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Transforming Equity-Oriented Leaders: Principal Residency Network Program Evaluation

This manuscript has been peer-reviewed, accepted, and endorsed by the National Council of Professors of Educational Administration (NCPEA) as a significant contribution to the scholarship and practice of school administration and K-12 education.



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After 12 years focused on developing school leaders who act as change agents for educational equity, the Principal Residency Network (PRN) partnered with Johnson and Wales University's Center for Research and Evaluation to conduct a utilization-focused (Patton, 2002) program evaluation funded by a grant from the Rhode Island Foundation. The PRN is a principal preparation program of the non-profit organization, the Center for Leadership and Educational Equity. This sequential explanatory mixed methods study explored PRN graduates' outcomes and perceptions of the program, with an overarching purpose of creating a coherent data collection and inquiry process to be used by program staff on an ongoing basis. Following the development of an evaluation framework, Phase I of the study consisted of collecting assessment data and feedback from current PRN participants, as well as administering a survey questionnaire to recent graduates of the program (N=14), previously administered in 2005 (N=21) and 2009 (N=6). Phase II of this evaluation was designed to further explore recent graduates' perceptions of the nature and relevancy of the program in developing their commitment and skill to lead for equity in order to recommend program improvements; N=7 participated in a 90 minute focus group. Findings indicated four conclusions from which recommendations were drawn: the program is achieving strong results, participants perceive the program to have an interconnected and coherent focus on preparing them to be equity-oriented leaders, the mentor is a critical component, and modeling the cycle of inquiry created through this evaluative study is important.

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PROGRAM FRAMEWORK

The Principal Residency Network (PRN) is a principal preparation program of the Center for Leadership and Educational Equity. The program was initiated in 2000 as a state-approved administrator certification program featuring an intensive residency with a mentor principal and a cohort structure. The PRN has continuously identified, refined, and implemented the research-based practices identified in Table 1 through ongoing efforts to collect and evaluate data for the purpose of program improvement. For a more extensive discussion of the theoretical framework and literature that supports the principal preparation practices listed in Table 1 and used by the PRN, see Braun, Gable, & Kite (2011a; 2011b).

Table 1
Principal Preparation Program Practices and Supporting Literature

Practices	Supporting Research and Reviews of Literature
<u>Structural</u>	
• Partnerships between universities and districts	Darling-Hammond, LaPointe, Meyerson, Orr, & Cohen, 2007; Jackson & Kelly, 2002; Milstein & Krueger, 1997; Murphy, 1993, 1999; Orr, 2006; SREB, 2006; USDOE, 2004
• Program developers' commitment	Darling-Hammond et al., 2007; USDOE, 2004
• Rigorous entrance requirements for strong and diverse candidates	Bredeson, 1996; Darling-Hammond et al., 2007; Hart & Pounder, 1999; Jackson & Kelly, 2002; Lauder, 2000; Leithwood & Jantzi, 1996; Milstein & Krueger, 1997; Murphy, 1993 ; Orr, 2006; SREB, 2006; USDOE, 2004
• Financial support, release time for participants	Darling-Hammond et al., 2007; Leithwood & Jantzi, 1996; Milstein & Krueger, 1997; SREB, 2006
• Supportive district and state infrastructure	Darling-Hammond et al., 2007; Orr, 2006; SREB, 2006
• Program monitoring for improvement	Lauder, 2000; Leithwood & Jantzi, 1996; Milstein & Krueger, 1997; Orr, 2006; SREB, 2006; USDOE, 2004
<u>Content</u>	
• Standards-based content	Darling-Hammond et al., 2007; Jackson & Kelly, 2002; Lauder, 2000; Orr, 2006; SREB, 2006; USDOE, 2004
• Coherent and relevant curriculum	Darling-Hammond et al., 2007; Jackson & Kelly, 2002; Milstein & Krueger, 1997; Orr, 2006; SREB, 2006; USDOE, 2003
• Individualized content	Jackson & Kelly, 2002; Lauder, 2000; Leithwood & Jantzi, 1996
• Focus on shared instructional leadership	Elmore, 1999; Jackson & Kelly, 2002; LaPointe, Meyerson, & Darling-Hammond, 2005; Leithwood & Jantzi, 1996; McCarthy, 1999; Orr, 2006; SREB, 2006
• Focus on equity and school reform	Jackson & Kelly, 2002; LaPointe et al., 2005; Leithwood & Jantzi, 1996; McCarthy, 1999; Murphy, 1999; Orr, 2006; SREB, 2006
<u>Delivery</u>	
• High quality internship	Darling-Hammond et al., 2007; Hart & Pounder, 1999; Jackson & Kelly, 2002; Lauder, 2000; Leithwood & Jantzi, 1996; Leithwood, Seashore Louis, Anderson, & Wahlstron, 2004; Murphy, 1993; SREB, 2006; USDOE, 2004
• Problem-based learning	Darling-Hammond et al., 2007; Hart & Pounder, 1999; Jackson &

	Kelly, 2002; Lauder, 2000; Leithwood & Jantzi, 1996; Leithwood et al., 2004; McCarthy, 1999; Murphy, 1993, 1999; Orr, 2006; SREB, 2006
• Mentoring or coaching	Darling-Hammond et al., 2007; Jackson & Kelly, 2002; Lauder, 2000; Leithwood & Jantzi, 1996; Milstein & Krueger, 1997; Murphy, 1993; SREB, 2006
• Cohort structure	Darling-Hammond et al., 2007; Hart & Pounder, 1999; Jackson & Kelly, 2002; Leithwood & Jantzi, 1996; McCarthy, 1999; Milstein & Krueger, 1997; USDOE, 2004
• Habit of Reflection	Davis, Darling-Hammond, LaPoint, & Meyerson, 2005; LaPoint et al., 2005; Lauder, 2000; Leithwood & Jantzi, 1996; Milstein & Krueger, 1997; SREB, 2006
• Performance assessments	Hart & Pounder, 1999; Jackson & Kelly, 2002; Lauder, 2000; Leithwood & Jantzi, 1996; Orr, 2006; SREB, 2006; USDOE, 2004

