An In-Depth Examination of Principal Preparation Redesign in Illinois

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Purpose of Study

1. Describe how the new policies are being implemented and variation between programs

2. Capture the early implementation of the policy and to determine where improvements could be made for the future

3. Identify which aspects of the implementation have been challenging and how programs are addressing challenges

Methodology

- Two-year, mixed-methods study
- Statewide scan
  - Fall 2014
  - Interviews with 45 key informants
  - Summarized in interim report (IERC 2015-3 available at http://ierc.education/our-research/publications/)
- Site visits
  - Spring 2015- Spring 2016
  - Interviews with faculty, staff, administration, students, and district partners in 12 sites
- Document review
  - Syllabi from sample of 14 programs
- Online survey
  - Fall 2015/Winter 2016
  - 75% response rate (21 of 28 programs)

Findings

Partnerships

More shared responsibility between program and district partner post-policy

- After redesign: required, but varies by program

  – Written, signed document outlining roles and responsibilities of program and partner

  – Entities involved in formal partnership: One district, several districts/ROE, partner advisory board

  – All have at least one formal partnership; some have 2-5 formal partnerships; most still maintain informal partnerships

- Varied levels of partner organization's involvement

  – Deep, on-going collaboration and reciprocal relationship between program and partner organization

  – Partner organization provides input and assists with implementation

  – Minimal involvement of partner organization with providing feedback and attending informational meetings

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Shared responsibility has increased and is beneficial

To what degree has the amount of shared responsibility between your program and your district partner changed since the redesign? Shared responsibility has: *(n=19)*

Increased a lot	21%
Increased somewhat	47%
Stayed the same	21%
Decreased somewhat	11%
Decreased a lot	0%

How would you describe this change (or lack of change) in the degree of shared responsibility? *(n=18)*

Very Beneficial	33%
Somewhat Beneficial	61%
Somewhat Detrimental	6%
Very Detrimental	0.0%

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"Through this partnership and what we're doing with principal prep, [we've] opened other doors to expand the partnership with [university]. We're considering, for example, some changes in the student teaching and a different model for that…We've worked with them on a curriculum for creating new [professional development] courses that are really designed according to the needs of the mission and our goals as a district and the learning that we need to do within the district for our teachers." – Head of HR at Partner District

Many resources are need to maintain partnering districts' involvement

- Examples of ongoing involvement
  - Communication and strong ties between program and district personnel
  - Most often with internships, placements, and principal mentors
  - Recruiting and reviewing applicants, participating on advisory boards, providing input for continuous improvement

- Funding needed to cover personnel time and travel

- Cultivating meaningful partnerships requires time
  - Districts are faced with accountability requirements and multiple demands on time - "Districts have many other higher priorities"
  - Program faculty/staff also stretched thin
  - Investment of time/resources vs. payoff

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"*Not every single partner is in the same place – it takes time to cultivate that...it takes time to sit down and talk, and talk about where we're headed. It takes time to nurture those partnerships. Really, that's the biggest challenge, is having the time to get out there – not us, only, but them.*"
- Program staff

Enrollment & Recruitment

Enrollments considerably lower than they were for general administration programs

- Substantial decrease at some institutions: 180 students →13; 100 students → 10; 600 → 140

- Enrollments starting to increase at many institutions, but not expected to return to Type 75 levels.
  - Average growth in enrollment of 42% from the first year of implementation to 2014-2015

- Almost two-thirds (63%) of programs surveyed were already at or above the enrollment levels needed for sustainability
  - Average growth needed to reach sustainability was smaller than average growth to date

- 76% optimistic they'll have sufficient enrollment within next 3 years, but 75% believe there will be too few qualified candidates to fill principal openings in the next five years
  - Some felt Type 75 did not produce qualified candidates

