Characteristics of Teachers Nominated for an Accelerated Principal Preparation Program

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ABSTRACT

This article reports the initial evaluation results of a new accelerated, job-embedded principal preparation program funded by a Race to the Top Grant (U.S. Department of Education, 2012a) in Florida. Descriptive statistics, t-tests, and chi-square analyses were used to describe the characteristics of a group of potential applicants nominated to the program by their principals. Demographic and education-related variables for the group were compared to a group of self-selected students enrolled in an existing educational leadership master’s program at the same public university. Initial statistical analysis revealed that more than two-thirds of the nominated teachers belonged to a minority group and had not majored in education as undergraduates. These findings have immediate implications for this new program and for research related to the identification of potential future educational leaders.

Keywords: Educational Leader Preparation, Graduate Education, Job-Embedded Training, School Leaders, Selection Practices, Tapping

INTRODUCTION

During the past decade, a consistent stream of government reports, conference proceedings, research studies, and issue briefs have sounded a clarion call for education reform, including changes related to how educational leaders are being prepared to lead American schools (Grossman, 2011; Levine, 2005; Orr, King, & LaPointe, 2010; UCEA, 2011). The central importance of school leaders to improving student outcomes has been known for many years (Davis, Darling-Hammond, LaPointe, Meyerson, Hallinger, & Heck, 1996; Miller, 2003). Leithwood, Harris, and Hopkins (2008) cited evidence from dozens of empirical studies, analyzed in meta-analysis, and determined that leadership explains between 5% and 7% of the difference in pupil learning and achievement. Although that percent seems small, it is one-quarter of the total difference across schools (12%-20%). During the past decade the debate on the effect of strong administrative leadership has developed, with most research clearly indicating important potential positive (or negative) effects of principals (headmaster,
school director, etc.) (Herrington & Wills, 2005; McGuire, 2002).

In July, 2009, as part of the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act of 2009 (ARRA), United States President Barack Obama and Secretary of Education Arne Duncan announced $4.35 billion in competitive funds for an initiative titled the Race to the Top (RTTT) (White House, 2012). This major new educational initiative leveraged the availability of hundreds of millions of new funding dollars to encourage states to demonstrate their openness to substantially change their educational laws and policies to advance a specific Federal government-backed educational agenda. Some of the long-term outcomes of the agenda would directly impact systems in place, mostly at colleges of education, to train educational leaders—principals and assistant principals. By August of 2010, the U.S. Department of Education had awarded Race to the Top (RTTT) grants to 11 states and the District of Columbia. Florida received $700 million (U.S. Department of Education, 2012b).

RTTT emphasizes the following reform areas: designing and implementing rigorous standards and high-quality assessments, attracting and keeping highly-effective teachers and leaders, supporting data systems that inform decisions and improve instruction, using innovation and effective approaches to turn-around struggling schools, demonstrating and sustaining education reform. The “sustaining education reform” aspect of the initiative includes plans to promote “other conditions favorable to innovation and reform” (White House, 2009, p. 1). This initial study is focused on the leadership reforms promoted by the RTTT initiative.

This focus on leadership reform in schools is not new to the profession. Critics and reformers have been paying increased attention to improvement needs in educational reform. The critics contend that college and university-based educational leadership programs are too time-consuming, too theoretical and are out of touch with the day-to-day realities faced by front line educators and school leaders (Levine, 2005). Furthermore, the critics state that the recruitment of applicants is faulty, with few effective systems in place to assure that high-quality candidates are recruited to apply for advanced educational degrees that lead to certification and entry into educational leadership positions. Along with the federal government, national organizations such as the National Governors Association and the Chief State School Officers have challenged school district human resource professionals and their college and university colleagues to work together to fundamentally alter existing pre-service and in-service programs for current and future teachers and educational leaders. This article is about the first stage of evaluation of a new and innovative partnership between a state university and a large urban school district that have received a $3.5 million grant to create a new kind of educational leadership preparation program, one that has been structured to respond to Federal and state requirements and to conform with what research indicates are effective methods with which to train educational leaders. Information derived from this report can serve not only to inform local program improvement efforts, but may provide helpful information to developers or prospective developers of educational leadership programs in other parts of the country and the world.

PURPOSE OF STUDY

This paper discusses the results of an initial evaluation of a leadership development program named PROPEL. PROPEL, which stands for Principal Rapid Orientation and Preparation in Educational Leadership, is a partnership between Florida Atlantic University (FAU) and Broward County Public Schools (BCPS), the sixth-largest school district in the United States. PROPEL was conceived to meet an urgent need for qualified school leaders in South Florida and was developed using research-based concepts regarding how principal education programs should be developed and implemented. The purpose of this mini-study, the first step in a comprehensive program evaluation of this multi-year program, is to examine the initial
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