Identifying the Administrative Dispositions Most Preferred by Urban School Leaders and School Leadership Candidates

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Abstract

This research study delves into the newly crafted ISSLC national school leadership standards asking current school leaders and school leadership candidates to prioritize their perceived level of importance of 20 administrative dispositions. 128 school principals and 165 school leadership candidates in the NYC schools responded to an electronic survey. Although an overall moderate correlation existed between the two constituencies, significant differences also emerged. For example, using a wider range of technology applications and protecting scheduled instructional time were seen as critical by the aspiring school leader, whereas current school leaders placed a heavier emphasis on building positive relationships with staff and using student test score data to drive instructional change. Implications for professional practice were drawn for both the role of the principal as well as for improving school leadership preparation programs.

Keywords: Urban education, administrative dispositions, school leadership, academic leadership, school leadership preparation programs, staff development, national core leadership standards and school climate

Background of the Study:
Instructional Dispositions Needed by the School Leader

There is little doubt that principals need to focus on the instructional process for both the benefit of their students as well as their teachers to help them reach higher achievement levels. For the past several decades, research indicates that higher performing schools are most frequently connected to the active engagement of the school leader in the learning process (Leithwood, 2003; Morrison, 2009). More than ever, school administrators are expected to be change agents leading the instructional mission (Cunningham & Cordeiro, 2009).

Determining the best way to accomplish relationship building with staff members and finding a way to forge consensus to improve instructional practices is a skill set that must be acquired and refined by the school leader (Fullan, 2012). The more that school leaders focus their relationships, their daily work, and their personal learning to the core business of teaching and learning, the greater is their influence on student outcomes (Robinson, 2008).

In particular, the skill set needed by urban school leaders seem to be identifiable as being distinct from other geographic settings (Marcos, 2011). When the Principal's Academy in the California urban schools focused greater attention on the understanding of "self" with school leader candidates and promoted taking courageous leaps into action,

their students demonstrated marked improvement in their performances (p. 253). In urban locales, the issue of persistent student transiency (and dealing with student resiliency in crisis) demands knowledge not traditionally found in educational preparation environments (Tobin, 2016).

Researchers have found that a positive correlation exists between certain types of school leadership dispositions and the academic performance of students (Marzano & McNulty, 2005). Specifically, a handful of "personal dispositions exhibited by the school leaders are critical to explain a high percentage of positive educational changes" (Leithwood, 2003, p. 3). Therefore, educational leadership preparation programs have an obligation not only to identify appropriate leadership dispositions in their own university's curricula but also to embed the study of these desirable dispositions into our future school leader training programs via persistent modeling and rehearsal.

Interstate School Leaders Licensure Consortium (ISLLC) standards identify foundational core values required by practicing school leaders to accomplish their tasks. Recently, these national standards have been reconfigured to accentuate the evolving body of research on the student learning process and to identify administrative dispositions used in a learning-supportive school environment.

Focusing on administrative dispositions to enhance student learning is a key concept. "Collectively, this new tier of prioritization can be characterized as leadership for learning. This leadership for learning requires school leaders to primarily focus on supporting student needs and to complement adult learning" (CCSSO, 2014, p. 2). These newly adopted ISSLC standards form the perspective for this study and as such dominate our review and analysis.

In conducting a study of national core standards on educational leadership it is important to note that a model of "one size fits all" is not the exclusive school leadership preparation paradigm. When critical administrative dispositions are cited in the national core standards, this overarching construct becomes more restrictive and may not have direct relevancy to each institution. Hoy and Miskel (2013) would argue that this type of closed system severely curtails critical thought. Once the organization of schools becomes a bureaucratic process developed by agents external to the system, initial creativity and potential energy of the staff dissipates.

Spillane and Diamond (2010) would expand this theory by asserting that leadership is best served when designed by and tied to current organizational members influencing the practices of others. This research project does not debate the relative merits of an open or a closed review system but acknowledges that more than one administrative platform is certainly worthy of greater analysis.

