate on the measure for the remaining standard from the state licensure exam.

### **Additional Professor Reflections Comparing Academy and Traditional Courses**

An important note to be considered regarding any comparison made by university instructors between traditional program delivery and the academy model is the level of experience the instructor has with each. Currently, the majority of professors teaching in the academies served lengthy tenures as K-12 administrators before beginning their teaching at Kansas State University. Their experience has included teaching in both traditional and academy models from the start of their service at Kansas State, and there can be clear differences noted between the models from both instructional and student outcome standpoints.

### ***Advising and Assisting Students***

Students who are chosen for academy participation enjoy not only the benefits of a guided admission process, but also benefit from the close monitoring and advisement relationship that exists throughout the academy experience. One of the greatest advantages for academy participants is navigating through the routines required each semester. Because the sequence of classes is predetermined, enrollment for each semester is simplified for academy members. Not only do they benefit from hands-on directions, by comparison to traditional student peers, they do not need to be concerned with class availability or course sequencing. The process of generating their prescribed program of studies, a formal document required by the Graduate

School, is more streamlined for academy students. Although programs of study differ among all students due to their own circumstances, such as previous degrees and licensure goals, the process is simplified for both the advisor and cohort members in part because of the continual contact in class meetings.

Additionally, all students nearing graduation must meet deadlines that are required by the University, Graduate School, and College of Education. Unfortunately for the busy traditional student, these requirements are easy to overlook or miss. Because of the nature of a cohort, there is continual support from one another to make certain everyone meets their obligations. Graduation participation becomes much more of a group bonding experience than an individual accomplishment.

### ***Notable Differences Between Academy Classes and Traditional Classes***

The development of a cohesive student relationship is not only an important outcome of the academy model, but serves as a foundation for the curricular and instructional decisions made for the duration of the academy. One of the major outcome goals for students in educational leadership is to gain an awareness of the importance of systems thinking and to gain the ability to visualize the larger picture of leadership and their own role in their school, district, and community. It is easier for academy students to attain this knowledge and appreciation, because the curriculum is designed to be seamless, with the leadership standards blended class-by-class, semester-by-semester. There is more opportunity for group goals because classes can easily cross semester. By design and with intention, the conclusion of a leadership academy in many ways creates a whole far greater than the sum of its parts.

By comparison, their traditional student peers take their classes as singletons, with each class standing alone, and in an essentially random order based on when they began their program and class availability. Nonacademy traditional students are exposed to systems thinking, but the students do not have the built-in advantages created by the leadership academy.

The demographic differences between students in an academy compared to traditional model students are also noteworthy. Students in academies are employed in the same school district, while students in the traditional model classes come from a variety of districts, as well as different states. Students in traditional classes can become a de facto cohort if they take several classes together, but unlike those in an academy, there is no guarantee that all such students are on the same time frame in the program of studies. Students in the academy are all at the same place as they work toward their degree. Another demographic feature, which may be worth study, is the fact academy cohort members are chosen by their school districts, whereas traditional students have themselves made the choice to seek their degree. Are there differences in outcomes between students chosen by school districts for the program and those who self-select to seek their degree?

These and other factors account for differences instructors face teaching in the academy versus traditional classes. In a traditional class it would be far less common to coteach, but it is an essential component of the academy model. Depending on the setup of the academy, the instructor roles could include a lead professor, a colead, a visiting instructor or professor, and a district partner instructor, with all involved approved members of the Kansas State University Graduate Faculty. At a minimum, academies would include a lead professor and district partner, with other instructors periodically joining to teach in an area of expertise. The students recognize who the lead instructor is, yet also know they are equally responsible to each instructor.

Teaching topics are generally divided and shared based on interest, experience, and knowledge of the topic or textbook materials. While there is some common planning to facilitate each class session, the instructors are generally responsible for their own lessons, assignments, discussions, and grading.

