A Case Study of a Principal Preparation Program

William Larson
Ohio University Southern

This paper describes the outcomes from a case study of a program for the preparation of principals. The case study is focused upon a regional campus cohort, which has been in operation and fully subscribed for ten cycles of the two-year program. The eleventh cycle of the program was initiated a year ago. The intent of the study has been to identify and describe aspects of the program that have influenced the preparation of its students, the endurance of the regionally-based program cohort, and the employment of its graduates as administrators throughout and outside of the region. To investigate these areas of interest, input was obtained via a survey that was sent to the participants of the program from the first ten cycles, with whom contact still exists, and via two focus-group sessions with graduates of the program. The focus group participants were purposely identified to include graduates of both genders and from multiple cohorts, who have become administrators. The participant selection process was based upon a perception that the program participants, particularly the graduates who have become administrators, would understand best the effectiveness of the program.

How has a regional campus, two calendar year principal preparation program been able to endure for over two decades in a portion of a state in which there is rather substantive competition from other universities for students and to witness its students being employed regularly as administrators? A qualitative study has been conducted to ascertain those aspects of the regional program and its delivery that have contributed to the program's continuation. Attention has also been given to the facets of the program that are perceived as having enhanced the development and employment of its students as administrators. To glean this information, past participants of the program were sent an online survey, which enjoyed in a relatively high completion rate. Then, nineteen graduates of the program, who had been employed as administrators, were randomly selected for and participated in follow-up focus group sessions. The principal preparation program has not only survived continuously for a

considerable period, the program has been fully subscribed in each of its cycles. The fully subscribed status of each of the cycles of the program reflects, in large part, that many of the applicants have been recommended by their principals, who are graduates of the program. The graduates of this traditionally structured and academically rigorous program are employed in nearly every district in the region. In some cases, the program graduates represent all or nearly all of the administrators in these districts. In addition, graduates of the program work in districts in other regions of the state.

The paper contains a description of the context in which the program has been implemented, a summary of the literature related to the preparation of aspiring principals, and the research questions upon which the study is based. The paper also includes an explanation of survey and focus group approaches that were used to conduct the study. The paper ends with an overview and discussion of the outcomes of the study.

Context

This section of the paper is devoted to an explanation of the context in which the regional campus principal preparation program, which is the focus of this study, has been implemented. The program was initiated nearly twenty-two years ago at the main campus of a state-supported public research university (high research activity). At the same time, the program was also implemented at a regional campus of the university. While the program was expected to continue indefinitely at the main campus, no such anticipation appeared to exist for the regional version of the program. The region is largely rural and reports a relatively high average unemployment rate of approximately eight percent (Ohio Department of Job and Family Services, 2014), a growing drug dependency problem (Maier & Jackson, 2010), and high rates of other social stressors that impact the schooling process (Pollard & Jacobsen, 2014). However, eleven cycles of the twenty-four month program have been conducted in the region. The eleventh cycle began a year and half ago.

The program is delivered via a cohort model. Nearly all of the participants of the cohorts have remained together for the length of the program. The student loss during each of the two-year cycles has averaged approximately one or two students. The losses have all been due to circumstances such as students moving from the region. No loss has occurred because a student changed to a principal preparation program of another university. The students are teachers and other school

professionals. A significance of their forms of employment is that the state traditionally requires two years of teaching or like experience as one of the qualifications for the obtainment of a principal's license. Another aspect of the school district employment of the students is that they work in settings that are conducive to clinical activities for their preparation as administrators. The students have the opportunity to witness, on a daily basis, the need for and implementation of the theoretical constructs and practices which they are studying in their courses.

While the state's alternative licensure route to the principalship has gained some traction in the region, the program described here is focused exclusively on the preparation of principals via a relatively traditional university course-based route. In fact, the faculty of the program has resisted participation in the alternative program, having not identified, in its estimate, a way to engage in the alternative approach that would lead to graduates who would be prepared for the rigors of administration, particularly as typically obtained with the traditional approach. The program is also delivered in a face-to-face manner, averting the online models that have reportedly gained popularity in the nation (Allen and Seaman, 2013; Artino & Stephens, 2009). The continuation of the traditional and the face-to-face approaches reflects the faculty's point of view that these practices contain the richest ingredients for the preparation of aspiring principals and administrators.

The students often apply for admission to the program based upon the recommendations of their principals and superintendents, many of whom are now graduates of the program. A value of this phenomenon is that the graduates understand and convey the demands of the program to those individuals who they are recommending. The outcome is that individuals, with relatively strong credentials, tend to apply for the program with an understanding and a commitment to the program's principles and requirements. This informal screening process is augmented by the meetings that the coordinator of the cohort conducts with each of the applicants in order to describe the program further and to communicate its intent to prepare the students in a meaningful manner for the challenges of administration.