With a mission to develop principals who champion educational change through leadership of innovative schools for the purpose of improving student achievement, the program has a significant focus on preparing administrators to lead for equity. This approach is grounded in the assumption that educational leaders can increase equitable outcomes for all students in schools through specific practices (Ross & Berger, 2009). The equity-oriented leadership practices the PRN aims to enable school leaders to enact are represented in Table 2.

Table 2
Leadership Practices for Equity Identified by Ross & Berger (2009)

<u>Curriculum Interpretation</u>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> · Encourage staff members to talk about issues of diversity and social justice · Model equity beliefs for staff · Clarify misconceptions about equity · Create a safe, affirming school environment
<u>Instructional Practices</u>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> · Enable teachers to provide students with the support they need · Provide all students with access to the whole curriculum · Recognize the potential for bias in special education identification · Support research-based instructional strategies
<u>Assessment and Evaluation</u>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> · Monitor progress toward achievement gap reduction · Use appropriate accommodations for assessments · Discourage strategies that involve gaming the accountability system · Celebrate all achievement gains · Increase the reliability of assessments for diverse student populations · Avoid cultural, linguistic, and gender bias in tests
<u>Community Involvement</u>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> · Recognize the expertise of parents and community members · Create partnerships with parents to support learning

METHODOLOGY

As a utilization-focused program evaluation design (Patton, 2002), the study began with the development of an evaluation framework in partnership between the PRN a research team at the university. Figure 1 depicts the framework in the form of a Theory of Action

(TOA). The goal was to use the program evaluation process as an opportunity to develop a consistent cycle of inquiry in which the preparation program staff could collect, analyze, and use data for the purposes of improving the program and modeling the inquiry process taught to aspiring principals to use in schools (Love, 2009). Therefore, the TOA/Evaluation Framework articulates the *Enabling*, *Intermediate*, and *Long-Term* program outcomes; the indicator data collected on the outcomes (bulleted in italics); and the timeline for data collection. Phase I of the study consisted of administering a survey questionnaire to recent graduates of the program and collecting assessment data and feedback from current PRN participants accessible at the time of the program evaluation (see indicator data underlined in Figure 1). Phase II was designed to further explore recent graduates' perceptions of the nature and relevancy of the program in developing their commitment and skill to lead for equity, an intermediate outcome in the TOA/Evaluation Framework. This section will describe the methodology for Phases I and II.

<u>PRN Practices</u>	<u>Enabling Outcomes</u> Measure annually	<u>Intermediate Outcomes</u> Measure 2-3 years	<u>Long-Term Outcomes</u> Measure every 5 Years
Structural <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • partnerships • supportive district/state infrastructure • monitoring for improvement • support for participants • rigorous entrance requirements 	Caliber of Participants <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Ratings on aspiring and mentor principal admission rubrics</i> 	Commitment/Skill to Lead for Equity <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Grad focus group</i> 	Increased Student Achievement in Schools Lead by Graduates <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Growth rates compared to similar schools</i>
Content/Curriculum coherent, standards-based, individualized curriculum focused on instructional leadership for equity	Performance on Program Experiences and Assessments <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>All rubric ratings</i> 	Completion of Program <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Graduation rate</i> 	Reduced Equity Gaps in Schools Lead by Graduates <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Reduced gaps between subpopulations</i>
Pedagogy/delivery <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • intensive residency • cohort structure • mentor support • authentic assessments • problem-based learning • reflection • modeling adult learning 	Proficiency and Growth in Leadership Standards <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Final exhibition scores</i> • <i>Pre and Final mentor assessment</i> 	Obtaining Leadership Positions <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Program database and Grad Survey</i> 	Improved School Learning Environment in Schools Lead by Graduates <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>State survey data</i>
	Quality of Program Experiences <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Mentor feedback</i> • <i>Grad Survey</i> 	Participation in Post Graduate Professional Development <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Grad Survey and program databases</i> 	Increased Quality of Educational Leaders in Statewide Community of Practice <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>State educator evaluation data or preparation program report card</i>
		Proficiency in National Leadership Competencies <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Score on ETS exit exam</i> 	

Figure 1. Theory of Action/Evaluation Framework

Note. The indicators of the outcomes are in italics. As part of this study, data was collected for the underlined indicators. Data was not available and/or will be collected at a later date for the other indicators.

Phase I: Data from Program Databases and Assignments

Prior to the period of this program evaluation, the PRN program only tracked completion of participants in the program, current roles of graduates of the program, and data from graduate surveys. These data were not adequate for program staff to engage in an ongoing cycle of inquiry to improve the program. Therefore, to measure the Enabling Outcome, *Performance on Experiences and Assessments*, detailed rubrics were created for each learning experience and assessment, and program staff calibrated their scoring on all assessments throughout the study year to insure inter-rater reliability was high. Likewise, to measure another Enabling Outcome, *Proficiency and Growth in the Leadership Standards*, the rubrics used during participants' final exhibition and by the mentor principals' to rate aspiring principal participants' proficiency were revised, articulated across performance levels, and program staff and mentor principals engaged in calibration exercises. Finally, the Enabling Outcome, *Quality of Program Experiences*, was measured in the survey discussed in the subsequent section and by analyzing the mentor principals' written responses on quality, challenges, and improvements for program. The data collected for these four TOA/Evaluation Framework Outcomes were compiled and used by program staff to make program adjustments at the mid-point and at the end of the year.

