

Redesigning Principal Preparation: A Case Study of the ASU Educational Leadership Tier II Program

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Over the past five years, Albany State University (ASU) has reconstituted its Education Specialist Leadership Tier II Program to prepare school principals to work in some of the least served schools in southwest Georgia (and, as described below, outside of Georgia as well). Prior to the redesign of the program, ASU was struggling with a limited number of applicants who met state requirements for enrollment, such as Tier I certification and a school leadership position. The redesign focused on a vision for a program that would be aligned to the best current thinking on the preparation of principals. This thinking included balancing authentic leadership experiences embedded in clinical practice, individualized guidance and mentorship from experts, and close partnerships with the school districts in which graduates were most likely to work upon graduation. This case study tells the story of what ASU did and how they accomplished this herculean task.

Keywords: educational leadership program, partnerships, continuous improvement

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Increasingly, school reformers are recognizing the central role school leadership can play in improving America's schools. A recent meta-analysis of the impact of school leaders (Grissom et al., 2021) found that while leadership is second only to teaching among school influences on student success, principals may be even more critical because of the potential for leadership to impact multiple classrooms of students. Acknowledging this impact of school leadership on student achievement raised awareness in school districts and higher education institutions on the importance of leadership training and preparation. Principal preparation is the pathway for aspiring principals to develop the knowledge, skills, and dispositions they need to be effective school leaders. More than two decades of research finds; however, that university-based preparation can lack rigor and relevance. A survey of American Association of School Administrator (AASA) members revealed that some 80 percent were dissatisfied with the quality of candidates available from principal preparation programs (Mendels, 2016). For over 20 years, the research and evaluation literature on principal preparation programs has emphasized the need for redesign (Darling-Hammond, et al., 2007; Elmore, 2000; Levine, 2005; Peterson, 2002). Only recently, and with substantial philanthropic support, have a small number of universities undertaken this kind of ambitious redesign.

Over the past ten years, several studies (summarized by Mendels, 2016) have focused on the role of school leaders and their impact on student achievement (Anderson & Turnbull, 2019; Bartanen, 2020; Bartanen & Grissom, 2019; Bartanen, et al., 2019; Gates, et al., 2019; Grissom, et al, 2019; Grissom, et al., 2021; Turnbull, et al., 2016). Five major themes have emerged from these studies that address the need to redesign university principal preparation programs: (1) as noted above, district leaders are largely dissatisfied with the quality of principal preparation programs, and many universities believe that their programs have room for improvement; (2) strong university-district partnerships are essential to high-quality preparation but are far from universal (Wang, et al., 2018); (3) the course of study at preparation programs does not always reflect principals' real jobs (Herman, et al., 2022); (4) some university policies and practices can hinder change (National Academies of Science, Engineering, and Medicine, 2020); and (5) states have authority to play a role in improving principal preparation, but many are not using this power as effectively as possible (Gates, et al., 2020).

The Wallace Foundation, a national philanthropy that has worked on school leadership since 2000, instituted a university principal preparation initiative (UPPI) driven by the idea that principals have a crucial role in fostering student achievement and is based on the five themes that emerged from the studies (Mendels, 2016). Faced with numerous challenges and threatened closure of the ASU Educational Leadership Tier II Program, ASU applied for and was awarded one of UPPI grants to redesign their Educational Leadership Tier II Program.

This case study seeks to unpack the ways in which ASU transformed its principal preparation program from one that could not recruit enough candidates to one that stands as a model for other education leadership programs and now draws students from across multiple states. More precisely, this article addresses these research questions:

- In what ways did ASU redesign its preparation program, especially with regard to candidate recruitment and selection, curriculum, clinical experiences, and partnering with key stakeholders?
- How did the redesign team engage ASU administrators and faculty to support these changes?

- What contextual factors contributed to or helped facilitate change in the program?

Background

Albany State University (ASU)

ASU, part of the University System of Georgia, is a proud historically black institution. ASU is now one of the largest Historically Black Colleges and Universities in the country and the largest in Georgia with enrollment of 6,400. Located in southwest Georgia, ASU serves more than 26 diverse school districts ranging in size from 15,600 students to as few as 300 students. The region is one of the poorest in the nation. In a message delivered to the ASU Faculty Senate, Dr. Arthur Dunning, former President of Albany State University, quoted a report written by the Carl Vinson Institute of Government at the University of Georgia (Carl Vinson Institute of Government, 2017) noting that there are more families living in poverty in the 2nd Congressional District, which is where ASU is located, than in any other district in Georgia. Historically, ASU's program to prepare school principals suffered from chronically low enrollment and adherence to outdated approaches to preparing principals. Consequently, the university closed the program in 2018 until the educational leadership degree program was redesigned.

Georgia Standards and Program Requirements

ASU uses the Georgia Educational Leadership Standards and Elements (GELS) (Georgia Professional Standards Commission, 2019) adapted from the Professional Standards for Educational Leaders (PSEL) (National Policy Board for Educational Administration, 2015) as the basis for program curricula. These standards, as well as the elements that accompany them, are reflected in planning forms, catalogs, syllabi, key assessments, and program design. Additional standards (national and state) as well as school district needs were also used in developing and implementing program curricula and clinical experiences at the appropriate levels. Standards include the National Educational Leadership Program Standards, Georgia Department of Education (GaDOE) Leader Performance Assessment Standards, Leader Keys Effectiveness System, Teacher Keys Effective System, Standards for Professional Learning (Learning Forward), Interstate Teacher Assessment and Support Consortium Model Core Teaching Standards, Teacher Leader Standards, Model Principal Supervisor Standards and Turnaround Competencies, and the educator preparation provider conceptual framework.