The cohort delivery model has augmented the program. The approach has been convenient to the faculty and to the students. The course schedule is published for the two-year period. Students can count on being able to register for the needed courses. In addition, teaching

assignments are apparent for the faculty, as soon as a cohort has been populated with students. Of even greater importance, the cohorts have become a vehicle for the development of authentic learning communities among the students and graduates of the program (DuFour, DuFour, Eaker, & Many, 2012; Stoll, Bollam, McMahon, Wallace, & Thomas, 2006). The students and graduates become close colleagues, who learn from each other while in the program and even after the program's completion. In addition, the learning process provides the students with an exhibition of the value of working in a collegial manner and of obtaining multiple perspectives, when engaging in a problem-solving process.

The twenty-four month preparation program includes the coursework, which is needed to be eligible for a principal's license in the state, along with a master's degree in educational administration. The coursework for the entire program is needed to obtain the license, while the master's degree is embedded within the license program, an arrangement that differs from the approach in which students pursue a master's degree and then additional courses if they wish to obtain a license. A principal's license in the state provides the foundation for pursuing most other administrative work, with a few exceptions such as the superintendency (which requires additional course and field work beyond the principal's program). An outcome is that the graduates of the program have been employed in such positions as curriculum and special education coordinators, in addition to the principalships. In fact, a rather substantial portion of the program is focused upon pedagogical and learning constructs and their applications. The contents of the program are based upon the standards of the Educational Licensure Constituent Council (ELCC) and the program is nationally recognized by the National Council for Teacher Accreditation (NCATE), which is now titled Council for the Accreditation of Educator Preparation (CAPE).

An internship, which spans the four academic year semesters within the two calendar year program, represents a significant portion of the studies of the students. The breadth and depth of the internship represents an attempt to provide the students with rich clinical experiences in preparation for the principalship and other forms of administration. The intent of the internships is for the graduates to know what they should do and understand the basis for doing what they should do, once they become administrators. The internship is balanced with the inclusion of a substantive theoretical framework regarding leadership, organizations, and

human behavior, as well as a considerable inclusion of foundational matters, including constructs from related disciplines such anthropology, business, critical studies, law, political science, public policy, psychology, and sociology.

Two of the primary objectives of the program, as noted above, are for the students to learn what it is that an effective principal does, along with developing and enhancing their understandings of the foundation upon which such good practices are based. The latter seems particularly important for the program's graduates, who happen to obtain employment in school districts other than the ones in which they had engaged in their internships and in which practices others than those with which they are familiar might be expected. The intent is for the students to be able to be effective, regardless of the culture and climate of their working environments, being able to assess and understand these aspects of their schools in ways that will guide them toward identifying effective courses of action.

The two-year cycle is offered to the students as an integrated and sequential program, as opposed to representing disparate and even possibly unrelated courses. The students are encouraged to view the learning experience from a programmatic perspective. An expectation exists that the students will have a more meaningful experience, if they obtain a view of the ways in which the components of the program fit together—that is, an understanding of the intersections. For example, principals often need to be able to view the system (Lundberg & Ornstein, 2012; Senge, Cambron-McCabe, Lucas, Smith, Durant, & Kleiner, 2000), including the multiple aspects of a situation before attempting to solve a problem or make a decision.

The region served by the principal preparation program cohort includes eight counties with thirty-nine school districts. Thirty-eight of the districts have employed at least one of the graduates of the program as an administrator. In many of the districts, all or nearly all of the administrators are graduates of the program. A rather widely held perception throughout the region is that the program's graduates have participated in the most thorough program among the preparation programs serving the region. This reputation acts as an enticement for individuals recognizing the value of being thoroughly prepared for administration. However, the reputation tends to act as a deterrent to individuals who desire, for whatever reason, to pursue a less comprehensive approach.

Literature Review

This study seeks to identify the aspects of a principal preparation program that appear to have influenced the preparation of its students, the twenty-one, nearly twenty-two, years of service provided by one of the program's regionally-based cohorts, and the employment of its graduates as administrators throughout and outside of the region. To support that end, a review was conducted to identify the literature that is focused upon the preparation of aspiring principals. The report of the review includes a summary of the general literature regarding the topic of principal preparation. Also included in the literature review are the results of other studies in which graduates and recently appointed administrators were surveyed and interviewed regarding their perspectives of the aspects of their programs that have contributed to their preparation. The inclusion of literature reporting on the perspectives of participants and administrators regarding their own preparation programs seems important to this study, as the methodology utilized here adopts a parallel approach, in that it is based upon the perceptions of participants and graduates of the regional campus program.

