Out Over Their Skis: A Study of Principal Preparation Program Policy in Florida

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Perceived shortage of principals, increased accountability demands, the changing role of principals, and the growing influence of the state over school administration have created a set of challenges for principal certification and licensure that have propelled a renewed need for analysis of certification and licensure processes. Recent calls to hold preparation programs accountable for outcomes have prompted states to develop and adopt preparation program accountability systems. One primary feature of these systems is the success of program graduates on a state test leading to principal certification. Yet, little research has examined the validity and reliability of such state tests in assessing even the likely effectiveness of aspiring principals, let alone predicting their actual effectiveness once employed as a principal. This conceptual study utilizes theoretical analysis of extant literature and empirical analysis of extant data from one state (Florida) to reach conclusions about the appropriateness of using a state test to (1) credential aspiring educational leaders; and (2) evaluate principal-preparation programs.

Keywords: accountability, equity, Florida Education Leadership Exam (FELE), principal certification, principal preparation, school leadership

Current literature on educational leadership preparation programs contributes to an understanding of what should be included in preparation curriculum–pedagogies that have the potential for developing strong leaders, inclusion of a rigorous internships, and effective partnership between universities and districts (Crow & Whiteman, 2016). However, little is known about the appropriateness of using a state examination to (1) credential aspiring educational leaders and (2) evaluate principal preparation programs. This paper utilizes critical policy analysis (Taylor, 1997) to address the research problem that policymakers, researchers, and practitioners lack a clear understanding of the appropriateness of the state examination (the Florida Educational Leadership Examination, or FELE) that educational leadership candidates in state-approved university-based[1] preparation programs in Florida are required to pass in order to graduate and obtain credentials to serve as a school administrator in ensuring quality leaders for the state's public schools.

Methods, Research Questions, and Conceptual Frame

As deployed here, critical policy analysis represents an approach in which policy is viewed as situated in (and thus the outcome of) specific contexts and the power dynamics that characterize those contexts (Ball, 1994; Edmonson, 2004; Prunty, 1985; Taylor, 1997). Operating from the position that policy is an outward manifestation of the values of its authors (Ball, 1994), such analyses are explicitly attentive to the historical, social, political, and economic forces that shape and are shaped by the values of the dominant groups in a particular context.

To provide an overall structure for the investigation, an analytical model developed by Fallon and Paquette (2009) based on earlier work by Blaikie and Soussan (2000) and Levin (2001) was adapted and modified. The model is grounded in a *stage theory* approach to understanding and describing public policy cycles (Fallon & Paquette, 2009). The one substantial modification to the Fallon and Paquette model here involved collapsing *policy adoption* and *policy implementation* into a single stage of the policy cycle. The rationale for that modification is that the contemporary FELE process has come about through an iterative process in which policy adoption and implementation (as operationalized in the model) are intertwined; thus, examining the two stages jointly should allow for a clearer understanding of the policy trajectory represented by the various iterations of FELE since its initial development.

The research questions driving the inquiry are aligned with the three stages of the policy cycle as described above. The first question asks *what are the historical, social, and political origins of the state examination used to certify school administrators in Florida?* The second question asks *what processes of policy development and implementation led to the current iteration of the Florida Educational Leadership Examination (FELE)?* The third question asks *what impact has the FELE had on the state's school leaders and the schools in which they serve*? In the case of all three questions, the inquiry adopts a decidedly critical approach focused on issues of social class (critical theory) and race (critical race theory). Data sources include archived primary documents (e.g., we examined state laws and administrative codes, state department of education materials) and publicly available extant data (e.g., we conducted original analyses of FELE results provided by the state department of education).

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[1] Of note, some non-university entities are involved in the development and implementation of educational leadership preparation, but the large majority of Florida educational leaders are trained in state accredited university programs.

The conceptual frame for this analysis integrates stage theory (Fallon & Paquette, 2009) and salient work from the extant literature describing current reforms and best practices in leadership preparation. Specifically, we utilize stage theory as a structural frame and the extant literature as the framework of critique (i.e., investigating the development and implementation of the FELE across stages through the lens of current thinking about what leadership certification programs should be and do).