Additional research is needed on how to create the conditions so that leaders can acquire the most appropriate dispositional skills to advance student learning in their setting. Being sensitive and responsive to teachers' needs and knowing how to grasp the subtle nuances inherent in a trusting internal culture also demands further reflection (Hallinger & Heck, 2010). Currently, individual states and school systems have been asked to engage all stakeholders in a discourse on the knowledge, skills, and dispositions related to the new standards suggested in the ISLLC redraft (CCSSO, 2014).

The field of educational leadership training has scant representation in terms of the content contained in its programs (Orr, 2010; Hess & Kelly, 2007). With the release of the ISLLC's updated dispositional standards, it seems an appropriate moment to

examine the suggested administrative skills and dispositions cited in the 2014 revision. In particular, identifying differing preferences and interpretations of these new standards emanating from varied educational constituents would clarify their value and potential impact.

The constituency group of urban school leaders is searching for ways to hone their personal administrative dispositional skills based on these new guidelines. In a study of school leadership that focuses on the student learning function, it is suggested that a crucial disposition necessary to stimulate instructional improvement would be for the school leader to become a consummate relationship builder with diverse people (Edgerson & Kritsonis, 2006). It is inferred that when transformational and shared instructional relationships co-exist in an integrated form, substantial reform occurs in the quality of pedagogy and the achievement levels of students (Marks & Printy, 2010).

Another constituency group, frequently missing from educational research, is the that of school leadership candidates. There is little research that systematically documents the content of leadership preparatory programs, their instructional focus, or even in the required readings assigned within their programs (Orr, 2010).

Presently, there appears to be distinguishable performance gaps in the ability of administrators immediately graduating from instructional leadership programs and the degree of exigent demand that school leaders initially face (Storey, 2013). Instructors of educational leadership preparation programs must be cognizant of these performance gaps, assess their theoretical implications, and then align their present curriculum to better meet national standards.

Significance of the Study

Given that research implies that differing school leadership styles significantly impact student learning, as well as the fact that little discrete research exists on the specific content in educational leadership preparation programs, an opportunity is created to examine basic constituency preferences for effective leadership dispositions. A study that measures the degree of congruence for preferences for critical leadership dispositions as suggested by ISLLC for school leaders and for school leadership candidates is a worthwhile area of investigation.

An initial research decision suggested that surveying school leaders alone might provide only a limited perspective on the question at hand. For that reason, the second constituency group of school leadership candidates was added. The opinions of school leadership candidates were seen as a critical dimension as they will be intricately involved in implementing instructional standards in their individual schools.

The phraseology suggested in the newly drafted national ISLLC core standards provides a baseline to analyze perceptual differences; it also allows for insightful research into how these particular standards might be seen as priorities by different educational constituencies. The differences in the preferred leadership dispositions held by each group can be first ascertained and then tested in terms of the strength of their relationship. An analysis of these differences would enrich our conceptualization of leadership practice as well as fulfill the request of the Council of Chief State School Officers (CCSSO, 2014) to engage in greater local dialogue on the value and appropriateness of the proposed newly written ISLLC standards.

There are four research questions being examined in this study:

1. From the list of revised draft ISLLC standards in 2014, which instructional dispositions are most preferred by school leaders?
2. From the list of revised draft of the ISLLC standards in 2014, which instructional dispositions are most preferred by school leadership candidates?
3. What are the similarities and differences between school leaders and school leader candidates in terms of their preferences for the cited administrative dispositions?
4. Which types of dispositions on instructional practice are most preferred by the constituencies of school leaders and school leader candidates?

Review of the Literature

With a deeper understanding of "self and the impact of their dispositions, leaders can, if necessary, modify their beliefs and values to enhance skillful performance in schools" (Green & Cooper, 2013, p. 3). The emphasis on the expanded leadership role aimed at student learning has placed increased demands on implementing a high quality teacher observation system to ensure that educators are taking the correct steps to improve student performance (Darling-Hammond, 2010). Based on a new conceptual stance on evaluation and supervision, greater emphasis needs to be embraced by the school leader to create a stronger and more collaborative relationship between the leader and teacher (Edgerson & Kritsonis, 2006). In the current parlance of school leadership reform, planning for improved instruction with teachers is now termed to be a human capital enterprise.