Certain themes prevail in the literature regarding the types of knowledge, dispositions, and skills that should be included in a principal preparation program. The themes are offered in the works of Cooner, Quinn, Dickmann, 2008; Conley & Cooper, 2011; Cunningham & Sherman, 2008; Lumby, Crow, & Pashiardis, 2008; McKenzie, Christman, Hernandez, Fierro, Capper, Dantley, Gonzalez, Cambron-McCabe, Scheurich, 2008; Perez, Uline, Johnson Jr., James-Ward, & Basom, 2010; Pounder, 2010; Pounder, 2012; Reames, 2010; Versland, 2009; Young, Crow, Murphy, & Ogwa, 2009. The themes are listed below in alphabetical order, as the literature appears to suggest that their value is interrelated, without one theme necessarily being more important than another theme. However, an exception could occur in which a specific contextual situation would necessitate that more emphasis be placed upon one theme more than another theme.

- A collegial and collaborative approach to learning, particularly as can occur with the use of a cohort structure that is delivered in a face-to-face manner at times and locations that are convenient to the students

and that are augmented with effectively developed distance learning techniques,

- A curriculum, which includes in a coherent manner, the knowledge, dispositions, and skills recommended for the preparation of principals, including a focus on state and national standards,
- A learning structure that:
  o Is attentive to the reactions and suggestions of the graduates of the program, particularly, but not limited, to those who become administrators,
  o Is based upon rigor and relevance,
  o Includes a relevant capstone project in which the students integrate and exhibit the outcomes of their learning experiences, and
  o Involves the principles of andragogy (adult learning), including a heavy reliance on written reflection,
- Learning experiences that reflect the actual work of a principal, such as matters pertaining to:
  o Culture and climate; including a focus upon the family and community,
  o Human behavior; particularly a capacity to be observant of antecedent participant characteristics and to be an effective problem solver and manager of conflict,
  o Leadership; especially creating a shared vision,
  o Management; including resource allocation,
  o Organizational matters; including organizational change, and
  o Social justice; as it pertains to ethics, social-economic matters, race, and religion,
- Learning that is flexible enough to be based upon the outcomes that have been identified with the use of assessments that reflect the contents of state and national standards,
- Substantive internship experiences that include mentoring and that provide the students with clinical opportunities to witness and apply the theoretical constructs, which are represented in the curriculum and studied in their preparation programs,
- The development among the students of an authentic sense of self-efficacy,
- The inclusion of activities in the program that contribute to communication skills, particularly listening, speaking, and writing skills,
- The involvement of a knowledgeable and caring faculty;

Other literature (Darling-Hammond, Meyerson, LaPointe, and Orr, 2010; Oplatka, 2009; Nelson, de la Colina, & Boone, 2008; Petzko, 2008) has been identified, which includes findings that pertain to the reactions of participants, particularly graduates who have become administrators, to their principal preparation. However, the quantity of such current literature seems rather limited. As reported in Petzko (2008), "only a limited amount of research has specifically asked new principals to reflect on what preparation was or would have been critical to their initial success" (p. 229). Such studies (Petzko, 2008), were relatively plentiful in the 1980s and 1990s. However, the number of studies has decreased, since the initiation of the 2001 Reauthorization of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act, which has been labeled as the No Child Left Behind (NCLB) Act, according to Petzko (2008) and the examination of the literature for this study.

In the Petzko (2008) study, school principals were requested to rank the importance of selected functions to their preparation. The results suggest that a principal preparation program should include attention, in the following order, to "human relations, personnel, educational leadership, curriculum, site leadership, organizational change, special programs, learning theory, student services, educational management, school law, technology leadership, public relations, business/finance, research, district leadership, facilities, and historical foundations" (p. 240). In a like manner to the highest rated item of the Petzko study (i.e., human relations), the importance of learning about relationships in preparation programs, both their associated "angst and support,' (p. 697) emerged as the only common theme among the principals who were examined in s study of Nelson et al., (2008).

In an Oplatka (2009) study, which took place in Israel, principals were requested to designate the degree to which they perceived that the content of their coursework contributed to their preparation. The outcomes of that investigation, in rank order are, "first years in the principalship, practical management, school marketing, school law, stress and burnout, educational policy, the career of a principal, decision-making, organizational behavior, change management, computer applications, creative thinking, value-added leadership, instructional leadership, organizational diagnosis, managing educational systems, management in practice, Israel identity, and event analysis" (p.137). The designation of attention to career-orientation and the identity of country have not been found in the other studies.

However, the other studies have been conducted in the United States in which education is more of a state, rather than national, function.

In the Darling-Hammond et al., (2010) study, principal program graduates, who had become administrators, were requested to designate the effectiveness of their principal preparation in selected categories. The graduates designated, in order of rank, "lead organizational learning, develop school vision, serve as an instructional leader, manage school operations, and engage parents and community" (pp. 104-105).