Review of Relevant Literature

In the last few decades of the twentieth century, several reports have called for reforms in the preparation of school leaders (McCarthy, 2002). The most influential of these reports was *Leaders for America's Schools* (National Commission on Excellence in Educational Administration, 1987), which recommended eliminating at least two thirds of existing educational leadership programs nationwide and modeling the remaining third after law or medical schools (Cohen-Vogel & Herrington, 2005). In 1996 (revisions occurred in 2008 and 2015), the Council of Chief State School Officers and the National Governors Association developed national policy standards for school leaders with funding from the Wallace Foundation. The six Inter-state School Leadership Licensure Consortium (ISLLC) policy standards were intended to upgrade the quality of the profession (Cohen-Vogel & Herrington, 2005). Eight states adopted the ISLLC standards outright, 23 others added to or modified the standards for leadership frameworks, and 10 states separately developed leadership standards found to align with the ISLLC standards (Canole & Young, 2013). Within a decade, the ISLLC standards had become almost universally accepted across the United States, and by 2005, 46 states had adopted, slightly adapted, or relied upon the standards to develop their own state standards (Murphy, 2005; Murphy, Moorman, & McCarthy, 2008). Of note, in 2015 the Professional Standards for Educational Leaders (PSEL) was released by the Council of Chief State School Officers, ostensibly replacing both the ISLLC and ELCC (Educational Leadership Constituent Council) standards.

Half of all US states have mandated that aspiring administrators take and pass a standardized examination as a condition of attaining their administrative license (Canole & Young, 2013). Of these states, 18 require the School Leaders Licensure Assessment (SLLA) developed by the Educational Testing Service (ETS), which is aligned with the ISLLC standards (Grissom, Mitani, & Blissett, 2017; McCarthy & Forsyth, 2009). States have also used the standards to implement significant changes in their program accreditation policies and processes and to mandate reviews of their approved leadership preparation programs (Murphy, 2003). At the national level, the National Council for Accreditation of Teacher Education (NCATE) educational leadership specialty area, conducted by the Educational Leadership Licensure Consortium (ELLC), has used a modified version of these standards to guide their leadership preparation program reviews since 2001 (Canole & Young, 2013).

Currently, 18 U.S. states, the District of Columbia, and two territories rely on the SLLA when licensing principals. Grissom et al. (2017) investigated 10 years of SLLA data on Tennessee test takers and found substantial differences in passage rates by test-taker characteristics. In particular, non-Whites are 12 percentage points less likely than otherwise similar White test takers to attain the required licensure score. Although candidates with higher scores are more likely to be hired as principals, they found little evidence that SLLA scores predict measures of principal job performance, including supervisors' evaluation ratings or teachers' assessments of school leadership from a statewide survey. Grissom and colleagues

(2017) question whether conditioning administrative licensure on SLLA passage is consistent with principal workforce diversity goals.

Policy Contexts

The literature on leadership preparation program elements does not exist in a vacuum, but rather in a context that has both internal and external forces. An increasingly influential external force is the regulatory role of the state (Cibulka, 2009; Louis, Thomas, Gordon, & Febey, 2008; Roach, Smith, & Boutin, 2011). The state's influence on program approval and improvement has intensified in the last several years, and in many instances has emphasized outcome measures (Cheney & Davis, 2011; Phillips, 2013a, 2013b). In addition to states' emphasis on program evaluation, other units have contributed to the increasingly high stakes for program evaluation. These include districts developing their own leadership preparation programs (Mitgang, 2012), foundations focusing attention and resources in the areas of leadership standards and leader preparation (especially Wahlstrom, Seashore Louis, Leithwood, & Anderson, 2010), and the private sector pursuing a role and an opportunity to monetize that role. In Florida, the Duval County School District (the state's 6th largest and the nation's 22nd largest district serving the Jacksonville metropolitan area) operates its own leadership preparation program (the Assistant Principal Preparation Program or APPP).

Program Assessment Instruments and Program Evaluation

The development of assessment instruments is a recent trend in the evaluation of academic programs. Consequently, researchers are increasingly focusing on program evaluation instruments and practices due to the high stakes nature of their outcomes and use (Gates & Kruse, 2016). The University Council for Educational Administration (UCEA) /Teaching in Educational Administration Special Interest Group (SIG) taskforce has been instrumental in designing assessment frameworks and in encouraging the development of appropriate instruments (Orr & Pounder, 2006; Pounder, 2012). Other researchers have also taken on this important initiative (e.g., Darling-Hammond, Meyerson, LaPointe, & Orr, 2010; Melton, Tysinger, Mallory, & Green, 2011; Ross, 2010).

The majority of program evaluation efforts are conducted at the state, rather than national level. Crow and Whiteman (2016) focused on program outcomes, and candidate performance, while recent trends among researchers compare programs within the same state, Indiana (Black, 2011), across several states (Darling-Hammond et al., 2010; Murphy et al., 2008), schools with similar characteristics (Doolittle & Brown, 2011), different state political climates (Louis et al., 2008), and different foci, including social (Rodríguez, Chambers, González, & Scheurich, 2010) and turnaround principals (Schmidt-Davis, 2012).

