



TAKING CHARGE OF PRINCIPAL PREPARATION:

A Guide to
NYC Leadership Academy's
Aspiring Principals Program

Commissioned by





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A GUIDE TO NYC LEADERSHIP ACADEMY'S ASPIRING PRINCIPALS PROGRAM

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NYC Leadership Academy's first class of Aspiring Principals

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

School leadership is a crucial lever of school change. Successful principals are responsible for shaping the culture of their schools, setting clear expectations, and cultivating and leading teams of teachers who can deliver high-quality instruction. As states and districts implement the Common Core standards and new teacher evaluation models, principals play an ever more critical role in supporting and evaluating teacher practice in the classroom.

While once seen as a building manager position, the principal's job has become highly demanding, complex, and urgent, as school leaders are held accountable for transforming schools and improving student outcomes. As research and practitioners in the field confirm the important role that school leaders play in advancing student achievement, there is a growing chorus of support for rethinking how the next generation of principals is trained and supported to ensure they can hit the ground running and meet the demands of the position.

For more than a decade, NYC Leadership Academy's Aspiring Principals Program (APP) has taken a standards-based, experiential learning approach to developing the breadth and depth of skills that aspiring school leaders need to succeed on the job. Unlike traditional educational leadership programs that equate readiness to lead a school with the completion of an established number of credit hours, this rigorous, accelerated 14-month leadership development program only graduates participants who demonstrate that they meet clearly articulated leadership performance standards. Much of the training takes the form of simulations and team

activities, frequent feedback, and a substantial clinical experience under the guidance of a carefully selected and trained mentor principal.

What makes APP powerful is its laser-like focus on designing a practice- and research-based leadership development model that prepares aspiring principals for the real-world challenges they will face. Underlying APP is a set of clear standards that specify what school leaders need to know and do to succeed. APP faculty are veteran practitioners with years of experience leading schools; they design the hands-on, job-embedded curriculum that gives aspiring school leaders a variety of opportunities to grapple with a wide range of challenges and master the necessary knowledge and skills. Maintaining a close partnership with the New York City Department of Education also allows program faculty to purposefully integrate evolving school system priorities and initiatives into the school-based immersion experiences to ensure that each year graduates are well-versed in district expectations.

APP begins with an intensive simulated school experience for six weeks in the summer, followed

by a school-based residency during the school year that augments classroom-based coursework. These dual applied learning opportunities allow aspiring principals to gain theoretical ideas, put them into action, and see and manage the consequences of those actions as they play out in school settings. Mentor principals support, coach, and reflect with the aspiring principals to ensure that they can perform important leadership tasks such as giving feedback to teachers, analyzing data, problem solving in the moment, building community, and implementing needed reforms. As a result, program participants build the habits and dispositions of strong leaders.

This guide provides an in-depth look at the core research-based elements of APP and why they are critical to preparing and graduating effective principals. It offers **existing leadership preparation programs and programs just getting started** a sequence of clear, concrete action steps they can follow to strengthen school leadership preparation and improve school and student outcomes. **District leaders** considering investments in school leadership development can make use of the tools and strategies for mapping how they currently source principals to their local school leadership needs. **State policymakers** can incorporate lessons learned on the value of practice-based principal preparation as they devise policy responses to the school leadership challenge.

NYC Leadership Academy partners highlighted in this guide demonstrate how APP has been adapted to a variety of other contexts. These partners include:

- Denver Public Schools (Colorado)
- iLeadAZ/Arizona State University (Arizona)
- Innovative Schools Development Corporation (Delaware)
- Sandhills Regional Education Consortium (North Carolina)
- Teachers21 (Massachusetts)

NYC Leadership Academy is proud of its accomplishments preparing effective school leaders and grateful to its partners in this work, including the New York City Department of Education, The Wallace Foundation, and others who have joined in this work nationally. This guide is intended to spur innovation in existing principal preparation work, inspire new programs, and strengthen the overall practice of principal preparation by providing insight into NYC Leadership Academy's model and helping others learn from their experiences in adapting APP to fit local circumstances, needs, and objectives.

MESSAGE FROM THE CEO

During the summer of 2014, NYC Leadership Academy kicked off our yearlong engagement with a 12th cohort of educators seeking to become school principals in New York City. At the same time, aspiring principals participated in similar summer intensive training in Minneapolis, Cleveland, Boston, Wilmington (DE), Charlotte, and Phoenix, thanks to the districts, universities, and nonprofits that have partnered with us to adapt our Aspiring Principals Program to meet their own state and district needs.

Over the past 11 years, our New York City-based Aspiring Principals Program has prepared 500 school leaders; today our graduates lead one out of every six public schools in New York City. Many of our graduates have gone on to district leadership roles as well. We continue to evaluate our program to inform continuous improvement. We have seen our graduates start promising new schools and turn around failing schools, and we have evidence that our graduates lead increases in student achievement. Alongside this impact, and with the support of The Wallace Foundation, our work has expanded in scope as we have developed a robust national practice that helps others adapt our model and build leadership development capacity at a local level. We offer a field-tested, data-driven approach that other school systems and partner organizations can use to support and advance effective leadership practice.

As we celebrate our first decade of service, we are publishing this guide to share insight into our approach to school leader recruitment, selection, and preparation. We offer examples of how other systems have adapted our practice-based model to fit their local circumstances and needs. We hope this guide will provide inspiration for other school systems and partner organizations that are also focused on supporting and advancing effective school leadership practice. We invite you to read and use the guide, whether you are starting a new program or looking for ways to strengthen an existing one, and encourage you to visit our website to explore the services we offer to support you in this work. Together, we can develop and support the leaders our schools need so that all students can thrive and succeed.

Irma Zardoya
Chief Executive Officer



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JPG Photography

THINKING OUT OF THE BOX: CRAFTING THE ULTIMATE PROBLEM-BASED PRINCIPAL PREPARATION EXPERIENCE

On a late night in June 2003, a few short weeks before the launch of NYC Leadership Academy's Aspiring Principals Program, I sat hunched over a computer trying to program a school schedule in ways that actually *minimized* the opportunities for teacher collaboration. I deliberately wanted to build a schedule that did *not* include time for professional learning on behalf of student learning. In just a few weeks, we would be asking program participants to devise strategies for improving the schedule, and I wanted to make sure I got the problems right.

As NYC Leadership Academy's founding Academic Dean, I had the opportunity to create the program's curriculum to train new school leaders for some of New York City's most challenging schools. I had done similar work as a college professor, but within the standard university course schedules, which were not always conducive to the learning environment I strived to create. Edwin Bridges, an emeritus professor at Stanford University who is widely considered the father of problem-based learning for training school leaders, gave me sound advice and his words echoed in my head: *Do not constrain your curricular approach to what you've been able to do in a university context. Determine what experiences educators should have prior to becoming principals and construct those experiences for them. Attend to both analytical and interpersonal skills.*

I went about devising a curriculum that was based in both a simulated school on which program participants would work over the summer and an actual residency school in which they would spend an academic year. I wanted the program's scenario school, the basis of its summer curriculum, to reflect the common problems many principals face when they enter chronically low-performing schools. I was excited to be designing a curricular scope and sequence that was based in real scenarios and in collaboration with practitioners who I trained in facilitating problem-based learning. I also had more access to relevant district-level information than I had as a professor and could get a better sense of the changing realities of the principalship. As hard as some university faculty members try, without a solid partnership and sense of mutual accountability with the district, it is often

hard to stay current on the policies, procedures, and pressures of the principalship.

As I worked on crafting the school's suboptimal schedule, a few feet away from me another member of the program's curriculum design team was modifying student work samples so that they would reveal patterns in teacher practice consistent with videotapes we had created using a mix of actors and actual teachers and students. At the same time, other colleagues were making sure that the school's organizational structure and budget were aligned, but unresponsive to student academic and social needs. Along with written profiles of each staff member, these data, videos, and profiles were meant to bring the scenario school to life and, when analyzed carefully, signal patterns and potential points for intervention. Our curriculum design team's late-night efforts were to provide a series of problems that program participants could work together to solve.

We finished designing the mock school just in time for the program's July launch. We had a thorough set of performance standards that articulated the competencies we expected program graduates to master, a robust curriculum, a fully realized simulated school that would be at the center of the aspiring principals' work during the six-week summer intensive, and talented mentor principals lined up for school-year residencies that would follow.

The program's work was—and still is—premised on the notion that adults learn best by doing, and that the real learning about school leadership occurs primarily in the act of leading schools. Yet schools in need of swift turnaround cannot afford to have their leaders simply learn on the job. Leaders charged with transforming chaotic schools into places of learning need to start ready for action, and they require preparation that is deeper and more intensive than what

basic credentialing programs are typically able to offer. They need something rigorous and experiential. They need professional development opportunities geared toward the real-world challenges of school-level leadership. They need simulations and significant time working under the mentorship of strong, effective principals who can guide their learning through meaningful leadership projects of increasing importance and responsibility.

We learned an enormous amount during that first year of the Aspiring Principals Program, and each subsequent year benefited from our previous efforts to provide program participants with authentic learning opportunities through simulations and on-the-ground training. And we quickly began to see the results of our work, as our graduates took jobs leading some of the city's most challenging schools, as they opened brand-new schools, and as they began to lead change for students.

We are proud of this work and believe it showcases how school systems and their partners can break away from their reliance on traditional approaches to training aspiring school leaders in favor of rigorous, problem-based, experiential preparation programs whose graduates are able to demonstrate the leadership competencies that will be essential to their effectiveness as leaders of schools where all students can achieve.

As practitioners, we know how difficult this work is and know that there are no easy answers. Our hope is that by sharing what we've learned about principal preparation we can continue to build this field so that the next generation has the school leaders that they deserve.

Dr. Sandra J. Stein
Former CEO and Founding Academic Dean of
NYC Leadership Academy

OUR MISSION

Since our founding, the core mission of NYC Leadership Academy has been to **prepare and support school leaders who can transform the most challenging schools and improve outcomes for all students.** The future of education requires well-trained leaders who can improve the achievement of students who need it most—leaders with a sense of urgency and commitment to all students, who can build and lead effective school teams. We are dedicated to the ongoing development of such leaders.

To learn more about our work, including our preparation of aspiring principals, coaching and support for current principals, and school leadership consulting across the country, please visit our website at www.nycleadershipacademy.org.



THE CASE FOR INVESTING IN SCHOOL LEADERSHIP

An effective principal is key to continuous school improvement and student achievement. Ongoing research confirms that school leadership is critical to students' academic success and the challenging work of school turnaround. Researchers have found not “a single case of a school that had improved its student achievement record in absence of talented leadership.”¹ School principals play an important role in teacher development and in creating the conditions that enable schools to succeed. A national meta-analysis of 69 studies involving 2,800 schools found that 25% of the variation in student achievement could be explained by principal leadership skills.²

Yet, being a school leader today is considerably more challenging than it was just a decade ago. At the federal, state, and district levels, there is unanimous recognition that a high-quality principal is key to improving school performance and student learning. With the implementation of No Child Left Behind, followed by the Race to the Top competitive funds intended to spur and support comprehensive education reform at the state level, and subsequent state and local school improvement efforts, principals are under tremendous pressure to consistently advance learning outcomes for every student in the school. School leaders are now responsible for much more than the day-to-day management and oversight of a school. They are increasingly playing a number of complex roles in their school and school communities. Principals are expected to:

- serve as instructional leaders who coach teachers through professional learning, while holding them accountable for student performance using new evaluation systems;
- achieve buy-in for and implement reforms that are, at times, met with skepticism by teachers and parents alike;
- focus on data-driven analysis to drive student learning while attending to the complex and comprehensive social, emotional, academic, and safety needs of every child; and
- build a professional community among teachers while determining which teachers need to improve quickly or move on.

Additionally, many districts have devolved the authority to make managerial and budgetary decisions to principals at a time when, due to budget constraints, school leaders have to do more with less. In order to be effective, principals

The residency model allows for significant and rapid growth of school leaders. It allows participants to apply authentic learning in real situations and to be involved in all aspects of running a school. The Aspiring Principals Program develops instructional leaders who are prepared to take on the work with a lens to impacting student achievement.

—APP Graduate and Mentor

MEASURING PRINCIPAL PREPARATION EFFECTIVENESS

Results of a longitudinal study conducted by the non-profit strategy consultants TCC Group in 2008 showed that NYC Leadership Academy exceeded all other evaluated principal preparation programs on all measured outcomes, including school-wide instructional leadership, individual and instructional leadership, professional support, leadership empowerment, planning and evaluative learning, school culture and tone, and parental engagement. In addition, in 2009, an assessment by the Education Development Center, entitled “Quality Measures for Education Leadership Development Systems,” gave the Aspiring Principals Program a 4+ rating on a four-point scale based on characteristics of effective principal preparation programs, the only program assessed that received this distinction.

Parents' perception of their school's level of engagement increased

nearly **20%** in the first three years of an APP principal's leadership. (NYCDOE Survey Data)

must have considerable leadership capacity, communication skills, instructional expertise, political savvy, and analytical sophistication.

Across the nation, the demand for highly qualified school leaders exceeds the supply.³ Yet, traditional preparation programs have long been criticized for offering training that is neither rigorous nor connected to school system realities.⁴ Thus, districts and their principal preparation partners must challenge the status quo and make an effort to ensure that newly minted principals are ready for the highly challenging and complex job of school leadership. Exemplary principal preparation is much more than delivering a series of courses, issuing course credits, and administering final exams to assess learning of theoretical principles. Aspiring school leaders need opportunities to practice the work and be responsible for leading change on behalf of students in real schools. Only through these immersive school-based experiences can they understand what it takes to create the conditions that enable students and teachers to thrive and succeed.

The NYC Leadership Academy's Aspiring Principals Program (APP) uses a rigorous, standards-based approach to curriculum design and experiential learning methods, revises the program on an ongoing basis to reflect initiatives and reform priorities of the New York City Department of Education (NYCDOE), and requires graduates to demonstrate clearly articulated leadership behaviors. Recognized as a national exemplar by the George W. Bush Institute's Alliance to Reform Education Leadership (AREL) and as a national model by the U.S. Department of Education's Doing What Works online library, APP provides an example of how a program can intentionally approach school leader preparation and hold itself accountable for graduating effective principals who can improve academic outcomes for students.

