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Evaluating the Effectiveness of Traditional and Alternative Principal Preparation Programs

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INTRODUCTION

While most reformers and educators agree effective school leaders make a significant impact on student achievement, two of the most highly debated topics in education is how to best prepare leaders for a 21st century school and how to evaluate their effectiveness. Since the creation of the principal's position, education reform has brought about legislation transforming the principal's role from a building manager and disciplinarian to a multi-faceted role responsible for strategic planning, managing funds, ensuring legislative compliance, implementing reforms, and increasing student achievement.

During the early to mid-twentieth century, formal educational leadership programs were established to train school principals, and past research indicates training programs have failed to keep pace with the evolving principal's role (Butler, 2008; Duncan, Range, & Scherz, 2011; Fleck, 2008; Hernandez, Roberts, & Menchaca, 2012; Lashway, 1999, 2003; Levine, 2005; Lynch, 2012; Miller, 2013; Reed & Kinsler, 2010; Zubnzycki, 2013). With the increased accountability on principals, it is paramount preparation programs adapt their practices to effectively prepare principals to lead in a 21st century learning environment.

In 2001, Congress passed the No Child Left Behind (NCLB) Act increasing the role of the federal government in ensuring a quality public education for all students (Randolph & Wilson-Younger, 2012). More specifically, NCLB mandated states set standards for educator quality and student performance and held schools and placed accountability measures on school districts for student achievement results for all students. To comply with the NCLB Act, Mississippi set standards to define "highly qualified" educators and developed a mandatory statewide testing program for grades three through eight and selected courses in high school (Mississippi Office of Student Assessment, n.d.).

REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

J. Alvin Wilbanks stated, “Leadership is the fundamental element that can drive an organization to phenomenal success, and lack of leadership can anchor it solidly in mediocrity, or worse” (Mendels & Mitgang, 2013, p. 8). Among school related influences, leadership is the second most influential factor on student learning, surpassed only by effective classroom teachers (Davis & Darling-Hammond, 2012; Lynch, 2012; Mendels & Mitgang, 2013; Miller 2013; Reames, 2010). Recognizing the importance of school leadership in improving student achievement, researchers and policy makers have begun targeting leadership in reform efforts. Duncan et al. (2011) noted improving instructional leadership as a cost effective way to improve teaching and learning throughout the entire school. While the notion of school leadership often encompasses activities undertaken by teachers, community groups, and site-based teams, Kafka (2009) contends school leadership usually refers to the work of the principal.

Historical Perspective of School Leadership

During the early nineteenth century, educational administration was not recognized as a distinct profession in American public education as school leaders were learned authorities, with little or no training, whose insights into the truth guided teachers, students, and the public (Lashway, 2009). The shift from one-room school houses to graded schools where students were placed in separate classrooms based on age and performance transformed the “principal teacher” position into a more authoritative role with additional responsibilities including organizing courses of study, administering discipline, and supervising the operation of all classes (Rousmaniere, 2007). Though reformers were making strides towards professionalizing educational administration, by the end of the century the principalship was still a poorly defined position with varying roles and responsibilities.

The early twentieth century brought about some separation of the principal and the teacher. Rousmaniere (2013) noted educational reformers of this time saw a professional improvement of the principal as a necessary task for the construction of a modern school

system and developed four strategies to clarify and enhance the role of the principal. Reformers reshaped the regular responsibilities of the principal away from the classroom towards specific administrative work housed in a separate principal's office, reinforced the principal's authority as a supervisor of teachers, promoted a competitive credentialing process for the principalship through colleges and universities, and developed a campaign to increase the number of men in educational administration (Rousmaniere, 2013). Principals joined reformers in the crusade for professionalization of the profession by fighting for authority and establishing professional organizations such as the National Association of Secondary School Principals (NASSP), the National Association of Elementary School Principals (NAESP), and the National Education Association (NEA) to legitimize the idea that principals drew upon specific knowledge and skills (Kafka, 2009). By mid-twentieth century schools were increasingly replacing the church as American society's central site of socialization, and as education became a more important part of American life, principals became an even more important part of American life (Kafka, 2009). Duncan et al. (2011) noted by the 1940s, principals were expected to be democratic leaders, and by the 1950s, principals took on the role of applying school law to ensure equity and equality.