Leadership Certification and Preparation in Florida

Florida Principal Leadership Standards (FPLS)

Florida was a leader among states in recognizing the need for explicit principal leadership standards (Santostefano, 2013). The Florida Management Training Act (Florida Department of Education, 1979) required a state system identifying competencies that support the effective

management of schools; a performance-based management training program; a program of competency-based certification for school managers to become effective July 1, 1986; and a performance-based evaluation and compensation program for educational managers (FLDOE 2009, 2012).

In April 2005, the Florida Principal Leadership Standards (FPLS) replaced the Florida Competencies (State Board of Education 6B-5.0012) and were adopted into rule (6A-5.080) by the State Board in 2006-07 (FLDOE, 2005). State Board of Education Rule 6A-4.00821 also states that the Commissioner of Education shall develop the Florida Educational Leadership Examination (FELE), and comply with Florida Statute 1012.56 (9)(b):

> The State Board of Education shall, by rule, specify the examination scores that are required for the issuance of a professional certificate and temporary certificate. Such rules must define generic subject area competencies and must establish uniform evaluation guidelines.

In 2011, Florida received federal Race to the Top (RTT) funding to review credentialing grounded by the rationale that as more is being expected from Florida students so more should be expected from Florida teachers and administrators (White, 2017). The Florida Department of Education (FLDOE) formulated a RTT Teacher and Leader Preparation Implementation Committee (TLPIC) comprising teachers; school leaders; postsecondary institutions; school districts; district administrators; superintendents; and school board members. This committee was tasked with revising the FPLS to align with contemporary research on effective school leadership as presented to them by Drs. Douglas Reeves and Raymond Smith from The Leadership and Learning Center, a division of Houghton Mifflin (Santostefano, 2013). The committee's FPLS draft was presented to a subcommittee of William Cecil Golden Program partners; postsecondary and school leadership preparation representatives; and other interested stakeholders in order to receive feedback. Based on that feedback, the FLDOE and the TLPIC revised the FPLS draft. Following review and revision by the Commissioner of Education, the proposed draft standards were presented to the State Board of Education (SBE) for adoption into State Board Rule (FLDOE, 2012). The revised standards, organized under three domains: students' achievement, instructional leadership, and organizational leadership (Florida Principal Leadership Standards, 2011) were adopted by SBE Rule 6A-5.080.

Florida Educational Leadership Exam (FELE)

As previously mentioned, the Florida Management Training Act (Florida Department of Education, 1979) stipulated that all prospective school administrators needed to pass a competency examination in order to achieve Educational Leadership certification in the state of Florida. The FLDOE developed the Florida Educational Leadership Examination (FELE) in partnership with its contractor, Pearson. Beginning in October 2007, passing results in three skill areas were required to achieve educational leadership certification: (a) school communications, (b) school management, and (c) school operations. The three areas were changed, effective January 1, 2009, to (a) instructional leadership, (b) operational leadership, and (c) school leadership.

The current FELE, known, as FELE 3.0 was developed to align with State Board of Education-approved FPLS, adopted into rule (6A-5.080) by the State Board in 2011 (FLDOE, 2014). In addition to updating examination content to reflect the updated FPLS, FELE 3.0 also focuses more explicitly on strategies that positively impact student achievement, incorporates the

new *Beginning School Effective Administrator Candidate* (BESAC) profile, and increases rigor and cognitive complexity of the examination as a whole (Canto, 2013). When redesigning the FELE, the state conceptualized the test's target candidate as being a BESAC. A concept developed and defined by a representative sample of Florida educators:

> A beginning school effective administrator candidate (BESAC) understands a core of research on instructional strategies, and behaviors, leadership, decision-making models, and state approved academic and accountability standards so that the administrator will have a high probability of positively impacting student achievement, faculty development, school management, and the development of professional and ethical behavior. (FLDOE, 2014)

The explicit focus on strategies to positively impacting student achievement represents attentiveness to the ongoing evolution of the role of a school leader from manager to chief instructional officer (see, e.g., Alvoid & Black, 2014). The BESAC profile represents an attempt to capture the breadth and depth of leadership knowledge and skill that can be expected at the point of entry to the field (i.e., the FPLS articulates the desired expectations for a practicing school leader; the BESAC profile is intended to help gauge how those same expectations can be applied to the school leader just entering the field). The increased rigor and cognitive complexity was the direct result of longstanding criticism that the examination was not challenging enough, with first-attempt pass rates typically between 85% and 90% state-wide.