HOW TO USE THIS GUIDE

This guide is designed to help school systems, universities, and nonprofits understand the core elements of NYC Leadership Academy’s Aspiring Principals Program that make it so effective. The guide highlights the research behind and lessons learned in structuring, staffing, developing, and implementing the program. By unpacking the thinking behind how and why we invest time in giving aspiring principals job-embedded learning opportunities, we hope others can benefit from our experience and not have to start from scratch. There is a growing research base on what makes an effective school leader and the kinds of experiences aspiring principals need to have in order to be ready to step into the challenging and complex job of school leader.

In addition to a decade of work in New York City, this guide highlights our work with partner school systems, universities, nonprofits, and states across the country to build high-quality principal pipeline systems appropriate to local leadership development needs. This portion of the guide is designed to illuminate how existing efforts can be augmented or strengthened in order to boost the effectiveness of investments. By distilling the work into clear action steps with examples of how other systems have chosen to adapt the APP model, our intent is to spread research- and evidence-based practice.



TARGETED AUDIENCES

This guide is intended to help school leadership practitioners gain traction more quickly and to inform policymakers of good practice.

Existing leadership development programs that want to strengthen key elements will want to delve into the details of the APP model, including the matrix of leadership competencies, the candidate selection process, why experiential learning is core to our approach, how we structure our program to scaffold and support the learning of aspiring principals, our staffing model, and more.

Programs just getting started will want not only to understand what sets the APP approach apart and makes it an effective principal preparation model but also how to design a program that responds to particular school system needs and challenges. Completing the needs assessment as a first step will help with planning and deci-

sions on how to allocate limited resources for the greatest impact.

District and state education leaders will want to consider how any investments in school leadership development are complemented by an investment in system improvements that create the conditions that make the work of school leaders sustainable and that are responsive to the range of challenges principals face in moving reforms forward. They should also find these ideas useful in examining the programs offered by their leadership development partners and in suggesting ways that collaboration might foster more effective and relevant preparation of candidates to lead local schools.

State policymakers will want to understand both the complexity of implementing a practice-based model and the importance of investing in experiential learning in order to truly prepare the next generation of school leaders to be effective in transforming school performance.



THE ASPIRING PRINCIPALS PROGRAM

NYC Leadership Academy’s Aspiring Principals Program (APP) prepares talented educators to be effective school leaders through an innovative, experiential approach to learning that enables participants to practice the authentic work of school leadership in both real and simulated contexts.

Each year, APP recruits and selects a talented group of educators who demonstrate the capacity to quickly develop the skills and knowledge needed to be effective leaders in the schools where the NYC Department of Education (NYCDOE) anticipates vacancies. Each cohort of aspiring principals completes a rigorous and high-intensity training sequence that exposes them to the wide variety of challenges that a New York City (NYC) school leader faces on a daily basis. This first section of this guide describes the NYC-based APP in its entirety.

CLEAR STANDARDS OF PRINCIPAL EFFECTIVENESS

NYC Leadership Academy developed and uses the Leadership Performance Standards Matrix as the foundation for APP. These standards outline the skills, knowledge, and competencies that aspiring principals need in order to be effective school leaders. The matrix’s development was informed by the Interstate School Leaders Licensure Consortium (ISLLC) Standards for School Leaders and the research of the Center for Performance Assessment. APP uses these standards as a structure to ensure that the cur-

riculum is designed to fully prepare candidates to assume school leadership positions, and as a framework for both formative and summative assessments of individual participant progress and, ultimately, readiness for the principalship. Within the standards, there are 12 key leadership dimensions, such as resilience, situational problem solving, focus on student performance, accountability for professional practice, and communication. Unlike some leadership standards, these research-based performance standards are set forth in explicit behavioral terms and offer clear examples of behaviors that meet, approach, and do not meet standards. This same framework, with adaptations for local contexts, is in use by other principal preparation programs with which NYC Leadership Academy has worked, including programs in Minneapolis, the Sandhills region of North Carolina, and statewide programs in Delaware, Arizona, and Massachusetts.

APP provides aspiring principals with ongoing opportunities to practice and internalize their skills by immersing them in complex school simulations and authentic school leadership work in actual school environments. This is vastly different from traditional university-based programs centered on completion of topic-based courses that are often disconnected from the reality of leading challenging schools.⁵

NYC LEADERSHIP ACADEMY LEADERSHIP PERFORMANCE STANDARDS MATRIX

LEADERSHIP DIMENSION	MEETING THE STANDARD	PROGRESSING TOWARD THE STANDARD	NOT MEETING THE STANDARD
1.0 PERSONAL BEHAVIOR			
1.1 REFLECTS AN APPROPRIATE RESPONSE TO SITUATIONS	<p>Leader considers the consequence of his/her actions, anticipates possible responses or reactions, and accurately adjusts behavior accordingly.</p> <p>Leader understands and manages emotions and is aware of their impact.</p>	<p>Leader usually considers the consequence of his/her actions.</p> <p>Leader adjusts behavior accordingly.</p> <p>Although aware of impact on others, leader is unable to always manage emotions. It is evident that leader is continually working toward managing emotions.</p>	<p>Leader often responds and reacts emotionally.</p> <p>Leader seldom considers the unintended consequences of his/her actions.</p>
1.2 CONSISTENT WITH EXPRESSED BELIEF SYSTEM AND REFLECT PERSONAL INTEGRITY	<p>Leader's behavior reflects core values at all times.</p> <p>Leader's actions are transparent and there are no surprises.</p>	<p>Leader's core values guide almost all behaviors.</p> <p>Leader's actions are usually transparent and there are few surprises.</p>	<p>Leader's behaviors are not driven by values that are recognizable.</p> <p>Leader's actions are not transparent with expressed belief system and surprise others.</p>
1.3 COMPLIES WITH LEGAL AND ETHICAL REQUIREMENTS IN RELATIONSHIPS WITH EMPLOYEES AND STUDENTS	<p>Leader understands the intent of the law and uses it to ensure the rights of employees and students are fully protected.</p>	<p>Leader is sufficiently familiar with the intent of the law to ensure compliance in protecting the rights of employees and students.</p>	<p>Leader violates—even just one time—the legal and policy requirements for the relationship between leaders and employees and students.</p>
1.4 VALUES DIFFERENT POINTS OF VIEW WITHIN THE ORGANIZATION	<p>Leader actively seeks and makes use of diverse and controversial views.</p> <p>Leader welcomes and appreciates diversity in demonstrable ways.</p>	<p>Leader usually or when approached makes use of diverse and controversial views.</p> <p>Leader is continually working towards valuing diversity.</p>	<p>Leader avoids diverse and controversial views.</p> <p>Leader suppresses other points of view and discourages disagreement or divergent thinking.</p>
1.5 REFLECTS APPROPRIATE PROFESSIONAL DEMEANOR	<p>Leader expresses and behaves in a way that is respectful of the norms, values, and culture of the organization.</p>	<p>Leader understands the norms, values, and culture of the organization but is not always consistent in behaving that way.</p>	<p>Leader's actions and behavior does not consider the norms, values, and culture of the organization.</p>

For the full NYC Leadership Academy's Leadership Performance Standards Matrix go to:
www.nycleadershipacademy.org/news-and-resources/tools-and-publications

All APP programmatic elements—from selecting the candidates to designing assignments to evaluating whether or not aspiring principals advance through and ultimately graduate from the program—are designed to ensure that APP graduates possess the required skills and qualities.

The work is based on adult learning research, which suggests that adults best internalize new knowledge through direct experience and reflection.⁶ By experiencing the discomfort of the unknown in practical, applied contexts, participants are motivated to quickly absorb new information and retain the learning. Immersion also helps participants not only to develop the

competencies they need but also to become self-directed, self-reflective, and empowered. As a result, by the time participants successfully complete the program, they have honed important school leadership skills previously only learned on the job.

RIGOROUS SELECTION PROCESS

Effective school leadership demands more than professional knowledge and skills; it requires educators with a high degree of personal integrity who act in accordance with their stated

SCREENING CANDIDATES FOR LEADERSHIP CAPACITY

APP uses a multi-step selection process to find candidates who possess baseline professional knowledge and can demonstrate resilience, self-reflection, the ability to problem solve effectively, interpersonal communication skills, and a willingness to be a public learner. The application essay is the first opportunity to look for evidence of a leader's problem-solving and systems thinking skills.

After this step, potential leaders are invited to participate in a group interview to see how they interact with colleagues and how they behave when faced with authentic challenges and time constraints. Candidates respond collectively to a complex school leadership scenario involving issues of school culture and climate. Each candidate plays the role of the principal, and the APP staff facilitates a group discussion to see how candidates manage ambiguity; process and react to new information; collaborate with others to problem solve; and ascertain potential consequences and implementation challenges. There are no right answers; the interactions between candidates provide valuable, real-time evidence of candidates' ability to work in teams and respond constructively to feedback and challenging situations. The group interview also includes the observation and analysis of a teaching video to determine the applicant's understanding of instruction and teacher pedagogy, as well as his or her ability to provide feedback.

Those who do well in the group interview are invited for the final step in the selection process—the individual interview, which focuses primarily on instructional knowledge. Applicants bring in a sample of student work and discuss the curriculum tied to that piece of work and what the student work says about the student. During the course of the conversation, the interviewer may give feedback to the applicant to see how receptive he or she is to feedback and will explore other competency areas as needed. The APP team then meets to make final selections.

beliefs. APP only selects applicants who hold a deep commitment to improving outcomes for students, demonstrate professional integrity, work collaboratively with others, and are open to the goal of continuous and public learning. The rigorous selection process uses well-defined criteria and a multi-stage application process that includes a written application and essays, followed by group and individual interviews requiring candidates to demonstrate their skills and dispositions in various situations. The criteria used during the selection process are derived from the Leadership Performance Standards Matrix to ensure that the selection process is identifying candidates who have the skills and dispositions needed to become effective school leaders over the 14 months of the program. See

page 18 for a sample of the matrix. This process allows APP staff to observe how potential leaders analyze complex issues, respond to real-time feedback, and interact with peers. For example, a candidate could be expected to demonstrate his or her openness to feedback during any phase of the selection process, and openness to feedback directly connects to one of the leadership dimensions in the matrix.

The selection process is also designed to identify applicants who are passionate in their commitment to lead schools on behalf of students and who can tolerate and even thrive in ambiguous and uncertain work environments.

In 2013, fewer than **12%** of APP applicants were selected into NYCLA's program.

NYCLA programs reach over **407,000** NYC public school students.

APP graduates serve over **157,000** students in public schools across New York City. [NYCLA Data]

SCREENING CANDIDATES FOR RESILIENCE

Not everybody is cut out for a leadership role. NYC Leadership Academy makes it explicit that graduates will be expected to lead the city's most challenging schools. The program has and continues to look for candidates who demonstrate a commitment to making a difference in the lives of children, with a track record of success and a passionate focus on the children who rely on schools the most as their means to college and careers. It selects candidates with a passion for social justice and a serious, disciplined stance as public learners, who can withstand the pressures of working through ambiguity, resource limitations, internal and external politics, and an ever-changing policy environment to create the conditions for teachers and students to thrive.

On-the-job learning is essential to one's preparation for the principalship. Much of the work of school leadership relates to situational problem solving. You can explore case studies during traditional classroom training, but I don't find this nearly as effective as experiencing a dilemma firsthand.

—APP Graduate



EXPERIENTIAL LEARNING

The best way to learn to be a school leader is to live it⁷; therefore, the best learning environments for aspiring principals are in simulated and actual schools. Once selected, APP candidates embark on an intense, full-time leadership development program that consists of: 1) an intensive simulated school experience; 2) a school-based residency under the guidance of a mentor principal; and 3) a planning phase that enables them to transition successfully into their school leadership roles. Throughout the program, in addition to the applied learning experiences, participants engage in academically rigorous coursework

that enables them to move between action and reflection, theory and practice, as they broaden their knowledge of schools as organizations and hone their leadership skills.

The program is designed and facilitated by faculty members (referred to as facilitators) who have served successfully in school and district leadership positions. The facilitators play a unique role: they not only design and implement the curriculum, adjusting as necessary to address learning needs that emerge during the program, but also coach, support, and evalu-

ate candidates; train and support the mentor principals; and create coherence between the field-based experiences and rigorous academic coursework.

The combination of the intensive simulation and the residency experience enables candidates to engage in the authentic work of school leadership prior to assuming the role of principal. To ensure that candidates emerge conversant in and knowledgeable of the structures, systems, and data they will use in their day-to-day work, both the summer intensive and the residency are designed to be responsive to specific school system needs and priorities. Aspiring principals are introduced to key NYC district initiatives and policies so that they become familiar with system-wide initiatives, such as the rollout and implementation of Common Core standards in schools, as well as more specific tools, such as the Quality Review and School Progress Reports. The Quality Review and School Progress Reports are NYCDOE accountability tools. The Quality Review is a two- or three-day school visit by experienced educators during which the external evaluator visits classrooms, talks with school leaders, and uses a rubric to evaluate how well the school is organized to support student achievement. School Progress Reports assess student progress, student performance, and school environment and grade each school with an A, B, C, D, or F accordingly. These district elements are integrated into the APP curriculum to ensure that learning experiences fit the local context.

PRACTICING SCHOOL ENTRY

One of the concepts that participants revisit throughout the 14 months of APP is how to successfully enter a school as a leader. Participants experience and reflect on this step through their entry into the role of principal in their simulated school, their entry into their residency site, their placement at a switch site residency, and finally, once hired, their entry into the school they will be leading. This practice of entering a school, quickly assessing key data to determine needs and challenges, exploring and understanding the dynamics of the culture, and in a short timeframe positioning oneself to effectively lead is critical to success. The goal of APP is to ensure participants build their experience and comfort with the school entry process, so that whenever their career involves entering a new school, they will know how to make the most of this important—and short—moment.

The APP curricular scope and sequence—for both the summer intensive and the residency—outlines broad learning goals and how each activity and assignment addresses the standards. Critical school leadership concepts and content are introduced and then revisited as participants progress through the program; this spiral approach adds new information and complexity over time. Participants apply their learnings from the simulated school challenges to the residency school site, thereby broadening their experience and deepening their knowledge base and understanding.

