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The Role of Accountability Policies and Alternative Certification on Principals' Perceptions of Leadership Preparation

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This study reports on findings from a survey of Massachusetts' school principals that examined their perceptions of the nature and quality of certification programs. Results indicate that when participants were certified (pre or post NCLB) and where they were certified (public, private, alternative programs) has a significant influence on the perceived content and quality of their preparation. These findings reveal that accountability measures may have led to changes in the content and structure of principal preparation programs over time and suggest a need for state standards that influence the development, delivery, and evaluation of principal preparation programs to reflect the requisite skills principals need and want in the 21st century.

The preparation of school leaders has come under scrutiny. A recent study, titled "Educating School Leaders," by Arthur Levine (2005) indicts educational administration and leadership preparation programs. In his report, Levine stated, "The majority of programs range from inadequate to appalling, even at some of the country's leading universities" (p. 23). While Young, Crow, Orr, Ogawa, and Creighton (2005) provide methodological concerns with the Levine report, other research has supported some of Levine's conclusions. In their study of school principals, Heller, Conway, and Jacobson (1988) respondents indicated that graduate training was rigorous, but not necessarily valuable or aligned with the real world of educational leadership. In a more recent study, Farkas, Johnson, and Duffet (2003) reported that all but four percent of practicing principals stated that on-the-job experiences or guidance from colleagues had been

more helpful in preparing them for their current position than their preparation program. In fact, 67 percent of principals reported that "typical leadership programs in graduate schools of education are out of touch with the realities of what it takes to run today's school districts" (Farkas, Johnson, & Duffet, 2003, p. 39). Even Gary Tirozzi, the executive director of the National Association of Secondary School Principals (NASSP), believes that "university programs for school administrators are not closely aligned with the instructional and real-world demands principals face" (2004, p. 43). Such reports indicate that our current system of preparing school leaders "may leave aspiring principals prepared for the traditional world of educational leadership but not for the challenges they will face in the 21st century" (Hess & Kelly, 2007, p. 268).

Not surprisingly, there are renewed calls to recalibrate certification programs. New models of preparation have focused on pedagogy (Sykes, 2002), organizational programmatic features (Orr, 2008), mentoring experiences (Daresh, 2004; Matthews & Crow, 2003; Pounder & Crow, 2005), succession planning (Macmillian, 2000), and the delivery of programs (Hale & Moorman, 2003; Tucker & Codding, 2002). Additionally, national and state standards for program accreditation and candidate licensure are pressing for principal preparation program "revisioning" to create new standards for school leaders.

Such "revisioning" has included the Interstate School Leadership Licensure Consortium (ISLLC) which re-authorized its standards in the fall of 2007 (see Murphy, 2003; Sanders & Simpson, 2005) and a recent announcement that the National Certification for the Accreditation of Teachers (NCATE) will undergo their own revisioning process (National Council for Accreditation of Teacher Education, 2008; National Policy Board for Educational Administration, 2002). In response, Murphy and Orr (2009) state that there is a "need for programs to address changing expectations for principal leadership, particularly to foster school improvement and meet accountability expectations for school performance" (p. 9). Critics have charged that traditional principal preparation programs have been slow to respond and as a result alternative preparation programs have emerged. Alternative programs have included on-line programs, college or university and school district partnerships, and programs that are not affiliated with a college or university (e.g., state-level principal associations). While many of the recommendations have lead to programmatic changes, important questions remain.

In light of the current discussion of the form of principal preparation program, in this study we sought to examine (1) the ways in which preparation programs are changing the specific knowledge and skill objectives they strive to have candidates learn and (2) how current principals perceive any modifications in programs in regard to their preparedness to be effective principals. For this research project we surveyed current school principals in Massachusetts about their certification

preparation programs. Our aim was to examine principal preparation through the voice of current principals and to analyze the data according to the type of certification program (public, private, or alternative) they attended and the time period in which they completed their programs. The rationale here was twofold. First, the recent proliferation of alternative preparation programs warrants further examination. By disaggregating the data by type of program, we were able to better understand the skills that practicing principals' needed to acquire and how types of preparation programming prepared them (or did not) in relation to those skills. Further, major educational policy reforms, such as No Child Left Behind, mark significant pressures for dramatic changes in practice and, in turn, principal preparation. By examining responses according to the time period in which principals earned their administrative license, we are able to highlight how educational policies, particularly accountability policies, may have impacted the content of preparation programs.

THE STATE OF THE PRINCIPALSHIP

Research indicates that the leadership of a school principal is a determining factor in school effectiveness, second only to the role of a student's classroom teacher (Hallinger & Heck, 1996; Leithwood, Seashore Louis, Anderson, & Wahlstrom, 2005; Leithwood & Wahlstrom, 2008; Robinson, Lloyd, & Rowe, 2008). A principal's capacity to facilitate conditions for student learning, manage the organization, and build community partnerships is paramount to reaching essential school outcomes. This is, in part, because a school principal is well positioned to re-shape a school's culture (Deal & Peterson, 1998). Yet, the species of "principal" is dwindling. National reports indicate that a great number of schools and districts are experiencing a shortage of qualified principal candidates (Gronn & Rawling-Sanaei, 2003; Fink & Brayman, 2006; Pounder & Crow, 2005). The University Council for Educational Administration reported that in 2007, 52% of principals leave their position within a three-year period (Fuller, Orr, & Young, 2008). And the shortage of principals is particularly endemic in districts perceived to have challenging working conditions, large populations of impoverished or minority students, low per pupil expenditures, and urban settings (Forsyth & Smith, 2002; Mitgang, 2003; Pounder, Galvin, & Sheppard, 2003; Pounder, Reitzug, & Young, 2002), with evidence to suggest that many high poverty districts field six or fewer applicants per principal vacancy (Roza, Celio, Harvey, & Wishon, 2003). This chronic shortage of administrators and applicants for vacant principalships, coupled with the importance of the school principal position, undermines the fabric of school improvement efforts nationwide.

The problem is not likely to be ameliorated in the near future. Reports indicate that the number of principal positions needing to be filled will grow 20% in the next five years (Mitgang, 2003). The high turnover in the

principalship has been fueled by pressure and demands that make the job nearly untenable. As Fink and Brayman (2006) speculate, having been stripped of their autonomy, principals are frustrated, which has produced "an increasingly rapid turnover of school leaders and an insufficient pool of capable, qualified, and prepared replacements" (pp. 62-63).

The more recent demands associated with accountability promulgated by No Child Left Behind (NCLB), including the mandates for student achievement, sanctions for "failing schools" that involve removing the school principal, and public reporting of test results, have placed new stressors on a position that many worried was already facing an exodus of qualified professionals (Gronn, 2002; Pounder & Crow, 2005; Pounder & Merrill, 2001). Consequently, the principalship is more difficult and less desirable than ever (Educational Research Service, 2000; Fink & Brayman, 2006; Pounder & Merrill, 2001); the added responsibilities of accountability have made the principalship unmanageable within constructs today (Beaudin, Thompson, & Jacobson, 2002; Lindle, 2004; Olsen, 1999; Quinn, 2002; Sykes & Elmore, 1988). Taken together, this three-way combination of variables—lack of applicants, impending mass retirements, and retaining practicing principals—underscored by a culture of high-stakes accountability, have created difficult conditions that undermine the survival of the principalship. As a result, today's principals must be equipped with a "Suit of armor" (Sykes, 2002, p. 146) in order in order to successful battle the conditions of their work. Recommendations to solve these problems have focused on (1) the necessary knowledge, skills, and dispositions candidates need to be effective, and (2) the structure, content, and pedagogy of leadership preparation programs.

