

RESEARCH UTILIZATION BRIEFS:

THE COST OF EXEMPLARY LEADERSHIP PREPARATION



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Although much attention has been given to delineating the features of effective leadership preparation, little is known about either the financing or the costs of pre-service development for principals or the impact that financing strategies have on the nature of principal preparation and performance. A recent study by Linda Darling-Hammond, Michelle LaPointe, Deborah Meyerson, Margaret Terry Orr, and Carol Cohen (2007), is an exception. This research sought to identify not only the features of effective leadership preparation but also what it costs to provide such programming. Reliable information concerning the sources of financing and the costs of effective preparation and professional development for principals is essential to assessing alternative models and planning for successful reforms.

Most studies of the costs of professional development since the 1980s have limited their focus to 1) estimating the range of spending by states, districts, or initiatives on professional development; 2) identifying and estimating the costs of categories of activities or budgetary line items for professional development; or 3) examining the distribution of the cost burden for professional development across government and stakeholder groups (e.g., Little, Gerritz, Stern, Guthrie, Kirst, & Marsh, 1987; Miles, 2003; Monk, Plecki, & Killeen, 2003). Although helpful, this research fails to provide an adequate understanding of what effective preparation and professional development initiatives cost—that is, the full amount of resources beyond budgeted expenditures, monetary or in-kind services, they require.

Using a Finance Project protocol, Darling-Hammond et al. developed a set of case studies that included detailed assessments of the costs of various program components and the financing strategies used to support the program.

The protocol documents the real costs in time and “person power,” including uncompensated time donated by participants and staff and in-kind donations from institutional partners, as well as the budgeted funding for mounting and sustaining each program.

EXEMPLARY PROGRAM FEATURES

In their research on effective leadership preparation, Darling-Hammond, et al. found that “how principals are initially prepared and subsequently supported by their districts is significantly associated with how they lead and what kind of school improvement gains they achieve” (p. 62). According to this research, high quality leadership preparation programs likely have the following attributes:

- Clear focus and clarified values about leadership and learning;
- Rigorous selection that addresses prior leadership experience and initial leadership aspirations, and gives priority to under-served groups, particularly racial/ethnic minorities;
- Standards based content and internship experiences;
- Active, student-centered instructional practices
- Supportive organizational structures to facilitate retention and engagement;
- Coherent, challenging, and reflective content and experiences; and
- Appropriately qualified faculty.

PROGRAM COST COMPONENTS

A first step in understanding program costs is to identify the key cost components or common programmatic elements of principal preparation and continuing development programs. These include:

- General Administration and Infrastructure
- Recruitment and Selection

- Coursework/Institutes and Workshops
- Internships
- Mentoring and Mentor Training
- Networking and Group Meetings, and
- Other Unique Program Costs.

Their analysis also involved identifying the budgetary resources needed to support these programmatic elements, including: personnel; facilities, materials, and equipment; travel and transportation; and “other.”

The estimated total costs of the four university-based pre-service programs range from \$1.5 to \$3.5 million per year, while direct costs (excluding participants’ uncompensated time) range from \$800,000 to \$1.9 million. Furthermore, differences between direct and total costs are largest for those programs in which participants do not have their salaries covered through a paid internship.

In order to better understand and compare the use of resources across programs, per-participant cost were also estimated. Total per-participant costs for pre-service program coursework are estimated to range from under \$20,000 to over \$40,000. This pattern generally corresponds to the number of credit hours of required coursework in the program. Per-participant internship costs vary even more widely than those for coursework, from \$2,100 to \$7,200 per participant, reflecting the great variation in design and intensity of these experiences across programs.

UNDERSTANDING PROGRAM COSTS

Policymakers and program developers need to be able to identify and project the type and scope of resource needs and costs for principal development programs in order to find funding sources and implement financing strategies that can meet those needs. This includes understanding the characteristics of these costs, such as whether they are monetary or non-monetary, and how they are affected by design features such as size.

The report offers the following considerations to aid policymakers or program developers as they seek to evaluate, replicate, or adapt various approaches to principal professional development:

- Budget Comprehensively
- Consider the Design, and
- Recognize the importance of personnel choices for costs.

REFERENCES

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This brief, developed by Michelle D. Young, is part of a Research Utilization Brief series co-sponsored by UCEA and The Wallace Foundation. The intent of the series is to highlight and share recent empirical research regarding effective leadership preparation and development, particularly research commissioned by The Wallace Foundation, with faculty, staff and leaders at the program, institutional and state levels, as it is these individuals who are in positions to use this research to make positive changes.

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