

UCEA Research Utilization Brief:

Findings from the 2017 *INSPIRE*-LEADERS IN PRACTICE (LP) Survey



University Council for Educational Administration
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The purpose of this research brief is to report the findings of the 2017 administration of the *INSPIRE*-Leaders in Practice (LP) survey to school principals. This survey administration is part of a comprehensive research endeavor by the University Council for Educational Administration to more effectively evaluate leader preparation programs and their resultant outcomes. Toward that end, UCEA led an initiative to develop a suite of survey instruments known as the Initiative for Systemic Program Improvement through Research in Educational Leadership --- *INSPIRE*.

The *INSPIRE* Suite of instruments includes: (1) the *INSPIRE* Preparation Program (PP) survey which asks program personnel to describe selected features of their leadership preparation program; (2) the *INSPIRE* Graduate (G) survey which asks recent graduates to evaluate the quality of their preparation program and their leadership learning (as aligned with national leadership standards); (3) the *INSPIRE* Leaders in Practice (LP) survey which asks practicing school leaders to self-assess their own leadership behaviors (as aligned with national standards) and to assess their school's conditions; and (4) the *INSPIRE*-360 survey which asks principals' teacher subordinates and district office superordinates to evaluate the principal's leadership performance (on national standards) and the school's corresponding conditions important to valued school and student outcomes.

The *INSPIRE* survey team recognizes the importance of gathering data from multiple sources so that educational leadership faculty may look at their programs with a deeper and more nuanced understanding of programmatic trends, areas of strength, and areas in need of improvement. In addition, when reported and examined in the aggregate, these complementary

sources of data help build the knowledge base in educational leadership preparation and performance.

Prior UCEA research briefs on the *INSPIRE* Preparation Program survey results and on the *INSPIRE* Graduate survey results are available on the UCEA website (see Endnotes for URL's). Below we report the results of the 2017 administration of the *INSPIRE*-Leaders in Practice (LP) survey.

2017 Leaders in Practice (LP) Data Collection and Respondent Background Data

In addition to school leaders' self-assessment of their performance behaviors and school conditions, the *INSPIRE*-LP survey asks school leaders to provide relevant professional and demographic background information. Those data, along with the data collection procedures, are reported below.

In the late Spring of 2017, principals from a single state were asked to respond to the *INSPIRE*-LP survey as part of a funded grant evaluation project. With the state office of education's cooperation, the electronic *INSPIRE* Leaders in Practice (LP) survey was distributed via email to 555 in-service principals. The survey administration yielded 136 useable responses for data analysis (a 24.5% response rate). Although the response rate does not meet typical survey administration standards, it is approximately twice as high as most mass mailing response rates which often hover more nearly 10%-12%.

The sample was comprised primarily of practicing school principals (97%) with a mean age of about 51 years old (s.d. =8.4). Women represented 58%

of the respondents and men represented slightly over 40% of the respondents. One hundred nineteen (87.5%) self-identified as White and slightly over 10% self-identified as persons of color. These leaders averaged almost 25 years of experience as professional educators (s.d. =7.2) and had spent on average approximately 13 years as K-12 administrators (s.d. =9.8), with approximately 8.5 years of service in their current positions (s.d. =5.6).

Approximately 46% indicated they had completed one of the state’s public university leadership preparation programs, with approximately 27% completing a national for-profit university preparation program, and over 26% completing a broad variety of out-of-state university programs. Almost 81% indicated they had earned a Master’s degree in their leadership preparation program, with 8% earning a Specialist’s degree, 3.7% earning a doctoral degree, and almost 6% earning no graduate degree. Similarly, almost 81% had earned a school building/principal-level license as a result of their preparation program whereas 16% had earned a district-level license and another 16% had earned a specialized K-12 administrative license (e.g. special education leader, curriculum specialist). As suggested by the percentages, some had earned more than one license. When asked to rate the overall quality of their leadership preparation program, participants generally responded favorably, with an average rating of 4.1 on a 5.0 scale (s.d. =.77).

When addressing their immediate career goals, 52% indicated they intended to remain in a building-level leadership position, 23% indicated they aspired to move to a district leadership position, 17% intended to retire from their current position, and less than 4% indicated they intended to leave the education profession.

Principals’ Self-Assessment of Leadership Practices and Behaviors

The first major portion of the survey is principals’ self-assessment of their own leadership practices and behaviors. Seven variable scales within the *INSPIRE-LP* survey measure major dimensions of school administrators’ leadership practices, and are closely aligned with current national educational leadership standards (Professional Standards for Educational Leaders [PSEL] & National Educational Leadership Preparation [NELP] Standards). The seven leadership scales

include (a) *ethical and professional norms*, (b) *supportive and equitable learning environment*, (c) *professional and organizational culture*, (d) *strategic leadership and school improvement*, (e) *operations and management*, (f) *instructional leadership*, and (g) *family and community engagement*. All variable scales have strong construct validity, as established by factor analysis, and similarly have strong reliability. The internal consistency of the seven scales is strong, with Cronbach’s alpha ranging from .710 to .902 (see Table 1). The school principals’ self-assessments in these major leadership domains were quite high, averaging 4.2 or higher on a 5.0 scale. The leadership scale average ratings ranged from a high in ethical and professional norms (\bar{x} =4.6, s.d. =.33) to a relative low in family and community engagement (\bar{x} =4.23, s.d. =.59). It is also important to note that ethical and professional norms has the lowest standard deviation, suggesting similar ratings among respondents, whereas family and community engagement has the highest scale standard deviation, suggesting relatively more rating variability among respondents. Table 1 reports descriptive statistics of each leadership domain in rank order of scale means. See Table 1 below.