SUMMER INTENSIVE: SIMULATION SCHOOL

Simulated schools offer the benefit of a controlled, low-risk environment that introduces candidates to the types of challenges they will face as school leaders in real time—without immediate consequences for actual schools, teachers, or students. The simulation school also highlights the interconnectedness of school issues. In living the job, candidates experience how their mental models shape their perceptions and actions; how their actions play out in schools, including unanticipated consequences; how feedback loops operate; and how an understanding of system dynamics can help identify the most promising levers for change and points for intervention.⁸ Constant scrutiny, feedback, and time pressures are centerpieces of the experience, as candidates learn to cope with unexpected challenges while working toward strict deadlines, all under the microscope of observation.

Select NYCLA curriculum, resources, and video are available on NYC Leadership Academy’s website at www.nyclleadershipacademy.org/news-and-resources/tools-and-publications.

Design

APP facilitators introduce participants to their simulation schools through a variety of documents that explain the school, its history, culture, and climate, and the various—often competing—demands within the district and school context. Each year, two simulated schools—one configured as a K-8 school and the other a 6-12 school—are developed that align with the local context and reform priorities; the school struc-

tures and accompanying activities are contextualized to each simulated school. To add depth and complexity to the simulated schools, there are detailed staff profiles, videotapes of teachers in action, a school budget, a master schedule, and school and student performance data. Additionally, staff members and program graduates play the roles of key school staff and community members and district personnel throughout the summer. Participants are assigned to a school depending on the level in which they plan to work upon completion of the program.

SIMULATING THE ROLE OF PRINCIPAL

The principles of adult learning theory hold that adults best internalize new knowledge through experience.⁹ Simulations have long been used in medical and administrative training programs and have proven to be an effective tool to foster the critical reasoning and effective collaboration necessary for tackling complex problems. Simulation schools give candidates opportunities to test their responses in real time and reflect on their actions. By immediately immersing candidates in an environment where they are expected to think like principals, strategize like principals, and behave like principals—using real school data, real school budgets, and real school tasks—they start to understand the demanding pressures of the principalship. The experience is highly emotional, mixing anxiety, hope, and fear. The lessons learned by “living” the role of the principal stay with candidates and help them build “muscle memory” so that they are ready to dive more quickly into the residency and eventually their leadership role in a school.

When the summer intensive starts, participants are told that, from this moment forward, they are the principals of the simulated school and they are expected to act, behave, and communicate from that position. They are given a number of high-stakes tasks, including analyzing past student performance data and teaching staff capacity; crafting a vision for the school; observing instruction; and developing strategic plans for instructional improvement (including professional development, coordinating a master schedule, overseeing a healthy school climate, and planning a way forward).

Within this simulated school context, participants work in teams of five, with each team operating as a “five-headed principal” of the simulated school. With weekly rotating roles among participants as facilitator, project manager, timekeeper, recorder, and team member, the aspiring principals experience different elements of leadership. APP cohorts have ranged in size from 20 participants to more than 90, depending on projected system principal needs year to year; thus, there are multiple project teams working as the five-headed principal of the same

simulation school. The teams make and present their decisions; turn in several group assignments (all authentic work that principals actually do); and observe and respond to the consequences of their actions and decisions together.

Candidates are asked to take charge of a team of people who may have completely different points of view and to work together to solve a problem under deadline and in the context of a simulated school. APP facilitators purposefully group participants so that teams include people with varied work experiences, backgrounds, skills, professional expertise, work styles, cognitive approaches, points of view, and interpersonal styles. Cognitive diversity among team members pushes candidates to develop their collaboration and communication skills. The team approach also helps participants build a culture of interdependency, team learning, mutual accountability, and continuous improvement, all of which are essential to effective school leadership. Team members are expected to interact with parents, teachers, and supervisors (in role) in order to understand the perspective of various school stakeholders.





CURRICULUM

Each of the six weeks of the summer intensive is organized around a key theme reflecting a critical piece of the principalship. These themes have evolved over time, reflecting both changes in system priorities and feedback from program stakeholders, including alumni, mentors, and district representatives, about what is most effective. The themes are revisited and expanded upon throughout the entirety of the program:

Week 1: Orientation/Analysis of Data

How do we look at schools?

What data do we select?

How is the organization of data an expression of one's mental model?

Week 2: The Social Context of Schooling

How do we assess and understand the school tone, culture, and climate?

Week 3: Standards, Curriculum, & Assessments

How do we take a deeper look at the school?

What additional information do we need and how do we use it to support student learning?

Week 4: Managing the School Vision:

Systems Thinking/Resource Allocation

How do we strategically organize time, people, money, and structure to articulate and support the school vision?

How do we understand systems thinking in the context of the school?

Week 5: Building Vision: Capacity Building

How do we leverage resources to develop staff in order to improve student learning?

Week 6: Transition into Leadership/Entering Residency

How do we make the shift?

How do we address the needs of our school as well as our own learning needs?

NYC LEADERSHIP ACADEMY

ASPIRING PRINCIPALS PROGRAM

SUMMER INTENSIVE WEEK TWO OVERVIEW

WEEK 2: THE SOCIAL CONTEXT OF SCHOOLING

How do we look at, assess, and understand the school tone, culture, and climate?

- Maintain a culture of mutual trust and positive attitudes that support the academic and personal growth of students and adults
- Establish a coherent vision of school improvement that is reflected in a short list of focused, data-based goals that are tracked for progress and are understood and supported by the entire school community
- Establish a culture for learning that communicates high expectations to staff, students, and families and provides supports to achieve those expectations.¹

When the week concludes, participants will know and be able to:

SCHOOL TONE AND CLIMATE:	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Analyze school climate • Understand multiple data points used to analyze school climate including, but not limited to, tone, political power, data, rituals/routines, language, values, connections to mental models, racism, classism, sexism, conversations and communication (verbal and nonverbal) • Understand the concept of climate/tone: general character, quality, or trend, atmosphere, feeling, mood
SCHOOL CULTURE:	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Understand the concept of culture: the customary beliefs, social norms, and material traits of a social group • Understand the concept of cultural proficiency • Identify and understand the culture of a school • Identify artifacts of a culture and interpret their meanings • Identify the underlying assumptions about a culture • Identify the way the behavior of an individual affects the school culture • Connect the understanding of how mental models shape ideas about school climate and culture • Connect professional learning communities to climate and culture
DEALING WITH AMBIGUITIES AND CONFLICT:	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Be comfortable with discomfort • Engage in active listening and be responsive to the needs of families, students, and the school community • Engage the school community around the school's learning goals • Understand the social context of schooling—how race, class, gender, intergenerations, and sexual orientation play out in schools • Understand the political context of schooling—how the concepts of positional and adult affiliations impact schools

¹Excerpted from the NYCDOE Quality Review rubric.



JPG Photography

Today APP alumni are leading and impacting one in seven schools across New York City. To meet some of our alumni and learn more about their work, please click here www.nyleadershipacademy.org/our-impact.

The summer intensive scope and sequence presents a mix of activities, mini-lessons, readings from research and practice-based professional literature, and individual and group assignments for each of the weekly units to guide the presentation of the content. By design, the assignments are not always straightforward nor do participants always get all the information they need (or the information they get may be unreliable or inaccurate). Unanticipated emails, impromptu meetings, and other last-minute requests are intentionally inserted to imitate the often-chaotic nature of school leadership. For example, the day after making a presentation to parents, team members may encounter a parent (played by a staff member or representative of a parent organization in role) who wants to challenge something the team said or did during their presentation. Participants are challenged to think quickly, devise responses, and then reflect on the consequences. This process helps participants to develop new strategies and builds good habits of self-reflection.

VIEWING SCHOOLS AS SYSTEMS

The APP program is anchored in the tenets of systems thinking, an analytical framework that explores the interconnections between various aspects of a complex system. Viewing schools as a system unto themselves and as part of a larger societal system, participants learn to observe the dynamic nature of interrelated parts (e.g., student attendance, teacher quality, homework policies, student achievement) and determine how and where to intervene to influence change. Systems thinking requires the development of observational and analytical skills in pattern recognition, understanding how individuals and communities take in information and make sense of it (mental models), and the ability to see how various parts of an organization are inter-related.¹⁰

APP program graduates to date:
[NYCLA Data]

499

What brings the simulated school experience to life is a series of actual tasks that real principals do regularly, which allow participants to practice being school leaders. The assignments come in many forms and use multiple pedagogical devices, such as role-plays, videotapes of classroom instruction, emails from supervisors, memos from staff and parents, phone calls, and activities that arrive in the principal's in-box. Each assignment is designed to develop specific performance competencies and is presented in a sequence that mirrors real school-year tasks. For example, one of the first assignments might be analyzing student performance data, videos of classroom practice, and student work products in order to identify the learning needs of the school's teaching staff. Later, that analysis might be the basis of designing a plan for professional development and allocating time, people, money, and space in light of the identified learning needs. Over the six-week period, participants see how their actions and decisions play out and are held accountable for the outcomes.

(See our website at www.nycleadershipacademy.org/news-and-resources/tools-and-publications for Sample Summer Intensive Assignments.)



One key element of the simulated school is the virtual classroom. The virtual classroom is a physical space at the training site set up to represent a specific classroom from the simulated school, which aligns with data participants receive and with their assignments. The virtual classroom contains everything a typical classroom would (minus the teachers and students). Student work hangs on the walls, classroom rules are posted, books are available in the classroom library, lesson and unit plans are on the teacher’s desk, and folders containing student work and teacher feedback are placed on each of the desks. A fictitious class roster of students is created using the data from the simulated school, providing multiple data points for each student including attendance and whether they receive Special Education services or are English Language Learners. Additionally, student work is selected to align with item skill analysis information for each student and data for the grade. All artifacts are carefully selected to ensure that the classroom is consistent with the simulated school. Weekly visits to the virtual

classroom provide the project teams with a deeper level of data about the school they are leading and allow participants to view and analyze the simulated classroom using the specific lens related to the weekly themes.

After careful analysis of the school, participants are asked to develop a “teachable point of view” (TPOV) statement¹¹ that communicates to others their ideas, values, and goals for the simulated school. The challenge is to create more than a generic vision or mission statement; the assignment focuses on the participants’ ability to articulate their point of view about how to build and run a successful school while at the same time motivating others to achieve that vision. This concise, personal touchstone connects their personal values and reasons for pursuing school leadership with the work they intend to do on behalf of the school. More than just words, the TPOV statements communicate the essence of what a leader brings to the school and builds coherence as a lens through which decisions can be approached. Participants

SIMULATING A DAY IN THE LIFE OF A PRINCIPAL

School leaders multi-task throughout their hectic days and constantly have to assess which of their many responsibilities are most important at a particular moment in time. Participants experience the disjointedness of the job when they are given their “in-basket assignment.” This series of documents, emails, and voicemail messages from various stakeholders including teachers, parents, community members, union representatives, district leaders, and service providers is designed to help candidates get a sense of the range of issues they must react to and prioritize on a daily basis. The aspiring principals are given a two-hour period to respond to every item in their in-basket. As they are reviewing the in-basket items, a secretary (played by a staff member) interrupts each participant to say that there is an angry parent who wants to meet with them right away. The participant is then escorted to a room where the parent is waiting with a specific complaint about the school that he or she wants resolved immediately. The parent (also staff or a volunteer in role) demands that the principal engage with them immediately. With no time for reflection, the principal must address the parent’s concerns on the spot, with very little information about the situation beyond what they are being told. The interactions are videotaped so that later the participants can watch how they responded under pressure. Immediately after the parent role-plays, while the principals are still processing the interaction, they are asked to conduct a classroom observation and give feedback on teaching practices. The last interruption of the two-hour activity is a fire drill. This shift of lenses from listener and communicator to instructional leader to school manager is difficult, but typical for a school leader. The demanding nature of the experience and the urgency in which participants are asked to respond mimic the real world and give candidates insight into the intellectual and emotional challenges of the job.

practice presenting their TPOV statements to their colleagues several times over the summer. In addition to getting feedback from their peers on the delivery, each presentation is videotaped. Their TPOV statement is also integrated into the letters that they write to teachers and parents of the simulation school so they practice honing their written and oral communication skills and tailoring their messages to different audiences.

Staffing

The core program team comprises facilitators, program specialists, and operations specialists, who work together to design the curricular scope and sequence and facilitate the delivery of the curriculum. Program specialists serve as a second set of eyes and ears during the training, observing the participants’ interactions and watching how individuals negotiate, collaborate, and demonstrate resilience when problems arise. They take “low-inference” notes (just

what they see and hear) that they share with the facilitators to help determine where individual and/or groups of participants might need additional support, information, coaching, or an experiential opportunity to push the learning. Operations specialists are on hand to provide logistical support and ensure smooth delivery of the program.

The facilitators organize and lead the learning of participants. They must be skilled at tailoring teaching strategies (e.g., mini-lessons, simulation, role play, coaching) to individual and group learning needs; designing strategic, focused interventions that push educators’ thinking; provoking and containing anxiety in the service of learning; and understanding the role of assessment—both self-assessment and assessment of others—as a teaching and learning tool.

At the end of each day of the summer intensive, the program team meets to debrief and make



adjustments to the curriculum in real time, based on daily observations and what they have determined are the learning needs of the group.

The result is that the facilitators and program specialists know each individual aspiring principal well and monitor his or her growth from beginning to end to ensure that every graduate

leaves ready to take on the complex role of school principal. While this cycle happens daily throughout the summer intensive, this same team of people works together throughout the year to continuously assess and revise program curriculum and plans in order to support the development of the aspiring principals.

UNDERSTANDING THE POWER OF LOW-INFERENCE DATA

Throughout APP, participants are pushed to use low-inference data. **Low-inference data** is factual, observable information—information that we can see and hear, without the interference of our interpretation, subjectivity, or assumptions. Low-inference data is a critical component of collecting evidence in order to understand what is really happening, not what one thinks is happening.

Teaching aspiring school leaders to look for and focus on low-inference data is one of the ways that APP builds participants' cultural competence. By examining the low-inference data and becoming aware of cultural and other biases inherent in the data we select and in how we layer meaning onto data, participants build the skills they need to make better decisions.¹²

The following example from a classroom observation demonstrates the difference between high- and low-inference language:

High-inference language: “Students were all engaged and on-task. They worked with partners, while the teacher circulated throughout the room to help students.”