The selection of instructional materials is at the sole discretion of the instructor teaching outside of an academy. School districts partner with academy instructors to select course textbooks and materials, and in many cases design those materials to fit the specific needs of their school district. This also influences instructional decisions when combined with the intentional design of the cohort membership.

Lesson planning often includes a decision to “jigsaw” assignments from texts and materials in the academy, whereas that happens with much less frequency in traditional classes. This practice is done not only to allow the coverage of more material, but out of necessity to make use of available time. The required materials and textbooks for academy students is oftentimes more extensive than for students in traditional classes, and while they are expected to read books in their entirety, a common academy practice would be to divide chapters to facilitate group presentation and discussion. A clear advantage for academy students is the ability to have group projects that can be structured and focused on a shared problem or issue.

This allows for increased opportunity to merge theory and practice in comparison to traditional classes. An issue or problem that exists in the participant school district may be shared by all cohort members, and can be a major focus examined across semesters and classes. This allows for deeper understanding of the relationship between theory and practice that can sometimes be missing for traditional model students.

#### ***Example Taken from Academy and Traditional Classes***

One feature for students in traditional classes is that the duration of a semester devoted entirely to one subject, such as ethical leadership, allows both the instructor and students to focus more in-depth and cover more related content. In the academy classes, only highlights from entire classes are presented, with the intent that each lesson, activity, or reading will fit into the larger picture of the entire academy curriculum. However, the academy presents a clear advantage by allowing the students to blend their learning across other subjects.

An example related to ethics helps to illustrate how students in the academy benefit from such an approach. Standard 5 of the ISLLC Standards states “Ethical Principles and Professional Norms: An educational leader promotes the success of every student by acting with integrity, fairness, and in an ethical manner” (2008, p. 15). One of the student outcomes from the Ethical Dimensions of Leadership class is for students to become better decision makers in all aspects of leadership. Students achieve this through practice and the use of resolution principles applied to ethical dilemma paradigms, and increase their skills through a process Rushworth Kidder (2003) describes as ethical fitness. Early in the academy, students are presented identical material related to ethical dilemmas that students in traditional classes receive. The difference for academy students is that there is greater opportunity to apply their resolution principles to a variety of situations, including the shared problems and issues they face together. This allows for not only a greater and deeper understanding of their own ethical fitness journey, but allows them to apply ethical decision-making practices throughout the remainder of the academy curriculum. Ethical resolution principles are then stressed when students later create research questions, analyze data, make decisions related to school culture, and nearly every other aspect of the academy curriculum.

This type of repetition and application simply cannot be done to the same degree for students outside of the academy experience, in part because there is no consistency as to when classes are taken in the course sequence for those students. That problem exists for other classes as well, and is a major reason the students in the academy often have a greater understanding of the larger, overall systems approach goal that we strive to have for all students.

#### **Conclusion**

As leadership in schools becomes ever more challenging, requiring multiple participants, and as the need grows for leaders to bring an increasingly greater array of skills, one university transformed school leadership preparation from the traditional model to a model based on building authentic partnerships with school districts. The result is a two-year master’s program designed to produce the leadership needed in the district where the teachers are already blooming as potential leaders. While the partnership model now accounts for over 90% of the master’s program enrollment at the university, both models fill a need in terms of making the program outcome available to all students. This article presents a contrast between the two delivery models, from the perspective of three university professors who have delivered instruction in both. Figure 3 presents a summary of the comparisons noted.