Phase I: Data from Graduate Survey

Two previous graduate surveys had been conducted prior to this study, the first in 2005 ($N=21$) and the second in 2009 ($N=6$); therefore, the same survey was sent out to all participants who had graduated in the past three years ($N=21$). Of those graduates mailed questionnaires, 66% ($N=14$) completed and returned them. The *PRN Graduate Survey* was designed to collect data on graduates' perceptions of quality, challenges, and improvements for the program. Four of the Intermediate Outcomes, *Quality of Program Experience*, *Obtaining Leadership Positions*, *Commitment/Skill to Lead for Equity*, and *Participate in Ongoing Professional Development* were measured by data collected from survey items. To determine content validity, the survey underwent content review by four educational leadership professors and instructors.

Descriptive statistics were run for all the items that contained a rating scale; for all the open-ended items, the written responses were compiled. The means for the items that measured the Enabling Outcome, *Quality of Program Experience*, were compiled in a spreadsheet that contained means for the same items from the 2005 and 2009 surveys. The means for all three years by item were represented together to allow for trend analysis.

Phase I: Data from State Database

To measure the Long-term Outcome, *Increased Student Achievement in Schools Lead by Graduates*, data were gathered from a state database. The Rhode Island Department of Education databases (RIDE, 2012) were used to collect data on student achievement in schools lead by program graduates. PRN graduates who had been a principal or instructional leader (e.g., Director of Curriculum, Co-Principal) in the elementary or

middle school during at least the three-year period between 2008-2011 ($N= 20$) were included in the study. Student achievement data were represented by the mean of the index proficiency scores for all students in a school on the English Language Arts (ELA) and Math New England Common Assessment Program 2008/09 and 2010/11 exams (RIDE). The school level (elementary or middle) and type of school (suburban, urban ring, or urban) were entered in a database with the index proficiency scores for all program graduates who had been a principal in the three-year period and for every school in the state to use as comparison groups ($N=225$). After the data were disaggregated by level and type of school, to measure the growth or increase in student achievement, the means from the 2008 and 2011 index proficiency scores were compared for the PRN ($N= 20$) and for everyone other school in the state. Due to the small number of program graduates once disaggregated, inferential statistical analysis is not possible; however, since this is a critical Long-term Outcome, it was important for the study to note as descriptive data.

Phase II: Data from Focus Group

Phase II participants included program graduates from 2008-2011 who were sent the *PRN Graduate Survey* and agreed to attend the focus group session. The final group ($N=7$) represented a cross-section of class years, school types, and professional backgrounds. A focus group moderator's guide was developed for the focus group session, using standard formatting for the sequence of questions (Krueger & Casey, 2009). Eight questions for this topic were designed to range from demographic and employment information to personal reflections and assessments of how the program prepared participants to 'lead for equity'. Specific content questions regarding barriers or enhancing experiences that assisted participants with their professional development, and questions regarding their mentor relationships, papers and exhibitions, and cohort/network meetings further added to the discussion. The final question was designed to solicit 'advice' from program participants regarding program strengths and weaknesses and encourage debriefing as a way to conclude the conversation without emotional conflict or discomfort.

The data collection procedures comprised of a single focus group session, conducted in late spring on University premises, facilitated by an external moderator for a 90-minute session. The session was audio taped, consent forms were distributed and 'ground rules' were conveyed prior to the beginning of the questioning.

Focus group data were transcribed following the session, and raw data files were analyzed using a sequence of coding, content analysis and thematic clustering. Modifying Krueger and Casey's (2009) Classic Approach for focus group data analysis, and Miles and Huberman's (1994) three-tier coding strategy (descriptive, interpretative, and pattern codes), data analysis process encompassed 'chunking' the data until it could be transformed into themes and categories, using participants' words and expressions to illustrate their 'meaning essence' (Miles & Huberman, 1994). The final stage of analysis involved reviewing transcripts to connect participant's quotes, stories and expressions with the thematic clusters in order to develop a narrative that reflected the findings (Krueger & Casey, 2009, p. 122). Trustworthiness strategies included 'thick descriptions', peer debriefing, and member-checking to ensure rigor and credibility in the results (Lincoln & Guba, 1985).

KEY FINDINGS

Phase I Findings from Program Assessments, Feedback and Graduate Surveys

Enabling Outcome: *Performance on Program Experiences and Assessments.* Data were compiled from rubric rating scales for each major assignment completed by aspiring principal participants in the program during the 2011/12 school year ($N=18$) and presented by ranked mean in Table 3. Aspiring principals must earn a “3” on each assignment to complete the program. If they earn less, on many assignments they have a limited opportunity to revise and resubmit the work. One notable finding is that the top five experiences and assessments in Table 3 on which participants scored highest were either conducted or turned in toward the end of the year. Though not apparent in the data in Table 3, another interesting result was that the Learning Plan and the Action Research Paper had the most amount of revisions required for participants to earn at least a 3. Both assessments require authentic leadership and ongoing effort to engage in the complicated assignment structure for aspiring principals to demonstrate learning. Due to the low initial scores on these two assignments, major revisions were made to the instruction to increase student success. The intention is to continue to compile and analyze the data each year to look for trends and make improvements.

