Knowledge Utilization Brief:

Challenges of Leadership Preparation Redesign: Being Activists for the Work

University Council for Educational Administration
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In October 2016, The Wallace Foundation initiated the $47 million University Principal Preparation Initiative (UPPI). The Foundation selected seven universities along with their state and district partners to develop, over the next four years, models for improving university principal preparation and to examine state policy to see if it could be strengthened to encourage higher quality training statewide.

These seven universities have overcome challenges over the four years of the redesign process. In this Knowledge Utilization Brief, we highlight some important lessons learned, based on data from detailed interviews with program leads or institutional representatives actively involved in the work of redesign.

> **To read in depth on the research approach and findings presented, please visit Wallacefoundation.org and reference:**
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> Launching a Redesign of Preparation Programs

Data Leads to Clarity

Programs undertaking redesign need to know as much as they can about their performance, which means collecting data on student learning and graduate impact.

> "Have clarity about what you're aiming to accomplish. … For us we were a program that primarily emphasized inputs. We could assure consumers, districts and the state that all of our students would have a certain array of high-quality experiences. What we concluded early on in our assessment was we couldn't really speak to

outcomes that were consistent. We couldn't say with certainty other than, sure, we had a terrific passing rate on the qualifying exams for certification."

In addition to collecting data, programs should prioritize providing space and resources for analyzing it and determining its implications for their program.

> "I think we collect a lot of data and speaking broadly about data, the idea is how can you leverage this data for program improvement and to see how our graduates are doing."

One systematic approach to learning about graduate impact is the leader tracking system (LTS), or formalized data collection procedures devoted to graduate performance. The LTS is distinct from alumni relations or other informal communication with graduates.

> **"Leader Tracking Systems are important because it provides evidence in terms of how are graduates are doing. We try to informally reach out and connect with graduates once they leave but what a tracking system or data like this allows is the opportunity in context for us to see all our graduates, where they're working, what positions they hold and how they're doing in those roles." ~NC State**

Collecting and analyzing data on program outcomes prior to a redesign clarifies goals and operationalizes success for evaluation later on.

Build Partnerships Carefully

Ensuring that a redesign addresses the needs of the field, as well as the goals of the program faculty, means establishing partnerships with the places that provide students and hire graduates. Program coordinators valued partners with common goals, shared inputs, and reciprocal benefits.

> "A partnership really needs to happen where you sit down, you walk into the office of the head of leadership development. If you're dealing with a consortium of small districts, sit down with those superintendents. Say, "this is what we're doing.' And you can start small. It doesn't have to be the entire program that you partner with."

To establish relationships with districts and other partners, programs should engage them in planning and data gathering. Here the goal is to learn about the partner's leadership needs and overall vision for their district.

> "Instead of kind of top down imposing here's what we've done, we decided to bring them together in a two-day design thinking workshop. … And we had [the district] there, we had principals, we had graduates, faculty members, district officers, area superintendents and others that all participated. And we from the ground up asked them, what kind of graduate do you need? Like what does it look like? What does leadership look like in your context?"

Communicating expectations with partners is important, to make sure that (a) the benefits of the partnership accrue in both directions, and (b) the contributions of both partners are worth the benefits.

> "I think that inevitably there's always this [organizational barriers]—I wouldn't say tension necessarily—but when you engage in partnerships, what does it mean to be in a partnership? I think for us it was clearly trying to articulate early on what does a partnership look like? So who is delivering this program? We as faculty, we feel like it's our obligation to deliver the program, but we want district input."

Partnerships require development beyond personal relationships, too, especially in school districts and schools of education where leadership changes frequently. Longstanding and fruitful partnerships need less defending each time there is an administrative turnover.

> "The partner work is deeply interconnected with the university. It surprised me that not all districts saw that they had a role." ~ SDSU

Define Equity and Social Justice

Equity and social justice are difficult concepts to define, both as program values and as partner/district outcomes. In redesign, however, it is essential that these be operationalized from both perspectives.

> "It's really high time that we, at least as a department and probably as a college, figure out what our real definitions are for social justice and equity because the profession doesn't have a solid definition for either of those terms."

From a district perspective, equity and social justice may look more like auditable student and personnel outcomes. Definitions of equity may vary by district, according to geographic, demographic, and economic characteristics. Localized definitions should inform preparation work, and then be threaded into those programs.

> "We've created our own equity definition with our district partners. And then we created an equity index. We have seven courses plus field work plus a kind of special topics course. What was really helpful is we talked about some protocols to look at how we make sure equity is showing up in all of our courses and not just one course."

Programs may construct definitions based on equity and social justice frameworks from research and/or from their own personal and professional experiences. Ultimately the working definition must be shared between partners in order to be effective.

> "I do know that for individuals of color, like myself, and other members of the faculty, our lived experiences and our professional experiences, have been quite different. Traditionally, there was very little representation of educators with urban experiences working in and with communities that are lower economically. Today there is more balance."

Faculty reported that previous approaches to social justice, often limited to a single course in a program, were found to be insufficient. Through

shared learning with other UPPI faculty, via semesterly Faculty Professional Learning Community convenings, they came to self-scrutinize this approach.

> "We're not a real diverse faculty and we're not in a real diverse area. So we used to have a course on equity and, you know, 'Hey, we're meeting the standard because we're talking about equity.' But this whole Wallace initiative has made us rethink where we are and as part of our work we've created a strand of equity that goes through each and every course."

Redesign efforts came to focus on expanding connections to equity into other coursework and program elements, which frequently required a shift in mindset on the part of faculty.

> **"It's not enough to be an advocate, you have to be an activist because we can learn and we can talk, and then in the privacy of our classrooms, we can do this work, but that's not really doing the work." ~FAU**

Pains of Re-culturation

Redesigning and launching a program requires imagination and flexibility, which may depend on significant shifts in program culture.

> "We had a strong director model and we are working to share primarily a lot in the way of decision making and direction going forward. But we are also redistributing load because we operate differently now."

In universities, there are frequently structures in place that lead to silos, even within colleges of education and departments.

> "We are designed to be a silo of ed leadership, a silo of teacher ed, a silo of counselor ed. So it means actually walking to the department chair next door and saying, 'You know, let's talk about how we can do this together.'"

Those involved in redesign should plan for the time needed to move from older and more familiar program elements, to newer ones.

> "You have to have faculty who are open to making change and giving up that territory. If they're

entrenched, getting them to have that mindset shift is gonna take some time and you have to work on that up front."

Re-culturing should also involve non-program colleagues in the college or department who may have a vested interest in the status quo.

> "Higher Ed and Ed Admin have always been looked at as a cash cow for many years. So we had some barriers that we've had to overcome—class size is one of them, faculty resources has been another—to really support the work."

Finally, programs should enlist partners in re-culturing as well, especially when those efforts are focused on addressing equity issues differently. System-wide learning begets systemic change.

> "My next job is to go and meet with all of these superintendents and talk about what kind of professional learning are we going to do together. Because if it's not your assistant superintendents, directors, middle-level administrators, principals, and assistant principals who are getting this professional learning, it's not going to be systematic."

> **"Even though my area of specialization is organizational leadership and even though I knew that this was coming and it would be a substantial part of the work of redesign, I can say honestly that I underestimated all that it entails." ~UConn**