Simply recruiting more people for a position that appears unmanageable and undesirable or re-visioning our current preparation programs based on new standards will not solve the problem of the principal pipeline. Four areas of research may provide insights into this problem. First, the responsibilities of school leaders must be reconceptualized, including the positions of assistant principal and principal, otherwise the administrative role is untenable as "the range of administration and supervising responsibilities in complex schools is far too great for one person to effectively manage" (Pounder & Crow, 2005, p. 60). Research has investigated the current roles and responsibilities of principals and implications for different leadership dynamics in schools (see Leithwood & Prestine, 2002; Leithwood, Seashore Louis, Anderson, & Wahlstrom, 2005; Murphy, 2002; Spillane, 2006). Second, leadership certification programs have been investigated regarding program content and delivery (see Hale & Moorman, 2003; Hess & Kelly, 2007; Levine, 2005; McCarthy, 2002; Tucker & Codding, 2002). A third area includes previous research on the knowledge, skills, and dispositions necessary for effective leadership (Leithwood, Seashore Louis, Anderson, &

Wahlstrom, 2005; Leithwood & Wahlstrom, 2008; Marzano, Waters, & McNulty, 2005). A fourth area includes research on the quality of leadership preparation programs' impact on leadership outcomes (Darling-Hammond, LaPointe, Meyerson, & Orr, 2007; Leithwood, Jantzi, Coffin, & Wilson, 1996). Specific studies have focused on specific program designs such as cohort models (Barnett, Basom, Yerkes, & Norris, 2000), problem-based learning (Copland, 2000), and internships (Cordeiro & Sloan, 1996; Ellis, 2002). In this article, we offer another vantage point: the principals' perspective. Other studies have also investigated principals' perceptions of their preparation (Jolly, 1995; Lawes, 2008; Martin, 2002; Poole, 1999; Quenneville, 2007); however, these studies (predominantly dissertations) did not include two important variables: type of preparation program and timing of certification receipt. This study specifically targets these two important variables.

PURPOSE OF STUDY AND RESEARCH QUESTIONS

This study reports on findings from a statewide survey of school principals that examined the nature and perceived helpfulness of certification program courses and skill development. Specifically, we sought to understand the following about current school principals and their leadership preparation: (1) What courses were taken? (2) What were the perceptions of current principals regarding how helpful the courses were to their practice? (3) What were the essential skills they perceived they needed to be effective school principals? And (4) what were their perceptions of how well their preparation program developed these skills? We disaggregated these data by ***when*** the principals were licensed (in relation to the enactment of state and national accountability measures) and the ***type of program*** (public, private, or alternative) in which they were certified. Based on recent policy mandates (specifically NCLB) and the recent proliferation of alternative certification programs, this timely research provides a better understanding of how certification programs have (or have not) responded to the perceived needs of program customers (e.g. current school principals).

The Massachusetts' Context

The Commonwealth of Massachusetts has been lauded for its focus on accountability measures. In Massachusetts the external accountability movement began with the passage of the Massachusetts Education Reform Act in 1993 that called for statewide curriculum frameworks and learning standards for all students in all core academic subjects. The act established the administration of a high-stakes assessment system. Since 1993, the Commonwealth has consistently ranked among the top of state-by-state analysis on the national assessment results, the National Assessment for Educational Progress (NAEP). Because Massachusetts has lived with a culture of accountability for nearly a decade

longer than the inception of NCLB, it is in a unique position to examine the effects of the high-stakes testing and the sanctions movement has had on the nature and dynamics of the principalship. Furthermore, Massachusetts has a wide array of public, private, and alternative routes to licensure. Table 1 provides an account of all certification programs distinguished by public, private, or alternative. Massachusetts provides a unique and rich context to understand the perceptions of preparedness of current school principals in relation to where and how they were trained and obtained their license. Results of our study have important implications for policy and practice in other states now on the cusp of experiencing the more long-term consequences of the culture of accountability promulgated by NCLB.

Table 1
Massachusetts Certification Programs

Program Type	***Number of Programs***
Public College/University Principal Preparation Programs (e.g. UMass Amherst)	9
Private College/University Principal Preparation Programs (e.g. Boston College)	9
Alternative Principal Preparation Programs (e.g. district-based and regional collaboratives)	5
Total Number of Massachusetts Certification Programs	23

METHOD

The Massachusetts Principal Population

Currently there are over 1700 practicing public school principals in Massachusetts. Thirty percent work in urban settings (515/1785), while the majority (70%) work in suburban and rural districts (1220/1785). Overall, there are more female (57%) than male principals (43%). There are 23 state approved principal licensure programs in the Commonwealth. Individuals seeking their initial endorsement can complete a full administrator preparation program, or seek alternative certification through the state's panel review process. According to Massachusetts DOE data, 3,500 people in the state held school administrator licenses as of October 2003 (Massachusetts Department of Education, 2003). In 2003, 914 people received initial Massachusetts' administrator licenses.

Survey Design

The research team developed an on-line survey to answer our set of research questions. The survey had five

main components: (1) participant demographics (including when participants were certified), (2) institution participants were certified from, (3) indication of courses taken and how helpful the courses were to the participant's practice (a set of 13 courses were provided), (4) ranking of skills school principals find important in their work and a ranking of how well their preparation program developed these skills (a list of 20 skills were provided), and (5) suggestions for improving preparation programs. The research team developed the set of courses and skills from a number of data sources. To begin, we examined the literature that targeted key or essential skills, knowledge, and dispositions (see Leithwood, Seashore Louis, Anderson, & Wahlstrom, 2005; Leithwood & Wahlstrom, 2008; Marzano, Waters, & McNulty, 2005). Next, we conducted an on-line survey of certification programs in Massachusetts to identify common courses offered and to solicit feedback on the essential skills. We then conducted a crosswalk of principal preparation literature to ensure the final list was comprehensive and not redundant. Finally, our team conducted two group interviews with current school principals and superintendents to reflect on our list of courses and skills. In the end, the team felt confident that the 13 courses and 20 skills fairly represented both the literature and practice.

Respondents

In June 2007, our research team sent out an on-line survey to a total of 1524 principals in the state of Massachusetts. The list of email addresses was provided by the Massachusetts Department of Elementary and Secondary Education. A total of 605 public school principals (non-charter) responded to the survey for a 40% response rate. Respondents were: 60% female; 29% urban, 57% suburban, and 14% rural; 24% had less than 3 years experience, 45% had 3-10 years experience, and 31% had more than 10 years experience. Table 2 provides a cross-tabulation table of participants: years since certification by institution type. Each cell displays the number of respondents who reported their years since certification in one of the three types of certification institutions. The left side of each cell displays the column percentage of respondents while the right side of each cell displays the row percentage, with marginal totals and percentages in the far right column and bottom row. As an example, in the first cell, 65 respondents had been certified between 0 and 5 years since the survey and had been certified by a public institution. These 65 respondents represented 47.8% of the respondents in the 0-5 years category (column) and 20.2% of the respondents in the public institution category (row).

Table 2

Disaggregation of study variables by years since certification and type of certifying institution

	Years Since Certification						
	0-5		*6-15*		*15+*		
Institution Type	*Column %*	*Row %*	*Column %*	*Row %*	*Column %*	*Row %*	*Total of Institution Type*
Public	65		124		133		
	47.8% (65/136)	20.2% (65/322)	59.0% (124/210)	38.5% (124/322)	72.7% (133/183)	41.3% (133/322)	60.9% (322/529)
Private	23		56		45		
	16.9% (23/136)	18.5% (23/124)	26.7% (56/210)	45.2% (56/124)	24.6% (45/183)	36.3% (45/124)	23.4% (124/529)
Alternative Programs	48		30		5		
	35.3% (48/136)	57.8% (48/83)	14.3% (30/210)	36.1% (30/83)	2.7% (5/183)	6.0% (5/83)	15.7% (83/529)
Total of Years Since Certification	25.7% (136/529)		39.7% (210/529)		34.6% (183/529)		529

Note: As demonstrated by the frequencies cross tabulated in Table 1, there is a highly significant relationship between certification institution type and years since certification, χ^2 (4, N = 529) = 64.8, $p < 0.001$.