Low-inference language: “Students were assigned a set of questions to discuss with partners. The teacher checked in with each pair to make sure they were on task. She refocused one pair that was not on task, asked two students clarifying questions and reminded the entire class that they were free to disagree with their partners but needed to back up their arguments.”

Not only is the low-inference description of what the observer saw happening in the classroom more rich with detail about the teacher's actions, but it also leads to a different understanding of how the teacher shaped the learning experience for her students.

APP facilitators introduce the concept of low-inference on the first day of the summer intensive, after an activity called Meet the Staff. Participants spend five minutes questioning a few members of their school staff, who are played by alumni and program staff. During the debrief, the facilitator might ask for participants' impressions of Tina Aguido, the parent coordinator. Participants often respond that she seemed unprofessional or overly familiar with both parents and students. They are then pushed to reframe their observations in low-inference language: “Ms. Aguido mentioned that she often speaks with parents about school matters when she sees them outside of school.” “Ms. Aguido said that she believes her camaraderie with students makes her more effective at her job.”

These distinctions between high-inference language (“unprofessional”) and low-inference observation (“she speaks with parents in informal settings”) begin building a deeper level of cultural competence—both for the participant whose language is being pushed, and for his or her colleagues. These opportunities for public learning ensure that all participants benefit from one another's teachable moments.

TEAM MEMBERS	ROLE
FACILITATORS	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Organize the learning • Lead the sessions • Coach the participants • Visit the residency school sites • Evaluate progress
PROGRAM SPECIALISTS	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Work with facilitators in developing APP curriculum • Manage logistics/coordinate agendas • Identify important research and reading materials • Assume different roles during role plays • Take low-inference notes
OPERATIONS SPECIALISTS	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ensure facilitators have the resources they need daily (e.g., laptops and projectors) • Set up for special events • Videotape activities and ensure that participants are able to review their footage • Make sure participants have access to computers and printers to complete the many individual and team assignments

MEASURING OUTCOMES

Throughout the summer, APP facilitators work closely with each of the participants, getting to know each one and coaching them individually. Facilitators are constantly monitoring their progress and evaluating their readiness for the role of principal. There are no grades. Instead, through the various assignments and activities, participants are expected to demonstrate competency on the leadership standards in order to successfully complete the summer intensive and advance to the school-based residency. For example, if a facilitator noted that a participant had poor communication skills, the facilitator would provide additional opportunities for the participant to develop his or her communication skills. This could mean linking the participant with a writing coach or providing additional opportunities to practice their presentations with feedback. Work that does not meet the standards can be re-submitted. But if a participant is

FACILITATOR REFLECTION

As a facilitator, my job is to lead as a co-learner, rather than the teacher or all-knowing expert, so that the participants own the work. I try to act as a supportive coach who works with the teams to frame questions, develop strategies, make choices, construct meaning, and provide feedback to one another. I want the group to make connections and generate learning; I use the dynamics in the room to guide them there rather than telling them. The more that I can step out of the picture, the more likely it is that participants will foster collaboration skills and develop confidence in themselves.”

—APP Facilitator



APP ALUMNI REFLECTION

“For me, the emotional impact of the intensive was as powerful as the intellectual challenge of it. The entire time you are out of your comfort zone, trying to work with others who have very strong personalities and opinions that often clash with your approach to leadership. You are expected to process and respond to these very real and complex challenges while being watched by the facilitators who give you ongoing feedback and push you to defend your behaviors and actions. You feel so exposed and vulnerable, but that’s an important part of the learning process. As a leader, you need to experience what it feels like to lose control, fail at things, take responsibility for your words and your actions, and build resilience to the inevitable setbacks. Leadership is not just about one person. It is about leading a group of adults who share authority and accountability. The intensive brought this to life for me in a way that I will never forget.”

—APP Graduate

unable to meet the standards after a reasonable amount of time, he or she is counseled out of the program. The reality is that candidates must be able to internalize the skills and content relatively quickly if they are likely to have success on the job.

In addition to feedback and evaluations from program faculty, participant team members are expected to provide feedback and coach each other throughout the summer intensive. Each participant has an opportunity to lead her or his project team, and all team members receive performance and behavior-based feedback aligned to standards from peers and the facilitator in the role as team leader as well as team member. The 360-degree feedback process is an opportunity for team members to give feedback around the team leader’s leadership style, strengths, and areas needing improvement aligned to NYC Leadership Academy’s leadership standards. Additionally, the feedback focuses on the dynamics of the team, and each member of the team is expected to use that feedback to improve the team’s performance. The work is evaluated in the context of the individual and the team. Specific feedback from peers helps

Mentoring aspiring principals has impacted my own work as a principal by allowing me to become more reflective of my practice both in long-term planning and on a daily basis. I've realized it is important that I follow the principle of "do what I do, not only what I say." This has also encouraged me to upgrade my own professional development.

—APP Mentor

candidates understand how others see them, thereby generating greater self-awareness and promoting resilience when faced with critiques about professional performance.

The constant give-and-take between facilitators and participants is always focused on helping candidates develop the requisite skills and knowledge they need to be effective principals. By the end of the summer, the facilitators know where the participants need further development and this informs residency placements.

SCHOOL-YEAR RESIDENCY

After successful completion of the summer intensive, APP participants are assigned to a New York City public school where they work full-time as an apprentice to an experienced mentor principal. Participants are assigned to residency schools based on their learning needs and the strengths of the mentor principal. When making residency assignments, staff members consider the kinds of schools that program graduates are likely to be assigned to as principals. For example, if a district anticipates vacancies in low-functioning, high-poverty middle schools, candidates likely to be placed in such schools would benefit from placement in similar schools that are high functioning to extract lessons that can be applied in their new schools. Additionally, program staff members take into account

participants' prior school experiences and make an effort to expose participants to a different kind of school environment to broaden their perspective.

The residency experience builds on the summer intensive, as participants take the concepts learned through their simulated experiences and apply them in a real school with real students, teachers, and parents. Over the course of the residency year, aspiring principals are exposed to all aspects of leading a school—from organizing instructional improvement efforts, to managing school operations, to navigating interpersonal and organizational dynamics, to engaging parents and the broader school community. Both the summer intensive and the residency are designed to give participants opportunities to practice, apply, and solidify their learning. The APP residency balances two important elements: 1) giving the participants authentic decision-making responsibility in the school; and 2) pairing the participants with mentor principals who can reflect with the aspiring principal and deconstruct his or her own leadership moments.

Students feel an **8%** increased sense of safety and respect at schools led by APP principals. (NYCDOE Survey Data)

MENTOR PRINCIPAL REFLECTION

“When I first became a mentor principal, I thought I had to be perfect. I couldn’t make mistakes. I couldn’t show weakness. I felt like I was supposed to have all the answers. But the professional development and support I got from the Leadership Academy and my mentor principal peers made me realize that I had to be honest and authentic in order for the mentee to grow—and in order for me to grow as well. The mentee and I would need to work as partners. So now when I first meet my mentee, I tell them that every day I’m going to ask them what I did to move the work and where I got in the way of the work. And I tell them they need to be honest with me and I will be honest with them in return. We are here to serve the students and if we don’t get better together, we aren’t going to learn and grow. And I’ve learned so much from my mentees about my own leadership style and how to work with and find a role for everyone on my staff.

“I also have learned to let go a little more and use my school as a laboratory based on their knowledge of the latest research and trends. I allow my mentees [to] try new things and when they work, we take them to scale. For example, students who are identified as needing after-school academic support now have the chance to move out if they demonstrate knowledge on interim assessments. In the past, those students were stuck there. We also revamped how we handle Individualized Education Programs (IEPs) so they are more fluid and organic; that effort was based on an 8th grade IEP pilot project started by one of my mentees. Their work lives on after they leave and serving in this role has changed me for the better.”

—APP Graduate and Mentor Principal

Authentic Leadership Assignments and Tasks

To give participants authentic decision-making opportunities, the mentor principal plans substantial projects and assignments that involve teachers and students, taking into account the specific learning needs of the aspiring principal as well as the priorities of the school. For example, the aspiring principal might work with teachers to analyze the results of their prior year’s curriculum initiatives to build their data analysis skills and decide on next steps in developing curriculum and building instructional practices. Alternatively, the aspiring principal might coordinate an academic intervention program. The goal is for the aspiring principals to practice strategic decision-making, see the implications of their decisions and actions play out in a school, and learn to facilitate change in ways that take into account the system dynamics of a school. The mentorship provides a safety net for their learning, as do

regular sessions with program faculty and peers. There are continual check-in points with facilitators and mentors to promote the aspiring principals’ learning and ensure that staff is continually adjusting tasks according to the participants’ growth and development. Additionally, participants learn a great deal from their peers’ school experiences during biweekly program sessions where their school-based experiences are used as focal points for activities, discussions, and work products.

Role of the Mentor Principal

APP staff members take great care in selecting mentor principals, looking for talented school leaders who have demonstrated a deep commitment to children and proven their effectiveness in leading school change and improving student outcomes. Mentor principals also must be able to identify appropriate learning opportunities

for aspiring principals; make their own thinking transparent; relinquish some control and decision-making authority to aspiring principals while ensuring mid-course corrections if there are missteps; provide adequate time to the aspiring principal for reflection on her or his development; and take responsibility for assessing the readiness of the aspiring principal and for creating a robust learning opportunity geared toward developing a future colleague. Even with these skills, mentor principals benefit from explicit professional development in mentoring. APP mentor principals come together as colleagues; exchange ideas and experiences on mentoring; and work with their assigned aspiring principal and program faculty to set clear expectations for learning opportunities, leadership performance, and participant evaluation.

APP invests time and resources in finding and preparing mentor principals to make the residency a truly valuable experience for the aspiring principal. The mentor principal must have expertise in areas where the resident needs further development and support. The mentor must also be able to delegate authority, deconstruct leadership challenges, and be reflective about his or her practice, including sharing missteps and oversights. In taking on this extra assignment, the mentor principal should be genuinely interested in the resident's learning trajectory and willing to guide the aspiring principal's development.

APP provides support and regular training to the selected mentor principals to ensure they understand their role and feel confident in debriefing with and giving feedback to aspiring leaders. First, mentor principals come together over the summer to visit the summer intensive, observe the aspiring principals, and see the facilitation of APP curriculum and the focus on experiential learning. Mentor principals meet at the beginning of the school year to clarify goals and



structures for the residency and begin to build a three-way partnership with the facilitator and the aspiring principal. A mentor/mentee retreat midway into the residency provides space for reflection on the aspiring principal's progress and an opportunity for additional training and support for both the aspiring principal and the mentor. Additionally, mentors are given separate training to help them be purposeful in their modeling of good practice and in how to assess



their aspiring principals' development needs. These ongoing sessions are critical to ensuring that the mentor principals find the right balance between pushing the aspiring principals to take on real responsibilities and develop new skills while also providing the necessary support and encouragement.

Formal training sets the foundation for learning but mentor principals really build their capacity when facilitators visit the school residency sites every four to six weeks. During these visits, the facilitator meets with the mentor principal, sometimes with and sometimes without the APP participant present, to help support the mentor in designing opportunities for residents to lead and manage school staff, allowing autonomy while also providing the appropriate amount of support. Additionally, facilitators and mentors

often jointly observe the aspiring principal in authentic school work to assess the aspiring principal's growth against standards, determine needed feedback, and decide on next steps. Because feedback is key to the aspiring principal's growth, the facilitator coaches the mentor principal on how to give targeted and timely feedback. This regular engagement between the facilitator and the mentor principal is critical to the aspiring principal's development.

NYC Leadership Academy designed a "compact" to articulate in very clear terms the roles and expectations of the mentor and aspiring principal during the residency. In signing the compact, mentor principals agree to commit the time required to participate in classroom observations, do school walk-throughs, and attend debriefing and planning sessions with the aspiring principal. The aspiring principal and the facilitator also sign the compact, which outlines the learning objectives and goals of the residency. It is designed as a living, dynamic document that requires ongoing assessment and continual modification to ensure that it addresses the most current learning goals of the aspiring principal. The mentor principal and facilitator refer to the compact regularly and use it to monitor the growth of the aspiring principal over the year to ensure that he or she develops and demonstrates the required competencies.

(See our website at www.nycladershipacademy.org/news-and-resources/tools-and-publications for an example of the compact.)

The structures of the residency alone do not ensure that the residency is serving the purpose of developing a future leader's skills. Program faculty need to further ensure that the mentor principal is devising high-level challenges and that candidates are actually progressing in their learning. For example, if a participant's learning goal relates to situational problem-solving, program faculty need concrete evidence that the candidate is able to build professional relationships and engage others in decision-making. There must be built-in rigor and continual assessment; opportunities for reflection and feedback; and opportunities to address the need for improvement, behavioral changes, or knowledge and skill development. The residency should not be a checklist of experiences that one must have but rather an opportunity to give the aspiring principal a chance to experience the challenges that principals face on a daily basis often with

competing priorities, imperfect information, tricky interpersonal dynamics, and resistant or reluctant teams.

The APP facilitator—as an outsider to the school—provides a critical set of eyes to ensure that the residency offers the participant rigor and complexity. The facilitator is responsible for supporting aspiring principals; pushing them out of their comfort zones when needed; and assessing readiness for school leadership. The facilitator also models behaviors of effective leaders, such as the ability to step back, look at things critically, and explore different angles and perspectives. When the facilitator visits the school, the time is spent very purposefully observing the aspiring principal in action. This observation allows the facilitator to see the participant's growth and connect feedback directly to the standards. Some of the APP facilitators use video to capture



conversations or discussions so they can refer to them later when debriefing and reflecting with the aspiring principal and/or mentor. This reinforces the habits of reflection, deconstruction, and continual and public learning. The three-way relationship focuses on the learning of the aspiring principal; accelerating the learning requires each member of the triad to hold themselves and each other accountable for ensuring that the aspiring principal is ready for the principalship by the end of the residency.

Curriculum

As with the intensive, there are regular classroom-based sessions during the residency year. The curriculum is simultaneously responsive to district and school expectations while also giving participants time to come together to reflect on and deepen what they have experienced firsthand in their schools. During the sessions, the aspiring principals are organized into new, flexible teams—different



NYC LEADERSHIP ACADEMY ASPIRING PRINCIPALS PROGRAM RESIDENCY SCOPE & SEQUENCE SAMPLE

THURSDAY, SEPTEMBER 27

KBAD'S (PARTICIPANTS WILL KNOW AND BE ABLE TO DO...)