Research Questions

Questions, which seem worthy of researching, have emerged from consideration of the context of the study and the related literature, as described above. For example, why has a continuous stream of applicants chosen to pursue this rather rigorous, twenty-four month program at a regional campus, when competing programs exist which appear less rigorous, can be completed in a shorter period of time, and in some cases from the convenience of a computer-screen? A related question pertains to the identification of the ingredients of the program that have contributed to the preparation of its students. A third question relates to the reason that the districts in the region and for that matter districts outside of the region have employed the graduates of the program, and in some cases have employed all or nearly all their administrators from the ranks of the program's graduates. Answers to the three questions seem important, particularly to those preparation programs that wish to maintain academic rigor and a traditional approach in the face of competition, which may not be wedded to such concepts and whose approach may be appealing to some or even many potential students.

Research Procedures

This qualitative case study, as previously indicated, pertains to a principal preparation program at a regional campus. An attempt has been made to ascertain the reasons that the program, in the face of growing competition from other preparation programs, has served the region for such a lengthy period. In addition, an attempt has been made to discover the reasons that its students appear to have been prepared well for the work of the principalship; and that its graduates occupy so many of the administrative positions throughout the region and even in positions outside the region.

The study has been addressed in two phases, with the anticipation that more phases will be pursued in the future. The first phase, which was initiated slightly more than four years ago, involved a survey that was sent electronically to the past participants with whom contact still exists. This amounted to 176 out of approximately 210 (83%) past participants of the program. One hundred and forty-three (81%) of the past participants, with whom contact still exists, responded to the survey. Contact has been lost with participants in various ways, such as when they have moved from the region to engage in retirement or to work in new jobs. Of the thirty-three program participants who did not respond, two indicated a choice to opt out of the survey and ten were participants who had not completed the program. Information regarding the reasons that others failed to participate was not received or ventured. The apparent strong response may reflect that the participants were made aware that their responses would be maintained in a confidential manner; a promise that has been kept.

The survey was administered with the intent of obtaining a broad perspective of the perceptions of the past participants to the program. The survey contained ten multiple-choice questions. The number and type of questions were selected based upon the notion that a greater response rate would be obtained to a shorter rather than a longer survey, particularly given that many of the participants had become school administrators by the time that the survey had been submitted to them. Eight of the ten questions contained voluntary "comment" sections. A pleasant surprise emerged, as a considerable number of comments were offered by the participants.

The second phase of the study, which was conducted slightly more two years ago, involved two focus groups of eight and eleven participants, respectively. The focus group sessions were addressed with the intent of capturing a more concentrated perception of the program than was obtained with the survey. The individuals, who participated in the focus groups, represented a random sample of program graduates who had obtained a principal's license, and in some cases a superintendent's license, and had attained administrative positions. Then the participants were purposely selected to represent a mix of female and male graduates who had been members of multiple cohorts. Sixteen of the nineteen participants were in principalships at the time of the focus group session. Of the other three, one was a superintendent, another was an assistant superintendent,

and a third was a central office administrative assistant. Fifteen questions were asked of the focus group participants.

The survey and focus group questions have been used to capture and describe the perceptions of the participants regarding the program. Their perceptions are considered to be significant to the study and for that matter to the way in which the program is structured and implemented. After all, who would know better whether the program prepares its students for administration than its participants and particularly its graduates who have become administrators?

The two phases of the study and this paper have been developed by four individuals. Recognition existed that the regional campus program coordinator would likely have some bias. For this reason, four other individuals, not involved in the program, were included to enhance the likelihood that the study results would be authentic. The survey and its questions were crafted by a faculty member who has left the university, along with the coordinator of the regional campus program. The results of the survey were recorded, maintained, and analyzed by an administrative assistant. The questions for the focus group sessions were developed and the sessions were conducted by a doctoral student in educational administration, who had not been a student in the principal preparation program and who works outside of the geographic area in which the regional campus program has been primarily delivered. His selection was based upon the notion that he would have little to no vested bias about the program and that he could create among the focus group participants an environment, which would nurture the authenticity of their reactions and feedback. The results of the focus group sessions were organized and coded by a doctoral student in teacher education who also had only limited knowledge of the program. This paper was developed by the coordinator of the regional campus program.

The questions used in the focus group sessions were:

- What attracted you to the program,
- Have you known of colleagues being discouraged from the program and if yes in what manner were they discouraged,
- Have you recommended the program to aspiring principals and what were the reasons for your actions,

- In what ways did your preparation contribute to your readiness to address the responsibilities of the principalship and the expectations of the community in which you have worked,
- In what ways was your preparation inadequate for your responsibilities as a principal in the community in which you have worked,
- What changes would you make to the program,
- In what manner were you prepared to address the socio-economic, ethnic, and racial matters of the community in which you have worked,
- What influence did the two-year internship have on your preparation for your school and district,
- What challenges did you experience with the internship,
- What courses would you recommend be revised, added, or removed from the program,
- In what ways was the program relevant and not relevant to your work as an administrator,
- What one word best describes the program, and
- What additional comments would you like to make.