Georgia has a two-tier licensure structure. Tier I licensure allows candidates to apply for school-level administrative positions below the principalship or district-level administrative positions not involving the supervision of principals. Tier II licensure is for those already in an administrative position including the principalship, the superintendency, and other administrative posts that involve the supervision of principals.

ASU Educational Leadership Tier II Program

The opportunity for the Educational Leadership Program in the School of Education at ASU to prepare effective leaders is paramount to the improvement of lives of students and families in

the region and beyond. The university administrators saw the need to develop and implement a high-quality learning sequence and develop stronger university/school-district collaborations and to do so in concert with the GaPSC. The GaPSC is the sole conductor of performance reviews for educator preparation programs in Georgia and is responsible for ensuring that principal preparation programs are aligned to licensing requirements and leadership standards.

The goal of the ASU Educational Leadership Tier II Program is to prepare candidates for the role of principal or other school/district leaders who evaluate other leaders. This program is an educational specialist program that provides just-in-time seminars and cohort learning through sequenced online instruction with clinical experiences with support throughout the program at the school or district level. Tier II certification candidates must complete at least 750 clinical hours, per Georgia state regulation.

The ASU Educational Leadership Tier II program is rooted in the belief that successful leaders are impactful, culturally-responsive, technologically-competent, and reflective practitioners dedicated to continuous school improvement and equity for all students, including the underserved. To continuously improve upon the identification, selection, preparation, and development of principal candidates and those who become leaders, this program provides intentional, purposeful experiences and engages with the districts in their service area to graduate individuals who are competent, skilled school leaders who lead through an equity lens.

Methods

The study employed a case study approach, defined by Yin (2014) as “an empirical inquiry that investigates a contemporary phenomenon (the ‘case’) in depth and within its real-world context” (p.85). The study team consisted of two senior practitioner-researchers (Carthon and Daniels) who were deeply involved in the redesign process and three external/independent researchers. Primary data were collected by the external researchers.

The study team conducted interviews and focus groups with key actors and partners. The team conducted four (4) focus groups and seven (7) individual interviews with university officials, state and district officials, Redesign Task Force team members, and redesign support partners. In total, data were collected from 18 individuals. Focus group and interview data were transcribed and coded using otter.ai. The research team also reviewed and analyzed documents related to the redesign such as meeting presentations and notes, grant reports, and previous interviews conducted with partners and students.

Given the small number of transcripts and documents, data analysis was conducted in Excel rather than purpose-built qualitative research software. Two researchers used an initial coding scheme to code three transcripts. After the initial coding, the researchers met to discuss coding efficacy and revised accordingly. The pair coded the remaining data and regularly met to review and ensure consistency in coding. The final coding scheme is shown below.

- Background
 - Impetus
 - ASU History
 - Redesign Goals
 - Additional Context
- Management

- Redesign
 - Curriculum
 - Recruitment/Selection
 - Faculty Roles
 - Partnerships
 - Program Content
- Continuous Improvement
- Outcomes
- University Activities
 - Rebranding

Once coded, the team met to identify and debate potential findings.

Findings

The Wallace Foundation Grant

In July 2016, the ASU College of Education, Department of Counseling and Educational Leadership was awarded a \$5.2 million UPPI grant funded by The Wallace Foundation. This grant, ending in December 2022, has provided funding for ASU to create a partnership network with three districts they serve (Pelham City Schools, Calhoun County School System, and Dougherty County School System), members of the Statewide UPPI, ASU Redesign Task Force, Georgia UPPI Professional Learning Community, ASU Educational Leadership Advisory Council, University System of Georgia, GaDOE, GaPSC, UPPI six universities, and other Wallace Foundation network. All of these partners have contributed significant time and expertise to redesign the ASU Educational Leadership Tier II Program that is evidenced-based and focused on equitable practices and leading with equity in preparing principals.

Several internal and external factors prompted the ASU Educational Leadership Tier II program redesign. Externally, changes in the national and state standards (PSEL and GELS) for educational leadership programs had sparked an interest in the administration of the ASU Educational Leadership Tier II Program. Before the adaptation of the GELS, the ASU Tier II program was ahead of the curve and had already begun participating in a statewide initiative involving university principal preparation programs in self-assessing their curriculum and practice. Supported by The Wallace Foundation and the Education Development Center, Inc.'s Quality Measures Self-Study, ASU, along with other Georgia Leadership Programs, identified areas for program improvement and the need for updated research-based curriculum and clinical experiences in their Tier II leadership program. Simultaneously, the state professional standards commission was in the process of making changes to their standards and state rules requirements for program approval. The new program approval requirements aligned to the Quality Measures domains, and indicators helped to promote the movement to “redesign” the ASU Educational Leadership Tier II Program.

The external support from The Wallace Foundation provided not just financial resources, but more importantly, access to an experienced facilitator to act as a critical supporter and a network of programs undertaking similar transformations with whom ASU could engage in conversation about change. The Project Director knew that The Wallace Foundation studies the

regions of the country and looks for district and university programs that are “the best fit for their initiatives....The Wallace Foundation knew the state of Georgia and its situation in terms of changes that were taking place and that ...the environment and climate in the state would allow us to do what we needed to do in terms of redesigning our program.”

Internally, the loss of candidates in the program and the need to update the content to meet the needs of future principals and district leaders demanded a need for change. As the program enrollment dwindled, it became apparent that candidates were looking for current, proven strategies conducted by school leaders that led to improved student achievement. ASU had to redesign their program to meet the new program approval guidelines and the desires of aspiring school leaders. There was a strategic need to serve school districts in this small, rural area of southwest Georgia. An ASU Redesign Task Force member and district partner explained, “We really wanted to tailor a program that was going to meet the needs of southwest Georgia, and requirements in Georgia as a whole.” Another district Task Force member stated, “I don't think [the program] aligned well to the real work of what was happening in schools. So, they wanted to increase the rigor of the program, in order to better serve the area. It was one of the programs that we could get to that was accessible for folks in that area. It was the only program that we had access to...if you look at the quality of schools in that area, there was also a need to improve leadership.”