Table 3
Performance on Program Experiences and Assessments (N=18)

Program Experiences and Assessments	Mean
School visits	4.0
End-of-Year Exhibition	4.0
Narrative Reflections	3.8
Clinical Visit 3	3.7
End-of Year Paper	3.6
Summer Residency	3.5
Fall Shadowing	3.5
Learning Plan	3.5
End-of-year Mentor Assessment	3.5
Readings	3.4
Mid-year assessments	3.4
Action Research Paper	3.3
Networking/Formal Learning	3.2
Portfolio/evidence	3.2
Vision Paper	3.1
Mentor meetings/coaching	3.1

Note. Scale associated with all items was 1=*inadequate*, 2=*approaching*, 3=*adequate*, and 4=*distinguished*.

Enabling Outcome: *Proficiency and Growth in Leadership Standards.* This outcome was measured with two data sources. The first was from the final exhibition scores for aspiring principals completing the program in 2012 ($N=14$). Final exhibitions

are a time for participants to articulate what they have learned and how they learned it around each leadership standard. The exhibitions are scored on a 4-point scale by every PRN staff member, mentor, and aspiring principal present for the exhibitions. The scores are averaged by standard (see Table 4). All six standards are well above the *adequate* level, with Standards 1 and 2 being the highest. Standards 1 and 2 contain practices that are the heart of what is entailed in instructional leadership. Most of the participants in the PRN come with a large degree of instructional leadership experience, as this is a prerequisite looked at closely in the admittance screening process. Standard 6 was the lowest score in Table 4. The Educational Systems Standard includes practices that require leaders to engage in dialogue and advocacy outside of their schools. These practices are more challenging for aspiring principals to engage in during their residency year(s).

Table 4
Final Exhibition Scores by Standard (N=14)

Leadership Standards	Mean
Standard 1: Mission, Vision, Goals	3.7
Standard 2: Learning and Teaching	3.7
Standard 3: Managing Systems	3.6
Standard 4: Collaborating	3.6
Standard 5: Ethics Integrity	3.6
Standard 6: Educational Systems	3.3

Note. Scale associated with all items was 1=*inadequate*, 2=*approaching*, 3=*adequate*, and 4=*distinguished*.

The second piece of data collected to measure the outcome, *Proficiency and Growth in Leadership Standards*, were the pre and final mentor assessments of the aspiring principal participants completing the program in 2012 (N=14) using a 4-point scale on the leadership standards rubric. Each aspiring principal has a mentor principal with whom they work closely. The PRN considers the mentor the primary instructor for the aspiring principals. Therefore, the mentor is in the best position to rate the proficiency of the aspiring principals throughout the year. While there are other data to triangulate aspiring principals' proficiency (e.g., exhibitions, portfolios, papers), the mentor rating provides critical feedback and perspective. Mentors rate aspiring principals on all the sub-sections of the standards at the beginning, middle and end of the year. Each standard's sub-section were averaged and the means for the pre-assessment, the final assessment, and the growth (difference between pre and final) are represented in Table 5.

All standards were rated at or near *approaching* at the pre-assessment and all standards were *adequate* at the final assessment. The mentor's pre-assessments validate the PRN screening process because the highest two standards are 1 and 2, which are the core practices for instructional leaders. The lowest scoring pre-assessments are for Collaborating with Stakeholders (Standard 4) and Educational Systems (Standard 6), though these two standards had some of the highest growth. Both these standards are difficult to enact as a classroom teacher, and the residency as an aspiring school leader gives great opportunity to engage and learn in the broader educational arenas represented by these standards. Interesting, the highest scoring final assessment is for Standard 5

(Ethics and Integrity). As scholars like Sergiovanni (1992) have advocated, the heart of school reform work for a leader has a heavy moral component. In the PRN, a major focus of the preparation is on enabling participants to become equity-oriented leaders (Skrla, McKenzie, & Scheurich, 2009) which requires a great deal of personal growth (articulated further in focus group findings), as well as leadership that models and challenges others to move schools from being agents of social reproduction to forces for social change (Ross & Berger, 2009).

Table 5
Mentor Ratings of Aspiring Principal Participants by Standard (N=14)

Leadership Standards	<i>Pre-Assess Mean</i>	<i>Final Assess Mean</i>	<i>Growth Mean</i>
Standard 1: Mission, Vision, Goals	2.4	3.7	1.3
Standard 2: Learning and Teaching	2.2	3.5	1.3
Standard 3: Managing Systems	2.0	3.5	1.5
Standard 4: Collaborating with Stakeholders	1.9	3.6	1.7
Standard 5: Ethics Integrity	2.1	3.8	1.7
Standard 6: Educational Systems	1.7	3.3	1.5

Note. Scale associated with all items was 1=*inadequate*, 2=*approaching*, 3=*adequate*, and 4=*distinguished*.

Enabling Outcome: *Quality of Program Experiences.* This outcome was measured through two data sources, the first of which was from written feedback solicited from current mentor principals in the program (N=18). The feedback was organized into four categories represented in Table 6. The mentors recognized many of the core practices of the program (see Table 1) as valuable, such as the cohort structure, the authentic residency, the practice of reflection, and the use of standards with individualization which can be seen in the use of a learning plan and coaching from an advisor. The universal concern mentors have is time to give their mentee, as well as the program. The areas of self growth mentors identified show that the nature of the learning relationship between mentors and aspiring principals is reciprocal. As with the rest of the outcomes data presented, the data on the improvements the mentors recommended have already been used to make changes to the program.