For the listing above, some of the fifteen focus group questions were grouped together. The data obtained from the focus group sessions were organized utilizing an Analytical Framework Approach (Patton, 2002). Initially, the two clusters of focus group data were organized question-by-question, as a semi-structured interview protocol was used. Then, the data were subjected to a content analysis that was organized by issues, particularly as key concepts, issues, and themes began to emerge.

An inductive analysis was utilized as patterns, themes, and categories were discovered during the process. The following steps were utilized during the analysis process:

a. The data were read, in full, numerous times, prior to the start of formal analysis.
b. The data were grouped into meaningful analytical units.
c. Codes (categories) were devised based on the segments identified in the data.
d. All the data from each focus group were segmented and assigned an initial code that was based on the categories determined by the analyst.
e. A frequency count was conducted to determine the frequency with which concepts were present within the data.

f.   After the data were analyzed, a final set of categories was determined to be a relevant framework for presenting the results. They included; (a) aspects of the program to be continued (b) aspects of the program to be revised, and (c) aspects of the program to be eliminated.

g.   Each code was then categorized into the final categories of: continued, revised, or eliminated.

h.   Both sets of focus group data have been reported separately (Focus Group 1 Data Analysis & Focus Group 2 Data Analysis) and together (Focus Group 1 & 2 Combined Report).

Results of this Study

The findings from the survey and the focus group sessions are reported in this section of the paper. For the survey, the results are reported question-by-question. For the focus group sessions, the results have been categorized and reported as the aspects of the program that the participants have proposed being continued, revised, and eliminated. In addition, responses to questions that do not pertain to the aspects of the program that should be maintained and changed have been included.

Results Emerging from the Survey:

These data were obtained from a survey. Responses to the survey, as noted above, were received slightly more than four years ago from 143 of the 176 participants with whom contact still exists. Everyone possible was included in order to obtain the perspectives of those students who did and did not complete the program, who did and did not obtain a principal's license, and who did and did not become principals.

The number and percentage of responses for each of the possible answers to the questions is included, with three exceptions. The exceptions are for the answers to the third, fourth, and ninth questions. In the case of these three questions, just the number of responses is included. The percentage of responses has not been included, as the participants were given the option to respond to as many answers as seemed applicable for these three questions. For the other questions, the participants were allowed to respond to only one answer. In addition, comments from the respondents that seemed relevant and useful to the study were included. They emerged in fourth, fifth, sixth, eighth, ninth, and tenth questions.

Question 1: In what cohort did you participate? The average response rate per cohort was 86%. The primary purpose of this question was to be able to identify, in the future, results unique to a cohort.

Question 2: What portions of the program did you complete? One hundred and forty-three of the participants responded to this question. Ninety-nine or slightly (slightly more than 69%) of the respondents reported having completed the master's degree and the license. Fourteen (slightly less than 10%) of the respondents indicated that they had completed only the master's degree. Twelve (slightly more than 8%) of the respondents reported obtaining only the license. Eighteen (slight more than 13%) of the respondents offered that they had failed to complete the master's degree or the license. In other words, approximately 87% of the respondents reported obtaining some combination of a master's degree and principal's license.

Question 3: If you indicated that you completed only the master's degree, only the license, or neither the degree nor license, would you like to complete one or both of them? Twenty-six participants responded to this question. Eight of the respondents indicated that they would like to complete the master's degree program; eleven reported that they would like to obtain the license; and seven offered that they would like to complete both the degree and license.

Question 4: What form of work have you engaged since leaving the program? The respondents were requested to designate each applicable category, regardless of whether that meant designating more than one category.

- Eighty-two offered having been a teacher.
- Twenty-eight indicated having been a coordinator at the building level.
- Sixty-five reported having been a principal.
- Thirteen indicated having engaged in central office work.
- Thirteen reported having been a superintendent.

Question 5: To what degree do you perceive that the program has been relevant to your professional preparation? One hundred and thirty-nine participants responded to this question.

- Sixty-eight (slightly more than 49%) of the respondents offered that the program had been of definite relevance to their preparation.

- Sixty-four (46%) indicated that the program had been of extraordinary relevance to their preparation.
- In summary, 94% (all but seven of the respondents) suggested that the program had been of definite or extraordinary relevance to their work.

Among the comments that were offered to this question were:

- "I find myself using the content of the program on a daily basis."
- "Linkages! Seeing the big picture now."
- "The content was so relevant; the network of colleagues from our cohort has been invaluable."
- "Some courses are extraordinary. I only have found a few in which I did not see relevance."