The latter part of the twentieth century would mark the beginning of another major shift for the American public school principal. Research and policy studies began emerging which would lead the shift from the principal as managers whose main focus was making sure the school operated smoothly to instructional leaders who focused on student learning. Leading the way in the shift in the role of the principal to an instructional leader was the National Commission on Excellence in Education's (1983) report, *A Nation at Risk: The Imperative for Educational Reform* and a growing body of research on effective schools. With further reform efforts in 2001, the federal government passed the reauthorization of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act, also known as the No Child Left Behind (NCLB) Act, and schools became increasingly accountable for student achievement. As research revealed the effects

leadership could have on student achievement, lawmakers and policymakers gained an increasing interest in public education, and the principal's role began to evolve into the complex role of the 21st century principal.

Public School Accountability

In 2001, the federal government passed the No Child Left Behind (NCLB) Act, which many consider the most sweeping education-reform legislation since the Elementary and Secondary Schools Act of 1965 (United States Department of Education, 2004). NCLB dramatically increased the federal government's role in in guaranteeing the quality of public education for all children in the United States, with an emphasis on increased funding for poor school districts, higher achievement for poor and minority students, and new accountability measures for students' progress in an effort to close achievement gaps (Public Broadcasting Service, n.d.). No Child Left Behind accountability measures expanded the role of standardized testing in public schools by requiring any school receiving federal funds to test students in grades three through eight once each year in reading and math and once during high school. Federally funded schools must also test students in science once in elementary school, once in middle school, and once in high school (Burke, 2012). According to Burke (2012), NCLB required states to disaggregate the performance data on these assessments among subgroups of race, income level, English language learners, and students with disabilities; moreover, the law established a myriad of new federal sanctions to punish states failing to increase student achievement.

To comply with NCLB assessment and accountability requirements, Mississippi developed a statewide, mandatory testing program for elementary, middle, and high schools. In grades three through eight, all students were required to take the Mississippi Curriculum Test, Second Edition (MCT2) each year. The Mississippi Science Test, Second Edition (MST2) was administered annually to students in fifth and eighth grade, and in high school, students were required to take assessments in English II, Algebra I, Biology I, and U.S. History, and pass

these Subject Area Testing Program, Second Edition (SATP2) exams to be eligible for graduation from a Mississippi public high school. Students were assigned a label based upon individual scale scores achieved on the MCT2 or SATP2. The labels were, in ascending order, Minimal, Basic, Proficient, or Advanced. Growth on MCT2, on the other hand, measured student achievement based upon gains from the previous year, and growth on SATP2 was measured from students' eighth grade MCT2 scores.

For schools and districts, student achievement was measured on a Quality of Distribution Index (QDI) scale and on a growth residual (GR) component to determine the school's state and federal accountability labels. QDI scores were based solely on student performance in a particular year and were unrelated to previous achievement levels. Schools and districts received a label from the Mississippi Department of Education based upon their students' scale scores, or QDI, and the range of positive and negative growth residuals among students.

Principal Preparation Programs

School leadership was once a vaguely defined profession requiring little or no training; however, Lashway (1999) noted the beginning of the twentieth century bought about the establishment of formal leadership programs at colleges and universities to prepare school principals. Early principal preparation programs focused on training principals to be effective building managers as that was the primary responsibility of principals; however, the increasing scrutiny schools and school systems are receiving from accountability measures and the increasing demands placed on administrators has made instructional leadership preparation the focus of much attention (Reames, 2010). According to Hernandez et al. (2012), researchers in the field of educational leadership have declared the quality of leadership provided by school and district leaders is highly dependent upon the quality of their leadership preparation experiences, and principal preparation programs have failed to prepare graduates for the role of instructional leader (Lynch, 2012; Miller, 2013).

The earliest principal preparation programs emphasized technical skills, with a strong flavoring of business efficiency (Lashway, 1999). For decades, pre-service training for principals looked something like this: while working as teachers, they took occasional courses at an educational school on such topics as school finance, law, and educational theory, and after a few years, they completed a culminating field assignment and applied for jobs in administration (Olson, 2007). During the latter part of the twentieth century, the "scientific era," theoretical ideas from the social sciences began to take precedence in PPPs and the make-up of faculties shifted from practitioners to discipline-focused specialists rooted in foundations and research (Lashway, 1999).