Another internal factor was the result of the merger between ASU and Darton College. This merger created an urgency to reassess all of ASU's programs. The timing of the merger and the opportunity to apply for a Wallace Foundation UPPI grant were in sync. The ASU Educational Leadership Tier II Program team knew that the UPPI grant would give them the needed resources to redesign the program and launch a new branding campaign for the program.

Perhaps the most important internal support came in the form of stable leadership from the project director to drive change. A district partner and key player in the redesign shared that “the saving grace of this [work] is Dr. Janis Carthon. She is the stable person...If she had left, this would have just collapsed, because she is the consistent person driving this work forward and you need that stability, especially in an environment where they [ASU] had a lot of turnover in the leadership.” Another university administrator believed that “through all those changes that [have taken place at the university] the [UPPI] core team, ... and the partners, ... persevered, and they met religiously and frequently.” The collaboration between the UPPI facilitator and ASU UPPI Project Director was also critical to continuing the work amidst the change in leadership at the university level. A GaDOE partner and task force member noted that “It was very obvious that the Wallace facilitator who was an external person ... and the point person at Albany State had a very good, strong working relationship.” He found this relationship instrumental in keeping the work focused against all odds and forging forward.

Redesign Process: Goal and Process

ASU's principal preparation program was redesigned to include high-quality learning experiences aligned to the Georgia Educational Leadership Standards, the needs of school districts, and the pre-assessed learning needs of each candidate. Before the redesign, there were no cross-cutting themes, and the program lacked a learning sequence and a “true partnership.” ASU and its partners worked diligently on a program with an intentional purpose, coherence, and alignment

to standards and district needs with attention to closing the equity gap. The sequences of learning have five cross-cutting themes: turnaround strategies, an equity lens, data-informed processes, reflective leadership, and regulatory alignment. Sequences of learning were prioritized and grouped to provide coherent learning experiences acquired from semester to semester. Additionally, sequences of learning were aligned to school leaders' daily and monthly duties and responsibilities. As a result of these cross-cutting themes, the program has purpose, coherency, a logical sequence, standards alignments, and a process of continuous improvement.

The cross-cutting themes were defined. *Data-informed processes and use* include examining and using a variety of performance data to make decisions for school improvement. *Equity* refers to measuring and monitoring achievement, fairness, and educational opportunities for students to ensure that there are no concrete or perceived barriers to learning opportunities. *Turnaround* refers to leading change to improve organizational structures, processes, and pedagogy to improve school performance. *Reflection* refers to the candidates' ability to think about their knowledge, skills, and behaviors in order to improve their leadership acumen and positively impact the performance of the schools they serve. *Alignment to the Regulatory Context* ensures that candidates will learn about the local, state, and federal laws, policies and regulations as well as state initiatives impacting school leadership. Each course incorporates these five themes into the content and coursework providing classroom content and clinical experiences that are designed around the context of the cross-cutting themes.

Georgia's Continuous Improvement Framework, developed and administered by the GaDOE, along with the school improvement frameworks of other program participant states are an essential and critical component of the school improvement planning, monitoring, and evaluation expected of state, school, and district leaders (Georgia Department of Education, 2021). In this preparation program, leader candidates have opportunities to understand their state's continuous improvement process and the context within which it operates. Candidates have guided practice in implementing activities related to the continuous improvement process during their clinical experiences and in the analysis, design, implementation, and evaluation of the individual School Improvement Instructional Change Project which is a key assessment in the program.

The Leadership Candidate Support Team (LCST) is a group of on-site mentors, leadership coaches, the clinical director, and university faculty who are well-versed in the continuous improvement framework providing Tier II candidates with in-depth performance-based learning opportunities and support as a part of their clinical experiences. Candidates are guided cooperatively by the LCST to include appropriate opportunities to demonstrate knowledge, skills, and dispositions reflective of current leadership research and program standards. This provides significant opportunities for candidates to demonstrate leadership dispositions, synthesize and apply knowledge, and practice and develop the skills identified in the Georgia Educator Preparation Rule 505-3-.77, the 2018 GELS adapted from the PSEL and LKES. Also, program candidates from other states are supported within clinical experiences aligned to the PSEL. Substantial, sustained, standards-based work in real settings and in real time are planned and guided cooperatively by the higher education institution and school district personnel for graduate credit or certificate only.

Partners and Roles

The ASU partnerships included a diverse group of partners. Three school districts were integral to the process: Calhoun County School System, a small, rural, high poverty, high minority district of only 700 students; Pelham City School System, a medium-sized, rural, high poverty, high minority district of 1500 students; and Dougherty County School System, a large, urban/metropolitan, high minority, high poverty district of 15,000 students joined ASU in the grant submission phase and have continued to support the initiative throughout the life of the grant and beyond. ASU has many alumni in teaching and leadership positions and a long history of partnerships with each district.

The Partner School Districts played a variety of roles throughout the life of the UPPI. The superintendent or a designee served as a co-principal investigator on the initiative as part of the leadership team. In addition, other district administrators served on the initiative Redesign Task Force and working group sharing information and their expertise, while also providing a critical friend's perspective.

The redesign process included voices of not only local partners, but also national and state partners. State partners included the GaPSC, GaDOE, and University System of Georgia (USG). Additional support partners included Quality-Plus Leader Academy—Gwinnett (GA) County Public Schools, Leadership Academy (formerly New York Leadership Academy), and University Council of Educational Administration (UCEA). These partners were invaluable to the project, as they provided input and feedback from across the state and the country as well as offering expert advice concerning legal and legislative policies, practices, and program approval requirements. Throughout the project, this collaborative partnership contributed to the brainstorming, planning, development, and initial implementation decision making process. ASU was transparent and open to collaboration and feedback from all their partners. This open and honest dialogue is another key feature of the project and a reason for some of the early wins and success of the program.