Question 6: To what degree would you recommend maintaining the way in which the program has been delivered, such as the use of monthly seminars, internships, and the sequence of courses? The responses to this question seemed contradictory. For this reason, the author of the paper has concluded that the question was poorly worded. One of the most common comments was "Not sure what the question is asking." However, four other comments seem worth reporting. They are:

- More online instruction, including webinars is suggested.
- I would suggest engaging in social media, mainly Twitter, to build connections with the group and other educators.
- More help on the job search side is encouraged.
- The internship is challenging; nearly impossible.

Question 7: Has your participation in the principal preparation program contributed in a positive manner to the work that you have engaged since leaving the program?

One hundred and forty-one of the participants responded to this question. Eight (6%), seventy-three (52%), and sixty (42%) of the respondents indicated that the program had contributed, respectively, in a marginal, definite, and extraordinary manner to their work. In other words, 94% of the participants indicated that the program

had definitely or had extraordinarily contributed in a
positive manner to their work since leaving the program.

Question 8: Has your participation in the principal preparation
program contributed in a positive manner to your professional and personal
growth?

One hundred and forty-three of the participants responded
to this question. Five (3%), seventy-one (50%), and sixty-
seven (42%) of the respondents indicated that the program
had contributed, respectively, in marginal, definite, and
extraordinary manner to their work. In other words, 92% of
the participants indicated that the program had definitely or
had extraordinarily contributed in a positive manner to their
professional and personal growth.

Following are some noteworthy comments offered by respondents:

- Every person needs to complete the program.
- Since completing the program, I have been able to get a job as a
  director of school improvement and now as an elementary principal.
- I do not feel that I would have been prepared for administration if I
  would have pursued an online program.
- I have benefited from the program, as a board of education member.

Question 9: In what manner have you communicated with other
principal preparation program students since leaving the program?
Respondents were requested to indicate each applicable answer.

- Sixty indicated that they had communicated in order to seek or respond
  to a request for information or advice.
- Ninety-one indicated communications that resulted from encounters at
  professional meetings.
- Fifty-one reported encounters at social settings.
- Twenty-five indicated not having communications.

Following are some noteworthy comments offered by respondents:

- I now represent the teachers, as a union representative against some of the members with whom I went through the principal preparation program; very interesting!
- It would actually be nice if each group had a reunion once a year in order to maintain contact and provide the opportunity to strengthen and maintain contacts.

Question 10: How many individuals have you encouraged to apply for and participate in the principal preparation program? One and forty-three responses were received.

- Nine (6%) indicated no one.
- Forty-nine (34%) reported one or two individuals.
- Fifty-eight (41%) suggested three to five individuals.
- Twelve (8%) indicated seven to 10 individuals.
- Fifteen (11%) reported more than 10 individuals.

Following are some noteworthy comments offered by respondents:

- I am not around educators often enough to make recommendations.
- I do not encourage all that have asked; only suitable, professional, and impressive candidates.
- I recommend the program to any teacher I come across. I feel it makes you a better educator…whether you want to be a principal or not.

Results Emerging from the Focus Group Sessions
The participants in the focus group sessions, which occurred slightly more than two years ago, are graduates of the program, who have obtained a principal's license, and who have become administrators. The results are categorized and reported regarding the aspects of the program that the participants reported that they would continue, revise, and eliminate. In addition, questions and answers, which do not pertain to the maintenance and change of the program, have been included.
The aspects of the program that the participants have recommended continuing and that they have reported finding particularly helpful, with an indication in parentheses of the number of times that each of the suggestions was made.

- The provision of encouragement and opportunities to collaborate with fellow students (28),
- The manner in which instruction and learning is delivered by the program leadership, professors, and mentors (26),
- The meaningfulness and relevance of the coursework and experiences (25),
- The inclusion of a rural focus (23),
- The use of an on-site, as opposed to an online delivery model (21),
- The nurturing among the students of personal growth and professional perspectives (17),
- The manner in which the program's academic year and summer semester schedule is structured, which is particularly attentive to the participants (14), and
- The opportunities, which are provided to engage in leadership while participating in the internship (12).

The aspects of the program that the participants recommended should be added. An increased focus should be devoted, according to the respondents, to: (a) technology; (b) special education issues; (c) the culture of poverty; (d) teacher and principal evaluation systems, particularly those being used by the state's department of education; (e) cognitive behavioral feedback; (f) school law; (g) research courses; (h) local politics; and (i) dealing with stress.

The aspects of the program that the participants recommended should be reduced. Suggestions were offered that the focus on two topics should be reduced. They are school finance and statistical and mathematical courses.

The aspect of the program that the participants suggested should be eliminated. One suggestion was made. The participants felt that more care should be exerted with the selection and guidance of their mentor principals for the internship portion of the program.

Responses to the focus group questions that seemed relevant to the study and that are outside of those described above.