As the role of the principal has changed, preparation programs have shifted their focus from creating efficient managers to preparing individuals who can lead a school to higher student achievement (Olson, 2007). In response to the growing concerns about principal preparation and effectiveness, state and national organizations began to develop professional standards for administrators (Davis & Darling-Hammond, 2012). The authors noted many states adopted or adapted licensure and accreditation policies developed by the Interstate School Leaders Licensure Consortium (ISSLC), and every state receiving federal funds established alternate pathways to administrative licensure in order to attract talented leaders from within and outside of education. In addition, Davis and Darling-Hammond (2012) pointed out efforts to study, revise, and improve principal preparation programs have paralleled the standards movement, and a growing number of innovative programs began to frame program elements around theories of adult and experiential learning by placing greater emphasis on hands-on internship experiences, thematically integrated curricula, problem-based instruction, and closer partnerships with school districts.

Despite the efforts in preparing leaders for 21st century schools, the overwhelming consensus from graduates, school leaders, and policymakers is graduates are not ready for the complex roles, and Lashway (1999) contended those who run the preparation programs are all

too aware of the need for change. Critics of PPPs denounce their curriculum and structure. According to Lashway (1999), university faculties pay too little attention to instruction, leadership programs are often isolated from other departments and the larger academic community, and graduates criticize coursework as irrelevant, insignificant, and uninspirational. Additionally, Levine (2005) argued the faculty in many educational administration programs is inadequate, and therefore, cannot meet the needs of aspiring administrators. He contended the programs rely too heavily on adjunct faculty who lack expertise in the academic content they are supposed to teach and at the same time, employ too many full-time professors who have had little, if any, recent experience as practicing school administrators (Levine, 2005). Astonishingly, just six percent of all education faculty have been principals, and only two percent have been superintendents (Levine, 2005). Levine (2005) noted 89 percent of program alumni surveyed said schools of education fail to adequately prepare their graduates to cope with job realities, and Miller (2013) cited a tenuous connection between theory and practice as well as poorly designed internships as a critical weakness in program structure. Levine (2005) pointed out, although many aspiring administrators say they want opportunities to connect university study with practical experience in schools, meaningful clinical instruction is rare. The most prominent debate is pre-service principals are not equipped with the skills to apply theoretical knowledge to real life situations (Duncan et al., 2011). Current PPPs must find a systemic way to balance the transfer of knowledge through coursework with meaningful immersion in practice. While colleges and universities continue to talk about preparation, school districts are talking about readiness (Zubnzycki, 2013).

In the mid-1990s, Mississippi and North Carolina were the first two states to take a hard look at their principal preparation programs (Hess & Kelly, 2005; T. Burnham, personal communication, December 3, 2014). Mississippi developed state standards for school administrators, which closely resembled standards developed by several national organizations, and mandated all programs within its borders develop reconceptualized administrator

preparation programs (Gupton, 1998). In 1994, Mississippi's then Superintendent of Education, Tom Burnham, assembled a task force to conduct program reviews on existing Mississippi principal preparation programs (LaPointe, Davis, & Cohen, 2007; T. Burnham, personal communication, December 3, 2014). After completing the program reviews, the task force presented recommendations addressing a variety of program issues, including selection of candidates for programs, curricular guidelines, and development to rate student competence during and upon exit from programs in its report, *Improving the Preparation of Mississippi's School Leaders* (Gupton, 1998; LaPointe et al., 2007). Perhaps the most staggering outcome from the task force's recommendations was the state's decision to close all administrator preparation programs and require programs to re-apply for accreditation under much more rigorous standards (LaPointe et al., 2007; T. Burnham, personal communication, December 3, 2014). According to Burnham, former Mississippi Superintendent of Education, and LaPointe et al. not a single program in the state earned accreditation upon its first application. Colleges and universities in Mississippi continued reform efforts to meet state accreditation standards, and currently eight institutions have state approved school administrator preparation programs (Mississippi Department of Education, 2015).