Analysis

Our initial analysis included descriptive statistics of the participants, including perceived helpfulness of courses taken and skill development in participant certification programs. Next, we used SPSS to disaggregate the descriptive statistics by two variables: (1) when participants were certified and (2) type of institution in which participants were certified. In regard to when participants were certified, we choose three time periods (Post NCLB: 0-5 years experience, 2002-2007), Post Massachusetts Educational Reform and Pre NCLB: 6-15 years experience, 1995-2001), and Pre NCLB and Pre Massachusetts Educational Reform: more than 15 years experience, pre-1995). The types of programs were categorized by public, private, and alternative. To analyze these data, we used analysis of the differences across groups including cross-tabulation and Pearson chi-square calculations. For each of the figures with significance levels, a chi-square was calculated within each survey question, testing for

significant differences across the categorical grouping, such as years since certification or type of certification institution.

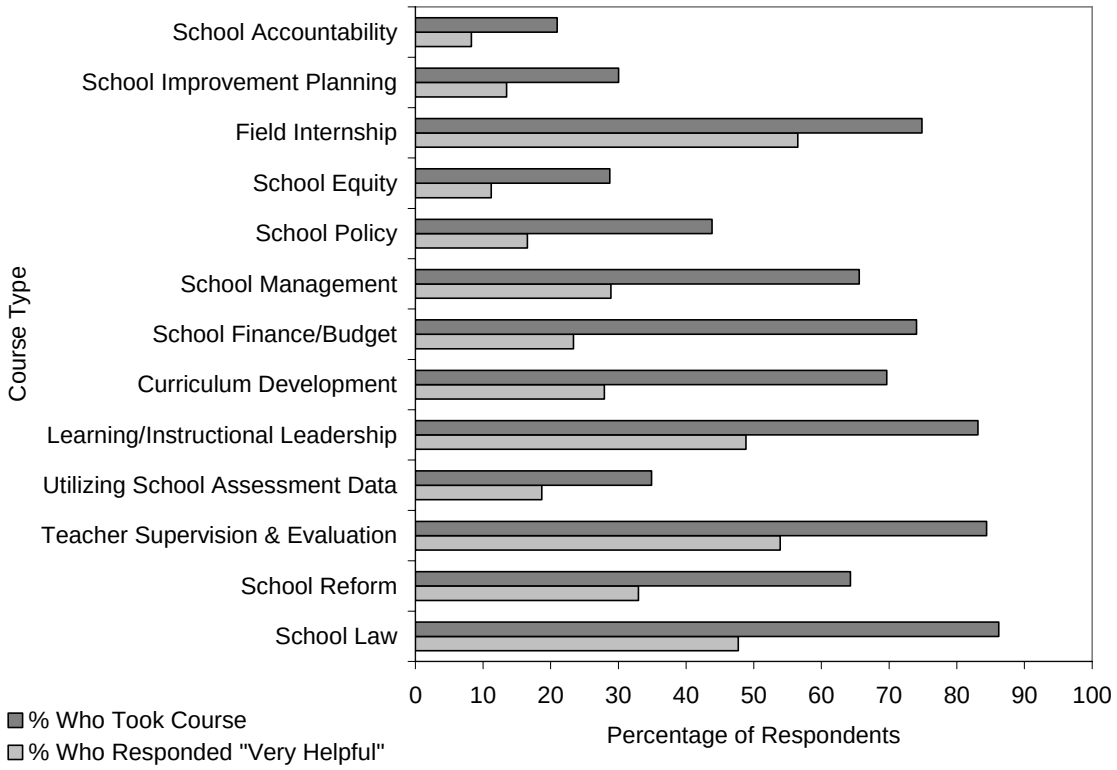
FINDINGS

Our findings are broken down into three areas. We begin by reporting the participants' responses to the courses they had taken during their certification program and the skills they describe as essential once becoming a principal. We also report the participants' ratings of how helpful the preparation courses were to them and how the programs prepared them develop specific skills. Next, we disaggregate the preparation courses taken and essential skill data at three time periods in order to identify significant changes in courses offered and perceptions of preparation over time. Finally, we disaggregate the preparation courses taken and essential skill data by type of certification program (public, private, alternative). Here, we identify significant differences in courses offered and the training in essential skills by the type of preparation program participants completed.

Prevalence of Preparation Courses and Perceived Helpfulness

Figure 1 indicates the courses that are most often taken in the respondent's preparation programs and how helpful they perceived the course to be in preparing them for actual practice. More than 70% of the respondents indicated taking four types of courses (school finance/budget, learning/instructional leadership, teacher supervision and evaluation, and school law) and a school internship. The course that was least cited as a course taken: school accountability.

Figure 1. Types and percentages of courses and internship preparing principals in Massachusetts took, and the percentage of respondents who indicated that for the courses and internship they took, the experience was "very helpful" in preparing them for actual practice



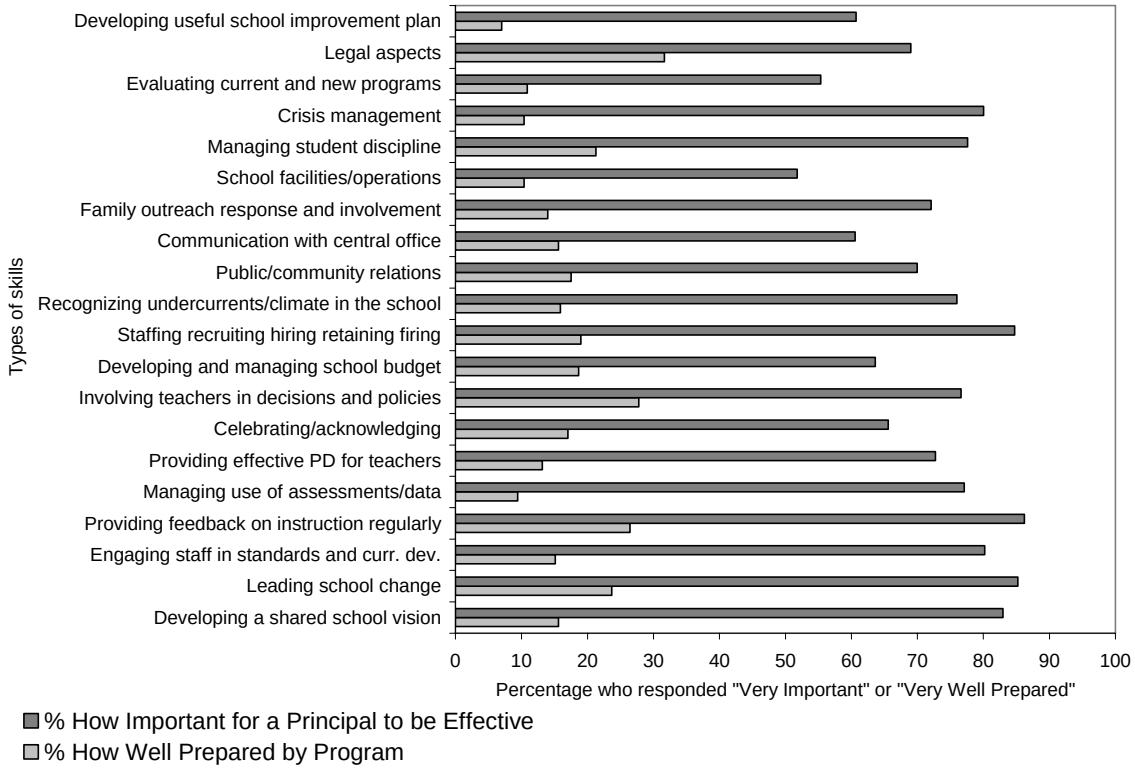
Of the 13 courses that respondents indicated taking, only field internship, teacher supervision, and evaluation were found to be helpful by more than 50% of the respondents. Overall, the courses that appeared to be most helpful for a principal's practice were learning/instructional leadership, teacher supervision and evaluation, and school law. Additionally, respondents perceive the field internship as helpful. This data shows evidence that not only are the certification programs in Massachusetts enrolling students in internships, but that the respondents reported that they had found internships very helpful for their practice. Overall, of the courses that were the least helpful to practice were school accountability and school equity.