The term "educational dispositions" first rose to prominence in the mid 1990's, replacing the former term "attitudes" found in the 1992 Interstate New Teacher Assessment Support Consortium (INTASC) Report, which argued that inherent intrinsic values will drive behaviors (Freeman, 2003, p. 373). The National Council of Accreditation for Teacher Education (NCATE, 2010) further defines professional dispositions as "values, commitments, and professional ethics that influence behavior" (p. 48). Dispositions are tendencies for individuals to act in a specific manner under particular circumstances, based on their belief system.

A tendency implies a pattern of behavior that is predictive of future actions (Tato & Coupland, 2003). The definition of dispositions in this study closely follows the research of Villegas (2007) in stating that a dispositional tendency implies a pattern of behavior that is the most likely to be predictive of one's future actions.

University professors consistently strive to select the most appropriate content to include within their school leadership programs, determine appropriate administrative models to study, and identify ways to assess school program effectiveness. The process needed to make administrative decisions is best left to scientifically-based tools to guide the way (Melton, Tysinger, Molloy, & Green, 2010).

In reviewing the relevant current literature on urban school leadership, there are two major elements that consistently reappear. The issue of comprehending the nuances of ethnic identity and the manner in which instruction is delivered are observable components within the current research of the urban school framework. Milligan and

Howley (2015) point out that many urban students are often color-conscious as well as being acutely aware of cultural identity. If a teacher has a different skin color and uses culturally insensitive language, there is often a strong denial of relationship with the instructor. In fact, even when a teacher possesses a comparable ethnic identity but intentionally or unintentionally is mostly dismissive of a student's cultural background, the degree of trust extended to the teacher wanes.

Beyond the issue of ethnic identity, urban students also want to be heard as distinct, respected voices coming from an identifiable cultural community with specific issues such as neighborhood safety, frequent family transiency, and encountering cultural barriers preventing them from moving higher in societal structure (McKnight, 2015). When issues of urban life are excluded from any formal discussion, students feel a stronger sense of isolation. In addition to community and ethnic backgrounds, urban students also carefully scrutinize any physical actions taken by school and local community leaders (Green, 2015). If decisions are made or actions taken that promote the continuance of class distinction or block the integration of ethnicities, students are quick to notice them, lowering their overall confidence in the formal construct of a governmental structure such as schools.

A second prevalent theme is improving the quality of urban education centers on the delivery of program instruction. Using teacher-centered focus groups, as compared to individual teacher preparation, of instructional planning leads to improved student performance (Portin et al., 2009). Empowering teachers to make decisions on content and delivery leads to greater inclusion of cultural diversity and provides a greater array of authentic educational perspectives. In another study designed to improve urban educational practices, by Halverson and Clifford (2015), school leaders that train and encourage teachers to utilize distributed instructional practices have experienced beneficial results. Distributed education occurs when teachers incorporate video and internet applications in their instruction, which is keenly aligned to the way that urban student interact with technology.

School values and school cultures are the undercurrent that drives the values, norms, dispositions, and traditions that define the quality of a school (Eakes, 2008). One researcher found that identifying school leadership dispositions to be so crucial to the success of a school that "it should be the very first place for any organization to consider in training transformational leaders" (Verland, 2012, p.15). Moreover, it seems that school leadership dispositions are not only more difficult to teach than knowledge and skills, they are also much more challenging to define and to measure (Edick, Danielson, & Edwards, 2007). For contextualization purposes, dispositions in this study are seen as those skills, knowledge sets, and active steps that educators are most likely to take in the completion of their daily work.

In theory, first-year principals need to be ready from the very start of their tenure to identify and implement instructional-based activities in a mutual collaboration process with staff to transform their school to an improved state of student learning (CCSSO, 2013). Using the combined knowledge and commitment of all stakeholders, school leaders need to focus on and support high-level student learning activities collectively developed and implemented by staff (Sanders & Simpson. 2005).