The first two years of the five-year redesign process required the team to organize and create a vision for change. The project director and facilitator oversaw the redesign process. The structure of the redesign team included the main UPPI team comprised of multiple state education agency representatives, university education leadership faculty and program administrators, district administrators/supervisors, school principals and leadership team members, and The Wallace Foundation network. UPPI team members were organized into small subgroups: a core team that managed the administrative aspects of the redesign and task force teams of experts who focused on specific areas or tasks. Also, an advisory council comprised multiple state and regional education agency directors, program managers, and district superintendents, and the university provost who advises and provides feedback on key items. This approach helped to sustain continuous improvement and partnership support.

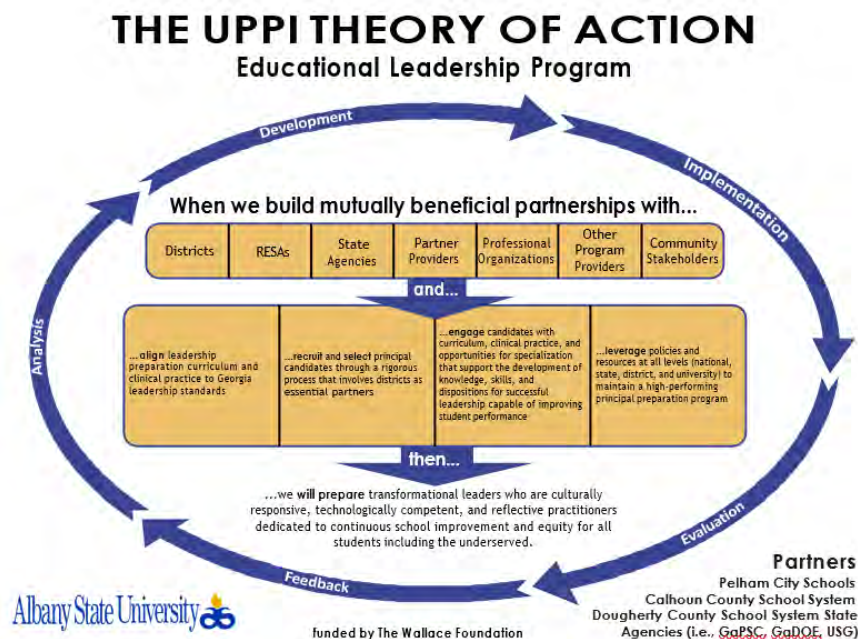
The redesign team created a theory of action and logic model for the program redesign, which was the guiding force for the work (see Figure 1 and Figure 2, respectively). Based on these documents, focus group interviews were held with all of the identified partners and organizations that would be impacted by the redesign. The focus groups were critical to figuring out what the "customers" (partner districts) needed from their school leaders. External consultant reflecting on the process stated, "The redesign team realized from the very beginning that this work could not be done in isolation; therefore, cultivating and managing relationships with internal and external stakeholders was crucial. [The team also] realized that they couldn't exist or remain in

existence being a standalone, [so the Task Force] really had to connect to school districts around them, [since these were] their customers.”

The partners had a disposition of collaboration and willingness to engage in the work. Engaging all the necessary partners in this redesign process promoted investment and buy-in among them. A leader of the Educator Preparation Division at GaPSC, commenting on the importance of the partnership, stated, “... the partnership piece was also a critical component throughout ... The P-12 partners were heavily engaged and were drivers of the redesign because the intent was to make the program fit the needs of the P-12 community.”

There was mutual investment and interest in the advancement of the southwest Georgia region. Building a program that meets the needs of the districts, strengthens the regional pipeline, and increases the skills and knowledge of the individuals enrolled in the programs brought the university, the programs, and the partner districts together. The partner districts were drawn to the perk of building leaders internally, as not to have to continue hiring externally. A district partner explained that “We were in need...[of] some type of principal prep program that would help our internal colleagues be prepared to step into those leadership roles. The whole southwest Georgia [region]...we want ... to prosper. And right now, we know that southwest Georgia is one of the lowest performing areas in the whole nation...So we felt like ... even if our people do get the training and then eventually leave us. It'll be okay ... because it's for the greater good.”

Figure 1
Theory of Action



Note. This figure shows the elements of the UPPI theory of action. As part of the redesign of the educational leadership program, the ASU team and its partners developed a logic model. A logic

model is a systematic and visual way to present and share the understanding of the relationships among the resources available to operate the program, the plan activities, and the changes or results hope to achieve (W.K. Kellogg Foundation, 2004).

Figure 2
Logic Model

Albany State University (ASU) Logic Model

Program: Educational Leadership
Situation: The processes and standards by which many principal preparation programs traditionally screen, select, and graduate candidates are often ill-defined, irregularly applied, and lacking in rigor. As a result, many aspiring leaders lack essential knowledge, skills, and dispositions needed to successfully lead schools to improve student performance, especially in under-served schools. (Wallace, 2016; Darling-Hammond, 2013; NCATE, 2002).
Goal: The Educational Leadership Program at ASU is rooted in the belief that successful leaders are transformational, culturally responsive, technologically competent, and reflective practitioners dedicated to continuous school improvement and equity for all students, including the under-served. By engaging in mutually beneficial partnerships with participating districts and other stakeholders and developing intentional purposeful experiences, we can continuously improve upon the identification, selection, preparation, and development of equity-minded principal candidates and other educators who become leaders in partner school districts.

