Knowledge Utilization Brief:

Lessons from Leadership Preparation Redesign: Not for the Faint of Heart but Worth It

University Council for Educational Administration
April 2020

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 models over the next four years for improving university principal preparation programs 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

Be Ready to Move Fast

Program leads were surprised at how quickly the redesign process moved. The pace of work accelerated the further into the redesign they moved, leading to pleasantly unexpected levels of accomplishment in just three years. This was particularly notable considering the slow pace typically ascribed to change in academia.

> "What that means though is the rate of acceleration in the area of re-culturation of our organization, changing beyond the design, us becoming who we said we wanted to be, is happening faster."

Being ready for the pace of the work includes tending to faculty commitment early on. Redesign leaders should prioritize communication and listening, and demonstrate how they value faculty perspectives.

> "I realized how consuming this process can be and how quickly things happen and need to happen. If you don't have full buy in from faculty, I can imagine this would have been an extremely difficult process to go through."

Faculty described the beginning of the process as "looking at Everest and saying how are we going to get to the top?" But with four years of hindsight, expressed pride in what a small faculty was able to accomplish:

> "Now we're at the final base camp before we summit. I'm amazed at how much we've accomplished, We're launching our new program this fall and we're in the process of beginning our first evaluation cycle. So it's amazing to see the work that we've done, but this is just base line."

Based on the speed of change, many programs expressed the need to pause and reflect. The Faculty Professional Learning Community offered by Wallace was an important opportunity for programs to slow down and reflect on their work to date.

> **"What I would definitely say first and foremost, that it's possible and it's worth it. However, much it costs, the time it takes, the energy that it requires, it's worth it to a person."**
> **~UConn**

Even Good Programs Need to Improve

Another reoccurring theme was the belief that programs were strong even before the redesign process. Programs did not engage in this work because they were unsuccessful, but rather because they felt that they needed to push for continuous improvement.

> "We had a program that we felt was doing great things. It had received the UCEA Exemplary Award, the NELA program. And then we had a very traditional on-campus program that was following state requirements for licensure. And our idea was how do we bring those together and how do we bring in new district partners to be part of that work."

One program, as a historically black institution, described being engaged in the work of developing equitable school leaders for a long time. The program is known for producing great educators including teachers of the year. Still, the redesign effort was an opportunity for them to take a step back to update and refine what they had.

> "What the UPPI redesign work provided was partners that were in this work, helping us diversify our readings, diversify some of the practices that were out there. Because in equity work, the one thing you know is that you're never done. All institutions should be going through some kind of redesign because that is what we expect of educators."

Sometimes equity work means expanding the types of enrollees the program pursues. Another program coordinator described the difference between simply being a good program and wanting to push to affect real change for unserved populations:

> "Our reputation has been, rightfully so, that we have been preparing the best candidates in our state. … I think (after redesign) we're a little better today, and we're going to continue to get better. We are beginning to open minds to what we believe is the area of responsibility we have that's beyond the technical, which is [our graduates'] truly seeing themselves as agents of change to level the playing field for those for whom the system has not worked well."

Ultimately the lesson was there are a variety of motivations for pursuing a program redesign, from seeking new groups of prospective enrollees, to updating curricula and pedagogies, to merging and aligning existing programs and program elements. All of these are forms of improvement pursued by successful programs that chose to redefine success on their terms.

> **"We can do better and we should be doing better. And there's an urgency to do it now." ~VSU**

Communicate to Break Down Silos

A common lesson learned among UPPI program is the need to communicate, both with internal and external colleagues and partners.

> "Sometimes you over-communicate and it's better to over-communicate and to have somebody say, 'are we having another meeting' as opposed to not communicating and not being able to work collaboratively. You can't work in silos."

Another program lead described the need for everyone to have a clear understanding of both their institution's mission and intended outcomes as well as their partner's mission and intended outcomes.

> "My advice is to have a collective sense of vision for the work—an urgency about the work—when you get a group of people both on the district side and the university side, who together realize this need."

Collaboration across departments and programs within the university can also reveal potential opportunities, such as alumni engagement with teacher preparation graduates who could eventually enroll in principal preparation programs.

> "The other piece that was really good was talking about how we move this outside of our own silo of ed leadership and move to how are we going to work with the college of education because after all teacher ed feeds up, right? And so we really need to engage in dialogue and work together outside of our departmental silos."

> **"Reasonable minds can differ and still get along. And that's what you have to do in this work. It's not for the faint of heart, that's for sure." ~WKU**

Work that Doesn't Require Money

While institutions benefited from the infusion of resources of UPPI, several program leads described redesign work that could occur without additional funding.

As an illustration of this, one program lead described how UPPI opened the process of sharing among faculty. He described that it did not cost money to do this work, but faculty needed to be willing to give up time and come to meetings in order to learn from each other:

> "A lot of the stuff we want to do can be done without money. And one of the things this UPPI program has opened up, we start sharing documents and processes all over the place. And before this was tightly held. … I share stuff. We share all of our syllabus, we share everything."

Another program lead described how important it was to have a faculty mindset open to the kinds of decisions required to develop equitable school leaders. Additionally, he asserted that courage, in some ways, was more important than money:

> "If you've noticed, none of that has to do with money. Money does have an impact as it relates to the leverage that you have with your state and policy makers. But really the courageous conversations and the things I mentioned are the most important."

From a shared mindset, a collective motivation can be developed, which goes a long way in fueling change. When more people are committed to the work, more people are willing to put in the extra time and effort that redesign demands— even without sufficient resources or monetary incentives.

> "We know school principals matter. We know leadership is critical in all the areas we want to work in. And so when you have a group pf individuals that understand that and realize the power that both a leadership prep program and a district vision can inform each other to generate leadership development."

Borrowing from Others

Learning from other institutions engaged in a similar redesign process even if context is different.

The seven UPPI institutions developed a strong sense of collaboration among each other that many pointed to as a key support for their redesign efforts. One program lead argued that the diversity among UPPI institutions was a strength:

> "It does help that we are different. All of our institutions are a little bit different not only geographically, but culturally. I think each of our faculty learn a little bit more every day as to how they can better prepare folks for this kind of work, but also seeing what other institutions are doing affirms the work that they're already doing."

The faculty Professional Learning Community convenings facilitated by the Wallace Foundation aided this development and collaboration between institutions who may not have been natural partners outside of UPPI.

> "To work with institutions—like San Diego State, North Carolina State, University of Illinois Chicago—where they were in their struggle and they weren't in the same place that we were in, but they all had vital information. The things that we have taken form each of those institutions in their redesign efforts have also really fueled us in a redesign."

These professional collaborations are possible, though, without the bells and whistles of a grant-funded initiative. Programs can collaborate on workshop proposals for the UCEA Convention, use Zoom or other video conferencing apps to meet regularly, and touch base at other conferences throughout the year. The lesson is that collaboration works in redesign.