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Methodology

Selection of Participants

New York City Public Schools were selected as the data pool for urban school leaders. After receiving permission from the Institutional Review Board of New York City, 365 different schools were contacted with a distribution of 125 high schools, 58 middle schools, and 183 elementary school principals being sent surveys. Participants were asked to voluntarily complete an electronic survey.

All of the twelve university leadership program directors of school leadership preparation programs associated with MCEAP (Metropolitan Council of Educational Administration Professors) in New York City were also contacted via a listserv directory. These directors were asked to send an electronic survey to their educational candidates who were near the completion of their school leadership program in an anonymous format. It was reasoned that graduate students who were unnamed in survey use would be more likely to respond. In all, 325 educational leadership candidates were sent a survey requesting voluntary participation. A response was requested within a six-week window.

Development of the Survey Instrument

An online survey was seen as the most efficient way to gather data within the first six weeks of initial dissemination. The twenty administrative "dispositions" were chosen directly from the newly drafted 2014 ISLLC standards. Within the newly written ISLLC standards, the specific standards selected that had the greatest resonance with instructional leadership were chosen: Instruction, Curriculum, and School Culture (CCSSO, 2014).

Respondents were asked the question: "From this list of 20 potential administrative dispositions that a school leader could possess, please indicate the top five preferences that you would personally select to improve the student learning process." Applying this approach to the data, each respondent selected five dispositions and fifteen others would be omitted.

Once the participants individually rated their individual dispositions, it would then be possible to arrange a list of preferred dispositions in a priority ranking from highest to lowest. These prioritized ranks could then be analyzed as a collective source of data, as well as broken down into the two selected constituency groups for basic comparison.

Categorizing by Various Types of Dispositions

In examining the dispositional functions suggested in the 2014 ISLLC draft standards, it was possible to further divide them into differentiated categories. The five types of dispositions were intentionally randomized in their placement on the survey to see if certain types of dispositions would be seen as more preferred than other types by the two constituencies. The dispositions stated below comprise five different types:

1. *Selecting Instructional Approaches:* "Employs technology in the service of teaching" (Item # 5); "Works to create productive relationships with students, staff, parents and members of the extended school community to increase learning" (Item # 6); "Ensures the use of effective differentiated pedagogy and student supports to reduce the learning gap" (Item # 16); and "Ensures that instruction is authentic and relevant to students' experiences" (Item # 20).
2. *Use of Instructional Theories:* "Ensures strength-based approaches to teaching and learning" (Item # 4); "Ensures that instruction is anchored on best understanding of child development and effective pedagogy" (Item # 9); "Ensures the presence of culturally responsive pedagogy that affirms student identities" (Item # 11); and "Ensures the use of learning experiences that enhance both the enjoyment of and success in learning" (Item # 12).
3. *Developing the School Environment:* "Ensures that students are enmeshed in a safe, secure, emotionally protective, and healthy environment" (Item # 1); "Ensures the formation of a school culture defined by trust" (Item # 2); "Ensures that each student has sustained social and academic support" (Item # 8); and "Monitors instructional time carefully" (Item # 13).
4. *Forming School Goals/ Using Assessment:* "Ensures the use of pedagogy that treats students as individuals and develops a concept of self" (Item # 3); "Maintains a culture of high expectations and challenge" (Item # 7); "Direct curricula and related assessments to maximize opportunities for student learning" (Item # 10); and "Uses assessment data in ways that are appropriate for their intended uses" (Item # 19).
5. *Adopting Student-Centered Activities:* "Nurtures the development of learning that places children at the heart of learning" (Item # 14); "Ensures that each student is known, accepted, and valued and feels a sense of belonging" (Item # 15); "Ensures that each student is an active participant taking responsibility for learning" (Item # 17); and "Provides students with social and academic experiences that are congruent with their culture and language" (Item # 18).