In terms of test structure/format, FELE 3.0 is organized as three separate subtests: leadership for student learning (with approximately 70 multiple-choice questions), organizational development (with approximately 70 multiple-choice questions), and systems leadership (with approximately 55 multiple-choice questions and one written performance assessment) (FLDOE, 2013). In total then, the examination includes approximately 195 multiple-choice questions and one written performance assessment (see Table 1).

Table 1
FELE 3.0: FPLS Content Alignment and Test Specifications

Subtest #1 Leadership for Student Learning	Subtest #2 Organizational Development	Subtest #3 Systems Leadership	
Standard 1 – *Student Learning Results* Standard 2 – *Student Learning as a Priority* Standard 3 – *Instructional Plan Implementation* Standard 5 – *Learning Environment*	Standard 4 – *Faculty Development* Standard 7 – *Leadership Development* Standard 10 – *Professional and Ethical Behavior*	Standard 6 – *Decision Making* Standard 8 – *School Management* Standard 9 – *Communication*	
70 Multiple Choice (MC) test items	70 MC test items	55 MC test items	Written Performance Assessment (WPA)
2 hours	2 hours	2.5 hours	

Source: FLDOE (n. d.)

All Florida state accredited, institutional, educational leadership programs require candidates to successfully pass the FELE (at a cost of $215.00 for the full test and $225.00 for a battery retake or a subtest) in order to complete their academic program. Successful completion of the academic program (including passing the FELE) leads to initial certification in Educational Leadership (Level 1 Certification) and eligibility for administrative positions in school districts. The processes followed in the development of FELE 3.0 is described in the following sections in terms of several key design components: stakeholder involvement, validation process, raters for the subtest 3 written performance assessment, standard-setting, and data monitoring and reporting.

Stakeholder involvement. According to Pearson Education (2017), stakeholder involvement in the test development process involved "highly qualified classroom teachers, district coordinators, college and university faculty" (para. 2), all of whom were "instrumental in gathering validity evidence and creating assessment materials that are job-related, accurate, measurable, bias-free, and aligned with relevant educational standards for the subject area" (para. 2). In comparison to the earlier version of the FELE, the redesigned FELE differs in the following ways: (1) higher cognitive complexity levels for items, (2) higher difficulty levels for items, (3) stronger emphasis on content knowledge needed by the BESAC, (4) minimum scoring for written performance assessment (WPA) determined at standard setting, and (5) no program/initiative names (Verges & Canto, 2014).

Validation process. Various stakeholder committees including educators from public schools and colleges across the state and generally reflected the diversity of the state of Florida (FLDOE, 2014) were engaged to complete the following activities: (1) develop, validate, and finalize competencies and test blueprints; (2) develop and finalize item specifications; (3) develop, field/pilot test, and validate items; (4) assemble and validate test forms; and (5) conduct key validation

Raters for Subtest 3 Written Performance Assessment. In order to be approved to score by the Florida Department of Education, FELE raters can be either an active school- or a district-level administrator with at least three years of experience; a school or district-level administrator with at least three (3) years of experience who has retired within the past two years; or a retired faculty member who has had three (3) years of experience as a school administrator or district-level administrator within the last ten years (Pearson Evaluation Systems Group, 2015, 2017).

Standard setting. The modified Angoff method (Angoff, 1971) was used to set passing scores for the examinations. Using this method, subject matter experts reviewed each item and marked the proportion of the BESAC population that would provide a correct response (FLDOE, 2015). Panel members represented districts and colleges across the state and generally reflected the diversity of the state of Florida were tasked with determining a test score that reflects the boundary line between candidates who satisfy the testing requirements for educational leadership licensure and those who do not. The passing scores are required to be set high enough to distinguish adequate from inadequate performance, but not too high to be unreasonably limiting (Pearson Evaluation Systems Group, 2017. The standard setting process included the following steps: (1) standard setting panel identified and trained; (2) performance-level descriptors developed; (3) item ratings identified and discussed; (4) discussion and feedback from FLDOE; and (5) ratings compiled to establish passing scores. During the first three months of FELE 3.0 implementation (i.e., January to March 2014), a *hold harmless* provision was implemented by setting the passing score at the point value that would maintain the same passing rate as the

FELE 2.0 that was administered through December 2013. Comparing the actual passing rates (using "linked" results, or results based upon maintaining the previous passing rates) with the results that would have been derived from immediate implementation of the new passing scores ("projected" results) demonstrates the increased expectations and the expected impact on test-takers (see Table 2).