Figure 3 | **Contrasting Traditional Master’s Program and Partnership Masters Academy**

| Characteristic                 | Typical Traditional University Master's in Educational Leadership Program  | District/University Partnership Academy Model  |
|--------------------------------|--|--|
| <b>Instructor Role</b>         | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Individual, university staff instructor with content expertise</li> <li>• Multiple instructors across program courses</li> <li>• Guest instructors may be invited</li> <li>• Scope of instruction: In depth content area</li> <li>• Limited connection to other courses content</li> </ul>  | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Team teaching with representation from both theory and practice</li> <li>• Consistent instructor presence</li> <li>• Guest instructors may be invited</li> <li>• District experts share application of concepts in actual work setting</li> <li>• Connect content topics in integrated context</li> </ul>   |
| <b>Student Demographics</b>    | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Students come from multiple districts</li> <li>• Class membership changes each course</li> <li>• Students self-select course enrollment after admission to department</li> </ul>  | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Students share common work environment</li> <li>• Closed cohort for two years</li> <li>• Employer selects class members based on performance in the district and enter at designated time after department admission</li> </ul>   |
| <b>Program of Study</b>        | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Discrete content knowledge aligned with leadership standards</li> <li>• No firm connection between classroom learning and field experiences</li> <li>• Typical college content textbooks</li> <li>• Discrete course offerings from various instructors encountered as students enroll and courses are offered</li> <li>• Gaps in enrollment or course offerings may interrupt flow on individual student basis</li> <li>• Students learn about other districts</li> <li>• Option for building leader's license</li> </ul> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Integrated content knowledge aligned with leadership standards</li> <li>• Developmental application in authentic setting with strong feedback loop</li> <li>• Contemporary materials aligned with district priorities</li> <li>• Integrated spiraling curriculum in sequential delivery. Ongoing interaction with District Planning Committee keeps continuous learning curriculum current over time</li> <li>• Set beginning and ending program dates</li> <li>• Students learn more about their own district programs and services</li> <li>• Option for building leader license</li> </ul> |
| <b>Student Support Systems</b> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• University advisement</li> <li>• Student networks emerge across districts</li> </ul>  | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• University and district advisement</li> <li>• Multiple networks emerge within district</li> <li>• One-on-one district mentor support</li> </ul>   |
| <b>Assessment</b>              | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Assessment of course work assigned by instructor</li> <li>• May include separate hours in a practicum supervised by a field practitioner</li> <li>• Assessment decisions by instructor</li> </ul>   | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Holistic view of student assessment over the two years</li> <li>• Ongoing collaborative assessment of coursework and immediate application of performance over two years</li> </ul>   |
| <b>Other Benefits</b>          | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Students make contacts in other districts that may lead to future employment options</li> <li>• Coursework based on campus or online</li> <li>• Coursework generalized</li> <li>• Class schedule coordinated with university calendar</li> </ul>  | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Students clarify district procedures and showcase skills to district decision makers that may lead to future advancement options</li> <li>• Coursework delivered within district with strong face-to-face component</li> <li>• Coursework has tight connection to district goals and priorities</li> <li>• Class schedule coordinated with district calendar</li> <li>• Students gain broader understanding of complexity of district decisions</li> <li>• District has two years to observe growth in prospective future position candidates</li> </ul>                                      |

## Endnotes

<sup>1</sup> To see a complete list of past and present academies and partners see Figures 3 and 4 in Mary Devin's "Transforming the Preparation of Leaders into a True Partnership Model," previously in this issue.

<sup>2</sup> An important distinction is made here: The earliest versions (1987- 1998) of leadership academies, as they were called, were post-master's degree professional development for practicing school leaders. Subsequent leadership academies of this "second wave", which is what is referenced here and the primary focus of this themed issue, have been partnerships for preservice prospective school leaders, providing master's degrees to the selected participants. For more on this distinction, see previous commentary in this issue, David Thompson's "Revisiting Public School/University Partnerships for Formal Leadership Development: A Brief 30-Year Retrospective."

<sup>3</sup> For more on the district liaison perspective, see previously in this issue Debra Gustafson and Nancy Kiltz's "District Liaison Involvement in Partnership Academies."

<sup>4</sup> For more on the student perspective and leadership growth in the partnership academy model, see previously in this issue Pilar Mejía, Samrie Devin, and Heather Calvert's "Inspiring Confidence and Professional Growth in Leadership: Students Perspectives on University-District Partnership Master's Academies."

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