Data-Gathering Procedures

In the case of the school leaders, an electronic survey personalized by name was sent to each of the current principals in the sample. Principals were asked to first carefully read the entire list of twenty administrative dispositions and then select their top five preferences, with a return request of one month cited. If the school leader did not respond within the first month, an electronic reminder was sent out.

For educational leadership candidates, coordinators of educational leadership programs were contacted in the greater New York City area asking for their institution's voluntary participation. If consent was attained, the electronic survey was then sent to the various candidates using their university's listserv mechanism. A similar procedure was used asking for a one-month return. A reminder was sent out after the window of one month expired.

Anonymity of respondent data was promised to all participants. Survey results were processed through a data collection service known as "student voice." This electronic system, popularly used in university settings, has the capacity to send out

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electronic surveys, store data and disaggregate the data findings from all sets of the general population.

Results and Findings

The results of the study indicate that although there is a moderate correlation for preferred dispositions between the two constituency groups, there were also several areas in which the two groups held different beliefs on which dispositions were the most preferred. It is the careful analysis of these two different sets preferences by the two constituencies that is important to examine.

Table 1
Comparison of Dispositions Preferred by Constituencies

#	Disposition	Leader N=128			Candidate N=165		
		Rank	Mean	SD	Rank	Mean	SD
1	Safe Environment	3	2.65	3.98	2	3.35	3.82
2	Trusting Culture	1	3.35	3.82	4	3.15	3.87
3	Students as Individual	13	1.25	4.30	15	1.25	4.30
4	Strength Based	19	.40	4.50	17	.90	4.38
5	Technology	20	.20	4.54	8	2.55	4.0
6	Productive Relationship	2	3.15	3.87	11	2.05	4.01
7	High Expectations	4	2.55	4.00	1	3.70	3.74
8	Academic Support	9	1.70	4.20	5	3.0	3.90
9	Child Development	5	2.20	4.08	10	2.15	4.09
10	Maximize Learning	10	1.6	4.22	19	.60	4.45
11	Culturally Responsive	18	.50	4.47	20	.50	4.47
12	Success in Learning	12	1.35	4.27	12	1.90	4.15
13	Instructional Time	16	.80	4.40	6	2.75	3.96
14	Child-based learning	14	1.05	4.35	18	.75	4.42
15	Value Students	15	.90	4.38	13	1.75	4.19
16	Differentiated Instruction	8	1.90	4.15	3	3.25	3.84
17	Student Responsive Learn	7	2.0	4.15	9	2.40	4.04
18	Match Culture to Academics	17	.75	4.42	14	1.50	4.24
19	Uses Assessments	6	2.1	4.11	16	.10	4.57
20	Authentic Instruction	11	1.5	4.24	7	2.56	4.00

Areas of Highest-Rated Preferred Congruence

In reviewing similarities, there were three dispositions that were consistently rated highly by the two constituencies. "Establishing a safe school environment" was rated as the number three preference by school leaders and was rated as number two by school leadership candidates. "Creating a trusting school culture" was the number one

preference for school leaders and was seen as the fourth highest preference for the school leadership candidates. "Setting high academic expectations for students" was the number four preference for the school leader and was the first preference for school leadership candidates. In all, the three dispositions of establishing a safe school environment, creating a trusting school culture, and setting high student academic expectations were all rated within the top five preferences by the two constituencies.

Areas of Lowest-Rated Preferred Congruence

There were 4 other identifiable dispositions that were similarly ranked but selected as lower preferences by the two demographic groups. The "development of culturally responsive materials" was rated as the 18th preference by the school leaders and was rated as the 20th preference by the school leadership candidates. The "use of a strength-based approach to pedagogy" was ranked as the 19th preference by the school leaders and was rated as 17th by the school leadership candidates. "Implementing elements of child-based theories" was selected as the 14th preference by the school leaders and was the 18th preference for the school leadership candidates. Finally, "matching a school's culture to the academic content" was seen as the 17th preference by the leaders and was the 14th preference for the school leadership candidates.