Table 2
Impact Data and Passing Scores by FELE Subtest (Jan to March 2014)

FELE Subtest	N tested	Linked (Current) Passing Score	Linked (Current) Passing Rate	Recommended Passing Score	Projected Passing Rates
FELE Subtest 1	237	42 of 70 (60%)	84%	48 of 70 (69%)	58%
FELE Subtest 2	232	40 of 69 (58%)	89%	48 of 69 (70%)	55%
FELE Subtest 3	235	Weighted Composite Score (MC 70% & Writing 30%)	72%	MC 36 of 55 (66%) Writing 7 of 12 (58%)	34%

Source: FLDOE, 2014

As depicted in Table 2, the implementation of new passing scores was predicted to result in a pass rate decrease ranging from 26 percentage points (for subtest 1) to 38 percentage points (for subtest 3).

Data monitoring and reporting. Data are collected on each item, allowing for the empirical consideration of item difficulty, item discrimination, content accuracy, and the plausibility of distractors. These item statistics are calculated and evaluated for the current administration and cumulatively (i.e., combined statistics for previous operational test administrations). In addition to simple descriptive data (e.g., *N* tested, *N* items used and omitted, raw score statistics), the analyses for the total test include the following: (1) *N* in 27% group (see item discrimination index), (2) average p-value, (3) average point biserial, (4) KR20 test reliability, (5) standard error of measurement, and (6) Brennan-Kane index. The analyses for each item include (1) item response distribution by response alternative (number and proportion); (2) p-value; (3) item-to-test point biserial correlations; and (4) item discrimination index (the difference in proportion correct between the upper and lower 27% of examinees). Item bias statistics (which measure the extent to which item performance may reflect group membership rather than the knowledge or skill that the item is designed to measure) are reported on a monthly basis for forms that meet the specified criteria for focal groups (focal group: Sample size=30 or more examinees) (Pearson Evaluation Systems Group, 2015).

After operational data have been reviewed by the FLDOE, it is shared with state approved program on a bi-weekly basis. The pass rate is monitored by the FLDOE and any underperforming items are removed (White, 2017).

FELE 3.0 Results

As noted, prior to FELE 3.0 statewide pass rates were generally at or near 90%. With the

implementation of FELE 3.0 came a marked decrease in pass rates (see Table 3).

Table 3
First-Time Examinees' Longitudinal Passing Rates by Subtest (2012-2015)

	2012 Pass Rate (*N* tested)	2013 Pass Rate (*N* tested)	2014 Pass Rate (*N* tested)	2015 Pass Rate (*N* tested)
FELE Subtest 1	88% (*N*=1,543)	89% (*N*=2,615)	84% (*N*=1,495)	65% (*N*=1,526)
FELE Subtest 2	94% (N=1,538)	93% (N=2,611)	90% (N=1,485)	60% (N=1,523)
FELE Subtest 3 – MC	88% (N=1,538)	86% (N=2,618)	82% (N=1,485)	52% (N=1,520)
FELE Subtest 3 - WPA	NA	NA	NA	55% (N=1,518)
FELE total – all subtests	90% (n=4,619)	90% (N=7,844)	85% (N=4,465)	58% (N=6,087)

Source: Canto & Olgar, 2017

In 2015-16, the two-year period since implementation of FELE 3.0 with the new cut scores, pass rates across the four examination areas ranged from 52% to 63% for first-attempt and from 71% to 75% for best attempt (Canto & Olgar, 2017) (see Table 4).

Table 4
Statewide Pass Rates for FELE 3.0 (January 2, 2015 – December 31, 2016)

Test Name	*N*	First-Attempt Pass Rate	*N*	Best-Attempt Pass Rate
FELE Subtest 1: Leadership for Student Learning	3,215	63%	3,199	75%
FELE Subtest 2: Organizational Development	3,158	60%	3,149	75%
FELE Subtest 3: Systems Leadership - Multiple Choice	3,205	53%	3,186	71%
FELE Subtest 3: Systems Leadership – Written Performance	3,200	52%	3,200	73%

Source: Canto & Olgar, 2017

It is not unreasonable to expect an initial dip in scores with the implementation of a new examination. When the results from Table 1 are divided into 2015 results (i.e., examinations completed January 2, 2015 to December 31, 2015) and 2016 results (i.e., examinations completed January 2, 2016 to December 31, 2016) and compared, however, the observed changes are minimal (indeed, in the case of the written performance section of subtest 3, the pass rate actually declined from 2015 to 2016. In other words, this was not an initial dip in scores but a sustained lower level of performance (and, in one case, continued decline) (see Table 5).