Table 6
Feedback from Mentor Principals in 2012

Mentors Identify as Valuable about the Program

- ***Cohort structure and meetings*** and networking with colleagues of diverse perspectives
- ***Residency is authentic*** leadership practice for aspiring principals
- ***Systematic reflection*** throughout the program, including mid-year work
- ***Learning Plan structure*** to guide the learning, and alignment with standards
- ***Mentor Standards*** used as a guide
- ***Resources of PRN Advisors*** as coaches

- ***Bigger impact of PRN*** on school as a resource to build leadership/learning communities

Mentors Identify as Challenges to the Program

- Taking ***time*** to participate while balancing growing priorities

Mentors Identify as Improvements Needed to the Program

- ***More Sharing with Mentors on Aspiring Principals (AP)*** progress and learning
- ***More/continued use of protocols*** to get feedback from their PRN cohort
- Create ***more cohesion within cohort*** since it feels larger, less ‘homey’
- Have ways to ***make up missed network meetings***

Mentors Identify as Areas of Growth for Themselves

- Skills in ***distributing leadership*** and building learning community
 - Prioritizing ***time for reflection***
 - ***Own overall leadership practice*** – Learned alongside AP
 - ***Evaluating*** AP learning
 - ***Scaffolding/coaching and showcasing*** APs learning and work
-

The second data source to measure the *Quality of Program Experiences* was from the graduate perspective and collected through the *PRN Graduate Survey* distributed to participants who had graduated between 2008-2011 ($N=14$). The same survey had been administered to previous graduates of the program in 2005 and 2009. The results displayed in Table 7 are from the items that asked participants to rate on a 5-point scale the degree to which each of the program experiences and assessments gave them the knowledge and skill to be prepared to lead change in schools. Table 6 contains the mean responses for all program experiences for all three administrations of the survey and ranked by the mean of all three surveys for each experience.

The vast majority of the program experiences were rated at a *considerable extent* or *great extent* throughout all three administrations of the survey. Notably, a few of the experiences were rated highest across nearly all three years: *Internship at school*, *Learning relationship with mentor*, and *PRN Advisor visits and feedback*. All three of these speak to the importance of the authentic learning that happens through the residency with supportive mentoring and coaching that happens from the mentor and advisor. The lowest-rated experience in the *2005* and *2009 PRN Graduate Surveys* was the Feedback Circle; however, after improvements were made based on the survey data, this experience was improved. The Feedback Circle was originally a small group of colleagues that the aspiring principal was supposed to convene to ask for feedback on their leadership; however, the structure was unclear. The Feedback Circle experience was modified so that aspiring principals identify the core group of colleagues that they will be working with to implement the initiative in their Action Research. Aspiring principals have to continuously find ways to get buy-in, grow commitment, change practice, and get feedback from this group. This reinforces the practices of shared instructional leadership (Marks and Printy, 2003) and makes the concept of a feedback circle more relevant.

Table 7
Graduate Ratings on Degree Experiences Prepared Them to Lead Change

PRN Experiences/Assessments	2005 Survey <i>M</i> (<i>N</i> =21)	2009 Survey <i>M</i> (<i>N</i> =6)	2012 Survey <i>M</i> (<i>N</i> =14)	All Surveys <i>M</i>
Internship at school	5.0	5.0	4.8	4.9
Learning relationship with mentor	4.4	4.8	4.6	4.6
PRN Advisor visits and feedback	4.7	4.6	4.6	4.6
Required readings	4.5	4.4	4.5	4.5
Final Exhibition and feedback	4.3	4.4	4.5	4.4
Mid-year Exhibition and feedback	4.1	4.4	4.7	4.4
Action Research Project	4.4	4.4	4.4	4.4
Meetings with AP's & Mentors	4.5	4.2	4.5	4.4
Vision Paper	4.5	4.4	4.3	4.4
Portfolio, review, and feedback	4.7	4.4	4.0	4.4
Non-PRN workshops/trainings	4.4	4.6	4.1	4.4
Final Paper/feedback	4.4	4.2	4.4	4.3
Learning Plan	4.6	4.2	4.1	4.3
Reflections	4.3	4.6	3.9	4.3
Meetings with AP's only	4.5	3.6	4.7	4.3
Mid-year Paper/Assessment	4.1	4.2	4.3	4.2
Visits to other schools	4.1	4.2	4.0	4.1
Mid-year Mentor Paper/Assessment	4.0	4.4	3.9	4.1
Final Mentor Ratings	4.0	4.0	3.8	3.9
Feedback Circle	3.5	3.6	4.1	3.7

Note. Scale for all items: 1=*Not at all*, 2=*a little*, 3=*somewhat*, 4=*a considerable extent*, 5=*a great extent*.

Intermediate Outcomes: *Completion of the Program and Obtaining Leadership Positions.* Since inception, the program has monitored completion data and the positions that graduates assume after completing the program. From 2000-2012, the program has had a 99% completion rate. Of the 83 graduates, 90% (*N*=75) have been hired into building, district or non-profit leadership roles. The remaining 10% (*N*=8) have remained in teacher leadership roles. The types of current leadership roles the graduates (*N*=83) have assumed are displayed in Table 8. The majority (77%) of graduates are currently in school or district administration or coaching positions in Rhode Island. Most of the remaining graduates, with the exception of those who have remained teacher leaders or retired, have moved from building leader positions to other leadership roles at the district level or in non-profit organizations and higher education.