- In response to a question about what attracted the focus group participants to the principal preparation program, two of the participating administrators mentioned the rigor of the courses. The most common response to this question was the opportunity to interact

with and collaborate in person with peers, a phenomenon that has led to the creation of a learning community among the participants.

- When the participants were asked the reason that they had recommended the program to others, the most common answers pertained to the quality of the program, its relevance, and its rigor.
- The quality and commitment of the faculty members and the respect that they offered to the students represented an aspect of the program that the participants reported as being very important for their preparation to become administrators.
- The participants reported that their understanding of the importance of community to the school grew through the program.
- Aside from the concern reported about some of the mentor principals, numerous expressions were offered by the participants that the internship represented an opportunity for them to gain a realistic view of administration or as jokingly noted "going to the dark side."
- When asked at the end of the focus group sessions for one word to describe the program, some of the most frequent comments were:
  - The program is extremely relevant and realistic,
  - The program is life-changing in a professional and personal manner,
  - The advisor and faculty are student-focused,
  - The learning experience is well organized and challenging.

Summary and Discussion

This paper pertains to a twenty-four-month regional campus-based principal preparation program cohort that has been fully subscribed for eleven cycles and whose graduates are employed as administrators in thirty-eight of the thirty-nine districts in the region and in districts outside of the area. All or nearly all of the administrators in many of the districts are nearly all graduates of the program. The study has been conducted in two phases. One phase comprised a survey of ten questions, with the opportunity for comments, which was sent to all of the students who have participated in the program with whom contact still exists. The other phase involved two focus group sessions in which graduates of the program, who have become administrators, were asked fifteen rather open-ended questions. The study was intended to identify the aspects of the program that have influenced the preparation of its students, the endurance of the regionally-based program cohort, and the employment of its graduates as administrators throughout and outside of the region.

Recognition exists that the findings of this study pertain primarily to the regional principal preparation program and are not necessarily transferrable to other preparation programs. In that regard, a review has been conducted of the literature regarding principal preparation programs, with a particular focus upon studies in which program participants and principals offered their opinions of the value of the preparation that they had received for their work.

The results of the survey and the focus group sessions of the regional preparation program and the evidence in the literature overlap in several ways. For example, the opportunity to participate in a collegial and collaborative cohort-learning environment, to have substantive and nurturing support from the faculty and the cohort advisor, and to benefit from a rigorous and relevant program can be found in the results of this study and the literature. However, the overlapping results appear to be more important to the regionally based program's participants, based upon the nature of their responses, than to the respondents in the studies reported in the literature. Another difference pertains to online programs. While they are growing in use nationally, the focus group participants of this study seem particularly determined that the regional program be maintained in a face-to-face manner. This reaction may simply reflect factors, such the participants perceiving that the program contributed to their growth as professionals. However, school administration is very much a people endeavor and for this reason may be most effectively taught in a classroom setting, in which the instructors and students can engage activities that would be difficult or even not possible in an online context.

References

Allen, E. I. & Seaman, J. (2013). *Changing course: Ten years of tracking online education in the United States*. Babson Survey Research Group and Quahog Research Group LLC. Retrieved at http://files.eric.ed.gov/fulltext/ED541571.pdf

Artino, A. R. & Stephens, J. M. (2009). Academic motivation and self-regulation: A comparative analysis of undergraduate and graduate students learning online. *The Internet and Higher Education, 12*(3-4), 146-151. doi: 10.1016/j.iheduc.2009.02.001

Barnett, B. G., Copland, M. A., & Shoho, A. (2009). The use of internships in preparing school leaders. In M. D. Young, G. M. Crow, J. Murphy, &

R. T. Ogwa (Eds.), *Handbook of research on the education of school leaders* (371-394). New York, NY: Routledge.

Conley, S. & Cooper, B. S. (Eds.) (2011). *Finding, preparing, and supporting school leaders*. Landam, MD: Rowan & Littlefield Education.

Cooner, D., Quinn, R., & Dickmann, E. (2008). Becoming a school leader: Voices of transformation from principal interns. *International Electronic Journal for Leadership in Learning, 12*(5). Retrieved from http://iejll.synergiesprairies.ca/iejll/index.php/ijll/article/view/551/213

Cunningham, W. G. & Sherman, W. H. (2008). Effective internships: Building bridges between theory and practice. *The Educational Forum, 72*, 308-318.

Darling-Hammond, L., Meyerson, D., LaPointe, & Orr, M. T. (2010). *Preparing principals for a changing world.* San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass.

Denzin, N. K., & Lincoln, Y. S. (Eds.). (2005). *The handbook of qualitative research*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications.

DuFour, R., DuFour, R., Eaker. T., & Many, T. (2010). *Learning by doing: A handbook for professional communities at work*. Bloomington, IN: Solution Tree.

