



Spotlight on Research by The Wallace Foundation: Launching a Redesign of University Principal Preparation Programs

In July 2016, The Wallace Foundation launched the University Principal Preparation Initiative (UPPI). This four-year, \$48.5 million initiative supports seven universities, their district and state partners, and mentor programs to redesign the universities' principal preparation programs according to evidence-based principles and practices. The goal is to generate lessons other university principal preparation programs and their partners can adopt or adapt as they undertake similar redesign efforts. After its first-year of implementation, a new study by RAND Corporation shows promising results. This spotlight is intended to briefly capture them.

The Wallace Foundation has partnered with RAND Cooperation to conduct a five-year study of how UPPI programs are being implemented and what early results demonstrate. Findings displayed here are from the [*Launching a Redesign of University Principal Preparation Programs: Partners Collaborate for Change*](#) report, outlining the UPPI's first full year (fall 2016 to fall 2017). Subsequent reports will offer in-depth assessments and analyses of state reform efforts, program implementation, and candidates' experiences within redesigned programs. The initial report highlights eight different findings gleaned during early implementation. These will be discussed in turn, followed by concluding thoughts.

1. UPPI programs began with some evidence-based features and contexts already in place.

University programs had already begun implementing some evidenced-based features. These included selective recruitment and coherent curricula to prepare candidates for the demands of the job. However, most did not align such features with extensive clinical experiences. University programs, with the help of their mentor programs, thus began redesigning them. This included the extent to which a full-time model could be implemented.

2. UPPI partnerships used the first year to develop a vision for the new program and the redesign process.

Because UPPI programs brought together supporting universities, districts, state partners, and mentor universities, much of the first year was engaged in planning what principal preparation redesign would look like. Three different activities were involved. First, UPPI leadership teams engaged with standards development. Some adopted new

program-level standards whereas others adopted state or national standards. Second, UPPI leadership teams engaged with program assessment. Specifically, Darling-Hammonds et al.'s (2007) research on exemplary principal preparation practices was used. Third, UPPI leadership teams engaged with logic model development. Steps included identifying goals for the redesign, identifying program features to meet such goals, assembling a model, and making iterative revisions. In the process, these activities helped each UPPI program deepen their redesign vision, their areas of strength and where development was needed, and develop the partnerships needed to carry out such work.

3. Each UPPI leadership team focused on redesigning its curriculum and instruction.

Across leadership teams, redesigning curriculum centered on: a) building core ideas across courses; b) developing cross-course assessments and assignments; and c) developing a tighter alignment between courses and clinical experiences. The overall intent was to connect theory to practice in meaningful ways. However, leadership teams acknowledged this became difficult given district partners wanted more practical applications.

4. UPPI leadership teams explored changes to clinical experiences and candidate recruitment and selection.

Reflecting evidence-based practices and UPPI goals, leadership teams explored how to enhance the clinical experience. The following evidence-based changes were considered: a) aligning clinical experiences with standards and curriculum; (b) providing candidates with realistic principal experiences; (c) extending the length of the clinical experience; and (d) considering options for enhancing the mentoring, supervision, and evaluation of candidates during the clinical experience. The intention was to provide candidates with experiences representing authentic principal work. Leadership teams also explored how to enhance recruitment and selection. Towards these ends, district input and more performance-based assessments are now being considered. But at the end of the first year, most leadership teams were still planning such changes.

5. University-based leads and actively engaged partners drove the initiative in the first year.

University-based leads helped support relationships across state, district, and program partners. They did so by: a) establishing a culture of trust and collaboration; (b) developing and maintaining a common goal; (c) "going slow to go fast"; and (d) using the logic model to guide the work. This helped drive both vision and buy-in across partners during the first year of implementation. Specifically, two models of collaboration emerged: a) *co-development*, in which representatives from each partner organization worked together in subgroups to execute key redesign tasks, and b) *input and delegation*, where partners engaged in work individually and brought back to the cross-organizational leadership team for review. District context, preference, and

capacity played a role in which model a partnership utilized.

6. UPPI prompted partner states and districts to consider issues and/or undertake activities they may not have otherwise.

The initiative not only promoted principal preparation redesign, but also influenced some states and districts to reconsider their policies and practices. At the state level, some partners have adopted new or revised leader standards, certification levels, and considered scaling elements of UPPI throughout their state. At the district level, some partners have considered revising principal hiring procedures, started working with other district leaders, and expanded professional learning opportunities for both current and aspiring leaders. They have also begun to plan and build a leader tracking system (LTS). Consequently, the UPPI has influenced both principal preparation redesign and tethered political and practical considerations.

7. UPPI leadership teams developed strategies to mitigate the most pressing challenges.

Implementation reforms across organizations often create assorted challenges. For UPPI, early challenges have included: (a) innovating within traditional university guidelines; (b) aligning curriculum with multiple sets of standards; and (c) balancing district-specific needs with more general needs. They have also included turnover and limited capacities. Towards these ends, leadership teams have developed several mitigating strategies. Turnover, clear goals, timeline, and documentation have helped most programs maintain focus on redesign work. With limited capacities, choosing the right individuals who had the skills, passion, time, and connections was critical. UPPI partners thus recognize choosing the right organizations and individuals from the outset is needed.

Conclusions from the first year

Thus far, all seven partnerships appear to be engaging in principal preparation redesign efforts. Teams have developed important relationships and are planning (and in some cases already implementing) evidenced-based principles and practices. For example, all teams have made progress toward curricular changes. These included building on core constructs across courses, developing assessments of cross-course assignments, and developing a tighter alignment between courses and clinical experiences. Furthermore, all teams have made progress toward planning for the LTS. This included considering what data to track, for what purposes, and how they would do so. Finally, state and district partners have reconsidered their policies and practices. In this way, the UPPI grants have provided the funding and time needed to engage in such redesign activities that otherwise would not be afforded. This is particularly true for university programs and their partnering districts.

At the same time, UPPI partners identified several lessons learned from their first-year

experiences. These can inform future UPPI-related principal preparation program reforms and other reforms conducted outside. First, selecting the right partner organizations and individuals from the outset is critical. Partners should value innovative approaches to preparing leaders, demonstrate a willingness to be flexible, and have a strong voice within their respective organization. Second, developing strong relationships across partnering organizations is needed. This helps encourage commitments to the redesign process, UPPI aims, and needs of each partner. Third, early uncertainty and slow progress should be expected. Partnering organizations have their own values, capacities, and needs. Therefore, working towards innovative principal preparation takes time.

In sum, the first year of the UPPI appears to show many promises. All seven partnerships are engaging in principal preparation redesign. As planning transitions to implementation, the next few years should be particularly exciting to watch unfold as The Wallace Foundation continues its mission to promote evidence-based principles and practices across university-based principal preparation programs. Please consider reading the full RAND report for a detailed analysis of the UPPI's first year.

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