Resources	Resources/Inputs	Activities	Outputs	Outcomes			Impact (25+)
				Short (2018-20)	Medium (2020-23)	Long (2023-25)	
ASU support, administrators, faculty, staff, and university services UPPI program graduates Partnering school district liaisons Regional Educational Service Agencies (RESAs) State agency representatives Advisory Council The Wallace Foundation support Professional Organizations Governor's Office and Key Legislative Leaders Alliance of Education Agency Heads (AEAH) National Organizations Local Businesses and Community Organizations	ASU administrators, faculty, staff, consultants, and graduates; district liaisons, state and UCEA representatives, partner providers School of Education full-time and part-time faculty (practitioners) and staff, partnering school district representatives, UPPI program graduates Georgia education policy, state and national leadership standards, UPPI partner/ expert providers, advisory council, district partners and ASU faculty Program clinical director and coordinator in collaboration with school district partners ASU faculty, district liaisons, RESAs, local, state agencies, and key stakeholders Georgia and national education policies including leadership standards	Weekly/monthly UPPI team meetings, monthly faculty meetings, annual team plus faculty retreat, semi-annual advisory council meetings Recruit, select, prepare qualified, effective faculty, staff, candidates, mentors, and coaches; establish entry/ completion requirements; develop brand, marketing program; recruitment strategy and selection procedures; align professional learning activities to redesigned program Develop, facilitate and coordinate the delivery of purposeful, coherent, evidence based content, clinical and professional learning experiences (assignments and projects), forms and materials, key assessment/rubrics aligned to Georgia and national educational standards; develop program review and evaluation system such as focused interviews with candidates, faculty, and staff using an independent evaluator and Quality Measures Self-Study Facilitate and coordinate high quality professional learning experiences aligned to Georgia and national educational leadership standards and program approval rules as well as linked to the performance of individual candidates Leverage policies and resources at all levels (national, state, district, and university) to maintain a high-performing principal preparation program	A redesigned principal preparation program that incorporates research-based curriculum and instruction, along with partner engagement in recruitment and selection of candidates capable of improving student performance and ensuring equitable treatment of all students Unique brand, updated Web page incorporating new brand materials and program information, aggressive multi-state recruitment efforts, structured selection process, rigorous, standards-based and performance-oriented curriculum; effective instructional team that includes faculty, staff, mentors, and coaches Certified candidates capable of improving student performance and assuring equitable treatment of all students; a comprehensive program manual; Leadership Candidate Support Team Guide; strong partnership agreements customized for each partner; purposeful, coherent, evidence based program built around a cohort model and equity framework An ongoing process of analysis (including predictive analytics), development, evaluation, and feedback on the educational leadership program and candidate/graduate performance; Leader Tracking System; instruments that measure candidates' knowledge, skills, and dispositions; district partners' evaluation of the program Professional learning community that includes candidates, graduates, district partners, university faculty, and other stakeholders Program alignment to national, state, and district standards	Seek and complete program approval from all stakeholders: university's committees, GaPSC, USG, etc. Increase the number of prepared and qualified mentors and coaches so that the ratio of coaches to candidates is no greater than 1:10 and the ratio of mentors to candidates is no greater than 1:3 Aligned professional learning activities 80% of participants are able to articulate effectiveness of the professional learning and how it will be used for improvements) Content and clinical experiences aligned to national and state standards, and district needs Candidates and in-service leaders provide high-quality professional learning experiences based on school and student performance data, aligned to Georgia and national educational leadership standards and Georgia program approval rules Content and clinical practice aligned to national, state, and district standards	Implement the inaugural redesigned program Increase training opportunities for mentors and coaches so that the ratio of coaches to candidates remains no greater than 1:10 and the ratio of mentors to candidates is no greater than 1:3 Refine content and clinical practice aligned to national, state, and district standards Provide virtual professional learning opportunities aligned to Georgia educational leadership standards, and program approval rules	Enrollment of at least 10 candidates per cohort 100% of new graduates and at least 80% of graduates continue to promote continuous school improvement and equity in their schools or districts At least 80% of districts report satisfaction with ASU graduates and their work 100% passage on state-required certification exam ASU graduates continue to move into higher positions in current or new school districts At least 80% of candidates and graduates report high satisfaction with the redesigned educational leadership program Creation of a pipeline of equity-centered principal candidates in southwest GA and neighboring counties	Significant improvement in leader and teacher development and instructional effectiveness through a focus on emotional health, equity and cultural responsiveness Significant improvement in student achievement and overall school performance among diverse student groups, especially under-served and marginalized populations Significant improvement on major equity measures, including but not limited to, diversity of instructional staff, parent satisfaction and engagement, student satisfaction and engagement, faculty and staff satisfaction and engagement Other higher education institutions in states where our graduates reside adopt equity as a major/important component of educational leadership programs
Assumptions Principals create the conditions to improve teacher practice and student performance and school culture (Mendels, 2013). School leaders who are properly prepared and supported will have a positive impact on teaching practices, retention, and student performance as compared to others who have not received comparable preparation and support.				External Factors Merger, administrative changes, and the historical perception of the University. District personnel turnover.			

Note. The logic model including four components: resources, activities, outputs, and outcomes served as anchors for the UPPI work.

Recruitment and Selection Changes

The ASU leadership program had taken a multi-pronged approach to recruiting and selecting candidates for the Tier II program. In reality, though, it was the same approach that most other universities use. To recruit candidates, the program typically hosted its own recruitment fairs, participated in other recruitment fairs across the state, distributed information at professional conferences, encouraged superintendents to recommend the program to district prospects, solicited recommendations via electronic newsletters to alumni, and encouraged current students and graduates of the program to help spread the word. While this approach had been somewhat successful, the program had remained fairly small and could not pull away from the competition, which is plentiful in the southeastern area of the state. To break away from the pack, the program realized that they would have to overhaul the recruitment strategies and

develop a detailed recruitment plan with specific actions and responsibilities assigned to program and university personnel.