Table 8
Current Leadership Roles of Graduates

Leadership Roles	N	%
Principal/Director	31	37%
Assistant Principal	16	19%
District Administration	9	11%
Instructional Coach/Coordinator	8	10%
Teacher Leader	8	10%
Retired/Moved Out-of-State	6	7%
Director/Administrator at Educational Non-Profit Organization	3	4%
Higher Education Administrator/Instructor	2	2%

Long-Term Outcome: *Increased Student Achievement in Schools Lead by Graduates.* State assessment data was used to compare student achievement between PRN graduates' schools and non-PRN graduates' schools. Table 9 and Table 10 represent the student achievement data for PRN graduates' who had been a leader in their school between 2008-2011 ($N=20$) compared to similar demographic schools. Due to the small sample size, the findings for this outcome are descriptive, as no statistical significance tests were appropriate to conduct. In five out of eight areas, program graduate schools evidenced greater growth than comparison schools: Urban Ring Elementary Schools in ELA, Urban Middle Schools in ELA, Suburban Elementary in Math, Suburban Middle in Math, and Urban Middle in Math.

Table 9
Comparison of PRN Graduates to Non-PRN Graduates' School English Language Arts (ELA) Scores on a State Assessment in 2008 and 2011.

School Category	N	ELA 2008 M	ELA 2011 M	ELA Growth between 2008-2011
PRN Suburban Elementary	9	92.16	93.36	1.20
Non PRN Suburban Elementary	62	91.44	93.35	1.90
PRN Urban Ring Elementary	6	89.48	92.55	3.06
Non PRN Urban Ring Elementary	49	89.07	90.96	1.88
PRN Suburban Middle	3	92.55	94.71	2.16
Non PRN Suburban Middle	24	91.45	94.02	2.57
PRN Urban Middle	3	75.65	83.63	7.98
Non PRN Urban Middle	11	77.79	83.72	5.93

Table 10

Comparison of PRN Graduates to Non-PRN Graduates' School Math Scores on a State Assessment in 2008 and 2011.

School Category	<i>N</i>	Math 2008 <i>M</i>	Math 2011 <i>M</i>	Math Growth between 2008-2011
PRN Suburban Elementary	9	90.71	92.99	2.28
Non PRN Suburban Elementary	62	89.31	91.45	2.14
PRN Urban Ring Elementary	6	84.76	86.40	1.64
Non PRN Urban Ring Elementary	49	84.02	85.70	1.68
PRN Suburban Middle	3	88.22	90.93	2.71
Non PRN Suburban Middle	24	87.51	89.44	1.93
PRN Urban Middle	3	63.63	72.97	9.33
Non PRN Urban Middle	11	70.30	72.70	2.40

Phase II Findings from Focus Group

Phase II findings are reported according to the inter-related elements known to affect participants' engagement and satisfaction with the program. Results are presented in the participants' own words, capitalizing on the stories, details, and multiple realities that were expressed in interactive discussions during the focus group session. The five key themes that emerged from the findings are presented.

Theme #1 *Making Hard Decisions and Bringing People Along!:* Residency Experiences, Challenges and Rewards. Participants shared detailed accounts of their residency placements. Most participants described the situations that arose as instances where they could see the direct relationship between what they learned in the program and their ability to navigate difficult situations 'on the job':

- "You start the program with certain knowledge and readings and a certain picture in your head about what you are going to do in your residency, and then things happen that change that picture... and you look back and say, 'Gee! I thought I was going to do one thing and I ended up doing another and its really ok!'"
- "You take what you learn in the program and you try to help people become aware of their biases – how they are not being equitable, and you start pushing those things as a leader ... and you start to see that people were afraid to own those biases... but you eventually see the fruits of your efforts..."

Participants also described the challenges of their residency experiences. Most graduates found that finding the balance between two jobs, plus the program, plus their personal lives, was an enormous obstacle to overcome; as one participant expressed, "I think that one of the things that was just so hard was balancing two jobs... and not letting

either one suffer...”. Equally challenging was ‘finding one’s place’, or trying to envision oneself in a leadership role different from prior positions or experience. One PRN graduate described the duality as “What hat are you wearing? What alliances are you honoring?”, followed by her later conclusion that “...now that I look back at it, it did prepare me for the eventual break from the past into a new leadership role.”

A common sentiment was learning how to make the difficult decisions, especially when one’s role had shifted within a community in which they had long resided:

- “At the end of the day, when hard decisions needed to be made and hard conversations needed to happen, you look towards the goal: you look towards the mission of your school and your vision and that is compelling...”
- “I came into the leadership role from the perspective as a classroom teacher and it wasn’t quite as easy as I thought. You see things from multiple perspectives all of a sudden, and then you realize what leadership is like, what it’s like to be in the classroom, and you marry the two together... to be an effective leader of children, of teachers, and of colleagues.”

Theme #2 Walking a Fine Line – Finding the Balance: Mentor Relationships.

As one participant stated, “The mentor relationship is complicated!”. Communication between and among participants and their mentors played a vital role in the development of each individual as a professional, a leader, and a contributing member of their educational settings. Conversely, participants described the numerous challenges that accompanied the substantial benefits of working with their mentors. As another participant stated, “these mentors are grooming you to be their next assistant, so they have a vested interest in your success... they don’t want you to look foolish, so their investment involves being careful about what you do or don’t do while you are there...”.

While working with mentors created important professional opportunities for each participant, these relationships also generated tensions over power and control, embedded in the experiential learning that occurred. Participants acknowledged the need to learn by doing, and they admitted that the opportunity to assume a leadership role was sometimes difficult, depending on the mentor. As one PRN graduate expressed, “you would start to facilitate a discussion with a parent, and then you would be stepped on, and suddenly you were no longer facilitating the discussion...”. A range of sentiments about these control issues included the following sentiments:

- “I remember one of the questions during our interview, when they were asking us about the partnership... and my mentor was asked, directly, whether they could ‘let go of control?’ and my mentor honestly expressed his concern by saying ‘it’s going to be a challenge!’”
- “We had a lot of difficult conversations about the experiences I needed to have, and there was talk... ‘oh, yes! I will let you have more control’, but it never came to pass...”