Table 1
Leadership Practices and Behaviors Results

<i>Practices/Behaviors</i>	<i>N</i>	<i>Min.</i>	<i>Max.</i>	<i>Mean</i>	<i>Std. Dev.</i>	<i>Reliability</i>
Ethical & Professional Norms (7 items)	133	3.71	5.00	4.62	.334	.748
Supportive & Equitable Learning Environment (4 items)	131	3.50	5.00	4.60	.415	.836
Professional & Organizational Culture (8 items)	131	3.43	5.00	4.54	.417	.877
Strategic Leadership/ School Improvement (5 items)	133	3.40	5.00	4.53	.414	.795
Operations & Management (6 items)	133	2.83	5.00	4.43	.408	.710
Instructional Leadership (9 items)	132	2.00	5.00	4.34	.486	.887
Family & Community Engagement (6 items)	130	2.67	5.00	4.23	.593	.902

Principals’ Assessment of School Conditions

Leaders were also asked about their school’s conditions – specifically school conditions known to be influenced by school leaders and important to valued school and student outcomes. The school condition variable scales included: (a) *teacher collaboration*, (b) *school improvement*, (c) *collective professional efficacy*, (d) *student engagement*, (5) *shared problem-solving*, (6) *family engagement*, and (7) *district support*. All variable scales have strong construct validity, as established by factor analysis, and similarly have strong reliability. The internal consistency of the

seven variable scales is strong, with Cronbach's alpha ranging from .815 to .898 (see Table 2). Average ratings ranged from a high of 4.2 (s.d. = .56) on teacher collaboration to a low of 3.5 (s.d. = .88) on district support. It may be that those school conditions rated relatively higher are those principals perceive as more able to be influenced by themselves. It is also noteworthy that there is more variability in principals' responses on the lower rated variable scales, suggesting that there may be less consensus among respondents on these school conditions (i.e. shared problem-solving, family engagement, and district support) than on the more highly rated school conditions. Table 2 reports descriptive statistics of each school condition in rank order of scale means. See Table 2 below.

Table 2
School Conditions

Condition	N	Min.	Max.	Mean	Std. Dev.	Reliability
Teacher Collaboration (5 items)	13 1	2.40	5.00	4.20	.560	.815
School Improvement (6 items)	13 1	2.40	5.00	4.15	.576	.864
Collective Professional Efficacy (6 items)	13 0	1.83	5.00	4.11	.604	.879
Student Engagement (4 items)	13 1	2.25	5.00	4.05	.570	.835
Shared Problem Solving (3 items)	13 1	1.00	5.00	3.84	.829	.896
Family Engagement (4 items)	13 0	1.50	5.00	3.72	.805	.888
District Support (4 items)	12 8	1.00	5.00	3.53	.882	.898

Closing

Several conclusions can be drawn from the results of the *INSPIRE* Leaders in Practice 2017 survey administration, although it is important to remember that these data reflect those of a small sample of principals in a single state and may not be generalizable beyond that state or even to the entire population of principals in that state.

- (1) These data suggest that practicing principals are highly satisfied with the quality of their preparation program experience.
- (2) The overwhelming majority of these principals wish to remain school principals or aspire to career ascendancy into district leadership roles. Very few desire to leave the education profession.
- (3) Although women often represent the majority of school principals today (versus two or more decades ago), the racial diversity of school principals remains weak

- at least in the state represented in this study and perhaps in many states.
- (4) The *INSPIRE*-LP variable scales are shown to be highly valid and reliable, and are closely aligned with national leadership standards and school conditions known to contribute to favorable school and student outcomes.
 - (5) Principals largely rate themselves favorably on key leadership behaviors or practices, although there is more variability in ratings on lower rated leadership practices (e.g. family and community engagement) than on higher rated leadership practices (e.g. ethical and professional norms).
 - (6) Principals' ratings of school conditions show somewhat less favorable ratings than leadership behavior ratings. Further, school condition ratings show more response variability, with lower rated school conditions (e.g. shared problem-solving, family engagement, and district support) having correspondingly greater response variability than higher rated domains, suggesting less consensus among principals. It is possible that the more highly rated school conditions are those that principals perceive they can more effectively influence.

Finally, we encourage these *INSPIRE*-LP data to be read and interpreted with other sources including, but not limited to, prior *INSPIRE* Research Briefs from UCEA (see links below). Using multiple sources (and multiple sources over time) will better inform leader preparation program evaluation and improvement efforts.

Endnote:

1. For *INSPIRE*-Preparation Program results, go to <http://3f17112qoj4l3y6ep2tqpwra.wpengine.netdna-cdn.com/wp-content/uploads/2016/05/INSPIRE-PP-Research-Brief.pdf>.
2. For *INSPIRE*-Graduate results, go to <http://3f17112qoj4l3y6ep2tqpwra.wpengine.netdna-cdn.com/wp-content/uploads/2016/05/INSPIRE-G-Research-Brief.pdf>.



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This research brief is part of UCEA's Research Utilization Brief series. The intent of the series is to highlight and share recent empirical research regarding effective leadership preparation and development with faculty, staff, and leaders at the program, institutional, and state levels, as these individuals are in positions to use this research to make positive changes. All research briefs in this series are available for downloading at <http://ucea.org/research-utilization-briefs/>

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