



RESEARCH BRIEF:

Recruitment and Selection of Educational Leadership Candidates

May 2016

PURPOSE

This UCEA research brief is in response to a recent call from the U.S. Department of Education seeking comments from the field regarding, “strategies to recruit, develop, and retain teachers and leaders (Title II).” UCEA is an international consortium of research universities with leadership preparation programs whose focus is to support research and practice for preparing educational leaders to support diverse populations. This brief draws from the research base in educational leadership preparation to propose a series of recommendations to improve current state policy and school leadership preparation program (SLPP) practices around the recruitment and selection of aspirant principal candidates.

INTRODUCTION

A growing body of literature has established the importance of school leadership (Louis, Leithwood, Wahlstrom, & Anderson, 2010). Among the various mechanisms by which principals create the conditions for teaching and learning that impact student outcomes are the critical effect they have on hiring and retaining high quality teachers (Branch, Hanushek, & Rivkin, 2012). Recent research has shown that principal leadership is the main reason why teachers report staying in or leaving a school (Amerin-Beardsley, 2012). Thus, the recruitment and selection of aspirant principals is important both for the broader effects of leadership and for the recruitment, selection, and retention of teachers.

This knowledge about the critical role of school leaders underscores the importance of recruiting, selecting, and preparing excellent principal candidates. Researchers refer to this process as the leadership pipeline, and it begins with the recruitment and selection of aspirant principals into SLPPs (Hitt, Tucker, & Young, 2012). A recent UCEA report (Anderson & Reynolds, 2015) found that 43 states require principal candidates to complete a state approved SLPP for licensure, therefore how SLPPs recruit and select candidates is influential in shaping who can eventually serve as a principal. Other research describes recruitment and selection as an essential aspect of effective SLPPs (Darling-Hammond, LaPointe, Meyerson, Orr, & Cohen, 2007) and has suggested that candidate recruitment may be associated with differences in program quality (Orr, 2010).

In a forthcoming chapter on recruitment, selection, and placement of educational leadership by Fuller, Reynolds, and O’Doherty, recruitment and selection are defined as follows:

Recruitment: “Recruitment encompasses all organizational practices and decisions that affect either the number, or types, of individuals who are willing to apply for or accept a given vacancy” (Rynes in McCarthy & Forsyth, 2009, p. 429)

Selection: “...selection processes describe the strategies, actions, and decisions associated with screening out—or screening in—prospective candidates for SLPPs.”

The authors describe these processes as distinct but complementary in how they work together to influence the size, quality, and diversity of the pool of potential future principals.

PROBLEMS WITH THE STATUS QUO

Despite the importance of generating a deep, high-quality, and diverse pool of aspirant principals, in their extensive review of the literature Fuller et al. (forthcoming) drew troublesome conclusions about both the state of SLPP recruitment, selection and placement practices and the literature base around these important processes.

First, case studies of programs across two states found that most SLPPs rely on word-of-mouth, brochures, and websites for recruitment (Black, 2011; Hackmann & Wanat, 2007). The lack of formal recruitment processes by many SLPPs may explain the predominance of tapping, or informal encouragement of select teachers to become principals, as the motivation for self-nomination into the candidate pool (Farley-Ripple, Raffel, & Welch, 2012; Myung, Loeb, & Horng, 2011). Myung et al. (2011) found that 72% of principals had been tapped by a former principal, and while principals were found to tap teachers with leadership experience, they also disproportionately tapped males and teachers who share their ethnicity that resulted in under-selection of leaders of color. We contend that SLPPs need to engage in more rigorous recruitment efforts to help overcome the biases inherent in informal recruitment mechanisms.

The available literature on SLPP candidate selection also raised concerns about current practice. First, there is wide variation in selection acceptance rates, ranging from 7% to 100% (Black, 2011; Gates et al., 2014). High acceptance rates may be an indicator of low selection criteria. Second, SLPPs may only employ typical higher education admission criteria (GRE, GPA) that does not assess critical skills needed for school leadership such as candidates’ prior experiences leading with other adults to improve student learning outcomes.

Finally, Fuller et al. (forthcoming) decry the lack of robust empirical research connecting practice to outcomes despite 20 years of documentation in the field calling for further research. Despite the enumerated reasons for taking caution in interpreting the research that is available (largely case studies), we feel that we can confidently make a set of recommendations that reflects a significant improvement on the status quo.

RECOMMENDATIONS AND EXAMPLES

1) State Policy for SLPPs

As reported in Anderson and Reynolds (2015) report on state policy for SLPP program approval and candidate licensure, many states have underdeveloped policy with regards to minimum requirements for SLPPs. In particular, only one state

(Tennessee) has policy requiring SLPPs to have rigorous plans for recruitment. UCEA hopes that other states will use both the [Policymaker's Guide](#) and the [SEP³ Toolkit](#) to improve what the baseline requirements are for SLPPs, including candidate recruitment and selection practices, and how they evaluate them. These required activities should be designed to raise minimum expectations for quality without being so prescriptive as to stifle innovation.

2) SLPP Aligned Practices and Self-Evaluation

SLPP candidate recruitment and selection processes ought to be aligned to program vision and district partner leadership standards (when applicable). This intentional alignment has been found to be a key element in innovative SLPPs (Browne-Ferrigno & Muth, 2009) and was an essential design feature in the Wallace Foundation principal pipeline development initiative programs (Turnbull et al., 2015). A new set of resources and tools created by UCEA and New Leaders, the [State Evaluation of Principal Preparation Programs \(SEP³\) Toolkit](#), designed to help states improve the evaluation of SLPPs suggests additional selection criteria options. UCEA has developed the [INSPIRE survey suite](#), a validated instrument with nationally normed comparisons, which can support programs in focused self-reflection and improvement in aligning practices with visions.

3) Well-Developed SLPP-District Partnerships

Increasingly, successful SLPPs are engaging in well-developed SLPP-district partnerships with robust collaboration across program features, including candidate recruitment and selection. Currently 16 states have some level of policy requirement for such a partnership (Anderson & Reynolds, 2015), although this is expected to increase with investments to expand and improve SLPP-district partnerships through a new Wallace Foundation initiative. Exemplary SLPPs at the University of Illinois at Chicago and the University of Texas at San Antonio provide examples of intentionally aligned, rigorous, albeit very different approaches to candidate recruitment and selection (described respectively in: Cosner, Tozer, Zavitkovsky, & Whalen, 2015 and Merchant & Garza, 2015)

4) Strive for Candidate Diversity

A high-quality candidate pool can reflect the diversity of the school communities that they will go on to serve, and recruitment and selection are essential in supporting the development of a diverse pool. Highly selective programs have achieved broad diversity. The SLPP at University of Illinois at Chicago reported demographic diversity of aspirant principals increased as selectivity increased (Cosner, et al. 2015). New Leaders reports that with a 7% acceptance rate, only 29% of their candidates identify as White (non-Hispanic) (Gates et al., 2014).

5) Support for Research

Finally, as a field we acknowledge the need for more research on the impact of recruitment and selection and preparation program outcomes. This research requires financial support of both private and public funding sources. The recent [call from IES](#) providing funding for research on leadership and leadership preparation is a step in the right direction.

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