Other states have followed Mississippi's efforts to improve the preparation of its school leaders. In 2001, SREB began work to produce sustainable changes in principal preparation in its 16 member states (Southern Regional Education Board, 2009; Levine, 2005). SREB (2009) argued for principals to be effective instructional leaders they need to understand how to inspire faculty to develop engaging instruction and engage faculty in maintaining a culture of high expectations for all, and developing leaders with these characteristics requires a new approach to their selection, initial preparation, and continuing support. In 2005, SREB partnered with the Tennessee State Board of Education and two universities in Tennessee to redesign educational leadership preparation in the state, and the results of the pilot program indicated the critical components of the redesigned leadership program can work in both a large urban district and

small rural districts and helped shape a statewide redesign of leadership preparation (Southern Regional Educational Board, 2009). According to SREB (2009), research identified several components of the Tennessee redesign project as essential to effective principal preparation. A partnership between universities and school districts is perhaps the most critical component of effective leader preparation and seemingly affects most other components of preparation practice. University-district partnerships allow districts to identify candidates with the potential to become the type of leaders needed to address educational deficits, and universities gain greater access to quality candidates in addition to reducing wasted resources often associated with the self-selection process traditionally used in recruiting candidates (Southern Regional Education Board, 2009). SREB (2009) contended these partnerships also allow for a more meaningful and authentic internship experience as the theories learned in the classroom are immediately tested against realities found in schools, and mentors and university faculty have the opportunity to work together to ensure field-based experiences are of high quality and include progressive opportunities to observe, participate in, and lead tasks relating to instructional improvement and school management. Other impactful components of effective principal preparation programs identified by SREB (2009) were university courses focused on instructional leadership and cohort models to foster collaboration and provide support for aspiring leaders.

The disconnect between how principals are trained and the realities of today's principalship is forcing colleges, universities, policy makers, and school districts across the nation to reexamine leadership preparation programs. In fact, two national surveys conducted in 2003 and 2006 revealed two-thirds of principals felt current principal preparation programs are out of touch with today's realities and did not prepare them to be effective instructional leaders (Butler, 2008; Hernandez et al., 2012; Lynch 2012). According to Zubnzycki (2013), a growing number of principal-preparation initiatives are forsaking university classrooms in favor of alternate-route principal preparation programs and much more familiar training grounds: the schools and districts where those aspiring leaders will end up working.

The University of Mississippi Principal Preparation Programs

The University of Mississippi offers two traditional route programs leading to licensure in K-12 school administration: the Master of Education in K-12 Leadership (M.Ed.) and the Educational Specialist in K-12 Leadership (Ed.S.). Both programs have the same admission requirements in relation to previous grade point Average (GPA), Graduate Record Examination (GRE) score, required teaching experience, and potential leadership skills. Once admitted to either program, candidates begin an 18-month cohort program in June. Candidates take six hours of coursework each semester for a total of 30 coursework hours then complete a 400-hour administrative internship, which counts for six credit hours towards the required 36 credit hours. Internships for both traditional programs are completed during the entire length of the program, occur at the candidates' current school, and are in addition to contracted teaching responsibilities (The University of Mississippi, 2014).

The University of Mississippi also offers an alternative to their traditional preparation programs. The Principal Corps, a comprehensive training program founded in 2009 with a two million dollar planning grant from the Jim and Donna Barksdale Foundation, is a 13-month program that takes a parallel approach to transforming teachers into educational leaders. The Principal Corps program can lead to a Master of Education (M.Ed.) or Specialist in Education (Ed.S.) degree in educational leadership depending upon the candidates previously awarded degrees (The University of Mississippi, 2014).

Admission requirements to the Principal Corps are similar to admission requirements to the traditional program. Similarly, applicants must have a minimum of three years teaching experience in K-12 education, a 3.0 or higher GPA in their last academic program, and a competitive GRE score to be considered for admission to the program. Additionally, Principal Corps applicants must hold a current Mississippi teaching license and a current teaching position in a Mississippi public school. The Principal Corps also encourages applicants to have the endorsement of their current school district superintendent since candidates often continue

to receive salary and benefits while participating in the program (T. Burnham, personal communication, December 3, 2014).

Once admitted to the program, the Principal Corps candidates enroll in graduate coursework while simultaneously completing a full-time fall internship and a full-time spring internship under two different veteran principals at two schools. Candidates begin the cohort program the first week of June and complete a six-hour class along with attending several workshops during the month of June. Candidates report to their assigned school in July and take eighteen hours of coursework while completing two internships during the fall and spring semesters. Candidates work in a full-time administrative capacity in each school for a semester. They gain approximately 1,760 hours of practical experience during these two internships. The university awards six credit hours for completion of the two internships, and the 36-hour program concludes with a six-hour course taken during the second summer of enrollment. Principal Corps candidates are assigned two mentors, an Instructional Leader (IL) Mentor who serves as the designated school representative and the University Mentor (UM) who serves as the program liaison (The University of Mississippi, 2014).