- Connect APP residency curriculum with big ideas from the Quality Review, college and career readiness, and the citywide instructional expectations.
- Deepen understanding of the systems and structures principals use to maximize their time to focus on instruction.
- Deepen understanding of literacy instruction and strategies aligned to the Common Core Learning Standards.

READINGS

- Allen, R. "Making Research a Reality: Educators Can Close the Achievement Gap with Lessons Learned." ASCD.
- City, E. et al. (2009). Instructional Rounds. (Chapter 1, pp. 21-38).

POST-READING:

- Boykin, and Noguera, P. Creating the Opportunity to Learn. pp. 37-58.

RESOURCE:

- Conley, D. "Redefining College Readiness."

HOMEWORK DUE

- Principal as Strategic Leader: Systems and Structures, Part I

NYC LEADERSHIP ACADEMY ASPIRING PRINCIPALS PROGRAM RESIDENCY SCOPE & SEQUENCE SAMPLE

THURSDAY, SEPTEMBER 27

ACTIVITY

WELCOME AND FLOW OF THE DAY

Introduce curriculum design for the residency:

The overarching goal of the residency is to provide participants with leadership and instructional skill sets needed to ensure that students are college and career ready by the end of 12th grade.

Residency curriculum activities will focus on both instruction and leadership in the context of expectations for school leaders in NYC.

COLLEGE AND CAREER READINESS

Focus Question: How do you understand college and career readiness?

In table groups, participants discuss and write their responses on Post-It notes, then categorize these responses into the four College and Career Ready domains identified by the DOE (Common Core Learning Standards, academic and personal behaviors, academic programming, college and career access).

In grade level groups, participants discuss the question: What does college and career readiness look like in elementary, middle and high schools? Chart responses.

Debrief: How does this connect to the NYCLA mission of closing the achievement gap? What is the leader's role in this work?

INSTRUCTIONAL CORE

Mini-lesson on instructional core as defined by Richard Elmore. Use graphic from Quality Review to highlight instructional expectations for schools: raising the level of content that students are taught, increasing the teacher's skill and knowledge and increasing the level of students' active learning.

Final Word protocol (modified from National School Reform Faculty): Participants review Chapter 1 of Instructional Rounds then use the Final Word protocol to share what resonates for them in the text. When protocol is completed, participants will share out a few of the big ideas with the group.

NYC LEADERSHIP ACADEMY ASPIRING PRINCIPALS PROGRAM RESIDENCY SCOPE & SEQUENCE SAMPLE

THURSDAY, SEPTEMBER 27

ACTIVITY

QUALITY REVIEW (QR)

Connect Instructional Core to Quality Review.

Focus Question: What are the expectations for schools?

Participants work in three groups to chart the core ideas of the QR statement buckets (instructional core, school culture, and structures of improvement). Participants then do a gallery walk to review the core ideas for all QR statement buckets.

EXPECTATIONS FOR SCHOOL LEADERS

Connect the Quality Review to the work of the leader.

Focus Question: If the QR represents the expectations for the school, what are the expectations of the school leader?

Display the five expectations for school leaders from the NYC Citywide Instructional Expectations. Each table is assigned one of the expectations where participants discuss the specific implications for work of the school leader. Share out.

Debrief: During the debrief, the facilitator will introduce the residency curriculum using the QR as the organizing structure:

- A deep dive into literacy leadership
- CCLS
- Teacher effectiveness
- Strategic decision making
- Building school culture

PRINCIPAL AS STRATEGIC LEADER, PART I

Participants review the first part of the Principal as Strategic Leader: Systems and Structures analysis they completed at their respective residency schools.

At tables, participants use low-inference data to discuss:

- What are the systems and structures in place at your school?
- What is your mentor's thinking behind each one?
- What is effective? Why? What is the evidence?

Debrief: Facilitators elicit ideas about the leader's decisions based on the context of the school i.e., an open campus lunch period may be successful in one school context and a challenge in another.

NYC LEADERSHIP ACADEMY ASPIRING PRINCIPALS PROGRAM RESIDENCY SCOPE & SEQUENCE SAMPLE

THURSDAY, SEPTEMBER 27

ACTIVITY

LITERACY LEADERSHIP LAUNCH

Participants think back on their early experiences as a reader in school, then gather at the statement that best represents their experience:

- Reading: It opened my world
- Reading: It was painful
- Reading: I “gamed” it

Participants share early memories of reading instruction in their own school experience. Participants return to tables and read “Jamika’s Story” from To Understand.

Debrief:

- From the story, what might you think the reading instruction in Jamika’s classroom looked like?
- What should reading instruction look like in order for students to develop a love of reading?
- If you were the leader of Jamika’s school, how might you handle the situation described in the story?
- What are the implications for you as a school leader?

INTRODUCE APP RESIDENCY COMPACT

Facilitator introduces the residency compact, emphasizing the focus on crafting learning experiences in three personal growth areas.

Participants describe how they have begun to do this work at the residency school.

Facilitator elicits activities and projects the participants hope to experience

from their teams during the intensive. Teams might be organized by grade level—elementary, middle, or high school. Or teams may come together to work on specific issues, such as curriculum design or how to interact with and support school-based teams.

The coursework uses “backwards design” to ensure that all standards are addressed as the scope and sequence unfolds. The curriculum generally follows the natural lifecycle of the school year, focusing on how to enter a school. The first classroom sessions focus on helping candidates with their entry strategy and how to analyze a new school. The spiraled curriculum of the summer intensive again unfolds as participants apply their learning to the realities of an authentic school. This begins with a focus on identifying patterns and trends in student data to help candidates detect strengths and weaknesses and assessing and understanding the school culture. Candidates learn how to facilitate and lead collaborative instructional teams, communicate effectively with multiple stakeholders, manage resources, and build competence in systems thinking.

The residency is purposefully designed to expose participants to different successful learning environments. At a point during the school year, APP residents switch schools, spending a month in a different school setting in order to observe an alternate leadership style, experience a new school culture and organization, work with a different student population, and gain exposure to diverse instructional approaches. The switch month also gives aspiring principals the opportunity to enter another school, giving

97% of APP graduates are placed in leadership positions in the NYC public schools within a year of completing our training. [NYCLA Data]

them additional practice at immersing themselves in a new culture and climate. After

their “switch month” they return to their host school, requiring them both to plan for their month-long absence and step back into their role upon their return.

Participant Evaluation

APP facilitators follow aspiring principals’ progress toward program standards through weekly assignments, observing them in sessions at the Leadership Academy, ongoing communication with the mentor principal, and site visits to the residency schools. Mentor principals follow progress as well, using the same program standards, the activities laid out in the compacts, observation of the aspiring principals in action and regular meetings, and reflections with the participants. The aspiring principal’s self-evaluation is as critical as the evaluations of the mentor and facilitator as it provides an opportunity for reflection and indicates the participant’s understanding of his or her performance in relation to the standards. This three-way team uses regular feedback to accelerate learning and ensure that all parties are continuously building their skills, with the focus primarily on the aspiring principal.

At the midway point and at the end of the program, the mentor principals are asked to conduct more formal evaluations of their aspiring principals. The evaluations are aligned to the program’s performance standards and require an assessment of whether the participant is on track toward a principalship for the following September. These more formal evaluations can carry very high stakes in that they can lead to program discontinuance for a participant who is not progressing toward the standards at a reasonable pace.

(See our website at www.nyclearshipacademy.org/news-and-resources for an example of the mentor evaluation.)

PLANNING, TRANSITION, AND SUPPORT

While transitioning into the principalship happens at the end of the residency, planning for placement starts on day one of APP. The most important support offered for placement is the

alignment of the program to the realities of the principalship in New York City.

In addition to ensuring that graduates meet the defined leadership standards, NYC Leadership Academy works strategically with the NYCDOE to support the placement of aspiring principals.



Building and maintaining strong relationships with district representatives is a key part of this work, since principal hiring is decentralized across the large system. Networking events that offer district contacts a chance to learn about the program and meet the aspiring principals are held throughout the year. Through their residency sites, participants are expected to attend district events and interface with district-level personnel as appropriate. In addition, program faculty have strong relationships with district personnel and knowledge of the schools in the system, so they are able to recommend that aspiring principals apply to open positions that would be the best fit for them. For example, if a superintendent shares with NYC Leadership Academy staff that they have an opening in a school where the parents were either disengaged or hostile to the previous principal, NYC Leadership Academy would refer the strongest candidates in building community to that position. Since that lack of community is likely the most pressing presenting problem in the school, the skill set required to move forward quickly in that area would be essential.

Upon successful completion of the residency, APP works closely with candidates to prepare them for the interview process and ultimately to enter their new schools. All aspiring principals apply for open positions through the same process as other candidates entering the principalship in the NYCDOE. APP continues to support aspiring principals throughout the application and interview process up through their acceptance of a position. Once they are placed, NYC Leadership Academy continues working with them, and all other first-year principals, through coaching after graduation.

91% of APP graduates who went into school-based positions have worked in a school that received Title I funding. (NYCLA Data)

SUSTAINING THE PROGRAM

Although APP was initially launched as a short-term initiative to help the NYC public schools meet an urgent and immediate need for strong school leaders, the program's success and key organizational practices within the NYC Leadership Academy have enabled us to sustain the program over time. Many aspects of the program's design remain unchanged from 2003, while others continue to evolve with each cohort we train. Staying current with district priorities and leadership needs has also been essential to the program's ongoing effectiveness, relevance, and sustainability.

Continuous Learning

From the outset, the NYC Leadership Academy established a culture that embraces continuous learning and improvement. Our ongoing program assessment and, over time, collection and analysis of robust data allow us to craft adjustments that make the program more responsive to participants' learning needs in light of the school and district context in which they will serve. In addition, APP staff revise the program regularly based on what we learn from the field about school leader needs (e.g., through our cadre of coaches who work with new and early career principals throughout the system), the district, and our alumni. The following are examples of changes or enhancements we have made to APP as a result of feedback and information we've gathered to inform program improvements:

- NYC Leadership Academy obtained feedback from a NYCDOE Network/Superintendent survey that APP graduates were not perceived as being successful at building community in their schools. In response, program staff revised our summer intensive curriculum to increase the focus on strategies for engaging staff in the

SAMPLE APP COST DRIVERS

Personnel Expenses:

- Project/Program Director
- Faculty (1 full-time per cohort of 20)
- Program support (.5 per cohort of 20)
- Participant salaries (for fulltime residency)

Non-personnel Expenses:

MENTOR/PARTICIPANT RETREAT (1 PER YEAR)

- 1.5 days
- Dinner Day 1; breakfast, lunch, snack Day 2
- Hotel rooms for all attendees plus staff
- 2 meeting rooms for evening of Day 1 and all day Day 2;
- 1 of the rooms large enough for all attendees

MENTOR TRAINING (2 PER YEAR)

- 1.5 days
- Hotel rooms for all attendees plus staff
- Dinner Day 1; breakfast, lunch, snack Day 2
- 1 meeting room

MENTOR STIPEND

FACILITATOR TRAINING

- 2 days
- Hotel rooms for all attendees plus staff
- 1 training room
- Breakfast, lunch, dinner Day 1;
- breakfast, lunch, snack Day 2

RECRUITMENT/ADMISSIONS

- College Net—online application platform (\$3,400/year plus \$5/application submitted)
- Space for general information sessions and/or online platform for virtual information sessions
- Space for group and 1:1 interviews
- Advertisements

SUMMER INTENSIVE

- 1 classroom per cohort
- 1 breakout room per cohort
- 1 staff room
- 1 computer room/library
- Participant housing
- Participant travel (to/from training plus one weekend trip home in the middle)

RESIDENCY

- Space for training

GRADUATION

- Degrees/certification costs for participants and friends/family
- Catering
- Certificates

OTPS FOR YEAR

- Copyright permissions (\$300/person for Summer Intensive, \$100/person for residency)
- Instructional materials (\$80/participant)
- Program supplies (\$115/participant)
- Equipment (LCD/laptop per classroom; 3 video cameras per classroom)

change process, communicating vision and values, and making strategic decisions about pace and sequence of change. The feedback helped the NYC Leadership Academy regain the balance between critical leadership issues such as managing human relations and the instructional content issues related to new NYCDOE reforms.

- Internal assessment of the APP interview process revealed that specific components of an early version of the process, including a question that probes a person's ability to self-reflect, are highly correlated with candidate success as principals. This question had been removed during a revision of the selection process. Armed with insight into this correlation, we revised the process to include this component again.
- An important source of feedback on whether APP is truly equipping graduates to meet the challenges of leading a school is the graduates themselves. When APP principals reported to us that they would have benefited from more training in operations prior to their placements, program staff addressed this by adding operations components to the late-spring residency curriculum.
- APP graduates also shared with the NYC Leadership Academy that they wanted more opportunities to come together as colleagues after graduation. In response, we have created an APP Alumni Association, which brings APP alumni across all cohorts together periodically for networking and other learning opportunities.

APP closely tracks and sets goals around program metrics such as dismissal rates (people who are admitted to the program but do not graduate) and graduate placement rates to help drive ongoing program improvement as well. On average, more than 90% of APP graduates are placed in school-level leadership roles within the first year of graduation. In a limited number of cases,

based on our assessments and participants' own reflections, graduates initially pursue assistant principalship positions as an interim step to the principalship in order to give them more time to develop their leadership capacity. In addition, APP graduates are also sometimes recruited directly into district-level leadership positions because that is where the need has presented.

FUNDING THE WORK

Developing and implementing an intensive principal preparation program such as APP is an investment. In the case of APP, the New York City business community and a number of foundations, including The Wallace Foundation, contributed the seed capital to establish the NYC Leadership Academy as a non-profit organization, underwrite the design of APP, and support the training of the first three cohorts of aspiring principals. In the fourth and fifth years of the program, funding of APP shifted to a public-private partnership: the NYCDOE assumed the cost of residency salaries, and additional private-sector funds continued to support program operations. Based on the program's track record of producing strong school leaders and our organizational focus on holding ourselves accountable for program results, the NYC Leadership Academy has been able to make a case for continued funding of the program from the NYCDOE.