Program Enrollment Summary
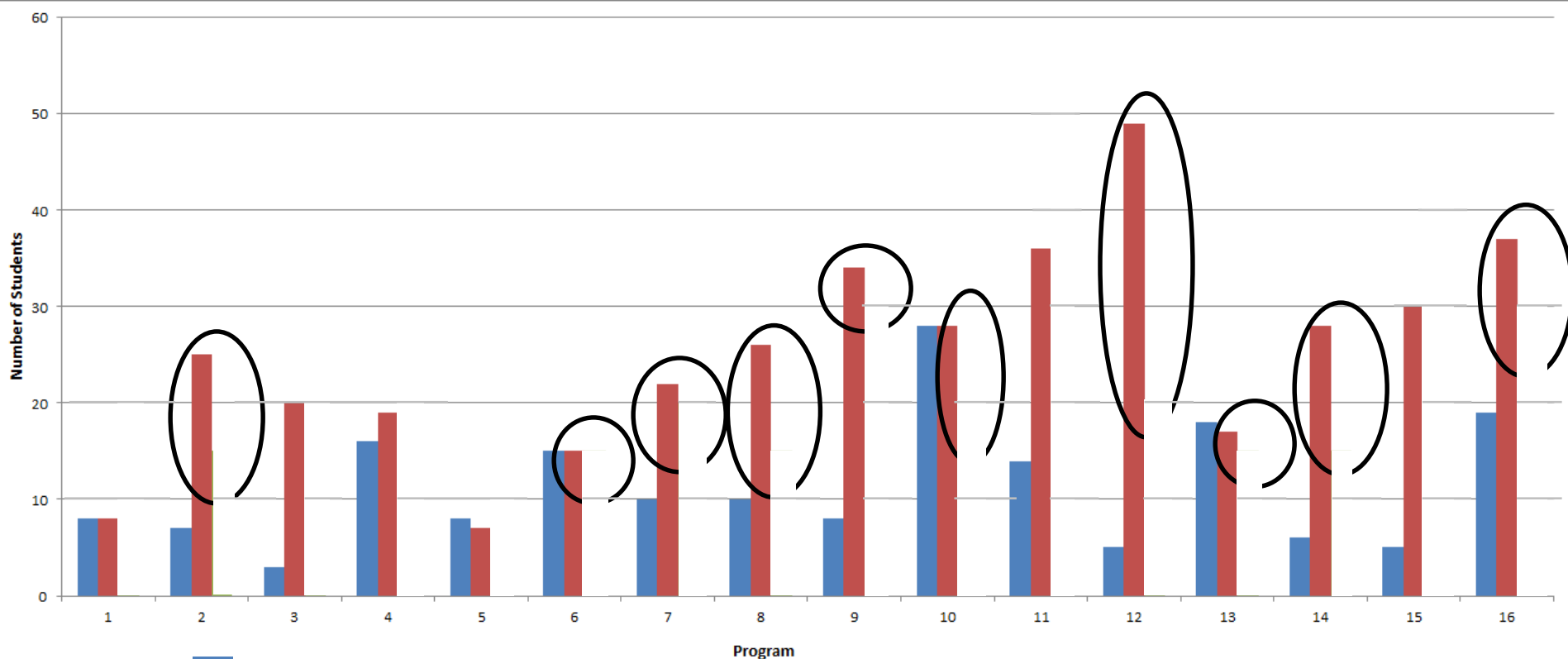
Legend:
- How many students enrolled during the first full academic year of your redesigned program?
- How many NEW students enrolled in your program during the 2014-15 academic year (include all new student cohorts who began in AY 2014-15)?
- How many NEW students do you believe would need to enroll in your program each year in order to provide the resources necessary for program sustainability?

A combination of factors inhibited enrollment

- Low enrollments by design – to some extent
  - Shift from general administration to principal prep – more targeted and selective admissions

- Other deterrents:
  - Program requirements (especially internship)
  - Increased costs
  - Confusion about requirements
  - Questions about marketability of credential
  - Competition from other states/programs

- Some worry that these may discourage potentially high quality candidates from applying

Programs are being asked to do more with less

- Reduced enrollment
  - Lower budgets
  - Fewer staff (57% say staff size decreased)

- New requirements
  - Expanded staff responsibilities (100% say workloads have increased)
  - More expensive to implement (95% say costs have increased)

- Tension with university administration
  - *'I keep having to remind my provost that enrollment numbers will never return to the levels from before the redesign.'*

- Questions about program sustainability
  - One program has suspended operations
  - 65% agree that policy changes will be difficult to sustain over time

Programs enhanced their recruitment strategies to boost enrollments

- Increasing enrollments is a top priority
  - 40% say "much more" difficult to recruit and 55% say spending "much more" time on recruitment, but 80% say having more selective criteria is beneficial

- New recruitment strategies
  - Increased outreach and education efforts
  - Two-stage admissions system
  - Expanding on partnerships
  - Seeking external funding to offset costs (e.g. for GTL)
  - Expansion vs. contraction (of off-site cohorts and start dates)

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Current candidates viewed as more committed, stronger, and no less diverse overall