Candidates selected for the Principal Corps program receive a scholarship covering the cost of tuition, textbooks, housing, and travel along with a stipend for each term. In addition, each candidate receives a laptop belonging to him or her upon completion of the program. Candidates who complete the program and accept an assistant principal or principal position in a Mississippi public school receive a $10,000 signing bonus from the Barksdale Foundation (The University of Mississippi, 2014).

Principal Effectiveness

Perhaps a more highly debated topic than how to best prepare principals to be effective school leaders is how to accurately measure their effectiveness. While research substantiates the principal is the second most influential school-related factor in student achievement, and a wealth of research examining teacher effectiveness exists, little empirical research evaluating

principal effectiveness exists (Fuller & Hollingsworth, 2014; Levine, 2005). Recent educational accountability reform has generated much interest in the effectiveness of school leadership and defined "principal effectiveness" as the ability of the principal to affect changes in student test scores (Fuller & Hollingsworth, 2014). However, the many argue that principal evaluations should encompass more than a change in student test scores.

Historically, the principal's job rested on public perception and the accomplishments of the highest achieving students (Lynch, 2012), and according to Fuller and Hollingsworth (2014), as recently as 2010 few states had developed comprehensive evaluation systems for school administrators. In the past, federal policymakers haven't given school leadership much attention; however, many states have developed performance-based evaluation systems for administrators to satisfy the requirement for waivers from certain requirements of NCLB (Fuller & Hollingsworth, 2014).

According to the Center for American Progress (2011), practitioners and researchers are continuing to learn about the best measures of effective leadership and next generation evaluation systems. Despite the abundance of high-quality studies on teacher effectiveness, little empirical research has examined methods of estimating principal effectiveness, particularly for evaluative purposes; policy makers simply assumed if teacher effectiveness could be estimated, then principal effectiveness could be estimated as well, despite the absence of research to validate such an assumption (Fuller & Hollingsworth, 2014). Principal evaluation policy is under scrutiny, and many have called for student achievement data to comprise part of the evaluation (Piro, Wiemers, & Shutt, 2011). Proponents of using student test scores in evaluating principal effectiveness champion the role of the principal as an instructional leader and often point to the emerging body of research identifying leadership as the second most influential school-based factor in student achievement (Davis & Darling-Hammond, 2012; Lynch, 2012; Mendels & Mitgang, 2013; Miller 2013; Reames, 2010; Mendels, 2012; Piro et al., 2011; Clifford & Ross, 2011). Opponents, however, argue student achievement test data is not a valid

measure for principal evaluation. Fuller and Hollingsworth (2014) asserted student test scores could provide an inaccurate measure of principal effectiveness because the tests were not designed for this purpose and variability in alignment among tests, curriculum, and what is taught might mean student learning is not accurately reflected in test scores. Moreover, Piro et al. (2011) cautioned against using student achievement scores for principal evaluation since the evaluator does not control for the lack of random sampling. The authors of the 2011 study noted the importance of random sampling for generalization purposes, and since most student populations are made up of children from the same geographic area, often with similar income levels and ethnic groups, generalizability of the results is not feasible. Although a growing body of research demonstrates the assessment of leadership should concentrate on factors over which the leader has more direct control, many state evaluation systems, prompted by accountability, have chosen student test scores as part of the formula for evaluating leaders, but (Tredway, Stephens, Hedgspeth, Jimes, & Rubio, 2012).

Although school leadership does not directly impact student test scores, Mendels (2012) maintained the indirect workings of a principal have a significant impact on student achievement in their school. Past research has sought to identify behaviors and practices linked to increasing student achievement. According to Spiro (2013) and Mendels (2012), a report published in 2012 by The Wallace Foundation pinpointed five key practices of effective principals: shaping a vision of success for all students, creating a climate hospitable to education, cultivating leadership in others, working with teachers to improve instruction, and managing people, data, and processes to foster school improvement. Other organizations, such as New Leaders, SREB, and the University of California-Berkeley's Leadership Connection have identified additional behaviors and practices shared by successful leaders (Southern Regional Education Board, 2009; New Leaders, 2012; Tredway et al., 2012). In addition, a team of researchers from Vanderbilt University and the University of Pennsylvania created an assessment called the Vanderbilt Assessment of Leadership in Education (VAL-ED).