In collaboration with partners, ASU designed and implemented a highly selective two-phase approach that included individual and group interviews as well as an on-demand writing assessment that focused on instructional leadership and teacher feedback in Phase I. Now, applicant readiness is determined using a rigorous, valid, and reliable process, which has resulted in a plan for recruiting and selecting candidates for the principal preparation program. Specific instruments were developed using identified selection criteria and activities aligned to standards. There is a data collection system, and members on the selection committee are trained.

Prior to the Phase I Selection Process, ASU colleagues, along with district and program partners, participate in a three-hour training session to review the selection process components and scoring criteria. All assessment participants are provided a Phase I agenda, and their assignments for individual interviews, on-demand writing/teacher feedback submissions, and candidate observations during the group interview. This is an evolving process and has gone from a fully in-person selection process to a fully online selection process. As the program grows and the number of program candidates increases, graduates are volunteering to participate in the Phase I Selection Process as a gesture of giving back to the program. The first group of program graduates to participate began with the 2021-2022 Cohort 4 applicants.

The redesign team changed its candidate selection process to recruit and select candidates who had a readiness, the experience, and the capacity to make them successful in the redesigned program. A former GaPSC director involved in these changes reflected on some of the reasons why the recruitment and selection process was redesigned, "...the idea was not more coming into the program just because you have a check and can pay the tuition. The idea was, let's recruit people who have an interest in leadership, and already have some dispositions that would suggest that they might be good leaders."

In terms of recruitment, ASU had believed that their relationship with the partner districts would allow them to try a more targeted, district-based approach to recruitment. Efforts were made to solicit district cohorts, starting with the three partner districts. This approach, however, was not successful for several reasons. First, two of the districts were too small to develop a cohort of candidates on their own, and there were only forty-four candidates in the state of Georgia that were eligible for the Tier II program when ASU began recruiting for the first cohort of the redesigned program. Also, school districts in the ASU service area were not focused on developing principal pipelines, which would have provided a resource for possible applicants.

These challenges along with perception and program organizational issues prompted a full-scale redesign of their marketing strategies and recruitment plan. Because of the limited number of Georgia candidates eligible for the program, ASU realized that to grow the program and serve more candidates, they needed to expand their service area and recruit from outside the state of Georgia. Now in the third year of the redesigned program, ASU candidates in Cohort 3 come from South Carolina, Virginia, Tennessee, and Mississippi, as well as Georgia. The program is continuing to expand its outreach to include other states, armed services candidates, and international candidates.

Changes in Curriculum

Prior to the ASU Tier II Redesign, the faculty used a variety of andragogic techniques to present information and facilitate learning in the classroom and online. However, while techniques such as case studies, problem-based learning, small and large group discussions, guest speakers, shadowing, workshops, seminars, and technology integration were used, the extent of use was not consistent across all instructors. The redesign efforts made a significant impact in this area by using practitioners as faculty because their field experience could speak to current issues facing school leaders. The team also recommended the employment of leadership coaches and a clinical director who are actively involved in present day P-12 protocols and research-based practices.

After several months of having the program analyzed, self-assessed, and externally reviewed and numerous sessions on the research and components of a high-quality educational leadership program, ASU determined that the program needed to start with a clean slate. This was not to be the task of revising or updating the program, but a clean sweep and overhaul of the program. With the use of a blank whiteboard and chart paper, the Redesign Task Force began to identify what a principal today needs to know and be able to do.

The redesign team aimed to develop a revised curriculum that equipped today's administrators with the skills to tackle the current challenges in education and to respond to the specific needs of partner school districts. The redesign team addressed standards alignment and enhancements. The curriculum, instruction and assessment, and clinical experiences for the ASU Educational Leadership Tier II program were aligned to district needs and the GELS that were adapted for the PSEL in 2018. Additional national and state standards mentioned in the Georgia Standards and Program Requirements are reflected in the program redesign.

Their criteria centered around content that was research-based and relevant for leaders in the partner school districts. Activities such as curriculum mapping, development of Key Assessments, and identification of the knowledge, skills, and dispositions highly effective principals must demonstrate were identified by the Redesign Task Force and used to create a framework for the redesign. Next, each of these components were aligned to the competencies defined by the 2015 Professional Standards for Educational Leaders (National Policy Board for Educational Administration, 2015). To achieve this alignment, all of the information was "chunked" and reordered to decide on the content and title for each course. From there, performance outcomes/competencies were created for each course and aligned to the GELS, which had adopted PSEL and adapted the elements to support the incorporation of PSEL in Georgia.

The Redesign Task Force sequenced courses that aligned to strategic times in the academic year of a school leader ("a year in the life") and the work happening in cohort members' schools. The curriculum was logically sequenced to support the development of candidate competencies over the course of the program. The sequences of learning provide coherent experiences and a strong clinical practice aligned to school leaders' daily and monthly duties and responsibilities. The ASU Redesign Task Force in collaboration with the Leadership Academy (formerly the NYC Leadership Academy) determined the duties and responsibilities by creating a month-by-month chart of activities that principals engage in and administer. For example, school leaders are required to develop budgets and resource allocations for the coming school year between February and April of each year; therefore, the Organizational and Management course

is taught during that same period to provide just-in-time information and authentic coursework and clinical experiences for the candidates.