The ongoing costs of running APP fall into two major categories—program operation costs and participant salaries during the full-time residency year. To help others think through the cost drivers associated with operating an aspiring principals preparation program and estimate program costs, we assembled a list of the programmatic cost drivers associated with APP, which can be found on page 48.

With respect to resident salaries, APP continues to be able to offer participants a full-time salaried

position as residents with the NYCDOE. One of the important considerations that NYC Leadership Academy staff and NYCDOE leadership discussed early on is the need to have clear gateways throughout the program to help control these costs. For example, we look closely at the transition point between summer intensive and the residency as a key gateway at which we assess participant performance and likelihood of success in the residency. Similarly, if a participant is not making progress toward the program standards once he or she is in the residency, we view the mid-year review as an important gateway to assess whether it is worth the continued investment in that person in terms of the likelihood that he or she will meet our standards of readiness to lead a school by the end of the program.

Other districts and organizations that we work with nationally have navigated their resource constraints by designing their principal preparation programs so that residents enter into existing administrative-level positions (assistant principal, instructional deans, etc.). Under this solution, program staff must work closely with the supervising/mentor principals to ensure that the aspiring principals still have the opportunity to fully engage in the learning and experiences they need to develop their leadership skills.

In looking at the costs of implementing a program like APP, we believe it is also important to consider the often-overlooked costs of not investing in leadership development. While many states and districts have begun to look

at teacher retention in economic terms, there has been less discussion of the high costs associated with principal turnover and returns on investing in school leader preparation and support in terms of increased principal retention rates and improved student achievement. In a study of Miami-Dade schools, researchers found that frequent principal turnover results in lower teacher retention and lower student achievement gains, which are particularly detrimental to students in high-poverty and failing schools.¹³ A recent RAND report found that principals are more likely to leave a low-performing school after one year, and that those schools are likely to do less well academically in the subsequent year.¹⁴ Furthermore, the persistence of low-performing schools—and the knowledge that it is impossible to turn around a school without effective leadership—underscores that the cost of not having a bench of principals who can lead the transformation of those schools is ultimately measured in the cost of student failure.

We encourage districts to look holistically at the funds they are spending on leadership development—how Title II funds are being spent, how assistant principal positions are being funded, what tuition reimbursement policies are in place—and think about whether those investments are generating the results they need and whether there are ways to deploy those dollars differently in support of leadership development efforts more directly aligned to the outcomes they want.

100% of APP principals rate their
NYCLA training as relevant or very relevant to their
work as principals. [NYCLA Data]



JPG Photography

COLLABORATING WITH THE DISTRICT

Ultimately, the purpose of APP is to serve the NYCDOE and its schools and students. Thus, one of the most important aspects of program sustainability has been our ongoing relationship with and responsiveness to the school system. This takes many forms—from working with the district annually to project the number of school leader positions that will need to be filled (which informs APP cohort size), to building relationships and feedback loops at both the central office and regional/network levels to ensure our work is aligned with district needs and that district human resources staff, who control placement decisions, are familiar with and understand our work.

While this collaboration is particularly important for a leadership development program like APP, which lies outside of the district it serves, our work with districts across the United States suggests that even internal leadership development programs can face internal disconnects. For example, a district-based principal preparation program that selects and develops aspiring principals against a set of leadership standards needs to make sure that the hiring criteria being used to place people in principal jobs matches or fits with those leadership standards.



DESIGNING A ROBUST PRINCIPAL PREPARATION PROGRAM: ACTION STEPS AND IMPLEMENTATION EXAMPLES

In every community, there are likely multiple stakeholders invested and engaged in the challenge of producing strong principal pipelines. States and districts may choose to develop their own programs internally, outsource, and/or partner with universities and nonprofits that select and train aspiring principals. The structure and program design varies depending on the needs of the local school system(s), capacity, and resources. Regardless of how local leadership development models are organized, it is not possible to take the APP program, created in the context of New York City, and implement it elsewhere. If programs are “dropped in” and not designed to fit a particular context, they are not likely to be successful.

This section of the guide outlines a series of action steps that give explicit guidance on how to determine where there are gaps and needs; key decisions that need to be made given resources available; tips on managing time and finding the right people to do what is very challenging and complex work; and how to institute the right structures and supports to make the model both effective and sustainable. Throughout, there are examples of how NYC Leadership Academy has engaged with dozens of states, districts, non-profits, and university-based programs across the country to develop and implement leadership development models that are responsive to local education reforms and policy environments. Whether creating new models from scratch or refining existing leader-

ship development systems, it is critical to develop a tailored approach to meet specific school leadership challenges.

Action Steps:

- Step 1:** Assessment of school leader demand/ supply and preparation pipeline
- Step 2:** Program design: options and considerations
- Step 3:** Designing an experiential learning curriculum: summer intensive and residency
- Step 4:** Staffing: identifying and training the design team and mentor principals
- Step 5:** Supporting program graduates on the job
- Step 6:** Sustaining the program over time

ACTION STEP 1: ASSESSMENT OF SCHOOL LEADER DEMAND/SUPPLY AND PREPARATION PIPELINE

The following questions on principal demand, supply, and preparation quality will guide conversations to assess the leadership development needs of districts. Based on the responses and the desired outcomes, school systems and their partners can identify the best possible strategies and approaches, given resources available.



PRINCIPAL DEMAND

What is the annual projected number of principal vacancies over the next five to ten years? Do you anticipate changes in the overall number of principal jobs in your district in the coming year (due to closures and/or openings of new schools)?

What percentage of schools is chronically underperforming?

What is the history of leadership in those schools?

Are there specific schools that are persistently hard to staff?

What is the retention rate of principals? Are there differences in retention in schools based on neighborhood, student demographics, student performance levels, grade levels (elementary, middle, or high school), or other significant school features?

What percentage of the turnover rate is due to retirements, unsatisfactory performance, or resignations? Are there patterns in the reasons for turnover based on neighborhood, student demographics, student performance levels, grade levels (elementary, middle, or high school), or other significant school features?

Are schools expected to do internal succession planning? If so, what supports are there for developing internal successors?

PRINCIPAL SUPPLY

What organizations are currently selecting and preparing principal candidates?

- State
 - District
 - University-Based Programs
 - Alternative Providers
-

What is your assessment of the preparedness of principal candidates from the various sources identified above?

How many new principals graduate from preparation programs licensed and ready for hire each year? For each of the programs, on average, how long does it take for graduates to secure jobs after graduation?

What is the typical path to the principalship in the district? Do the steps along the path optimize preparedness? (For example, if one of the steps is an assistant principal role and that job is focused only on operations management and not instruction, how does this step help prepare new school leaders?)

What, if any, efforts are made to identify and encourage talented educators to move toward leadership positions?

How are principals assigned to schools?

Are there enough high-quality candidates applying for leadership positions? If not, are there certain types of schools that are more challenging to staff than others?

What is the formal feedback loop from the district to the program to provide information on district needs and the successes and challenges of alumni?

In addition to understanding the landscape of principal supply and quality in light of demand, it is important to take stock of resource availability, such as existing programs, time limitations, and funding constraints. For example, if principals are needed to step into schools in September, what is the time frame available for identification,

selection, and preparation? What resources are available to tap into, including existing lines in district or state budgets, government grants, and private philanthropy? Will that funding be sustainable, and what can be done to secure long-term funding streams?

PRINCIPAL PREPARATION QUALITY

Note: Answers should be cataloged for each local principal preparation provider.

Are performance standards that clearly define the behaviors of effective principals used to determine selection, training and development, and evaluation and assessment structures?

Is the process for identifying and selecting candidates rigorous and reflective of the qualities the district deems necessary for successful leadership?

Who are the faculty and what are their competencies at:

- facilitating adult learning?
- enhancing team learning?
- understanding systems thinking?
- understanding the political context of the school system?

Does the program require learning from doing actual meaningful leadership work in schools? What kinds of feedback do the participants get during the training period?

Are graduates demonstrating the requisite skills, knowledge, dispositions, and behaviors of effective principals? If not, where are the gaps?

Are graduates demonstrating knowledge of how to lead major district-specific initiatives and policies (for example, Common Core roll-out, new assessments, evaluation models, budgetary practices, community engagement, etc.)? If not, where are the gaps?

Looking across the preparation programs, **is** your district covered for every type of vacancy with graduates prepared to lead schools in restructuring, start-up schools, charter schools, schools that need to move from “good to great,” etc.? If not, where are the gaps?

Are there data available that link principal outcomes on the job (e.g., student achievement trends, parent satisfaction surveys, supervisor ratings) to the preparation program?

Leadership development, needs analysis, and planning are not one-time events. They need to be performed on an ongoing basis to ensure that preparation models are aligned with evolving district priorities and kept up to date as new initiatives roll out. The landscape is ever changing as states and districts introduce new

curriculum models, student assessment tools, school and staff evaluation rubrics, etc. Using a data-based approach and building strong ties with the local school system ensures that pre-service learning experiences for principals reflect today’s leadership expectations.

A Strategic Approach to Developing Leaders for Low-Performing Schools in Delaware

Innovative Schools is a nonprofit organization that serves as an intermediary and partner in improving schools in the state of Delaware. Based on an assessment of the public school leadership pipeline across the state, Innovative Schools found that roughly 10% of principals and assistant principals leave the public school system each year, creating about 40 openings. Only half of those positions are typically filled by promotion. The other 20 positions, many of which are located in the state's lowest-performing schools, are open for new hires each year. In order for those schools to be transformed, the state needs strong leaders who can catalyze fundamental change.

Starting in 2010, Innovative Schools has worked in partnership with NYC Leadership Academy to implement the state's first alternative certification program to recruit and prepare school leaders to lead turnaround schools. The Delaware Leadership Project (DLP) is modeled on the Aspiring Principals Program. NYC Leadership Academy helped Innovative Schools' program team determine the organizational structure, staffing, budgeting, funding options, stakeholder engagement strategies, and plans for sustainability. Innovative Schools was able to demonstrate to the state that, by building on NYC Leadership Academy's evidence-based model, it had the capacity to do the work effectively. Primary financing came from a portion of the state's Race to the Top grant and foundation support.

To date, the DLP has trained and certified 12 aspiring principals who have committed to leading Delaware's highest-need schools for the next three years; a third cohort of four aspiring principals is currently completing the residency. Selection into the program has become highly competitive, and a geographically and racially diverse group of educators are applying for admission. DLP received more than 100 applications for the most recent cohort, of which nearly two-thirds were from out-of-state candidates; two-thirds were also from non-white candidates. Demand for DLP as a source of school leaders has also increased, from five districts initially interested in the program to eight districts and charter schools that are now including DLP as part of their principal preparation strategies.

For more information about DLP, visit: <http://www.innovativeschools.org/delaware-leadership-project>.

ACTION STEP 2: PROGRAM DESIGN: OPTIONS AND CONSIDERATIONS

The diagnostic questions above should help shed light on any unmet school leadership needs. The next step is to think about the best way to address those needs either by strengthening and redesigning current programs or creating principal pipeline options. No matter whether you sit at the district or state level, there are several structural or framing options to consider: whether principal preparation should be in-house, outsourced to another entity, or in partnership with an external provider (nonprofit or university). Each of these has a number of trade-offs.

One consideration is scale and size. Smaller districts may not feel the investment is worth it if they have only small numbers of aspiring principals. Similarly, the number of principal positions a district needs to fill each year may be too small to justify a dedicated program. With a cohort-based model such as APP, a great deal of the learning experience, particularly during the summer intensive, is driven by participant work and interaction with each other; as such, we recommend those adapting our model design their programs to have at minimum six to ten aspiring principals per cohort.

With this in mind, there are advantages to having multiple districts partner to increase the pool and cohort size. In the Sandhills region of North Carolina, a relatively suburban and rural area in the southeastern part of the state, the Sandhills Regional Education Consortium (SREC) sought and received Race to the Top funds to create an aspiring principals program to serve all 12 member districts. Each of their three cohorts has included approximately 20 participants, and placement rates in school-level administrative positions across participating districts have been very high (100% for the first cohort and 90% for the second cohort). See p. 61 for additional information on SREC's program. The Delaware

Leadership Program (described on p. 57), the Turnaround Leader Academy in Massachusetts (described on p. 57), and the iLeadAZ program at Arizona State University (described on p. 59) are other examples of programs that serve districts and schools throughout a state. These statewide programs aim to provide more uniform pre-service training and development and focus on preparing principals to turn around their state's most chronically under-performing schools. However, one challenge of this approach is getting buy-in across multiple districts and tailoring the program to meet individual district needs, which calls for development and implementation of a strategic communications plan to ensure buy-in and build engagement across all the district-level stakeholders.

A second consideration is capacity. Some larger school districts have invested in a homegrown approach to identify and develop top-notch principals from within to meet specific district needs. Other districts or states may decide that they simply do not have the capacity to take ownership over principal preparation. They may prefer to establish strong partnerships with outside providers and use their influence as the employers of graduates to strengthen the quality of pre-service training and development. Or they could outsource to established programs.

Districts and states may also want to think about how to best spur innovation and creativity. Even if they have the staffing capacity internally, they may decide that the central bureaucracy would impede more creative approaches and therefore may choose to house their leadership development program outside of central office bureaucracy where it could be more nimble and responsive.

No matter how efforts are structured, it is important to keep in mind the importance of engaging relevant stakeholders in school leadership improvement discussions and aligning leadership development initiatives to support school improvement and student learning.

A STATEWIDE MODEL TACKLES DELIVERY CHALLENGES AND SUSTAINABILITY IN ARIZONA

Arizona State University's Mary Lou Fulton Teachers College offers both a traditional and an alternative route to securing a master's degree in educational leadership. The alternative route, called iLeadAZ, is a 15-month principal training program based on NYC Leadership Academy's model. The program is offered in partnership with designated districts throughout the state—including urban and suburban areas, rural communities, and communities that serve Native American students—to prepare aspiring leaders to serve in high-needs schools.

iLeadAZ was initially launched in 2008 with support from an Excellence and Collaboration in Educational Leadership grant from the U.S. Department of Education. The grant provided tuition for participants and, in return, students committed to serving in a leadership position in a high-needs district for five years following completion of the program.

