“Quality Leadership depends on quality preparation.”

As the pressure to improve teaching and accelerate learning increases, the importance of hiring, developing and retaining highly qualified school level leaders has never been greater. Research suggests that successful school leaders influence student achievement in several important ways, most powerfully through their influence on staff and on their organizations, such as improved teaching practices and an organization-wide commitment to learning and growth.

It is essential that leadership preparation programs provide leaders with the requisite knowledge and skills essential to quality leadership practice. However, not all preparation programs are equally effective at preparing future leaders.

There exists a growing base of empirical research that links quality leadership preparation to effective leadership practice as well as research that identifies program features strongly correlated to effective practice. These features include:

1. Recruitment and selection that address prior leadership experience and initial leadership aspirations;
2. A coherent program that is organized to support the development of learning focused leadership;
3. Curriculum that is tightly integrated with fieldwork;
4. Learning strategies that are active and student-centered;
5. Assessments of learning that support student growth and program improvement.
6. Supportive organizational structures that facilitate retention, engagement and growth;
7. Internships;
8. Appropriately qualified faculty; and
9. Preparation partnerships with districts.

Simply because a preparation program is sanctioned by a state to provide leadership certification or licensure does not mean the program reflects research-based features; nor does it mean the program produces high quality leaders. When investigating how well principals are being prepared to support teacher quality and student achievement, it is helpful to ask a few simple questions.

**JUST ASK**

1. **What strategies, information and criteria are used to select candidates for participation in the preparation program?** If the criteria or processes do not reflect the work of school leadership or if anyone who applies is admitted, find out why.

2. **What kind of leader does the program claim to prepare and how is that type of leadership reflected in the program curriculum and practical experiences?** It is one thing to claim to prepare “learning focused leaders” or “social justice leaders” and another to actually do so. Faculty and graduates should be able to discuss the connection between graduate
3. **How does the program bridge research and professional knowledge to leadership practice?** Faculty and graduates should be able to share examples of field-based learning and to discuss how such experiences bridge program content to practice.

4. **What kinds of teaching and learning experiences are integrated into the program?** Faculty and graduates should be able to describe how program elements advance candidate knowledge and understanding of teaching, learning and leadership within complex educational environments and increase their ability to lead through authentic problems of practice.

5. **How do you know that candidates are gaining the intended knowledge and skills?** Program faculty and graduates should be able to discuss a variety of processes used to assess knowledge, abilities and reasoning.

6. **Are candidates part of a cohort? Do they have access to coaching or mentoring while in the program?** Faculty and graduates should be able to identify and discuss the important role of such supportive structures in leadership development, engagement and retention.

7. **How does the internship support leadership development? How is it supervised and by whom? What does it involve and how is it funded?** Faculty should be able to describe how internships provide opportunities for candidates to practice leadership under the guidance of an experienced and successful mentor.

8. **Do program faculty represent expertise from the research and practice communities?** Faculty should be able to articulate how the individuals who participate in the delivery of their program contribute to rigorous and relevant leadership development.

9. **What kinds of partnerships inform the program and how do district personnel influence and/or inform the program?** Partners and program faculty should be able to articulate how the partnership results in an enhanced ability to meet the needs of the field.

10. **How are candidate assessments used by the program to promote candidate growth and program improvement?** Faculty should be able to describe formal and informal processes designed to utilize candidate assessment data to enhance candidate development and to improve or enhance their preparation programs.