Performance Assessments

Significant improvements were made to the course content, especially the key and critical assessments in the program. Key course assessments are nationally validated and meet the GaPSC Program Requirements. Critical assessments are designed in the same format as the key assessments for courses that may not have national validation. The key and critical assessment format is based on the Analyze, Design, Implement, and Evaluate (ADIE) model, which requires candidates to analyze, design, implement and evaluate experiential learning. Assessments are aligned to GELS and national standards such as the Performance Assessment for School Leaders, equity specialized certificate focused on Exploring and Deepening an Equity Mindset (BloomBoard micro-credential), GaPSC identified dispositions, and instructional change project. External experts in the field evaluate the PASL and equity specialized certificate.

Clinical Experience

The ASU clinical experience made full use of the philosophy that the best way for an educator to learn how to be a principal is by doing the things that principals have to do under the watchful eyes of an experienced clinical director, onsite mentor, and leadership coach. Their plan was to use a large portion of the funds provided by The Wallace Foundation grant to relieve a number of promising leaders from teaching responsibilities to serve as apprentices/interns under highly effective principals in their respective districts. Although this plan did not come to fruition, they were able to design the clinical practices throughout the program to fulfill the 750 hours of clinical practice required by the GaPSC along with other state clinical experience requirements. This plan provided opportunity and flexibility for each candidate to address the skills and dispositions they needed most to develop or enhance as identified in each candidate's Individual Growth Plan.

The partner districts strongly emphasized the need for aspiring school leaders to be able to observe teachers and provide effective feedback. This was a non-negotiable from the districts, and the ASU Redesign Task Force kept this requirement front and center in the redesign. The purpose of this extensive performance-based clinical experience was to provide candidates with real life experiences as a school principal that also included collegial visits, advanced professional development, and problem-based seminars.

The ASU Educational Leadership Tier II Program includes sequences of learning and clinical experiences that culminate in a key assessment designed in the form of an Instructional Change Project. The Instructional Change Project must demonstrate the candidate's progression towards meeting the knowledge, skills, and dispositions identified throughout the Educational Leadership Tier II Program. Candidates must successfully prepare a final presentation, report of findings, and proposed recommendations to be shared with the school leader, LCST, and members of the school community.

ASU, in partnership with local schools and districts, requires Tier II candidates to solicit problems of practice that have been identified by the partners. The candidate uses actual school data and research as the basis for their Instructional Change Project. From this information, the

candidate will analyze the findings and develop an improvement plan for the partner school or district. ASU encourages schools and districts to participate as a way of providing 1) clinical experiences for the candidate in a real-life, real-time setting and 2) opportunities for the university to give back information and resources to their partner schools and districts that will be immediately relevant and timely.

Changes in Faculty and Staff

Prior to the redesign of the Educational Leadership Tier II Program, all courses were taught by full-time university faculty, including some who were decades removed from the school building and classrooms or had never taught or been in a leadership role in K-12 schools. Presently, the Tier II program employs four part-time faculty and two full-time faculty. The part-time faculty are current practitioners representing school, district and state level leadership. This blend of practitioners and institutional faculty bring experience, up-to-date knowledge, and best practices to the curriculum that the ASU candidates need.

The program has added a full-time clinical director and an instructional leadership coach to provide additional candidate support. These new staff positions are critical to the program and candidate success. The expectations for the leadership coach and clinical director, as well as for the onsite mentors and faculty are explicitly outlined in the Leadership Candidate Support Team (LCST) Guide. The support of the clinical director and leadership coach has had a profound impact on candidate success. They are required to meet with the candidate and their onsite mentor at least two times a semester.

Furthermore, candidates are required to complete an instructional change project as a culminated assignment. Faculty support the analysis, design, implementation, and evaluation of the school improvement Instructional Change Project and coursework. The support staff (leadership coach, onsite mentor, and clinical director) ensure supervision and support for all components of the project and clinical experiences. The faculty and the Tier II staff support the candidates in the practice and development of leadership dispositions, the applications, synthesis of appropriate knowledge and skills learned throughout the program.

Implications

Four themes emerge from ASU's experience restarting and rebuilding its principal preparation program. Each of these themes has implications for other IHE's facing similar circumstances. These themes are: circumstantial readiness, institutional management, and engaging key external stakeholders.

Circumstantial Readiness

Rebuilding the program relied on an honest recognition of the state of the program, its relationship with key internal and external stakeholders, and the university itself. Both the program and university were in flux. As part of the merger with Darton, the university was reassessing its programs and their fit within the newly merged institution. Additionally, a merger between administrations made it especially difficult to reform the struggling program, so

redesign from the ground-up was a much more bureaucratically feasible option. The redesign facilitator described the impact of the merger, “[ASU was] going through so many changes, combining Darton College and ASU was a big issue...which group of administrators did you listen to? Everybody was interim, and most of their administration wasn’t willing to take a big leap out and make any kind of bold changes. So, they all agreed...it was better to just shut the program down than try to make great improvements to get it back up and running.”

As was the case with other principal preparation programs nationally, local school districts—those who would hire graduates—did not hold ASU in high regard. This needed to be and was recognized as the critical factor: not only did ASU need districts to want to hire its graduates, but just as critically, districts in southwest Georgia needed to have confidence that they could reliably find new principal candidates from ASU. This was uniquely poignant in southwest Georgia where the principal pipeline is virtually non-existent outside of ASU’s program, and graduates’ local ties to the region make leadership roles in local districts the most appealing and feasible opportunities. A Redesign Task Force member described ASU’s goal as “really want[ing] to tailor a program that was going to meet the needs of southwest Georgia.” While another Redesign Task Force member shared that, from the district perspective, there was a certain level of de-facto reliance on ASU and, “in order to better serve the area, it was one of the programs that we could get to that was accessible for folks in that area. It was the only program that we had access to.” The mutually beneficial nature of the program’s success created a readiness for reform that contributed significantly to the redesign’s success.

