



# School Leadership Program Highlights:

## Illinois State University

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The School Leadership Program (SLP), housed in the Department of Education's office of innovation and improvement, provides grants to support the development, improvement and expansion of programs designed to provide high-need schools with high-quality administrators. Since 2009, the program has supported 41 programs, located in 24 different states, in their efforts to recruit, train, and mentor effective school leaders. Several institutions of higher education, including Illinois State University, have received this grant and implemented it to train and support principals in high-need schools. In this edition of the SLP Highlights, we share how Illinois State used SLP funding to test and implement academies for administrators across the state.

### Illinois State: SLP Funds Emphasizing the Importance of School Leaders

#### Setting the Stage

In 2010, Illinois passed bold and innovative legislation to strengthen the standards guiding principal preparation. As a result, a general administrative credential was replaced with a more rigorous program focused specifically on the important role of the school principal. After enactment the state went from 31 general administrative programs with roughly 7,600 candidates enrolled to 26 principal preparation programs with fewer than 700 candidates.

A team at the Center for the Study of Education Policy at ISU supported the research-based changes and was confident that the new program standards would improve the quality of school leadership throughout Illinois. They also knew that the strengthened standards were at risk of repeal without a clear model and strong data validating impact on student outcomes. The team endeavored to produce actionable research that provided evidence on how principals impacted student learning.

In a state facing unprecedented fiscal challenges, the team knew there were insufficient university or foundation funds available to achieve their ambitious goals. In 2013, the team at ISU submitted a proposal and was awarded a five year, \$4.6M School Leadership Program grant to support the Illinois Partnerships Advancing Rigorous Training (IL-PART) project. IL-PART represents a collaborative effort between 3 high-need school districts and 4 universities that have come together in formal partnerships aimed at improving the way in which principals are prepared and developed in Illinois.

### Strong Leaders Create Strong Schools

Guided by the strengthened Illinois program standards for principal preparation, IL-PART partners worked to develop strong university- district partnerships with robust training and authentic leadership activities. Supported by SLP funds, the IL-PART partners developed a strong pipeline of excellent school leaders for both public and private schools.

Partnering universities and districts deepened their relationships and piloted an intensive, full-time internship model. The full-time internship included a full semester of job embedded school leadership experiences designed to better

"It is doubtful that we would have been able to sustain the strengthened Illinois standards for principal preparation without the SLP grant. The grant helped us validate expectations for the field and offered assurance to districts and preparation providers alike that we were on the right path."

~ Dr. Erika Hunt, Senior Policy Analyst and Researcher, ISU

prepare aspiring principals for the challenge of today's schools. The SLP grant also funded administrative positions at each partnering district and at the Greeley Center for Catholic School Effectiveness to coordinate the partnerships, match candidates to host schools, provide support to candidates and host principals during the internship, and integrate the project into the district's overall talent management system - including informing school leader succession planning.

Within three years of SLP funding, IL-PART outpaced all of their achievement targets by more than doubling the original size of the program. The target for principal preparation candidate enrollment was 80 candidates, but IL-PART partner programs enrolled a total of 231 candidates by the end of year 4 of the 5-year grant. By year 4 of the grant, 109 candidates completed an IL-PART supported principal preparation program and 41 candidates had been hired as principals or assistant principals. Of those 41 hired as principals or assistant principals, 59% were hired in high-need districts.

The value of the intensive full-time internship has been recognized by other district in the state. One has replicated the model through their core budget. The project has also provided technical assistance and materials to other districts across Illinois interested in replicating the model. Through the SLP funding, IL-PART tested and scaled their principal internship model by identifying methods that made the approach more affordable and sustainable.

IL-PART partner districts (Bloomington, East Aurora, and Quincy), a network of Catholic schools, and universities (Illinois State Univ., Loyola Univ. – Chicago, North Central College, and Western Illinois Univ.) , not only exceeded expectations in the pre-service component, they also exceeded targets for in-service professional development:

- 42 Principals were trained & qualified as mentors eligible to host principal interns (167% of target)
- 101 Principals & Assist. Principals participated in on-going professional development (202% of target)
- 100% of participating Principals & Assist. Principals demonstrated positive student growth
- 96% of participating Principals & Assist. Principals were rated positively on their evaluations
- 78% of participating Principals & Assistant Principals remained in high need districts

## Profiles in Leadership: Messina Lambert, Incoming Principal of Irving Elementary School

The experiences of SPL graduates in Illinois bear out the virtue of having strong leaders. Messina Lambert, the incoming principal of Irving Elementary School in Bloomington, Illinois credits the Illinois State program with helping her have a plan for student learning and having a backup plan for when that learning doesn't go as expected.



Lambert explains her time in the Illinois State program explored relationship building that focuses on the depth of issues at play in the classroom in order to create a school culture that supports transformative change for all students. The program also focuses on the value of taking time to build these relationships rather than rushing in to create change for the sake of change.

Beginning next year at Irving Elementary School, Lambert will have the opportunity to put what she learned at Illinois State into practice to help all students learn and succeed—regardless of background. Illinois State focuses on global perspectives on student learning in order to create cultures that are respectful of all students. The program emphasized the importance of a diverse group of learners with diverse voices as creating a series of positive “teachable moments.”

The SLP-funded program also focuses on providing educational leadership coursework at an affordable rate so students from around the state will have the principals they need to create the classrooms they deserve. Lambert lauded her experience, especially the work with cohort mates will now be joining her among the ranks of Illinois principals ready to help all students learn and succeed. From the beginning of the application process to graduation day, the program focused on students.

“The program application itself “set the tone for the coursework and the purpose because [helping all students] was a big deal. I feel as if every person I’m graduating with is interested in being an administrator and helping kids by being good principals.” ~Messina Lambert, Irving Elementary School

## Quality Leadership Preparation Matters

Over the last 15 years, evidence has mounted to demonstrate the importance of school leadership.

Leaders affect every aspect of schooling. Indeed, research suggests that leadership not only matters, it is second only to teaching among school-related factors in its impact on student learning. Additional research suggests that principals, through their actions, can be powerful multipliers of effective teaching and leadership practices in schools.

Developing educational leaders who can effectively shape teacher practice to serve all children well is essential. The empirical research base on leadership preparation and development has expanded over the last decade, providing preparation providers with a clearer understanding of how to improve the preparation experiences of educational leaders. In particular, research has offered key insight into best-practices concerning recruitment and selection of candidates for preparation, the structure and delivery of preparation, the induction of novice leaders, professional development for practicing leaders, and how to support an effective pipeline spanning preparation and practice.

The School Leadership Program has offered preparation programs the opportunity to build state-of-the-art programs that meet the leadership needs of the schools and districts they serve. Just as principals can be powerful drivers of student outcomes, educational leadership preparation programs can be powerful drivers of leadership outcomes. Fully funding these program grants can impact students throughout the United States and provide them with excellent school leaders.

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This edition of SLP Highlights, developed by Margaret Thornton and Marcy Reedy, is part of a UCEA's School Leadership Program Series. The intent of the series is to highlight the effective work accomplished by grantees of the School Leadership Recruitment and Support Program. Based at the University of Virginia, the University Council for Educational Administration is an international consortium of research universities with graduate level leadership programs. UCEA members are marked by a distinguishing commitment and capacity to lead the field of educational leadership and administration.

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