Perceived Importance of Specific Skills and Perception of Preparedness in These Skills

Overall, the respondents indicated that all of the skills mentioned in the survey are to some extent "very important" for their practice (see Figure 2). In fact, with the exception of "evaluating current and new programs" and "school facilities and operations" (that both are over 50%) all of the skills are over 60%. This indicates that,

overall, principals feel they need a number of skills to be effective. Skills rated as particularly high included: leading school change, developing a shared school vision, providing regular feedback on instruction, and staff recruiting, hiring, retaining, and firing.

Figure 2. Types and percentages of skills principals reported as "very important" for a principal to be effective and "very well prepared" by the principal's certification program



The lower and lighter shaded bars in Figure 2 refer to participants' perception of preparedness by their preparation program. Strikingly, all but "Legal aspects" fall below 30% in regard to how well they were prepared by their program to carry out a particular essential skill. In fact, "Developing useful school improvement plans" fell below 10%. There appears to be a general dissatisfaction with principal preparation programs: More than 50% of the respondents indicated that all 20 skills were very important to be successful as a principal; however, respondents overwhelmingly indicated that their programs did not prepare them in these skill areas. Did participant perceptions of courses and skills change over time? That is, since NCLB, have there been marked changes in courses offered and skill focus? In the following

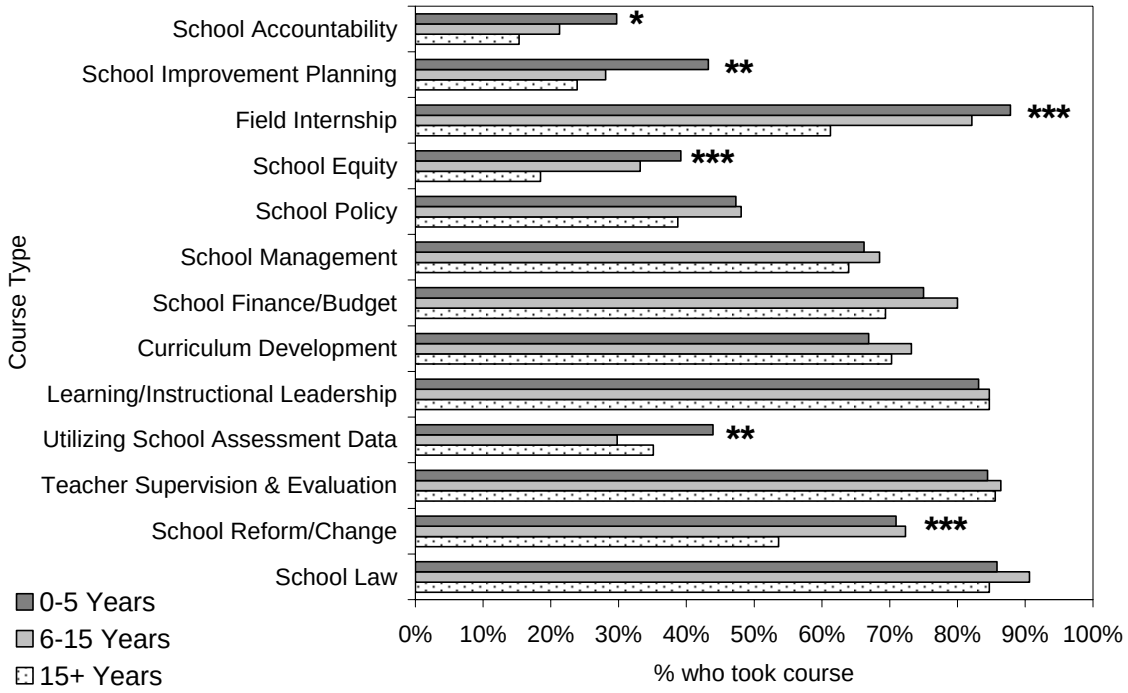
section, we examine the ramifications of policy on course content and skill development.

Changes in Program Content and Perceptions of Preparedness over Time

The previous findings highlighted the preparation courses that the study's participants took and perceived helpfulness of these courses. We also reported on the skills these acting principals identified as essential and their perceptions of how their preparation programs prepared them. In this section, we re-visit the preparation courses and essential skills disaggregated by time period. Using data from the survey, we analyzed when the participants completed their principal certification program by when principals were licensed: more than 15 years ago, 6-15 years ago, and 0-5 years ago. We purposefully chose these time increments based on the reauthorization of the Elementary Secondary Education Act in 2002, No Child Left Behind, as well as the Massachusetts Educational Reform of 1993. These policies ushered in a new set of mandates, regulations, and sanctions that placed accountability squarely on school based educators.

There is a significant rise in accountability/reform courses participants took across the time periods (see Figure 3 below). That is, respondents reported that more accountability/reform type courses were offered after both the Massachusetts Educational Reform (1993) and NCLB (2002) policies. Specifically, "School Accountability", "School Improvement Planning", "Using School Assessment Data", and "School Reform/Change" course titles all rose significantly over time. Additionally, *when* principals were trained had a significant impact regarding how well their programs prepared them. Principals who were prepared more recently had a higher perception of how well prepared they were in accountability skills (e.g., developing useful school improvement plans, managing the use of assessment data, and leading school change). This finding suggests that the type of courses offered by certification programs and the skills that are targeted have changed in concert with educational reforms. More specifically, there was an increase in accountability type courses and skills for those certified in the last six years. This suggests that the accountability policies may have ramifications on the curriculum of certification programs.

Figure 3. Percentages of principals who reported taking different types of certification courses, disaggregated by years since certification



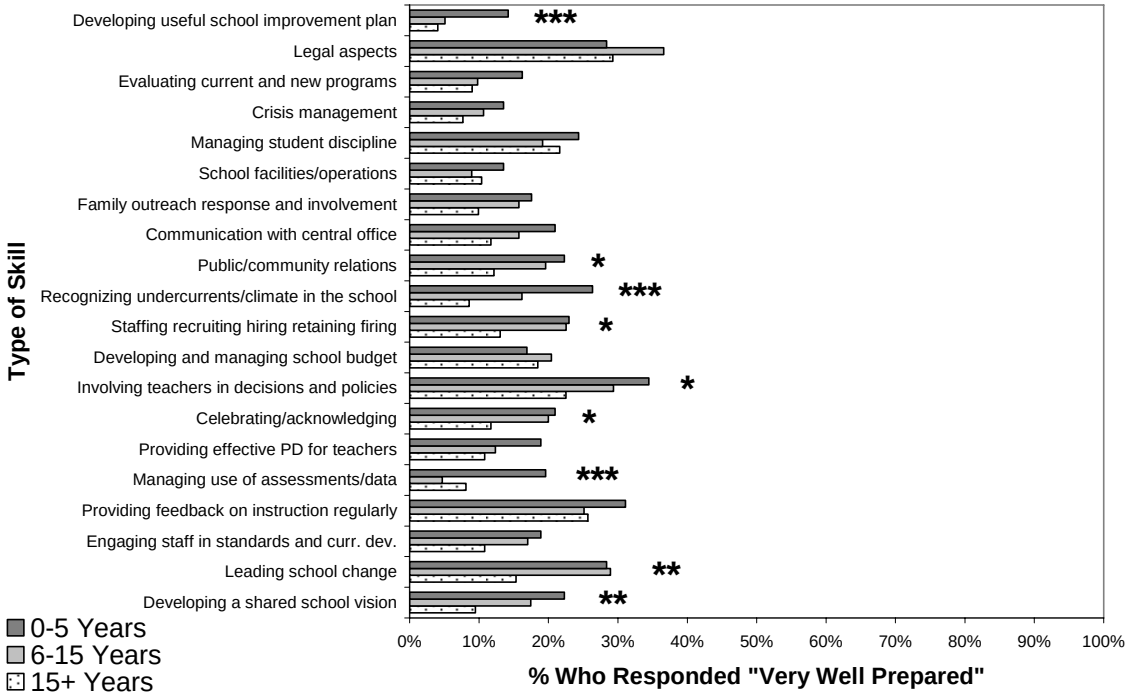
Note: For within category Pearson Chi-Square significance levels: * $p<0.05$, ** $p<0.01$, *** $p<0.001$

The data also reflect a significant increase in "Field Internships" and "School Equity." Finally, it should be noted that there were no significant decreases in any of the courses. This provides an indication that course requirements may be on the rise through time—a finding beyond the purview of this study but which warrants further research.