Table 5
Statewide Pass Rates for FELE 3.0 (2015/2016 First-Attempt Pass Rates Comparison)

Test Name	2015			2016		
	N	Pass Rate	Mean Score	*N*	Pass Rate	Mean Score
FELE Subtest 1: Leadership for Student Learning	1,617	63%	202	1,598	63%	203
FELE Subtest 2: Organizational Development	1,568	58%	200	1,590	63%	203
FELE Subtest 3: Systems Leadership - Multiple Choice	1,620	50%	197	1,585	55%	199
FELE Subtest 3: Systems Leadership – Written Performance	1,618	54%	7	1,582	50%	7

Source: Canto & Olgar, 2017

The impact of the new passing scores for FELE 3.0, effective since April 2015, quickly became evident:

> "It is embarrassing," said one middle school teacher. "It's ridiculous. I want to cry. I now feel like this is the stupidest thing I've ever done." He left a professional career in writing to get his master's in teaching but hasn't been able to pass the FELE's essay portion. Over the last two years, he said he's taken the essay, which focuses largely on data analysis, six times, spending over $1,000 on the test alone. Graded on a number scale, an examinee must earn a score of seven to pass, and the highest score possible is a 12. The last time he took the test, he said he "felt the best he'd ever felt" and was sure he'd passed. "I scored a four," he said. "I don't even know what to think." (Dion, 2017, paras. 12-14)

The pass rate for the Written Performance Assessment (WPA) referenced by the above teacher is 50% among first-time examinees (Dion, 2017). The sentiment expressed is reflective of many test takers due to the failure to receive any feedback on their test performance. Unofficial scores are released at the test site immediately after the test and official score reports are issued electronically within 4 weeks after testing or 6 weeks for tests with performance items (FLDOE, 2015). Test scores can be challenged ($75) by going to a Pearson Vue, the test's administrators, center and, in one hour, writing a letter to the FLDOE "defending the essay without knowing what exactly is wrong with it—on a computer without spelling or grammar checking software" (Dion, 2017, para. 18). Changes to passing scores impact student matriculation (e.g., program enrollment, academic progress), certification, employment within Florida public school districts, and ethnic and racial diversity among the ranks of certified assistant principals and principals (Canto, 2013).

Program Approval

The impacts of the implementation of FELE 3.0 are not limited to aspiring leaders who take the examination. With the passage of Florida HB 719, Level 1 certification programs in the state are required to report the following as part of the program approval process (FLDOE, 2016):
1. Rate of program completers placed in school leadership positions in public schools;
2. Results from personnel evaluations of program completers;
3. Passage rate on the Florida Educational Leadership Examination (FELE 3.0);
4. Impact that program completers have on student learning;
5. Strategies for continuous improvement and involving program completers, other school personnel, community agencies and business representatives in the program evaluation process; and
6. Other data provided by the institution or school district.

The first requirement is problematic for reasons beyond the immediate scope of this paper and are best addressed elsewhere. Requirements five and six are innocuous. Here, and related to the role of the state test in leadership preparation certification and approval of preparation programs, our focus is on requirements three, two, and four.

The third requirement stipulates that preparation programs be evaluated based on the success of their students on the FELE. There are logistical challenges resulted from the way this requirement was operationalized in the statutory language (e.g., all programs require a passing FELE result for program completion, so the rate would be 100% for all), but these challenges can likely be addressed. A more pressing issue is that the FELE itself has no established criterion-related validity; thus, preparation programs are to be evaluated based upon their success in preparing students to pass an examination for which there is no external marker of utility with regard to effective leadership or desirable schooling outcomes.

Theoretically (and subject to some notable methodological limitations), the second and fourth requirements have merit as outcome measures for leadership preparation programs. The results of administrator evaluations and student assessments would be useful indicators for understanding the effectiveness of completers who are practicing leaders, assuming a valid, reliable evaluation system for administrators and a valid, reliable system for assessing student learning. The irony is that these two measures offer potential (but not used) variables for enhancing the validity of FELE 3.0 (i.e., for promoting predictive validity).

Analysis

Within the context of changes in leadership preparation in recent decades, the state of Florida has essentially placed most of its eggs in a single basket—the FELE. At considerable time and expense, the state has developed its own standards and its own examination for assessing knowledge and application of those standards. It is important to note here that the state took great pains during the development process to promote (1) *face validity*: ensuring that the examination is an effective *translation* of the construct—in other words, ensuring that the FELE measures the Florida Principal Leadership Standards (FPLS); (2) *content validity*: ensuring that the examination reflects relevant content for the discipline—in other words, ensuring that the examination structure and individual items are attentive to the relevant extant literature; and (3) *reliability*: ensuring that examinees experience essentially the same examination regardless of where or when they take it.