VAL-ED is widely recognized as a fair and reliable assessment and places far greater weight than most other tools on leadership behaviors known to promote better instruction (Mendels & Mitgang, 2013).

Mississippi Principal Evaluation System

The Mississippi Department of Education (MDE) defines effective school principals as leaders who help ensure all students reach ambitious targets of performance (Mississippi Department of Education, 2012). In 2012, MDE developed a comprehensive evaluation system, which includes the Val-Ed Assessment, to determine principal effectiveness as part of ESEA flexibility waiver. The Mississippi Principal Evaluation System (MPES) is an evaluation instrument based on the Mississippi Standards for School Leaders used to measure outcome data and leadership behaviors to evaluate principal effectiveness (Buckley, McNair, & Hart, n.d.). A leader's summative evaluation score under MPES is comprised of four components. Principals, in conjunction with their supervisors, set quantifiable goals based on the previous years achievement scores in two academic areas, language arts and mathematics. These collaborative goals count for a total of 50% of the summative evaluation score. A third component of MPES is based on two organizational goals targeting the school's areas of greatest need for improvement. The organizational goals may be established for staff and/or students and may not be identical to the language arts or mathematics goal. Each organizational goal comprises 10% of the summative score. The remaining 30% of the principal's summative evaluation score is determined by Circle Survey results. The Circle Survey is administered during December and/or January and collects data about the perception of the school administrator's performance from three respondent groups: the full- and part- time certified staff who report to the school administrator, the schools administrator's supervisor of record, and the administrator himself. Circle Survey topics include outreach and support, management and leadership, instruction, communication, school environment and climate, and professionalism. MPES requires five conferences between the principal and supervisor of

record throughout the year to set goals, monitor progress towards the goals, and determine strategies for improvement.

The Mississippi Principal Evaluation System was initially developed to evaluate traditional and alternative school principals as well as directors of career and technical education (CTE) centers, but in 2014, MDE decided assistant principals would be evaluated using the same instrument. The building principal will serve as the supervisor of record for assistant principals. Assistant principals share the same goals as the principal but receive their own Circle Survey results thus creating their own summative score.

METHODOLOGY

Design of the Study

This quasi-experimental study conducted a goal free program evaluation of the University of Mississippi's principal preparation programs by examining the impact of graduates from both programs on student achievement in Mississippi public schools, as measured by Quality of Distribution Index (QDI) scores. The study determined if a statistically significant difference in school QDI score differentials existed between the University of Mississippi educational leadership program graduates and the Mississippi Principal Corps graduates during their first, second, and third years on a leadership staff. The study examined and compared changes in school QDI scores in each of the program graduates' school years on the leadership staff. The school's previous year QDI score served as the baseline data for each evaluation year. The comparisons were made in consecutive years beginning with the initial year of placement as a school administrator. Due to the change in the accountability model, the study is limited to SY2010-2011 through SY 2012-2013.

Participants

Participants in the study were chosen based upon their principal preparation program and placement as a Mississippi public school principal or assistant principal between SY2010 – 2011 through SY2012 - 2013. Graduates of the traditional educational leadership program are referred to as the Part-time (PT) program graduates, and graduates of Principal Corps graduates are identified as PC graduates. Graduates of either program who did not hold a principal or assistant principal role in a Mississippi public school during the designated years were excluded from the study. Additionally, Participants who changed schools during the timeframe of the study were treated as a separate participant. Due to the manageable size of the population and availability of the data, no sample was chosen for this study. The statistical tests were run on the entire population. The participant group in this study, highlighted in Table

1, is comprised of 41 graduates of the PT program and 25 graduates of the PC for a total of 66 participants

Table 1

Overview of Participants

Program	Number of Graduates	Number of Eligible Participants
Part-Time Program	135	41
Principal Corps	29	25

Procedures

Using SPSS 22, a series of independent samples *t* tests were conducted to determine if a mean (*M*) difference in QDI score differentials existed between principal preparation programs in any of the participants' first three years on a leadership team based on student achievement results from the Mississippi Curriculum Test II (MCT2) and the Subject Area Testing Program II (SATP2). The school's previous QDI score team was used as a baseline score, and QDI differentials were calculated for each participant's first, second, and third years on a leadership staff. Not all participants had served on a leadership staff for three consecutive years, so it is important to note participants were tested on each of the applicable years. It is also important to note QDI differentials focus on growth rather than the actual school QDIs; therefore, participant measurements focused on positive and negative gains exclusive of the current school accountability label.