Grogan, M., Bredeson, P. V., Sherman, W. H., Preis, S., & Beatty, D. M. (2009). The design and delivery of leadership preparation**.** In M. D. Young, G. M. Crow, J. Murphy, & R. T. Ogwa (Eds.), *Handbook of research on the education of school leaders* (395-416). New York, NY: Routledge.

Lumby, J., Crow, G., & Pashiardis, P. (Eds.) (2008). *International handbook on the preparation and development of school leaders*. New York, NY: Routledge.

Lundberg, F.C. & Ornstein, A. C. (2012). *Educational administration: Concepts and practices.* Belmont, CA: Wadsworth Cengage Learning.

Maier, G. T. & Jackson, A. D. (2010). *Ohio prescription drug abuse task force: Final report task force recommendations.* Retrieved from http://www.healthy.ohio.gov/vipp/drug/~/media/1F1DD52D1CA24ADBB9 8551AD588114EC.ashx

McKenzie, K. B., Christman, D. E., Hernandez, F., Fierro, E., Capper, C. A., Dantley, M., Gonzalez, M. L., Cambron-McCabe, N., & Scheurich, J. (2008). From the field: A proposal for educating leaders for social justice. *Educational Administration Quarterly, 44*(1), 111-138.

Nelson, S. W., de la Colina, M. G. & Boone, M. D. (2008). Lifeworld or systemsworld: What guides novice principals? *Journal of Educational Administration, 46*(6), 690-701.

Ohio Department of Job and Family Services (2014). *June 2014 ranking of Ohio county unemployment rates.* Retrieved from http://ohiolmi.com/laus/Ranking.pdf

Oplatka, I. (2009). Learning the principal's future internal career experiences in a principal preparation program. *International Journal of Educational Management, 23*(2)*,* 129-144.

Orr, M. T., with Barber, M. T. (2009). Program evaluation in leadership preparation and related fields. In M. D. Young, G. M. Crow, J. Murphy, & R. T. Ogwa (Eds.), *Handbook of research on the education of school leaders* (457-498). New York, NY: Routledge.

Perez, L. G., Uline, C. L., Johnson Jr., J. F., James-Ward, C. & Basom, M. R. (2010). Foregoing fieldwork in leadership preparation: The transformative capacity of authentic inquiry. *Educational Administration Quarterly, 47*(1), 217-257.

Petzko, V. (2008). The perceptions of new principals regarding the knowledge and skills important to their initial success. *NAACP Bulletin, 92*(224). doi: 10. 1177/0192636508322824

Pollard, K., & Jacobsen, L.A. (2014, February). *The Appalachian region: A data overview from the 2008-2012 American Community Survey*. Washington, DC: Appalachian Regional Commission. Retrieved from http://www.arc.gov/research/researchreportdetails.asp?REPORT_ID=109.

Pounder, D. (2010). Leader preparation special issue: Implications of policy, practice, and research. *Educational Administration Quarterly, 47*(1), 258-267.

Pounder, D. (2012). School leadership preparation and practice survey instruments and their uses. *Journal of Research on Leadership Education, 7*(2), 254-274.

Reames, E. (2010). Shifting paradigms: Redesigning a principal's preparation program's curriculum. *Journal of Research on Leadership Education, 5*(12.5), 436-459.

Rusch, E. A. (2008). Curriculum and pedagogy. In J. Lumby, G. Crow, & P. Pashiardis (Eds.), *International handbook on the preparation and development of school leaders* (203-231). New York, NY: Routledge.

Salazar, M. J., Pazey, B. L., & Zedmbik, M. K. (2013). What we've learned and how we've use it: Learning experiences from the cohort of high-

quality principalship program. *Journal of Research on Leadership Education, 8*(3), 1-26. doi: 10. 1177/1942775113502021

Senge, P., Cambron-McCabe, N. Lucas, T., Smith, B., Dutton, J., & Kleiner, A. (2000). *Schools that learn. A fifth discipline fieldbook for educators, parents, and everyone who cares about education*. New York, NY: Doubleday/Currency.

Stoll, L., Bolam, R., McMahon, A., Wallace, M., & Thomas, S. (2006). Professional learning communities: A review of the literature. *Journal of Educational Change, 7*(4), 221-258.

Taylor, D. T., Cordeiro, P. A., Chrispeels, J. H. (2009). Pedagogy. In M. D. Young, G. M. Crow, J. Murphy, & R. T. Ogwa (Eds.), *Handbook of research on the education of school leaders* (319-370). New York, NY: Routledge.

Versland, T. M. (2009). Self-efficacy development of aspiring principals in education leadership preparation programs. *Scholar Works, Montana State University.* Retrieved from http://scholarworks.montana.edu/xmlui/handle/1/2476

Young, M. D., Crow, G. M., Murphy, J., & Ogawa, R. T. (Eds.) (2008). *Handbook of research on the education of school leaders*. New York, NY: Routledge.

Acknowledgment