As noted earlier, this work substantively involved academic and practitioner stakeholders.

While important, such efforts are insufficient to establish confidence in a high stakes examination that will be used to certify leaders, confer degrees, and evaluate university-based academic programs. Criterion-based validity measures like predictive validity, concurrent validity, convergent validity, discriminant validity (Johnson & Christenson, 2008) would help to increase confidence in the examination (and, through that process, likely disclose issues and yield recommendations that could improve the examination and its implementation). Of these measures, the two most salient here are *predictive validity* and *concurrent validity*. Measuring the correlation between FELE results and desirable outcomes (administrator evaluations and/or school-wide assessment results) would enhance confidence that what the FELE measures is aligned to what practicing administrators are expected to do (*predictive validity*). Measuring the correlation between FELE results and some external measure of leadership quality (e.g., SLLA results) would enhance confidence that what the FELE measures is what the larger community of scholars, policymakers, and practitioners has deemed relevant and important for school leadership (*concurrent validity*).

There are other issues as well. M.Ed. Educational Leadership programs have a moral imperative to ensure that content delivery reflects and addresses current federal, state, and district school issues. Ultimately this leads to dissonance between program content and FELE content due to the FELE constantly lagging behind the curve. On a more pragmatic level, taking the FELE imposes a substantial personal financial cost for the aspiring school leader. The first attempt of any combination of subtests is $215; retakes (any combination of subtests) is $225; and a single section of Subtest 3 (either the multiple-choice or the Written Performance Assessment) is $150. Inability to personally fund the taking/retaking of the FELE can seriously impact career progression of aspiring school leaders. Students from university-based programs also incur additional tuition costs in order to maintain enrollment in their educational leadership academic program until they have completed the remaining graduation criteria of passing the FELE (FLDOE, 2013).

Timing as to when to take the FELE can be contentious. For the test to be valid, it can be assumed that all program content is of equal value but it can take up to 6 weeks to receive a full test score. As M.Ed. Educational Leadership candidates are required to pass the FELE in order to graduate and most candidates seek a May graduation date in order to move forward in their career, candidates are taking the FELE earlier in the program (when they may be less prepared) to ensure that they are able to have a second chance at taking the test bearing in mind the need for a 30-day gap between attempts. Moreover, most FELE test takers are full-time teachers with substantial professional commitments. Consequently the FELE tends to be taken on a Saturday and it is a long day. Subtest 1 and 2 are allocated two hours each and Subtest 3 is subdivided into 90 minutes for the multiple-choice section and one hour for Written Performance Section. If two or all three subtests are taken in a single session, there is a 15-minute break between each subtest.

Assessment feedback is minimal, leading to candidate frustration and irritation. Unofficial pass/non-pass status for the multiple-choice-only subtests/sections are provided immediately after testing; official score reports are released within four weeks of testing; and official score reports for subtests/sections with performance assessments are released within six weeks of testing (Florida Educational Leadership Examination (FELE) (081)). Specifically, the lack of feedback on the Written Performance Assessment (WPA) has given cause for concern amongst both students and faculty. The WPA is intended to measure prospective educational leaders' and administrators' ability to analyze and interpret educational data, as well as the

efficacy of their written communication. Examinees are asked to respond to a prompt related to student achievement data as it applies to a given school type. Scoring rubrics are provided by the FLDOE in the free FELE test information guide. Faculty and examinees are well acquainted with the rubrics and ensure that all required aspects are addressed in WPA responses. Yet, excellent writers and data analysts are failing to achieve a passing grade in this section and often are unaware of the issue they need to address to experience success.

Conclusion

In this study, critical policy analysis was utilized to address research questions investigating (1) the historical, social, and political origins of the state examination used to certify school administrators in Florida; (2) the processes of policy development and implementation that led to the current iteration of the Florida Educational Leadership Examination (FELE); and (3) the impact has the FELE had on the state's school leaders and the schools in which they serve. Results suggest that the reforms in leadership preparation policy that resulted in various iterations of the FELE was grounded in sound intentions but evolved over time into a problematic process with empirical limitations and practical issues that demand attention.