Institutional Management

University-Wide Changes Created Both Challenges and Opportunities for Program Revitalization. Most prominent among the accomplishments in navigating and managing ASU as a higher education institution were the changes to the recruitment and selection of students and successfully transitioning program faculty to a new curriculum. Historically, ASU focused on an open program that would enroll as many students who were academically qualified for the university as possible. With the redesign, the program shifted to recruiting and selecting students who not only appeared qualified for graduate work at the university but also appeared to be well-qualified upon graduation for positions as education leaders. That shift in mindset—from academically qualified to be a graduate student to professional potential to serve as a school principal—was one of the most profound shifts in the redesign process. Without losing sight of the responsibility to serve southwest Georgia, the redesign team seized the opportunity presented by the GaPSC and recruited candidates from outside Georgia.

Shifting student recruitment and selection was only half of the challenge and the opportunity within ASU. A program aligned to new nationally recognized features of effective principal preparation required not only additional faculty with direct knowledge and experience in school leadership but also faculty willing and able to teach revised curriculum, which presented institutional challenges. Tier II faculty were accustomed to teaching their research, interests, and syllabi, and a newly designed curriculum was a change to this “norm.” There was a required shift in faculty culture needed to accompany logistical, curricular, and other changes made. Tenured university faculty did not necessarily agree with the direction the program wanted to go and noted the dramatic change in rigor-level, which resulted in difficult conversations and discomfort

around what their role, if any, should be. A former Task Force member reflected, though, that, “I think sometimes if you want change, you have to make people feel uncomfortable...they were pushed to a point of growth.” In the interest of promoting growth, previous Tier II faculty found new roles in the (largely unchanged) Tier I program.

There was a university-level tension between designing a program that meets the standards, norms, and expectations of Albany State (and IHEs in general) versus one that truly serves and caters to the needs of the districts to whom it is responsible. One way in which these tensions came to light was in the push-back that came from the university expectation that full-time and often tenured faculty lead instruction when that is not necessarily the most impactful in a principal preparation program. The redesign wanted faculty who were experienced and immersed in the current challenges of leadership in schools, not instructors with outdated experience and war stories. A Redesign Task Force member shared, “The idea in the program was, let's go out. And let's find educators who are out there working doing the work, and let's hire them as adjunct faculty.” This shift required a change from institutional norms where the term *adjunct faculty* often is equated to lower quality because of lower cost. In this case, the idea was to flip that ASU expectation on its head and redefine the purpose of, qualifications for, and respect granted to adjunct faculty.

Amidst the turbulence of the university environment, there was relative stability within the redesign team. Although there was turnover in leadership, for most of the process, a single leader shepherded the process along through multiple changes in university leadership (both deans and provosts) as well as with partner districts.

Engaging Key External Stakeholders

Transformative changes to a program such as the changes at ASU would not have happened had the team not engaged key external stakeholders. While it is easy to point to the importance of the financial resources provided by The Wallace Foundation, the Wallace Foundation was in some ways the least important external stakeholder. That is not to minimize both the importance of external funding and the reputational capital that goes along with a major philanthropic grant. The Wallace Foundation funding allowed for key staff and consultants to redesign the program. Merely having a grant from Wallace lent enormous credibility to the work and helped immeasurably with the rebranding. Nonetheless, the most important benefit from engaging with Wallace was undoubtedly access to expertise to inform the redesign.

Engaging local school districts to forge partnerships was not only a substantial change from past practice but improved the curriculum, faculty engagement, student recruitment, and placement of graduates. The redesign was recognized and informed by the mutually beneficial process. There were inherently shared interests between the University, the program, and the partner districts. Those shared interests capitalized on the shared interest in advancing southwest Georgia by building a program that met the needs of the districts, strengthened the regional leadership pipeline, and improved the knowledge and skills of students enrolled in the program.

Conclusion

The focus of the ASU Project Director and the Tier II staff remains on continued improvement of the program and its sustainability. The program will seek continuous feedback from students, faculty, staff, and alumni as it continues to establish itself as a producer of high-quality school leaders. The Project Director has strategically used the grant period to establish a cadre of well-trained prospects and concentrate on replenishing the numbers as these initial prospects are placed in principal positions. This will undoubtedly be a smaller group and will require a smaller financial commitment than at start-up. Different apprenticeship/internship models can be explored, such as part-time rather than full-time, requiring less release time from the classroom, or a principal-for-a-day arrangement several times during the year, supplemented by specific principal duties at other times and intense involvement in the district's leadership institute. If, through the selection process, the program can determine which skills and dispositions need developing most, a specific plan can be created for each candidate and implemented in a systematic way. Sustainability in cash-strapped districts may require developing creative ways to get promising candidates significant "principal-type" practice time.

Institutions of higher education redesigning both teacher and administrator preparation programs in partnership with local districts is still a fairly new concept but one that is critical to the success of school leaders and, therefore, to student achievement. While other institutions of higher education will have their own unique circumstances, motivations, and resources, the goal of redesign remains the same: program improvement intended to produce school leaders who are highly prepared for the rigor and demands of their roles. Similarly, many obstacles faced by ASU will remain common across institutions of higher education; for example, institutional policies and bureaucratic hurdles will be likely challenges to any redesign program. Regardless of circumstance and obstacles, though, the key components for redesign highlighted by ASU (circumstantial readiness, institutional management, strategic branding, and engaging key external stakeholders) will be critical elements of an undertaking of similar purpose and magnitude by other institutions of higher education.

The larger significance of this redesign at ASU should not be undervalued. There is no debate about the importance of The Wallace Foundation's investment in ASU's principal preparation program. The UPPI grant was essential to the program redesign process. But the impact of foundation grants often lasts only until the grant is fully spent. In this case, with the generous support of The Wallace Foundation, ASU built a sustainable and scalable educational leadership program that stands as a model for redesigning higher education nationally.

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