Figure 4 summarizes the respondents' perception of how well their preparation program prepared them based on the essential skills for their practice disaggregated by the three time periods. In general, the respondents ranked preparation of these skills very low (all fall below 40%) across all time frames. Nonetheless, the perception of the usefulness and how well the principals were prepared by their programs has changed significantly over the years. Most importantly, there is a statistically significant rise in the perception of preparedness in two main categories over time: accountability and climate/culture. Principals who were prepared more recently expressed that they were better prepared in accountability and climate type skills. Again, there was no significant decrease

in any of the skill areas over time. Interestingly, the largest significant gain, "Recognizing Undercurrents/climate of school," is worth noting. Marzano and colleagues conducted a meta-analysis of school leadership studies and found that the leaders ability to "recognizing undercurrents" in a school had the highest correlation to student achievement (Marzano, Waters, & McNulty, 2005).

Figure 4. Percentages of principals who responded that they were "very well prepared" by their preparation program for each type of skill, disaggregated by years since certification



Note: For within category Pearson Chi-Square significance levels: * $p<0.05$, ** $p<0.01$, *** $p<0.001$

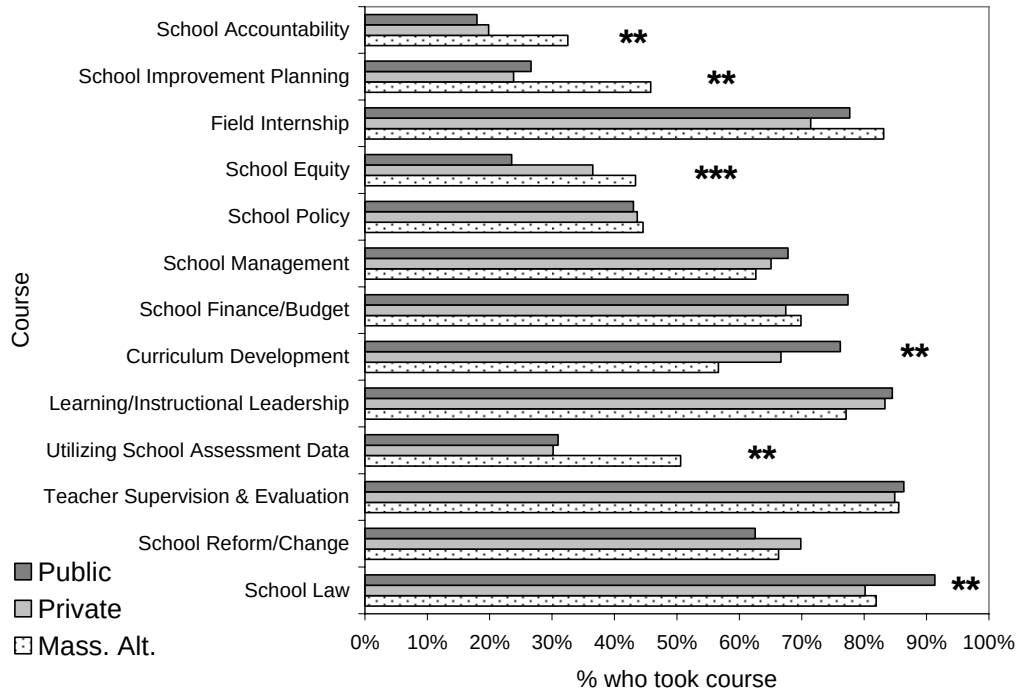
Program Content and Perceptions of Preparedness by Program Type

Findings presented in Tables 1 and 2 reveal that there is a growth in alternative certification programs (see Table 1). Moreover, the data from our survey indicates a steady rise of those completing their certification training in *alternative* programs: only five respondents with 15 or more years experience completed training in alternative settings while 30 participants with 6-15 years experience did, and 48 participants with only 0-5 years of experience did (see Table 2).

In this section, we report on the course and quality of preparation data by the type of preparation program through which the respondents were certified (public, private, alternative). There was a significant difference in accountability type courses and skills among various preparation programs (see Figure 5). Specifically, those

certified using the alternative route from the MA Department of Elementary and Secondary Education ranked taking courses and building skills in "School Improvement Planning", "School Equity", and "School Assessments Data" significantly higher than respondents in public or private certification programs. The only significant differences found in public certification programs were "Curriculum Development" and "School Law"—both of which were significantly higher than in other certification programs. Our data suggests that Department of Education alternative programs have a higher perception of training future principals to address school needs for accountability, leading school change, and managing the climate of the school.

Figure 5. Percentages of principals who reported taking different types of certification courses, disaggregated by certification program category

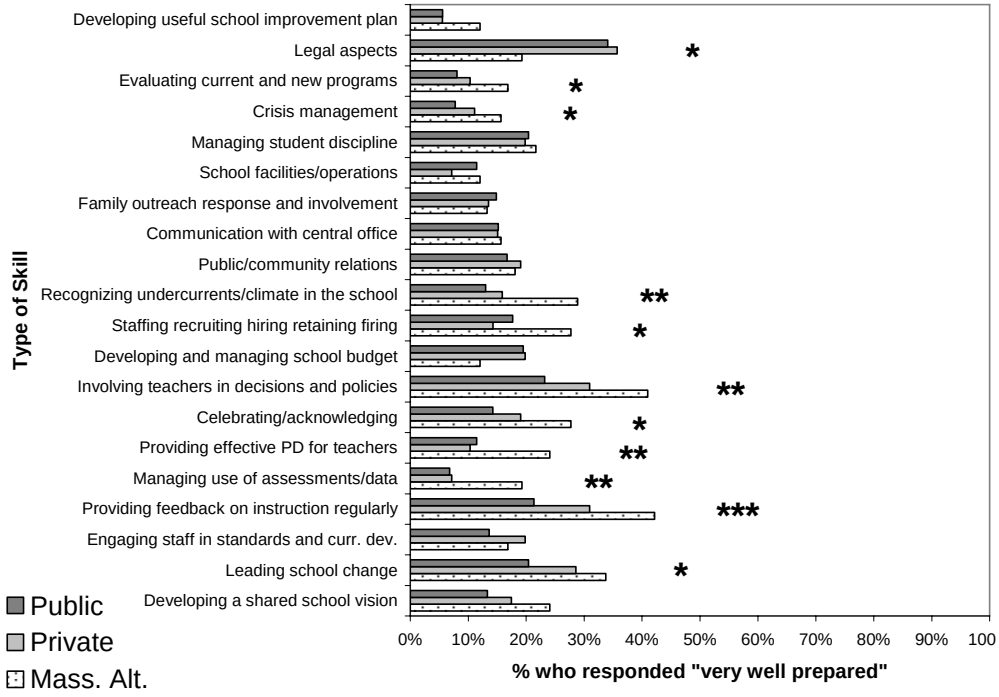


Note: For within category Pearson Chi-Square significance levels: * $p<0.05$, ** $p<0.01$, *** $p<0.001$

Our data also indicates that the Massachusetts Department of Elementary and Secondary Education alternative certification programs are regarded more highly as preparing future principals across multiple categories than either public or private. Within these categories, the alternative programs have a higher perception of training future principals to address school needs for accountability, leading school change, and managing the

climate of the school (see Figure 6). The only areas where the alternative programs do not rank higher are in law and budgeting; however, these results must be interpreted with caution, given that respondents certified by the alternative programs made up only 15.7% of the total sample (Table 2).