- “I saw how my mentor struggled with control and I realized that if I had someone under me, working in this way, I am not sure I would be able to let go and allow someone else to run that conference or talk to that parent...”

This struggle brought with it a greater sense of self-awareness, for both parties:

- “The flip side of this experience is that the mentors have the opportunity to learn just as much as the aspiring principals... if they let themselves learn. If they are willing to open up and let learning take place...a kind of double-edge sword that would be difficult for any of us”

The conversation about mentor relationships, both positive and negative, generated discussion about the options for improving that piece of the PRN experience. Several participants advocated for ‘multiple mentors’ or a different screening process for mentors; as one participant noted, “...there is a lot to be said for having multiple mentors, multiple viewpoints on how to manage situations and assume leadership”:

- “It is complicated and I know this is an intense program but the idea that you are learning from just one person, and that somehow you are locked into one set of ideas... well, that may not be the best option?”
- “Why couldn’t mentorship come from different sources, by having several mentors?”
- “I think having multiple mentors was what ended up happening to me naturally, just because of my situation... and I learned a lot, sometimes different things, from both of them...”

Participants transitioned from this concept of having several mentors to the focus on how to conduct screening of potential mentors, and offered the following recommendations:

- “I would recommend that just as the aspiring principal needs to go through the screening process, so should the mentors... they are principals in schools and are under a lot of pressure... There should be a sense of what the relationship absolutely must involve and what is really needed for true mentorship...”
- “Maybe someone in a different school or a different role can balance what you are already doing with your mentor to add to what you are learning... and the principals, as mentors, have so many demands on their time that to expect them to provide all the knowledge and experience you need may be unrealistic?”

Theme #3 *Focused Hard Work and Reflection!*: PRN Program Components.

The majority of participants indicated that while they spent considerable time either in class or in preparing for class, the value of the total experience could not be over-stated. The intentional program design, which incorporated projects, papers, reflection, and presentations, comprised just a few of the important elements of this experience:

- “One of the special things about the program is that it is individualized, based on who you are and where you are and the needs of the school and district you represent...it is one of the greatest benefits of the program!”
- “The specifics of the program, the papers, the tools, the learning devices, the portfolios... we could extract data from the schools and apply what we had learned... it was immediately transferable!”
- “In a way, it is still an obstacle for me... trying to move something or use what I learned in PRN, to increase equitable outcomes... having people realize their own influence in that perspective and realizing that people are afraid to own ‘equity’ and that their role is to recognize that they can influence and lead that effort...”

These sentiments mirror most of the comments offered during the discussion, to include a significant element focused on personal reflection:

- “One of the biggest pieces of the program that I took away with me was the need for reflection.... Reflection, reflection, reflection! It has taught me to take the time to stop and think, so that when something happens, I need to process and not just default, go to the typical reaction...”
- “Reflection is a huge piece of this program. I think as educators we often go, go, go – and we don’t stop to take the time to think about what was happening. Leadership requires that reflection and the program taught you that...”

Another significant piece of the PRN program was the immersion in the leadership standards, which participants acknowledged as an important element in their learning process:

- “...getting really grounded in the leadership standards and the true meaning behind those standards, impacted everything you did in school...”
- “Focusing on the standards in this program really grounded me, really made me pay attention to what was critical and important in my role as a leader”

Participants discussed the value of the vision paper assignment, which they prepared at the beginning of the PRN process:

- “Early in the program you write down your vision in a paper, and when you look at the guidelines, and you try to outline your vision you say ‘huh?, what?’, but then you get it down on paper and you look at your final product and you say ... Wow!”
- “My vision paper was different, I think I came with a set of assumptions... this is what I felt education was about. But I was looking through the eyes of a parent, and after I had gone through the PRN, had the experience, done the research, had

the discussions, I looked at what I wrote and... oh, my gosh! My vision was so different than what I initially thought and I realized that I had grown up!”

Another important component was the experience of the cohort as a learning community:

- “I remember thinking at the time, when we were going through the exhibitions and getting our portfolios ready, that there was wonderful value in seeing this all together... and I was dying for the opportunity to have time one day when we would all meet and just sit around a table and talk about the material we shared and learned from...”
- “The professional learning communities that formed in our peer group and then going back to school during that year, trying to apply what we learned... it was significant”

The overarching sentiments, however, were expressed in how hard the work was and how gratifying the program experience was for each individual:

- “I came into this program saying to myself..’how hard can it be?’, but ...its complete immersion! Focused hard work!”
- “For me, it was the structure of the program, the projects, the way we would read something and reflect on it, and have a concentrated amount of time to apply those concepts... and it was through the application that you could see the big picture. The learning-by-doing had the biggest impact on me and that came from the structure of the program.”
- “What happens to you during the process is that you look back and think about the various barriers and you realize that the program helped you get through it...”

Participants indicated a high level of satisfaction with the design of the program, directed towards building capacity for ‘leading for equity’; their perceptions of the value of this program was viewed as integral to their satisfaction with their experience, overall. As one participant summed it up, “I did not know what to expect, and I was so quickly moved into the program... but once I got over the ‘shock’, I felt so empowered when I came back out!”