Areas of Distinct Contrast

In all, there were 5 preferences that were ranked in direct contrast between the two constituencies in terms of their relative perceived preference:
1. The school leaders rated using "technology as an invaluable component of instruction" as their lowest preference (rank #20), while this disposition was the 8th highest preference for the school leadership candidates.
2. Using "student assessments as an appropriate way to improve instruction" was seen as the 6th highest preference for the school leaders, but the school leadership candidates placed this disposition as their 16th preference.
3. "Careful monitoring of the use of instructional time" was deemed to be the 16th highest preference for the school leaders but was the 6th preference for the school leadership candidates.
4. The disposition of school administrators "to develop productive relationships with their school staff" was rated as the 2nd highest preference for the school leaders, but the school leadership candidates placed this item as their 11th highest preference.
5. Lastly, "maximizing curricular options" was the 19th preference for the school leader, yet school leadership candidates rated it as their 10th highest disposition.

Correlation of Ranked Dispositions

Through the application of a Spearman Rank Order Correlation, a statistically moderate correlation (rho=.509) existed between the expressed preferences of school leaders and school leadership candidates. A Pearson Product-Moment Correlation is a statistically

accepted method used to measure the degree of congruence between ranked pairs. (Harring, 2011). In reviewing the standard deviation between ranked dispositions, values tended to cluster to a consistently close central tendency.

Findings on the Types of Dispositions Preferred by Groups

Table 2
Grouping of Preferred Administrative Dispositions by Types

Disposition	School Leaders	Leadership Candidates	Disposition	School Leaders	Leadership Candidates
	Composite Mean	Composite Mean		Composite Mean	Composite Mean
Instructional Approach			**Instructional Theory**		
Relationship	3.15	2.05	Developmental	2.20	2.15
Differentiate	1.90	3.25	Strength Base	.40	.90
Authentic	1.50	2.56	Cultural	.50	.50
Technology	.20	2.55	Success	1.35	1.90
Totals	1.68	2.60	Totals	1.11	.36
School Environment			**Reaching School Goals**		
Safe School	2.65	3.35	Individualize	1.25	1.25
Trust	3.35	3.15	High Expect.	2.55	3.70
Supportive to Academics	1.70	3.00	Maximizing Curriculum	1.60	.60
Class Time	.80	2.75	Assessment	2.10	.10
Totals	2.12	3.06	Total	1.87	1.41
Student-Centered					
Child-Based	1.05	.75			
Responsible	2.00	2.40			
Relevancy	.75	1.50			
Valued	.90	1.75			
Totals	1.17	1.60			

In general, school leaders were fairly closely clustered with their scored preferences for the various types of dispositions. The composite mean score for the five different types varied from a low of 1.17 for student-centered preferences to a high of 2.12 for dispositions that dealt with improving the school environment. In the case of leadership candidates, the five mean scores grew from a low mean of 1.36 for instructional theory up to a high score 3.06 for improving the school environment. Taking composite ratings per category allowed for computing the mean.

In aggregate, improving the school environment was the disposition that received the highest rating. However, the data did not lead to a firm conclusion that one specific type of administrative disposition was seen as vastly preferable to another.

Interpretation of Results on Differing Preferences by Constituents

The data suggest that there were five basic areas of incongruent thinking on five of the dispositional values stated in the 2014 ISLLC draft:

1. *Using Technology in Your Pedagogy:* School leaders felt that in weighing the relative value of the 20 dispositions stated in the new ISLLC standard, the commitment to using technology as an integral component of student learning was ranked as their least preferred or their number 20 rank. The school leadership candidates ranked it as their eighth preferred disposition. There might be some generational perspective in place here as the younger school leadership candidates were more likely to have been raised using technological applications than the preceding generation. Another theory that could be offered is that school leaders recognize technology use as a valuable tool for learning but not necessarily a guarantee that student learning will naturally flow from its use. Given limited financial resources, it might also be possible that school leaders need to judiciously utilize available school resources to achieve the greatest perceived benefit for their value.