Figure 6. Percentages of principals who responded that they were "very well prepared" by their preparation program for each type of skill, disaggregated by certification program category



Note: For within category Pearson Chi-Square significance levels: * $p<0.05$, ** $p<0.01$, *** $p<0.001$

DISCUSSION

In the previous section we reported on the findings of our survey. Results indicate that *when* participants were certified (pre- or post-NCLB) and *where* they were certified (public, private, alternative programs) has a significant influence on the perceived content and helpfulness of participants' preparation. The results also suggest the following:

- Overall, principals who responded to the survey did not find the courses they took helpful/related to practice (with the exception of internships, see Figure 1) nor did they find useful their skill development from their principal certification programs (see Figure 2).

- Overall, principals believe they need a great number of skills

to be effective, specifically skills that are connected to accountability and learning demands (see Figure 2).

- The results suggest that legislative policies has played a significant role in both the courses participants took and the types of skills they were taught, particularly in terms of accountability related courses and skills (see Figures 3 and 4).

- Alternative preparation programs are on the rise. According to respondents in this study, these programs are offering more accountability and reform content in their courses and participants are somewhat more satisfied with these programs (see Figures 5 and 6).

These findings coincide with the conceptual and empirical literature explored previously in this paper. For example, a number of critiques have cited the need for more real-world, internship-like experiences in preparation programs. Principals in this study clearly found utility in such experiences over skill development in coursework. Examples like this provide interesting entry points into discussions about how best to prepare aspiring school leaders. Before we look at such implications, we offer two discussion points: (1) Policy may impact the preparation of future school leaders, and (2) alternatives may influence the normative practice of traditional programs.

Big Policy has a Trickle Down Effect

The findings tell us that policy matters. Like the immediate and substantive changes to K-12 schooling after the launch of Sputnik (1957) and release of the scathing "A Nation at Risk" report (1983), state-level policies in Massachusetts (Educational Reform of 1993) and national-level policies (NCLB, 2002) can impact the operational aspects of principal training. Our findings indicted that the types of courses participants reporting taking changed in concert with recent educational reforms. More specifically, there was an increase in accountability type courses for those certified in the last six years. Policies of the educational accountability movement may be impacting the curriculum of certification programs.

It is important to keep in mind that only focusing on accountability as the new archetype for preparation programs can have pitfalls. That is, the findings in this study suggest that culture building, community relations, communications, etc. are also important aspects of the effective leader. Besides accountability, field internships and school equity are two other course topics that significantly rose over time in this study. Rather than ward off non-accountability or reform focused content and skills, preparation programs should do their best to deliver the content current and future school leaders need to carry out the demands of accountability and to fulfill their professional mission of leading a

community of teachers to advance student learning.

From Alternative to the Norm

Our data revealed that the respondents in the survey regarded the Massachusetts Department of Elementary and Secondary Education approved alternative programs in higher esteem than the public and private programs. Moreover, our findings indicate that of all of the different programs, principals rate the department of education alternative programs somewhat higher than public or private programs in the state. While this result is preliminary and based on a subset of the overall data, and thus one must use caution in interpretation, this finding may be a result of the contextualized nature of the alternative programs and may have other advantages over traditional programs including:

- Cost—Alternative programs have different cost structures and especially the district-based programs may provide financial assistance in the form of matching if not covering the complete cost.

- Accessibility—Alternative programs may have more flexibility in scheduling of courses including weekends and summers. Additionally, the location of the courses may be in closer proximity to students.

- Clear Objectives—Newly minted programs have the advantage of being created in the era of school accountability reform.

- Meaningful Internship—Alternative programs may have opportunities to support full-time internships and have access to practitioners in the field to support field placements.

- Best of Both Worlds—Many alternative programs offer and integrate courses that are delivered by highly qualified faculty from local public and private institutions of higher education.

- Cohort Model—Alternative programs typically provide an opportunity to join a cohort of other individuals seeking licensure at the same time, providing a sense of colleagueship and avenue for shared learning and support.

Massachusetts has a number of highly rated universities and colleges, both public and private. As these institutions continue to seek what is becoming increasingly scarce funding, the natural market forces may cause the type of change in certification programming that aspiring principals seek. In the future, traditional programs may need to modify programming as the current "alternative" status of some programs may become the norm.

Study Limitations

This study extends prior work on principals' perceptions of their preparation by investigating the variables of when people were certified and where people were certified; however, the study has limitations that we acknowledge. To begin, the three-level response scale was used instead of a traditional Likert scale. This limited the range of possible analyses. A study replication may use a Likert scale in order to conduct more complex analyses and in order to ensure validity of the key courses and skills developed in this survey. Additionally, we acknowledge that responses may have been biased by the source of the survey. That is, because the survey was sent under the auspices of a current preparation program, participants may have been compelled to respond in a particular manner. Further, alternative preparation programs did not proliferate until the late 1990s. As a result, their impact on our first time variable (Massachusetts Educational Reform in 1995) is limited. This study did not investigate the common or unique aspects of each alternative preparation program, thus the interpretation of what the significant differences look like from program to program is limited.

IMPLICATIONS FOR PRACTICE, POLICY, AND RESEARCH

Implications for Traditional Principal Preparation Programs

Many studies reiterate the need for experiential education for school leaders in the form of clinical requirements and mentorship. While many leadership programs have responded to demands for more practical experiences by increasing students' clinical experience requirements, the vast majority of programs are designed to permit students to maintain full-time employment as educators while they complete their coursework as part-time students (Hackmann & Wanat, 2007). Research also indicates that utilizing excellent administrators as mentors can enhance the clinical experience (Brown-Ferrigno & Muth, 2004). Cohorts are also valuable as they provide an efficient structure as well as create a camaraderie and potential professional network for educational leaders (Hackmann & Wanat, 2007).

Aspiring school principals need well-articulated, real-world experience throughout their program, not only at the end. Additionally, programs must make explicit the procedural *how* terms such as data-based decision-making and instructional leadership that are operationalized in practice.

Implications for Policy

Despite the cogent recommendations of education reformers regarding the content and structure of principal preparation programs, it is wishful thinking to think that these recommendations will somehow translate into a sound principal preparation curriculum. Administrators are trained to become competent professionals in a multitude of domains through preparation programs that are governed by state education policy. It is the state education bureaus of educator

certification and licensing, responsible for the accreditation and oversight of educator preparation programs, which have the power of policy levers to ensure that new principals have acquired standards-based knowledge and skills. Neither the federal government nor local institutions of higher education have as much authority as the state to influence the inputs, throughputs, and outputs of educator training programs. Ultimately, it is the responsibility of each state education bureau to grant an initial principal's license based on their determination that candidates have met their standards and are qualified to join the professional ranks. As such, we believe state standards need to be examined and transformed in order to meet the preparation needs of 21st century principals.

Professors of educational leadership look to state administrator standards as a guide for determining the scope, sequence, and content of leadership preparation programs. As our study suggests, standards can be a powerful policy lever for communicating 21st century learning expectations and for designing, evaluating, and improving principal preparation program curriculum. We believe that teachable, actionable, and measurable 21st century standards for administrators can have a significant positive effect on principalship preparation in four ways.

1) Recruitment and succession. Massachusetts' standards for principals should enable teachers and others with leadership potential to acquire an early and accurate understanding of the principalship in the 21st century. With teachable, actionable, measurable standards, potential candidates would no longer have to rely on anecdotal stories (often negative) and limited personal observations of building-based leadership to decide if becoming a school principal is a desirable thing to do. School district leaders should be able to use principal standards in the recruitment and succession planning process as a tool for communicating and enticing aspiring leaders into seeking administrative positions and obtaining the appropriate preparation and training.