RESULTS

There were 69 QDI differential scores used for the 66 participants in determining year one school QDI impact, 34 QDI differentials used in determining participants' year two school QDI impact, and 12 QDI differentials used in determining participants' year three impact on school QDI. Tables 2 and 3 present an overview of the mean (*M)* QDI differentials for PT graduates and PC graduates, respectively, for each year in the study timeframe.

Table 2

Part-Time Program QDI Differentials

PT Program	*N*	range	*M*	SD	SE
YR 1	42	78	7.667	14.487	2.235
YR 2	21	75	7.095	19.136	4.176
YR 3	7	53	15.286	18.319	6.924

Table 3

Principal Corps QDI Differentials

Principal Corps	*N*	range	*M*	*SD*	*SE*
YR 1	27	57	3.778	12.055	2.320
YR 2	13	51	5.615	12.920	3.583
YR 3	5	32	9.600	13.353	5.972

For first year measurements in QDI differentials, there were 42 PT participants and 27 PC participants. First year PT principals had the largest range of scores, with the largest negative impact on school QDI of -35 QDI points, and a maximum gain of +42 QDI points. A first year PC graduate's largest negative impact on QDI score was -29 QDI points while the greatest gain was +27 QDI points. As indicated in Tables 2 and 3, the mean (*M*) Year 1 QDI differential for the PT program was 7.667 with a standard deviation (*SD*) of 14.487, while the Year 1 *M* QDI differential for PC was 3.778 with a *SD* of 12.055. Part-time program *M* QDI differentials (*M* =

7.667, *SD* = 14.487) were higher than PC QDI differentials (*M* = 3.778, *SD* = 12.055) in their initial year on a leadership staff.

Of the 69 participants with first year measurements, 21 PT participants and 13 PC participants served on the same leadership staff for a second consecutive year. During their second consecutive year on a leadership staff, the largest negative impact on school QDI for a PT graduate was -39 QDI points while the largest gain in QDI score was +36 QDI points. The largest second year negative impact on school QDI for a PC graduate was -21 QDI points, and the largest positive impact was +29 QDI points. The Year 2 *M* QDI differential for the PT program was 7.095 with a *SD* of 19.136, and the Year 2 *M* QDI differential for PC was 5.615 with a *SD* of 12.920. Part-time program QDI differentials (*M* = 7.095, *SD* = 19.136) were higher than PC QDI differentials (*M* = 5.615, *SD* = 12.920) in their second consecutive year on a leadership staff.

Seven PT participants and five PC participants remained on the same leadership staff for a third consecutive year. For the participants' third year measurements, the maximum negative impact on school QDI for a PT graduate was -8 QDI points. On the other hand, the greatest gain yielded by a PT graduate in their third consecutive year on a leadership staff was +45 QDI points. The smallest range of scores was seen in PC graduates third consecutive year on a leadership staff. The minimum QDI differential for PC graduates' third consecutive year was -14 QDI points, and the maximum increase was 17 QDI points. The Year 3 *M* QDI differential for the PT program was 15.286 with a *SD* of 18.319, and the Year 3 *M* QDI differential for PC was 9.600 with a *SD* of 13.353. Part-time program QDI differentials (*M* = 15.286, *SD* = 18.319) were higher than PC QDI differentials (*M* = 9.600, *SD* = 13.353) in their third consecutive year on a leadership staff.

Independent samples *t* tests were conducted to determine if a statistically significant difference existed in the *M* QDI differential between Principal Corps graduates and the University of Mississippi educational leadership graduates in their first, second, and third

consecutive years on a leadership staff. Quality of Distribution Index score differentials for each level of principal preparation program were normally distributed, as assessed by Shapiro-Wilk test ($p > .05$), and there was homogeneity of variance, as assessed by Levene's test for equality of variances ($p = .354$).