2. *Appropriate Use of Assessment Data*: School leaders rated the use of assessment as their sixth highest rank, while leadership candidates rated it as their 16th. School leaders are now facing increasing demands to validate effective educational practices (NCATE, 2010). Both federal and state bureaucracies are requesting data-driven analyses to support local claims of competency. Since these increased visible measures are embedded in quality reviews and evaluation procedures, urban school leaders utilize varied forms of assessment data as a basic function in their daily tasks. School leadership candidates might have a lower preference for the concept of using data due to a lower degree of perceived need. The disparity in this preference might also indicate that the present pool of educational leadership candidates have not yet been fully versed in how analysis of assessment data can better inform their instructional practice.

3. *Careful Focus on Instructional Time*: School leaders ranked this disposition as their 16th highest preference. School leadership candidates placed its importance much higher, selecting it as their 6th highest. Since many school leader candidates are still presently serving as classroom educators, they are cognizant that every instructional minute has distinct value. Teachers also are experiencing a demand for greater competency (Darling-Hammond, 2010). Connecting teacher effectiveness with the achievement of student test scores requires the educator to cover prescribed core content within a fairly rigid timeframe. School leaders may not resonate with the perceived importance of scheduled instructional time but might focus more on the larger perspective of improving student test score results within standardized testing.

4. *Developing Productive Relationships with Others*: School leaders clearly understand that developing positive and cooperative relationships with teachers, parents, and students is a key component in setting up an effective environment for learning. Leaders rate this item near the very top of their required duties, putting it as their second highest preference while school leadership candidates see this need as their 11th highest preference. School leaders see the effect that developing positive social relationships has in the daily life of the school. Within the construct of social relationship building, factors such as trust, reliance, and constructive guidance are valuable commodities for all participants. When teachers form a stronger bond with their school leader, they are much more likely to seek instructional support and increase their personal commitment on job performance (Hallinger & Heck, 2010).

5. *Focus on Student Learning:* School leaders rated this disposition as their tenth highest preference. School leadership candidates, however, saw this item in a different light, rating it as their 19th most preferred item. One potential explanation might be that school leaders have the consistent experience of stating that student learning is at the very core of their educational mission, but the school leadership candidates have not yet analyzed this position or attempted to take the pragmatic steps needed to approach maximizing student learning.

Limitations of the Study

Several limitations on the interpretation of the results and findings are acknowledged:

1. As a research study, the design of interpreting these results merely indicates a ranked order of preferences for specific items from a limited selection of choices. It also allowed for a measurement of the strength of correlation between two groups. Nonetheless, this study was not designed to lead to an exact analysis of direct cause and effect relationships.

2. Any theory attached to the results on the importance or the rationale of preferences is purely speculative.

3. Assumptions given on the results emanate from the review of the literature, the professional practices in place for urban school leaders, as well as available data from university leadership preparation programs.

4. Selecting only urban school leaders as our total pool of participants is also a limiting factor in that the perspective from this constituency group may not reflect the entire perception of the educational community.

Suggested Future Research

Findings given here just begin to scratch the surface of identifying the type, the nature, and the degree of preference that school leaders might hold for specific administrative dispositional traits. Additional studies should follow with qualitative analyses on this topic as well as moving beyond the limited set of expert opinions suggested from the

ISLLC data to reach a greater range of options. Continued focus on dispositions for instructional leadership in schools searching to improve student learning might lead to the examination of other pertinent research questions, such as:

1. Which dispositions aimed at relationship building with teachers held by the school leader most significantly impact student learning?
2. How does administrative locus of control impact student learning?
3. How does the impact of prior training by the school leader on student learning theories affect achievement levels?
4. What effect do certain administrative dispositions have on students internalizing learning outcomes?
5. What impact do certain administrative dispositions play in engaging parents in the student learning process?

Implications for Administrative Practice

After a review of the data, six major implications of practice arise. Three of these implications apply to the practice of school leadership and three of them reference practice for leadership preparation programs.