There were some challenges in creating a statewide initiative for a large state like Arizona. For example, iLeadAZ begins with a five-week summer intensive that engages participants in comprehensive simulations grounded in authentic school experiences. But because of the expense of providing housing and food for a cohort of 15 to 20 people to come to the university for five weeks, participants had to cover the costs themselves. Additionally, the program development team had to work to align the curriculum with the university's credit requirements and the competencies outlined in the Leadership Performance Standards Matrix.

Finally, because it was difficult to arrange face-to-face learning time on a regular basis with aspiring principals coming from almost 20 geographically dispersed districts across the state, program staff had to think creatively about delivery of coursework. As a result, instead of weekly in-person meetings, the iLeadAZ program includes a combination of online and hybrid courses, with participants coming together for Friday and Saturday conferences ten times throughout the school year.

While the external funding for iLeadAZ has ended, thanks in part to high graduate placement rates in school-level administrative positions across its early cohorts (86-93%), the university has decided to continue the program as its "flagship" principal preparation program. Students will now pay their own tuition to the program, the university will support the costs of operating the program, and partnering districts will commit to placing participants in non-classroom teaching positions so they can complete a year-long residency, as well as covering the cost of leadership coaches.

For more information, see <http://www.education.asu.edu/iLeadAZ>.

ACTION STEP 3: **DESIGNING AN EXPERIENTIAL LEARNING CURRICULUM: SUMMER INTENSIVE AND RESIDENCY**

Once the structural elements are defined, the next step is the crafting (or redesigning) of the curriculum. To design a thoughtful, standards-based, comprehensive curriculum takes time—probably six months if starting from scratch—and sufficient staffing resources. If at all possible, the facilitators who will be delivering the training should be involved in creating a curriculum that melds classroom-based lessons with real-world simulations and experiences. Thinking about how the curriculum will be delivered and facilitated is a critical component and therefore it is important to consider the program team’s experience and expertise in both design and facilitation.

Once the right people are assembled, the group needs to identify a set of standards that specify the actions and behaviors of effective school leaders, which will undergird the program and curriculum. APP staff developed and use the Leadership Performance Standards Matrix. But there are other options. Almost every state defines and sets leadership standards; some use the ISLLC (Interstate School Leaders Licensure Consortium) standards, others have created their own. School districts may also have their own sets of standards. In selecting leadership standards, be sure to specify clear and actionable behaviors as much as possible to help ground the program’s learning goals. It can be difficult to measure participant learning and development if the standards are too general.

Crafting the curriculum involves developing a set of assessments and building a comprehensive scope and sequence of activities that will allow participants to learn the content and build the skills they need to meet the standards. The goal is to help aspiring principals master the content and skills by designing a logical sequence of hands-on, real-world learning activities that encompass a wide range of school leader responsibilities. Once the activities are planned, facilitators work with program specialists to identify readings and lessons that can support the candidates’ learning, building their skills and content knowledge throughout each phase of the program.



A CURRICULUM THAT MEETS THE NEEDS OF MULTIPLE DISTRICTS IN NORTH CAROLINA

The Sandhills Regional Education Consortium (SREC) is a collaboration of 12 districts in southeastern North Carolina. The SREC is using Race to the Top federal funding to support a Leadership Academy that prepares aspiring principals to lead turnaround schools across the state. While the 12 participating districts range from relatively rural communities to more suburban areas, the area as a whole is generally underserved and many of its schools are considered low performing.

The Sandhills Leadership Academy (SLA) is based on NYC Leadership Academy's model and includes a summer intensive and a residency program. The curriculum is standards based. The consortium began by examining North Carolina's Standards for School Executives, which describe the behaviors of effective sitting principals. With those in mind, SREC and NYC Leadership Academy defined the most important behaviors that aspiring principals need to demonstrate when exiting a preparation program. SREC cross-walked the Leadership Performance Standards Matrix and the state standards to create their own framework.

The summer intensive was planned as a relatively short three-week experience. The challenge was to design a curriculum that would give aspiring principals a solid grounding in key issues and a chance to test their skills and knowledge in a simulation school before working with a mentor principal in the residency. Week one of the summer program focuses on understanding school data and getting to know oneself as a school leader; week two centers on analyzing data in connection to school improvement efforts and giving feedback to adults; and week three examines issues of equity and equality and the transition to the residency site.

With such a condensed summer experience, some of the learning elements had to shift to the residency portion of the program. For example, rather than delve into specifics of benchmark assessments, which vary from district to district, faculty spend time during the summer intensive talking about assessment challenges more broadly. Then, when aspiring principals enter their residency programs, they get firsthand experience in working with local benchmark assessments and analysis tools.

The simulation school learning activities also needed to be responsive to a wide range of challenges faced by rural and suburban schools. Using real-time data from a local school as a starting point, SLA faculty purposefully incorporated into the school scenario realistic tasks and complicated elements similar to those the principals would likely encounter on the job. For more information, see <http://www.sandhillsleadershipacademy.com>.

SUMMER INTENSIVE: SIMULATION SCHOOL

Programs opting to create a school simulation that gives aspiring principals the opportunity to learn how to address complex leadership challenges within a controlled environment need to create a convincing and comprehensively constructed simulation experience grounded in the particulars of the local context. It is often useful to start with an existing school as a model. Using the basic information available on that school, develop a fictitious school with a student body with demographic features and educational needs and give detail including a school budget, descriptions of the teaching staff and additional personnel, a floor plan for the physical plant, and a sense of the community in which the school sits. This introductory information plus new information delivered throughout the experience should come in different formats, including written documents, videos, classroom artifacts, student work samples, teacher files, lesson plans, letters/memos, and interactions with members of the school community via role play. An important theme of the intensive experience is ambiguity. Just like in the principalship, aspiring leaders are given information that may be incomplete, contradictory, potentially unreliable, and subject to interpretation.

The curriculum includes a mix of team and individual assignments that draw on authentic day-to-day challenges and dilemmas school leaders face. The assignments are likely to employ a wide range of pedagogical devices, such as role plays, an “in-box” activity that arrives on the principal’s desk, videotapes of teachers teaching a lesson, memos, emails, presentations, etc. The purpose of these assignments is to reveal how participants manage themselves, their time, and other resources around them like team members and team leaders. Assignments may have

MAXIMIZING LEARNING ROLE-PLAY

Role-play is especially useful for developing leadership competencies. It allows individuals and groups to explore a range of possible decisions and the outcomes of those decisions. In a role-play, participants can receive immediate feedback on the success or lack of success of moves and counter-moves. But designing a role-play can be tricky. It is important that the role-play be focused on one core dilemma that the designer himself cannot with certainty answer. This allows for genuine exploration and inquiry. The role-play should contain uncertainty and ambiguity with no one right answer. When setting up the role-play, only provide enough information to crystallize a conflict, no more. Leaving out details allows the players the opportunity to bring their own fears, expectations, and imaginations to the scene. Finally, it is important to stop or freeze the role-play frequently in order to provide opportunities for reflection and change of direction. This maximizes learning, which is the point of the exercise.

- Questions to ask when designing a role-play:
- What is the objective? What do we want participants to practice?
- What is the core dilemma they will explore?
- Who are the players/characters?
- How much information will be provided?

competing deadlines, heightening tension and forcing people to prioritize under pressure.

Each assignment should contain a clear description of the expected work product; the school leadership standard(s) the assignment is designed to assess; at least one authentic challenge or task; and a rubric for evaluating the assignment. In total, the assignments should address all of the performance standards and correspond proportionally to their level of

importance. The order of assignments should correspond with the natural timing of the school year. Once assignments are planned, the curriculum scope and sequence is built as a framework and includes mini-lessons, readings, and other ways of delivering supporting content.

This work takes time and constant review. During the summer intensive, the APP program team debriefs daily to give facilitators and staff an opportunity to assess, reflect on, and refine the curriculum, as well as to assess participants' performance as measured against the leadership standards and decide on necessary supports.

Residency

There are a number of considerations that need to be addressed in creating a residency experience, including length of time and if the residency is part of a larger program or a stand-alone element. While NYC Leadership Academy believes that a full-time, year-long residency is optimal—as it allows aspiring principals to experience the full “life cycle” of the school year and provides plenty of time for them to see and reflect on the consequences (intended and otherwise) of their actions within the school—there are different configurations, including job-embedded experiences, that can give participants a meaningful amount of time to practice being a leader. The success of the residency is highly dependent on having well-trained and well-supported mentor principals and facilitators who make regular visits to the school site as coaches and supporters.

The success of the residency also depends on the program's ability to make an effective match between the aspiring principal and the mentor principal. Programs that have a learning component before the residency have the benefit of getting to know the individual's strengths and development needs. If the residency is a stand-

alone, then a program needs to think about how to best evaluate the learning styles, skill level, learning goals, and past experiences of the aspiring principals so they can be placed in appropriate residency school sites.

The summer intensive also helps build trust with the aspiring principals and sets the expectation that learning will be shared and public but done in a safe environment. If your program does not have a similar structure to the summer intensive, consider other opportunities to bring participants together to introduce them to the notion of public learning and the expectation that participants should be willing to step out of their comfort zones and take risks in order to develop and grow.

While it can be difficult for aspiring principals to hear feedback about their actions and behaviors, the mentor principals can make such conversations more neutral and less personally threatening by focusing on behaviors and the development of specific skills outlined in the standards. To do this well, the facilitator and the mentor principal need to internalize the language of the standards deeply and use them to ensure common understanding regularly in conversation. Many programs claim to be standards based, but keeping the standards front and center throughout the preparation experience helps bring to life the concept that the learning is in the work. It is also important to stay focused on the fact that this is high stakes with real impacts for students.

As discussed earlier, the curriculum generally follows the school year cycle and emphasizes how to enter (and re-enter) a school. The big themes spiral and address summer content more deeply as participants explore how to position themselves as leaders, build effective teams in schools, assess instructional practices,

look at informal and formal data, make sense of patterns and trends, and see the connections between inter-related school elements and how to influence change at the systems level.

It is also important that the curriculum remains current and responsive to district and school expectations for principals. For example, school leaders might be held accountable for developing teachers and giving them feedback as part of the district or state's teacher effectiveness system. Or they might be leading their school through the transition to the Common Core curriculum. This work needs to be infused into the curriculum so that candidates understand district expectations and their implications for school leadership decisions and actions. At the same time, faculty need to take into consideration the needs of the individual participants and be ready to personalize the delivery of the curriculum by developing different sessions or activities for targeted participants or by grouping participants by need.

ACTION STEP 4: **STAFFING: IDENTIFYING AND TRAINING THE DESIGN TEAM AND MENTOR PRINCIPALS**

Design Team

Assembling a strong program design and implementation team is critical to program success. APP hires facilitators who are experienced school principals or principal supervisors with strong track records of success as administrators. The program looks for people with solid observational skills, a capacity for synthesizing multiple competing ideas, an ability to maintain a neutral stance, a comfort with ambiguity, and a deep knowledge of both adult learning and backwards curriculum mapping. Additionally, program faculty need to have intact (or develop) a deep understanding of systems thinking, understanding how multiple forces interact and what the implications are for the school leader given the systems context. Program specialists and operations specialists who work with the facilitators to plan the curriculum and manage the learning sessions are also vital members of the support team.

Even with a highly selective hiring approach, it is critically important to provide ongoing training and support of program faculty. Experienced principals will likely know the ins and outs of leading a school but they may not have had much experience or practice in facilitating adult learning through simulation, using authentic questioning techniques, employing coaching strategies, and giving feedback aligned to perfor-

mance standards. This requires an instructional approach that is less about straight content delivery and more about facilitating learning: helping participants become critical thinkers who can work independently and collaboratively to frame questions, develop strategies, make choices, construct meaning, and provide productive feedback. Faculty also need regular training on new district initiatives and protocols to stay up to date with district expectations and how to help principals navigate internal systems.

Mentor Principals

The mentor principal is key to a successful residency. It takes time and effort to identify and train the mentor principal to ensure that the aspiring leader's residency experience is relevant and substantial. The best principals do not necessarily make the best mentors. Good mentors are those who can deconstruct their thinking and articulate their decision-making processes for the benefit of the aspiring principal. Ideally, principals with those skills who are currently leading successful school turnarounds are the top candidates.

District personnel may be good sources for identifying strong mentor principal candidates. It is likely that there are sitting principals who have a pattern of mentoring and grooming others to take on leadership positions in other schools. Those principals have the capacity to be mentor principals. Schools that are making strides in improvement efforts are also excellent learning labs, provided that the principals have a solid foundation for mentoring or are open to honing and expanding their mentoring skills.

BUILDING A MENTOR PIPELINE

While finding high-quality mentors can be a challenge, it is a challenge that gets easier over time. Existing leadership development programs have the benefit of drawing on graduates who are currently serving in the principalship, who understand the residency program curriculum, and who are invested in the type of action learning from which they themselves benefited. Alumni who have established a track record of effective leadership make very strong mentors: they remember the importance of the residency experience and tend to be very effective at creating rigorous and relevant learning opportunities for their mentees.

The mentor application process should be designed to help program staff determine the best mentor candidates. Mentor application processes can include any or all of the following:

Written Application. Applicants can respond to questions such as:

- What do you expect to gain from the experience of mentoring?
- How would you help teach, model, or provide relevant experiences to help an aspiring principal develop specific competencies?
- What do you anticipate to be hard about the work of mentoring?

Site Visits. Program staff can conduct site visits to meet the most promising mentor candidates at their schools. While there, they can walk around the school with the principal, visit classrooms, ask questions about observed classroom practices, and watch how the prospective mentor interacts with teachers and students. Mentor candidates might also be asked to suggest a residency project that relates to a particular problem of practice to see how they might structure an aspiring principal's learning activities.

Program Visits. Mentor candidates can also be asked to visit the preparation program to understand the program, meet faculty, and learn about mentor expectations and supports.

COMPENSATING MENTORS

The mentor principal, who is held accountable for helping develop the candidate's skills and competencies, is taking on extra work above and beyond job expectations—and supporting this growth within an environment for which the mentor principal is ultimately held responsible. To signal that mentoring is an important responsibility, programs should consider finding ways to recognize and/or compensate mentor principals for their time and effort. APP pays its mentor principals a stipend. At the time of this guide's publication, APP mentors receive \$250 per mentee per month, which is paid directly to the mentor principal in a lump sum at the end of the school year. The school could also be given a financial award from the district as acknowledgment of the principal's contribution. Other options include non-financial recognition—such as publicly honoring mentors for their contribution to the future of leadership in the district—or provision of other resources, such as staff support.