2) Preparation and training program curriculum. 21st century administrator standards should provide significant guidance about the appropriate curricular content and learning experiences of administrative training programs. Educational leadership preparation program faculty members should use standards to develop a shared understanding about the types of programs that they need to design for those seeking a principal's license. Elements of the standards can be addressed, spiraled, and sequenced purposefully throughout the program, as opposed to courses being offered based on the individual desires of available instructors. In addition, teacher educators could use the standards as a tool for introducing the field of administration to teacher licensure candidates. Students enrolled in professional preparation programs predicated on teachable, actionable, and measurable standards are more likely to

understand and appreciate what they are expected to learn, thus improving their training experience.

3) Program accreditation and candidate licensing: Transformed state standards for administrators would enable the development of valid and reliable candidate performance assessments (i.e. program-based portfolios, a statewide competency exam, and the alternative/peer review process). Department-based educator preparation, quality, and licensure personnel should be able to use the standards to more authentically judge program quality and to assess the capacity of candidates to facilitate 21st century K-12 teaching and learning environments.

4) Current performance. Quality administrator licensure standards can provide district-level staff developers with a better sense of their new principals' knowledge and skills, from which to springboard subsequent professional development. Superintendents could use licensure standards to develop a clear sense of what newly hired administrators know and are able to do, and subsequent models of supervision and mentorship could be more accurately framed to address the standards, thus bridging the gap between preparation and performance-evaluation systems.

Implications for Research

It should be noted that there might have been a larger percentage of respondents that were certified more than 15 years ago that did not recall courses they had taken. This may have impacted the results. The possibility of such an alternative explanation warrants further research (e.g., study replication) if such policy appraisals are to be deemed appropriate. Future research is also needed to explore the question of whether overall course requirements are on the rise. This study indicates that while there are a number of courses that have increased over time, few of the course topics have decreased. In addition, while this initial study used a 3-point survey scale, future research will focus on more in-depth survey items with Likert-type scales that delve deeper into the questions posed here. Other ideas for further research include cross check self-reports with actual transcripts for clarity and accuracy. Finally, it may be useful to use state achievement data with perceptional survey data.

CONCLUSION

Findings from our study reveal that accountability measures may have led to changes in the content and structure of principal preparation programs over time and suggest a need for state standards that influence the development, delivery, and evaluation of principal preparation programs to reflect the requisite skills principals need and want in the 21st century. James March (1978) characterized the directions that school leaders are provided with as a "a bus schedule with footnotes by Kierkegaard" (p. 244). Current pressures and demands placed on school leaders make such a statement

accurate. In the end, the beliefs leaders hold, the knowledge they attain, and the skills they are able to practice must meet the expectations we hold for them. We must be cognizant and able to assist these aspiring leaders to know, understand, and be able to do what will be required. Consequently, those responsible for assisting the development of knowledge and skills and those promoting application to such positions should be aware of what current school principals need and the kind of education they are receiving. As we work to improve our current principal certification programs, we would be well advised to listen to the voices of those doing the very important work of leading our schools. The choir of experienced and well-intended leaders in the field may answer the calls for principal certification reformation.

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Appendix

MA Principals Survey

Response Summary

Total Started Survey: 618
Total Completed Survey: 571 (92.4%)

Page: Demographic Information

1. How many years have you been a school principal?

	Response %	Response Count
Less than 3 years	23.3%	143
3-10 years	45.8%	281
More than 10 years	30.9%	190
Answered question		*614*
Skipped question		*4*

2. Please indicate your gender:

	Response %	Response Count
Male	39.4%	239
Female	60.6%	368
Answered question		*607*
Skipped question		*11*

3. Please indicate your race/ethnicity:

	Response %	Response Count
Asian/Pacific Islander	0.8%	5
Black	4.6%	28
Latino	1.5%	9
White, non-Latino	92.4%	561
Other (please specify)	0.8%	5
Answered question		*607*
Skipped question		*11*

4. Please indicate your professional position(s) prior to becoming a school principal [check all that apply]:

	Response %	Response Count
Paraprofessional	3.0%	18
Teacher	68.8%	406
Department Head/Lead Teacher	14.8%	90
Assistant Principal	58.9%	358
Director (e.g. Curriculum, SPED)	13.8%	84
Private Sector	3.6%	22
Other school-related (please specify)	15.8%	96
Answered question		*608*
Skipped question		*10*

5. Do you consider your school

	Response %	Response Count
Urban	29.2%	177
Suburban	57.3%	348
Rural	13.5%	82
Answered question		*607*
Skipped question		*11*

6. Please indicate the configuration which best describes your current school:

	Response %	Response Count
Preschool	0.0%	0
Elementary	53.2%	321
Middle school or junior high	17.6%	106
High school	13.3%	80
Combined middle/high school	2.7%	16
K-8	5.0%	30
K-12	0.3%	2
Other (please specify)	8.0%	48
Answered question		*603*
Skipped question		*15*

7. What is your current educational level:

Bachelor's	0.7%	4
Master's	26.2%	159
Master's + 30 (or Certificate of Advanced Graduate Study)	65.0%	395
Doctorate	8.2%	50
Answered question		*608*
Skipped question		*10*

8. Indicate the year you received your principal certification:

	Response %	Response Count
Pending	0.7%	4
2007	0.7%	4
2006	3.3%	20
2005	4.1%	25
2004	4.6%	28
2003	5.0%	30
2002	5.8%	35
2001	5.0%	30
2000	5.8%	35
1999	3.8%	23
1998	5.0%	30
1997	5.1%	31
1996	3.3%	20
1995	2.6%	16
1994	3.0%	18
1993	3.6%	22
1992	1.7%	10
1991	2.8%	17
1990	3.0%	18
1989	3.3%	20
1988	2.6%	16
1987	2.0%	12
1986	1.3%	8
1985	2.5%	15
1984	0.7%	4
1983	1.0%	6
1982	2.3%	14
1981	0.5%	3
1980	2.5%	15
Before 1980	12.2%	74
Answered question		*606*
Skipped question		*12*

9. Indicate the institution from which you received your principal certification:

	Response %	Response Count
Out of State	6.6%	38
DOE Review/Alternate	6.6%	38
Elms College	0.2%	1
Suffolk University	0.2%	1
American International College	1.4%	8
Boston College	2.3%	13

Boston Public Schools	0.3%	2
Boston University	3.5%	20
Bridgewater State College	11.6%	67
Cambridge College	3.6%	21
Curry College	0.0%	0
Eastern Nazarene	0.3%	2
EDCO Collaborative	0.9%	5
Emmanuel College	0.3%	2
Fitchburg State College	7.1%	41
Framingham State College	3.0%	17
Hampshire Educational Collaborative	0.2%	1
Harvard Graduate School of Education	3.8%	22
Gordon College	0.0%	0
Lesley University	3.0%	17
Massachusetts College of Liberal Arts	2.3%	13
Massachusetts Elementary School	3.5%	20
Principals Association (MESPA)	0%	0
Massachusetts Secondary School	0.5%	3
Administrators' Association (MSSAA)	0%	0
Merrimack Education Center (MEC)	1.4%	8
Northeastern University	1.9%	11
Salem State College	8.5%	49
Simmons College	0.2%	1
South Coast Educational Collaborative	0.2%	1
Springfield College	1.2%	7
Springfield Public Schools (LEAD)	0.3%	2
The Education Collaborative (TEC)	0.5%	3
UMass/Amherst	4.7%	27
UMass/Boston	5.7%	33
UMass/Dartmouth	0.3%	2
UMass/Lowell	2.6%	15
Westfield State College	3.3%	19
Wheelock College	1.2%	7
Worcester State College	6.1%	35
Other (please specify)	0.7%	4
Answered question		*576*
Skipped question		*42*

Page: Principal Preparation

10. What would you say are the MOST ESSENTIAL skills and knowledge that today's principals need?

	Response Count
Answered question	*581*

Page: Principal Preparation Program Course Information

11. For each of the following course areas, please indicate: (a) Did you take this course as part of your certification program? (b) If yes, how helpful was it in preparing you for actual practice?