Implications for School Leaders

1. *Technology Use*: The relatively low value placed on the use of technology by school leaders related to student learning is counter-intuitive to current educational trends. Given the consistent surge of technology use in schools in the last two decades and the rapid rise of technological-based applications in learning software, school leaders would do well to more deeply consider the use of technology as a viable educational tool to embed in their educational practice.
2. *Monitoring of Instructional Time*: School leaders view the monitoring of instructional time in a different manner than teachers. It seems reasonable to conclude that school leaders minimize the relative value of maintaining maximum instructional time, placing it at a different critical-need level than teachers. Protecting instructional time needs to be a stronger dispositional goal.
3. *Higher Value Placed on Developing the School Environment:* The data reveal that school leaders place a higher value on improving the school environment than they do for considering the maximization of increasing curricular options. There is little doubt that there is an interactive effect on well-structured school management and the progressive strength of student learning (Hallinger & Heck, 2010) but caution is suggested as to where the greater degree of focus needs to be placed. Greater focus on studying student learning theories would be beneficial.

Implications for Educational Leadership Preparation Programs

1. *Use of Assessment Data*: Seeing the lower preference given for using assessment data by leaders might indicate that school leadership preparatory programs need to be more explicit in the explanation of how to use data to improve instruction and include these materials within their core curricula. Some theorists argue that learning improves when students directly relate to the hands-on approach of seeing results. (Mandinach & Honey, 2011).

2. *Relationship Building*: Given the lower priority held by school leadership candidates on the importance of building personal relationships, it would also be prudent to ensure that leadership preparation programs include a greater emphasis on the social interaction skills needed by school leaders to work collaboratively with the staff. The very high dispositional priority ascribed by current school leaders on working to build social relations with staff testifies to this need. If trust or the relationship status is weak between teacher and leader, any effort to plan for improved instruction is fraught with greater opposition (Edgerson & Kritsonis, 2006).

3. *Maximizing the Focus on Student Learning*: Since school leadership candidates have placed this function as one of their lowest rated dispositions, it may indicate that either school leadership candidates themselves or school leadership preparation programs have not yet internalized or accepted the importance of student learning as a leadership goal. Candidates do not see the concept of focusing on student learning as being in the forefront of their daily work, yet all of the bureaucratic accountability standards move this disposition forward as a most crucial consideration. School leadership preparation programs need to actively highlight this topic as a foundational element and assist school leadership candidates to realize that state and local district program audits and staff evaluations methodologies will consistently refer to the degree of student achievement as recorded in standardized testing results.

Conclusions

As a general synopsis, the strength of correlation on preferred dispositions between the two constituencies of urban school leaders and school leader candidates implies that future school administrators are moderately correlated with urban school leaders. In a closer examination of specific preferred values, some disparities in thought are identified that might be attributable to generational differences, familiarity with instructional design theory, or in seeing a critical need to build social relationships with staff.

With a particular focus on student learning as suggested in the 2014 re-drafted ISLLC administrative dispositions, there is a moderate correlation validated between urban school leaders and school leadership candidates. However, there are also specific administrative dispositions cited in the draft standards that elicit different levels of preference between two responding groups. These different perspectives between the two constituencies are:

1. In considering the use of "technology" in the process of teaching, leadership candidates assumed that this learning tool would be a natural application used in everyday life while the leaders might have interpreted the term "technology service" in a different context with other potential implications.
2. Using a "strength-based" approach with students might infer that respondents were not fully aware of the semantic meaning of this term and therefore not able to assess benefit or value.
3. It would be reasonable to assume that all constituencies would be quite satisfied if all aspects of school life focused on a maximization of student learning. However, knowing how to reach this goal does not seem to be a seamless entity found in school leadership preparation programs.
4. Placing a higher value on the need to maintain and/or increase instructional time during each school day would be seen an important goal to examine. In the light of existing union contracts, related educational expenses, providing adequate staffing levels and meeting more rigid national mandates this goal is in need of nuanced interpretation.

There are parallel demands to continue to investigate two strands of this discussion. First there is a necessity for universities to carefully consider the implications of the changing nature of the school leaders' role in terms of leading instructional improvement, and secondly there is an essential duty to demonstrate examples of a realistic process by which school leadership candidates learn how this designated goal can be implemented.

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