- 75% of program coordinators say candidates more committed to becoming principal
  - 50% say "substantially more"

- 70% say candidates are stronger in terms of overall capabilities
  - 0% say weaker

- No overall negative impact on diversity reported
  - 60% say no change, 30% say more diverse
  - But still viewed as area for improvement

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Curriculum

Moving from General Administration to Principal Prep

- Generally viewed as a welcome change
  - Some programs completely revamped, others merely tweaked

- Strong focus on instructional leadership
  - This was business as usual for some institutions
  - At least half of the courses in each program explicitly address instructional leadership

- School improvement and data literacy & analysis become established components of the curriculum
  - Especially around teacher evaluation and development
  - 85% say ability of graduates to lead school improvement has increased, 75% say data skills have improved

Curriculum seen as more authentic, but concerns that management has been deemphasized

- Tight link between coursework and fieldwork increases authenticity
  - 75% say field experiences have improved
  - But still room for improvement

- "Pendulum has shifted too far" away from management content and toward instructional leadership?
  - Importance of management skills for day-to-day operations
  - Beginning to return at some institutions

- Heard these comments from both program staff and candidates

Increased quality of training for leading special student populations – but is it enough?

- Special education is "ubiquitous" and candidates can learn a lot from their classmates

- All programs now include early childhood education content and experiences

- ELL content is well-integrated, but placements are difficult in some regions

- Only 5% believe quality has declined in these areas, but 25%-40% say focus has not increased

Internships & Mentoring

Typical format of internship has not changed post-policy

- Typical internship
  - Length/duration: Part-time, two/three semesters
  - Setting: candidate's school
  - Mentor: candidate's principal
  - Unpaid

- Internships in some programs differ
  - Length/duration: Full-time/full year
  - Setting: new school, two different schools (elementary & HS), multiple settings
  - Mentor: new principal, assistant superintendent, etc.
  - Paid

Many candidates would prefer paid, full-time, year-long residency

After redesign, internship experiences are deeper, more authentic

- More substantial, authentic preparation for principalship
  - Focused on instructional leadership
  - More direct leadership vs. observation
  - Practical, authentic and wider variety of experiences
  - More time in internship

- Increased and more meaningful mentorship
  - Increased supervision
  - Better feedback to candidates
  - Better training for mentor principals
  - Mentor principals also benefit from experience

"What's working well [with the internship] are the activities that are required have significant value and meaning in order to be a principal [and that] there's a more of an established relationship between the [principal] mentor, ...the student, and the professor." – Program Coordinator

Challenges to implementing successful internships

- Difficult to find placements for all grade levels and different student populations

- Difficult to find enough faculty supervisors/principal mentors due to requirements

- Less ability to differentiate internships due to prescriptive experiences in policy

- Intensive amount of time required to implement internships
  - Program: Paperwork, documentation, and assessment
  - Candidate: Difficult to juggle teaching responsibilities with internship

Continuous Improvement

Continuous improvement is not yet realized for most programs

- Typically informal

- Most programs collect data on current candidates

  - But few collect systematic data on graduates

- Data used primarily to evaluate program and tweak it

- One program has extremely detailed continuous improvement processes in place (outlier)

  - Data collected on candidates from application → participation → completion → employment as assistant principals or principals.

  - Data analyzed to help improve various components of the program → continual feedback loop

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Probably one of my goals that I'll get to in the summer to say – obviously, I want to do it. I want to have some kind of data, but I'm just trying to keep information on everybody that's been in the program while I've been here so that I can make sure they're getting everything that they're supposed to get and that they've done the modules, and the principal exam, and the internship, and all the classes, but then did they pass Phase One; did they pass Phase Two? And then it'll be extended as far as where you were beforehand and where you're going to be afterwards. And so I'm kind of keeping that.

Summary

- Redesign has strengthened partnerships, but implementation varies widely
- More shared responsibility requires more resources for sustainability
- Enrollments are considerably lower than they were for general administration programs, but candidates are viewed as stronger, more committed, and no less diverse
- Programs have enhanced their recruitment strategies, but small numbers have already affected programs
- Increased coverage of special student populations, but still worry that current preparation (particularly for ECE and ELL) will be insufficient preparation
- Instructional leadership a clear focus, and school improvement and data literacy and analysis well-established, but these are not necessary new
- Field experiences linked to coursework have increased authenticity, but concern that management has been de-emphasized
- Little change to the format of the internship, but content is much improved despite numerous challenges
- Outcome data for continuous improvement is currently lacking