MENTOR TRAINING TO ENHANCE THE RESIDENCY EXPERIENCE IN COLORADO

The University of Denver's Ritchie Program for School Leaders is a well-regarded aspiring principals program that has been producing principals for Denver Public Schools (DPS) since 2002. Each year, Ritchie interns work alongside veteran principals to receive on-the-job training, mentorship, and support, while also taking coursework at the university.

DPS and Ritchie program staff grappled with the challenge of engaging sitting school principals as strong mentors who could design robust school-based learning experiences and facilitate and assess the learning of their residents. Both partners recognized how important it was to have experienced principals as mentors to their program participants. However, they also saw that being an exceptional mentor required additional skills beyond being an exemplar principal. Specifically, they identified that as leaders working in a high-stakes environment, mentor principals were finding it hard to relinquish their authority and give residents authentic opportunities to make decisions that had lasting consequences.

DPS and Ritchie program staff determined that they needed formal training for mentor principals and reached out to NYC Leadership Academy for assistance. The training, which was customized to reflect program leadership standards, provided mentor principals with a consistent understanding of their role within the overall preparation program and helped them build critical mentoring skills, such as the ability to deconstruct and reflect on their own practice, give constructive feedback, design authentic learning experiences, and manage the risk inherent in allowing a resident to take on real leadership within a school for which the mentor principal is held accountable.

NYC Leadership Academy has since worked with the district to strengthen its selection, training, and coordination of DPS mentor principals who supervise aspiring principals from all the principal preparation programs that serve the district. This system-wide focus has allowed the district to establish clear mentor competencies and to differentiate training for new and experienced mentors, which helps DPS promote a standard of quality across residency experiences.

For more information about leadership preparation in DPS,
<http://leadindenver.com/leadindenver/pathways-to-school-leadership.html>.

ACTION STEP 5: **SUPPORTING PROGRAM GRADUATES ON THE JOB**

Even with excellent pre-service training and development, novice principals are likely to need support post-graduation to continue their development on the job. Coaching is one possible source of support. NYC Leadership Academy provides standards-based, facilitative coaching to early-career principals to help them build their skills so they are able to move their schools forward.

Another more nebulous, but nonetheless important, level of support is the need to assist the principal in navigating the larger political context—serving as a buffer where needed—especially in districts that are laboring to turn around underperforming schools. Turnaround principals are hired with the expectation that they will move quickly to diagnose, analyze, and strategically act to set a timeline and a vision for change that repositions the school as a learning organization. But unless the ramifications of this change are understood and supported by central office staff at all levels, the principal can quickly be faulted for causing too many disruptions and noise within the system when reorganizing the school.

Therefore, it is important for leadership development organizations to be aware of district dynamics and systems and to monitor the work of their graduates once in schools to ensure that their principals can stay focused on leading change in schools. Program staff need to have close relationships with district personnel and know how to navigate the district bureaucracy so they can intervene if and when the principal's actions cause discomfort and political fallout.

There can be district-level repercussions for actions that principals take or decisions they make. NYC Leadership Academy can help alumni navigate these pitfalls in a variety of ways. If the principal has a NYC Leadership Academy coach—which all first-year principals are offered—the coach would likely be involved in helping the principal to understand the situation, reflect on the leadership moves that caused it, and strategize as to how to resolve the situation. APP program staff can also provide support for the principal, through their knowledge of both the individual and the school context. In addition, NYC Leadership Academy staff, who may not be direct contacts of the principal, could use their relationships with district staff to help deconstruct the situation from a different perspective or gain greater understanding of the political landscape in which the principal may have made a misstep. These can all help individual principals navigate the complex, political world in which they operate.

Programs can also help identify and call attention to any administrative roadblocks that impede principals from getting the work done. For example, principals are often bogged down by requests for the same information—in slightly different formats—from various departments within the central office. The program can serve as a feedback loop to the district, identifying patterns and problems and suggesting changes such as streamlining communications and coordinating requests for information. Programs can minimize the time principals must spend on administrative matters unrelated to student learning. The reality is that large systems are often burdened by incoherent policies that either conflict with one another or interfere with school-level change efforts.

For preparation programs that sit outside of a district, it may be harder to establish and maintain

the necessary relationships with district personnel to give program graduates political cover and support or help navigate complex systems. In this case, programs should pay particular attention to their curricular scope and sequence to ensure that their aspiring principals leave with a solid understanding of systems thinking and strong communication and alliance-building skills.

ACTION STEP 6: **SUSTAINING THE PROGRAM OVER TIME**

Sustaining an aspiring principals program typically depends on a variety of factors, not all of which are under the program staff's direct control. However, the program's ability to develop effective school leaders who meet the school leadership needs in the school systems the program serves is an important dimension of planning for sustainability. Two critical aspects of this work are evaluating program results and collaborating closely with the school system(s) for which the program is preparing principals.

EVALUATING PROGRAM RESULTS FOR CONTINUOUS IMPROVEMENT

To date, most principal preparation programs across the country have not invested in data systems or evaluation tools either to assess impact or improve programming to best meet the needs of the principals they serve. Most programs do not know how effective their graduates are in securing principal licenses, obtaining administrative positions, retaining those jobs, and having an impact on the schools and students they serve. Nor do they have an understanding of their graduates' strengths and limitations to make their offerings more robust and rigorous.

With Race to the Top and other federal efforts to strengthen accountability, some states are beginning to enact policies to hold principal preparation programs accountable for principal effectiveness, particularly student achievement results. This new focus on outcomes will require states and/or principal preparation providers to measure the impact of their training and development on the growth of their principal graduates.

In the near term, assessing program effectiveness includes gathering information to help programs determine whether they are successfully producing people who are ready to lead schools; programs may also have other goals, such as expanding the number of people of color in school leadership positions, or placing graduates in turnaround or otherwise high-needs schools. NYC Leadership Academy sets goals around and tracks metrics such as diversity within APP cohorts, participant graduation rates, the rates of graduates who go into principalships or other leadership roles, and the rates of graduates taking on school leadership in high-needs schools.

Program evaluation should begin while candidates are still in the program to provide insight into what preparation components are most effective and what aspects of the program might need improvement. APP participants who successfully complete the summer intensive portion are asked to provide feedback via an online survey, rating their experiences and perceptions of the activities, assignments, and facilitation strategies. Additionally, at the end of the residency, aspiring principals complete a survey to provide feedback on mentor quality, the residency experience, and perceptions of program effectiveness overall. Candidates are also asked to estimate their growth in each of the APP Leadership Competencies on a pre- and post-assessment.

One
 in seven NYC public school principals
 is
 an APP graduate. [NYCLA Data]

Follow-up should also be done with graduates once they are on the job. APP periodically surveys and conducts focus groups with graduates who have been in their school leader roles for more than one year to gather insight on what was missing from the program and whether they need additional support. Supervisors and community leaders are also asked to share their perceptions of APP graduates in relation to other early career principals, and mentor principals are surveyed to get feedback on the program and the support they receive. The combination of quantitative and qualitative feedback is used to continuously improve the program to better prepare future aspiring principals. Having a plan for program assessment that identifies the near-term indicators program staff can use in the first few years to determine whether the program is on the right track and what improvements can be made is important, just as over the long run programs need to find ways to measure their graduates' effectiveness as school leaders.

Over time, NYC Leadership Academy has constructed a comprehensive database that measures program impact and the performance of graduates over time. This database includes a full history on each program participant, including

job placement and employment data, tenure decision date and status, and school and student outcomes. Data on student outcomes compares schools led by APP principals in comparison to peer schools and encompasses overall student achievement performance and progress, change in perceptions of the school and school leadership over time by teachers, students, and parents, and ways in which school leaders have impacted teacher quality. The database can also be used to analyze school performance trends over time and predict how a school might perform under a variety of interventions.

Creating a longitudinal history that tracks graduates in schools over time requires a significant investment of staffing and infrastructure resources to set up and maintain, and programs that sit outside of the districts they serve—as well as those that serve multiple districts—need to work with their partner districts to determine a process for efficient sharing of data. But being able to look at school-level data over time provides invaluable insights that can help programs continuously improve their leadership development offerings and provide evidence of graduates' impacts on schools and students.

ASSESSING EARLY IMPACT OF A STATEWIDE PRINCIPAL PIPELINE PROGRAM IN MASSACHUSETTS

Teachers21 is a highly respected nonprofit organization in Massachusetts known for its professional development, public policy work, and educational research. In 2011, Teachers21 worked in partnership with NYC Leadership Academy to develop the Turnaround Leadership Academy (TLA) to help districts create a pipeline of effective leaders for their most challenging schools.

As an established organization with a history of providing professional development and leadership training, Teachers21 had strong staffing capacity and good relations with the state. NYC Leadership Academy served as a partner in the design of the leadership development program, which includes a four-week summer intensive, a school-based residency experience, and coaching. The two organizations presented the model to the state and secured statewide Race to the Top funding support, allowing Teachers21 to offer rigorous aspiring principal training at low costs to districts with one or more underperforming schools.

The TLA trained its first cohort in 2012-2013, and 100% of the aspiring principals that completed the program were hired into assistant principal or principal positions across five participating districts. To help provide insight for Teachers21 program staff into the program's early impact, NYC Leadership Academy conducted surveys of the first cohort of participants, their mentors (the principals who supervised their residencies), and their current supervisors and provided results to Teachers21. Among the findings:

- Participants reported growth in all areas of the performance matrix—in particular, the areas of supervision of staff and leadership development—as a result of their preparation experience.
- Residency mentors felt strongly that the residency experience benefited TLA participants, the mentors themselves, and their schools. All mentors reported that they would be willing to serve again in this role.
- One residency mentor reported that a resident had improved ELA team instruction and outcomes for students in the building and raised “advanced” scores from 8% to 28% among the ELA student population, by using a cycle of inquiry to determine shifts in instruction needed to improve scores and improve student learning.
- In a recent survey, all supervisors of program graduates reported that the performance of these leaders this year has been either good or

excellent. They generally rated these leaders as more proficient than other new leaders in a range of leadership competencies and felt that they were mostly or completely ready to undertake leadership tasks such as the continuous improvement of teachers.

Recently renamed the Urban Principals Development Institute, the program is continuing to build partnerships with districts across the state; for more information, including a video about the program, see www.teachers21.org/programs-and-courses/programs/urban-principal-development.

BUILDING AND MAINTAINING RELATIONSHIPS WITH THE DISTRICT

Principal preparation programs do not just prepare educators to be principals; they prepare people who will lead actual schools situated within actual systems—whether a single district, multiple districts, or a charter school network. Positive connections and active collaboration with those systems ensures the program has the knowledge and relationships necessary to be an effective supplier of school leadership talent. Providing school leaders with the learning opportunities they need requires knowledge of the system’s expectations for principals, as well as the political/reform context in which they’ll be working. While this is easier for district-based preparation programs, program staff still need to make sure there is good communication and alignment with other central office functions—such as human resources—to ensure there are no disconnects between the preparation program standards and what hiring managers are looking for in school leaders. Building these relationships must be an ongoing process and should happen on both formal and informal levels.

Examples of how programs can build formal program connections include:

- Involving district personnel in recruitment and selection of program participants and mentor principals
- Inviting district staff members to observe program events, such as a day during the summer intensive
- Including program staff in district principal training around new initiatives
- Surveying district personnel for feedback on the program

Suggestions for fostering informal program connections include:

- Building relationships with district HR staff to facilitate job placement of aspiring principals
- Building relationships with principal supervisors to continue learning about district leadership expectations and to get real-time/ongoing feedback on how program graduates are performing in their schools
- Working with mentor principals to construct authentic learning opportunities for aspiring principals

A FINAL WORD: THINKING BEYOND PRINCIPAL PREPARATION

Effective principal preparation programs are only the first step. Any large-scale approach to school reform that is built on individual heroism will fall short. School systems cannot rely on a steady flow of exceptional human beings who will work countless hours and struggle against the system to ensure that they successfully reach every student and close longstanding achievement gaps.

System leaders have to be willing to make the necessary policy changes so that the work of highly trained and motivated leaders is facilitated, rather than impeded. Building a robust leadership development program will not be enough. Policies that encourage learning at every level, that minimize fear of exposing what you don't know, that provide opportunities to exercise appropriate levels of local decision-making authority, and that do not push the burdens of central reporting and administrative record-keeping onto principals are ultimately better for student outcomes than those that are punitive, promote a culture of fear and paranoia, or keep principals locked in their office responding to endless requests for the same information

from various departments in the district office. Principal supervisors who stand shoulder to shoulder with principals to try to see the challenges as they see them and help think through possible solutions are infinitely better for school improvement than those who stand in judgment of a principal's work, looking only at the most easily accessible data over time periods that are far too short to allow for reliable measurable gains in student performance. Individual leaders can accomplish a great deal; it happens time and time again. But an individual leader can only take the work so far without systems in place to support improvement and to make the job one that is doable, over time, by real people with real lives.

ADDITIONAL SUPPORTS AVAILABLE

NYC Leadership Academy is committed to improving student learning and success nationwide—particularly among the most vulnerable students—through high-quality school leadership. Through our national consulting practice, we help districts, universities, and other organizations build their own capacity to design, implement, and continuously improve preparation and support programs that are responsive to local education reforms and needs.

For more information about our consulting services, please visit www.nyclleadershipacademy.org/nationwide-education-leadership.



MATERIALS

- Leadership Performance Standards Matrix (excerpt on p. 18)
- Summer Intensive Curricular Scope & Sequence (excerpt on p. 26)
- Residency Scope & Sequence (excerpt on p. 41)
- Sample APP Cost Drivers (available on p. 48)

ADDITIONAL MATERIALS

Please visit our website at www.nyclleadershipacademy.org/news-and-resources for access to the following NYCLA materials:

- Leadership Performance Standards Matrix (full version)
- Summer Intensive Curricular Scope & Sequence (3 full days)
- Sample Summer Intensive Assignments
- Facilitator Guide to In-basket Activity
- In-Basket Activity Instructions and Sample Items
- In-Basket Day Curriculum
- Sample Scenario School Staff Profiles
- Scenario School Challenge
- Residency Overview
- Residency Compact
- Residency Curricular Scope & Sequence (3 full days)
- Final Aspiring Principal Evaluation

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