	Yes	No	Don't Remember	Response Count
School law	92.5% (531)	7.3% (42)	0.2% (1)	574
School reform/change	69.8% (396)	25.9% (147)	4.2% (24)	567
Teacher supervision and evaluation	90.3% (520)	9.0% (52)	0.7% (4)	576
Utilizing school assessment data	37.9% (215)	58.1% (330)	4.0% (23)	568
Learning/instructional leadership	89.5% (512)	9.6% (55)	0.9% (5)	572
Curriculum development	75.4% (429)	21.4% (122)	3.2% (18)	569
School finance/budget	80.0% (456)	18.8% (107)	1.2% (7)	570
School management	71.3% (404)	24.3% (138)	4.4% (25)	567
School policy	48.0% (270)	42.5% (239)	9.6% (54)	563
School equity	31.4% (177)	59.0% (332)	9.6% (54)	563
Field internship/practicum	81.0% (461)	18.6% (106)	0.4% (2)	569
School improvement planning	32.6% (185)	63.7% (361)	3.7% (21)	567
School accountability	23.0% (129)	68.5% (385)	8.5% (48)	562

(If Yes) How helpful?

	Very helpful	Somewhat helpful	Not helpful	Response Count
School law	55.4% (294)	42.0% (223)	2.6% (14)	531
School reform/change	50.4% (203)	43.7% (176)	6.0% (24)	403
Teacher supervision and evaluation	64.0% (332)	30.3% (157)	5.8% (30)	519
Utilizing school assessment data	49.1% (115)	38.5% (90)	12.4% (29)	234
Learning/instructional leadership	59.1% (301)	37.1% (189)	3.7% (19)	509
Curriculum development	39.7% (172)	48.3% (209)	12.0% (52)	433
School finance/budget	31.4% (144)	50.7% (232)	17.9% (82)	458
School management	43.7% (178)	49.9% (203)	6.4% (26)	407
School policy	36.2% (102)	51.1% (144)	12.8% (36)	282
School equity	30.4% (59)	49.5% (96)	14.9% (29)	194
Field internship/practicum	75.3% (348)	21.0% (97)	3.7% (17)	462
School improvement planning	40.7% (83)	49.5% (101)	9.8% (20)	204
School accountability	35.2% (51)	51.7% (75)	13.1% (19)	145
Answered question				*580*
Skipped question				*38*

Page: Key Practices for Principals

12. Below are some potentially key practices for administrators. For each, please rate: (a) HOW IMPORTANT IS THIS SKILL for a principal to be effective and (b) HOW WELL DID YOUR PREPARATION PROGRAM PREPARE YOU for this practice.

How Important

	Very important	Somewhat important	Not important	Response Count
Developing a shared school vision	91.3% (511)	8.4% (47)	0.4% (2)	560
Leading school change	94.3% (525)	5.7% (32)	0.0% (0)	557
Engaging staff in standards and curriculum development	88.4% (494)	11.6% (65)	0.0% (0)	559
Providing feedback on instruction to teachers regularly	95.0% (531)	4.7% (26)	0.4% (2)	559
Managing use of assessments/data	85.3% (475)	14.4% (80)	0.4% (2)	557
Providing effective professional development for teachers	79.0% (448)	18.9% (107)	0.4% (2)	567
Celebrating school accomplishments/acknowledging failures	72.7% (404)	26.3% (146)	1.1% (6)	556
Involving teachers in decisions and policies	84.9% (472)	15.1% (84)	0.0% (0)	556
Developing and managing school budget	70.5% (392)	28.1% (156)	1.4% (8)	556
Staffing – recruiting, hiring, retaining, firing, etc.	93.9% (522)	5.8% (32)	0.4% (2)	556
Recognizing undercurrents, climate, etc. in the school	84.2% (468)	15.6% (87)	0.2% (1)	556
Public/community relations	77.5% (431)	22.3% (124)	0.2% (1)	556
Communication with central office	67.2% (373)	32.3% (179)	0.5% (3)	555

Family outreach, response, and involvement	80.1% (444)	19.7% (109)	0.2% (1)	554
School facilities/operations (schedule, buses, etc.)	57.6% (319)	40.6% (225)	1.8% (10)	554
Managing student discipline	86.3% (478)	13.5% (75)	0.2% (1)	554
Crisis management	89.0% (493)	10.5% (58)	0.5% (3)	554
Evaluating current and new programs	61.6% (341)	36.8% (204)	1.6% (9)	554
Legal aspects	76.6% (425)	23.1% (128)	0.4% (2)	555
Developing useful school improvement plan	67.9% (374)	29.2% (161)	2.9% (16)	551

How Well Prepared by Program

	Very well prepared	Somewhat prepared	Not well prepared	Response Count
Developing a shared school vision	18.2% (96)	47.9% (253)	33.9% (179)	528
Leading school change	27.7% (146)	45.9% (242)	26.4% (139)	527
Engaging staff in standards and curriculum development	17.6% (93)	48.3% (255)	34.1% (180)	528
Providing feedback on instruction to teachers regularly	30.8% (163)	47.5% (252)	21.7% (115)	530
Managing use of assessments/data	10.9% (58)	38.3% (203)	50.8% (269)	530
Providing effective professional development for teachers	15.3% (81)	43.3% (228)	41.6% (219)	526
Celebrating school accomplishments/acknowledging failures	19.9% (105)	40.6% (214)	39.5% (208)	527
Involving teachers in decisions and policies	32.3% (171)	46.3% (245)	21.4% (113)	529
Developing and managing school	21.8% (115)	49.4% (261)	28.8% (152)	528

budget				
Staffing – recruiting, hiring, retaining, firing, etc.	22.2% (117)	39.8% (210)	38.0% (200)	527
Recognizing undercurrents, climate, etc. in the school	18.6% (98)	43.3% (228)	38.1% (201)	527
Public/community relations	20.5% (108)	48.7% (256)	30.8% (162)	526
Communication with central office	18.3% (96)	44.7% (235)	37.1% (195)	526
Family outreach, response, and involvement	16.4% (86)	50.7% (265)	32.9% (172)	523
School facilities/operations (schedule, buses, etc.)	12.2% (64)	44.4% (232)	43.4% (227)	523
Managing student discipline	25.0% (131)	43.3% (227)	31.7% (166)	524
Crisis management	12.2% (64)	37.0% (194)	50.8% (266)	524
Evaluating current and new programs	12.8% (67)	50.2% (262)	37.0% (193)	522
Legal aspects	37.1% (195)	50.3% (264)	12.6% (66)	525
Developing useful school improvement plan	8.3% (43)	38.0% (198)	53.7% (280)	521
Answered question				*560*
Skipped question				*58*

Page: Recommendations

13. How would you rate the overall effectiveness of your principal preparation program? (Please be as specific as possible.)

	Response %	Response Count
Very effective	26.0%	143
Somewhat effective	50.5%	278
Neutral	13.5%	74
Somewhat ineffective	7.3%	40
Very ineffective	2.7%	15

Answered question	*550*
Skipped question	*68*

14. What suggestions do you have for improving principal preparation programs? (Please be as specific as possible.)

	Response %	Response Count
		485
Answered question		*485*
Skipped question		*133*

Page: Administrator Licensing Questions

15. For each of the following groups—should that group have its own, separate state license (as opposed to one license for all)?

Separate license for this group?

	Yes	No	Response Count
Principals/Assistant Principals	76.9% (426)	23.1% (128)	554
Superintendents	88.8% (491)	11.2% (62)	553
Business Officers	87.0% (481)	13.0% (72)	553
Special Education Directors	88.4% (489)	11.6% (64)	553
Directors and Supervisors	52.6% (289)	47.4% (260)	549
Answered question			*556*
Skipped question			*62*

16. Should there be differentiated standards/licenses for urban, suburban, and rural principals?

	Response %	Response Count
Yes	9.0%	50
No	91.0%	505
Answered question		*555*
Skipped question		*63*

17. Should there be differentiated standards/licenses for elementary versus secondary principals?

	Response %	Response Count
Yes	59.4%	330
No	40.6%	226
Answered question		*556*
Skipped question		*62*

18. Any final comments?