The correlation between successfully passing a multiple-choice licensure examination and principal performance has yet to be adequately researched, let alone proven. Nevertheless the state of Florida has made success on such an examination *the* central element of determining the suitability of aspiring school leaders. Moreover, there is increasing movement toward evaluating leadership preparation programs based on outcomes that largely reflect the results of the same examination. In contrast, educational leadership professors who work with aspiring administrators and the school and school district where they serve possess substantive knowledge of their students from classroom interactions and rigorous internships in the field where both scholarship and practitioner excellence are examined. Attentive to the limitations evident in the current operational model, we would recommend that attention be paid to nurturing demonstrable competencies rather than completion of multiple-choice questions and to utilizing modern technology to assess aspiring administrators. Whether this requires an electronic portfolio, clinical simulation with interactors' role-playing student/teacher/parent is perhaps the topic of another paper. What is clear from the results presented here is that such possibilities need to be explored.

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Appendix

44 Statements of Highest Consensus after Three Rounds of the Delphi

Delphi Statement	% rating *very important*	Domain
60. The principal values the strong library's impact on student achievement.	100	Dispositions
57. The principal values the librarian's expertise as a teacher.	100	Dispositions
76. The principal values the library being an integral part of instruction.	100	Dispositions
56. The principal values the library providing equitable and open access to its resources.	100	Dispositions
33. The principal hires and retains the best certified librarian available.	100	Skills
58. The principal values the librarian's expertise as a collaborator.	96	Dispositions
59. The principal values the librarian's expertise as a leader.	96	Dispositions
63. The principal values instruction for digital and information literacies.	96	Dispositions
6. The principal understands that credentialed librarians are certified teachers who integrate with the curriculum to support instruction.	96	Knowledge
30. The principal clearly communicates to teachers the value of the library program to student learning	96	Skills
34. The principal includes the librarian in the campus' professional development activities, in order to keep the librarian informed and current.	96	Skills
40. The principal trusts in the knowledge, skill, and professionalism of an effective librarian.	96	Skills
44. The principal ensures proper technology infrastructure for the library.	96	Skills
45. The principal holds the librarian accountable for a strong, integrated program.	96	Skills
48. The principal supports reading across the curriculum.	96	Skills
62. The principal values the library's work to build engagement for a culture of reading.	91	Dispositions
50. The principal recognizes that "adequate" is not enough and expects and supports a strong library program that increases student learning and engagement.	91	Skills
53. The principal values the library's welcoming and accepting environment.	87	Dispositions
55. The principal values the unique nature of the library program and supports it accordingly.	87	Dispositions

61. The principal values the library's integration of technology to strategically support the curriculum (not just gadgets).	87	Dispositions
6. The value the school librarian can bring to the students' learning is essential knowledge for the principal. (Added in Round 3)	87	Knowledge
15. The principal envisions the library as the hub of the school, setting a welcoming and accepting environment.	87	Knowledge
18. The principal understands the importance of continuous and adequate funding to maintain an effective collection of print and digital resources.	87	Knowledge
20. The principal understands the need to schedule time for the librarian to collaborate, plan, and teach.	87	Knowledge
3. The principal understands the changing role of libraries during a time of widespread educational change.	87	Knowledge
31. The principal seeks out the definition of a strong school library program, learns about it, expects it on her/his campus, and asks for change or celebrates its strength.	87	Skills
43. The principal leads in establishing a culture centered on reading and the pursuit of knowledge.	87	Skills
54. The principal values the library program's contribution to teacher development.	83	Dispositions
64. The principal values building student self-confidence and independence as readers and learners.	83	Dispositions
66. The principal values the library engaging both students and faculty in the process of learning.	83	Dispositions
67. The principal values the library's facilitating 21st Century learning.	83	Dispositions
68. The principal values the librarian's integration of library standards into curricular content.	83	Dispositions
74. The principal values intellectual freedom.	83	Dispositions
23. The principal understands the importance of equitable and open access to library resources.	83	Knowledge
8. The principal knows what a good librarian does.	83	Knowledge
28. The principal allocates appropriate funds for the library from the building budget.	83	Skills
35. The principal initiates and expects teacher-librarian collaboration.	83	Skills
39. The principal schedules grade-level or content-area collaborative time that includes the librarian.	83	Skills
69. The principal values the library offering just-in-time, at-point-of-need, instruction.	78	Dispositions
71. The principal values the library as the hub for media resources and technology.	78	Dispositions
73. The principal values the library's high-quality	78	Dispositions

collection of resources.		
75. The principal values affective support for students (beyond quantitative measures and statistics).	78	Dispositions
11. The principal understands what constitutes 21st Century skills and how the librarian mediates that learning.	78	Knowledge
4. The principal holds an accurate understanding of the librarian's complex role.	78	Knowledge