Results from the independent samples *t* tests revealed the PT program *M* QDI differential was higher than the PC *M* QDI differential in the each year on a leadership staff. Despite the differences, there were no statistically significant differences in the *M* QDI differentials at the significance level of .05. The results are shown in Table 4.

Table 4

Independent t Test Results for QDI Differentials

YR1	QDI Differential	*t*	*df*	Sig.	Mean Difference	Std. Error Difference	95% CI Lower Bound	95% CI Upper Bound
	Equal Variances Assumed	1.160	67	.250	3.887	3.354	-2.805	10.582
YR2	QDI Differential	*t*	*df*	Sig.	Mean Difference	Std. Error Difference	95% CI Lower Bound	95% CI Upper Bound
	Equal Variances Assumed	.246	32	.808	1.480	6.025	-10.793	13.752
YR3	QDI Differential	*t*	*df*	Sig.	Mean Difference	Std. Error Difference	95% CI Lower Bound	95% CI Upper Bound
	Equal Variances Assumed	.588	10	.570	5.686	9.669	-15.858	27.229

CONCLUSION

In summary, analysis revealed PT program graduates *M* QDI differentials were higher than PC graduates in each of the three experiential years. In their initial year on a leadership staff, the PT *M* QDI differential ($M = 7.667$, $SD = 14.487$) was 3.889 points higher than the PC *M* QDI differential value. Second year measurements indicated the PT *M* QDI differential ($M = 7.095$, $SD = 19.136$) was 1.480 points higher than the PC *M* QDI differential ($M = 5.615$, $SD = 12.920$). Lastly, PT graduates who remained on the same leadership staff for a third consecutive year had a *M* QDI differential ($M = 15.286$, $SD = 18.319$) 5.686 points higher than

PC graduates (*M* = 9.600, *SD* = 13.353) who completed three consecutive years on the same leadership staff. Further analysis of the results indicated, though PT *M* QDI differentials were higher than *M* PC differentials in each year, there was no statistically significant difference at the .05 alpha level in *M* QDI differentials between the University of Mississippi PT program graduates and Principal Corps graduates and in any year.

Despite no emerging statistically significant difference, it is essential to note the results suggest practical implications for the University of Mississippi and Mississippi school leaders, as a lack of statistical significance is not always indicative of lack of importance. Study outcomes could still be clinically important and warrant further consideration. In this study, when considering the sheer number of QDI differentials, both programs produced nearly triple the gain scores than the number of losses in each of the three years. In their first, second, and third years on a leadership staff, program graduates yielded 52, 25, and nine QDI gain scores, respectively. In the corresponding years, graduates produced only 17, eight, and three negative gain scores. Results are presented in Table 5.

Table 5

Gain and Loss Scores by Program

Year +/-	PT *N*=	PC *N*=	PT Avg.	PC Avg.	UM EDLD Combined	Overall Gain
YR1 Gain	32	20	+13.6	+9.6	+12.1	+6.2
YR1 Loss	10	7	-11.4	-13.7	-11.8	
YR2 Gain	15	10	+16.2	+11.0	+14.1	+6.5
YR2 Loss	5	3	-23.5	-12.3	-16.4	
YR3 Gain	5	4	+23.4	+15.0	+19.0	+12.9
YR3 Loss	2	1	-5.0	-14.0	-8.0	

Notes: Averages are of gain scores or loss scores exclusively for the designated year. Overall gain is inclusive of +/- QDI differentials. Of the 115 QDI differentials measured, one PT measurement in the second year of the study showed no change in QDI score.

Research has establish a strong connection between school leadership and student achievement in our nation's schools, and because our schools are not performing at expected levels, principal preparation programs have come under fire from critics and policymakers. The results of this study, however, indicate both University of Mississippi principal preparation programs are positively impacting student achievement in the state. Nevertheless, a focus on improvement efforts could result in the production of higher quality school leaders and an even greater impact on student achievement. Recommendations for future research to assist the University of Mississippi in preparing effective school leaders include continued evaluation of both principal preparation programs for continual improvement purposes. Research efforts could build upon this study to identify the performance levels of schools contained in the study and gain more insight on the impacts on student achievement. A qualitative follow-up to this study could also help gain insight into the impacts on student achievement and various components of both principal preparation programs. Lastly, reform efforts should focus on connecting principal preparation program evaluations to their program outcomes, which is the impact of their graduates on student achievement.

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