Theme #4 *A Special Kinship and Built-in Empathy: Cohort Interactions and Experiences.* Participants were not haphazard in their allotment of time; they quickly learned that time management was an essential ingredient to their success, both academically and professionally. Part of that management was linked with their cohort relationships, the ways in which they shared the experience and worked together. Many found that their peer-to-peer interactions formed the basis for their satisfaction with the experience, finding empathy and camaraderie in each other; the findings here suggest that these individuals intuitively set aside time for interactions with each other. As mentioned

earlier, participants identified the cohort experience as connected to the development of a professional learning community, a special network of colleagues:

- “We had a very close cohort, you gain such a kinship ... it’s like going through the birth of your children and its intensive... you laugh, you cry, together you support one another and it is all encompassing.... And then it is done! You intend to stay connected, but it is so hard... I miss them all!”
- “We all came from such different places, and I crave that comradeship and I went to the Equity Institute last year just to connect with people again and feel that same feeling...”
- “Having the close cohort connection was like built-in empathy...”

As one participant indicated, while others agreed, the transition of classmates to colleagues to friends during the program was a meaningful benefit. As she noted, “...I might want somebody to talk to as I move ahead, and we all had each other to share things with... I remember [the program director] coaching us to do that, once you leave here, seek each other or a group that is going to help you down the road, problem solving and seeking advice...”

Theme #5 *Strengthening a Strong Program: Recommendations for Program Modifications and Improvements.* Participants were quick to praise the program and their experiences; suggestions and recommendations were provided in the context of how to strengthen an already strong and vibrant program. As one participant stated, “...there are so many PRN graduates, there’s a voice, a strong voice, and collectively we should be able to support the program going forward and provide a network for [the program director] and the program development...”.

Specific program recommendations included the following ideas:

- Screening process for mentors
- Multiple mentors to broaden participants’ experience
- PRN grads as mentors for PRN students
- Support group after graduation
- Alumni network expanded
- Ongoing professional development
- Networking opportunities for graduates

Finally, there was consensus around the sentiment that the PRN had been more than an educational experience for participants; it had been transformational. Participants expressed a range of emotions regarding their overall PRN experience:

- “When you are immersed in the program we would cry together or complain and ask why we had to do something, and then... you look back and you make those benchmarks and achieve those accomplishments and you say Oh!! Now I get it,

now I know why we did that ... Trust the program! It's rigorous but so valuable..."

- "The process, for me, was truly transformational. I think it is just so moving when you are going through something where you have to stand up in front of your colleagues and state what you believe... and I started to cry and could not stop crying... actually, it was part of the transformation, the growing, being really honest about what you believe. It brought it all together for me!"
- "It was a wonderful experience, really life transforming! I think even career transforming, for me, and yeah... the integrity of the program is solid but there are always things that can be improved. But I am very, very proud to be a graduate of the PRN and I look to [the program director] and the way she structured it and the way she ran it, with all her pressures, and she did an exceptional job!"

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

A Strong Program

The results from Phase I of the study demonstrate that the program is achieving strong results in regards to participant performance, growth, completion, and attainment of post-graduate leadership roles. Further, the survey results indicate that participants feel that nearly all program experiences had a considerable or great impact on their ability to lead change, and this has been relatively consistent over the 12 years of implementation. Phase II results from the focus group concur with the Phase I results that suggest the program is high quality. While focus group participants offered suggestions for improvement of the program, many of the comments and themes reflect that the overall perception was that the program was highly effective in preparing them for their leadership roles.

Interconnected and Coherent Equity-Focused Program

The focus group findings revealed that the structure of the program, combined with the residency experience, provide a comprehensive and transformational experience for participants. As one participant said, "It was a wonderful experience, really life transforming...even career transforming." The degree to which graduates rated the PRN experiences all fairly high on the *PRN Graduate Survey* also indicates that they feel the structure, curriculum, and pedagogy of the program are interconnected and provide a coherent learning process. Results suggest that participants recognized that a major focus of the program is on preparing equity-oriented leaders. Further, focus group participants did not see this focus as isolated or discrete, rather it was deeply integrated into all their learning experiences.

Mentoring

A cornerstone of the program is the intensive residency experience with a mentor. This can be seen in how high both of these experiences are rated in the *PRN Graduate Survey* results. The intensity of the experience and the relationship lead to powerful learning, and can lead to challenges. The written mentor feedback identified enriching experiences, like the professional development with the cohort and the learning plan, and the challenges they faced, mostly around time and a sense of community with the group. Focus group participants offered specific and practical suggestions for program modifications to improve the mentoring component. Additional study by the PRN in these areas is strongly suggested, particularly regarding the idea of using multiple mentors and using PRN graduates as possible mentors.

Cycle of Inquiry and Modeling

The Theory of Action/Evaluation Framework designed at the onset of the study was used to develop an ongoing cycle of inquiry to improve the PRN program. PRN staff used the data collected to measure the Enabling Outcomes at the mid-point of the year to make mid-course corrections and at the end of the year to make improvements for the 2012/13 school year. The PRN staff also compiled the data from this evaluation into a data dashboard that was presented to the Center for Leadership and Educational Equity (CLEE) Board of Directors as a tool to track progress of the PRN toward achieving the outcomes described in the TOA/Evaluation Framework. This process will happen each year as new data is available so that trends can be analyzed and so that the CLEE Board can use the data to inform decisions around providing resources and seeking funding. Continuing the cycle of inquiry using the TOA/Evaluation Framework developed in this study will be essential in order to monitor important outcomes and to improve the PRN.

There is evidence from the mentors' written feedback and the graduates' focus group results that participants have found multiple ways to use learning experiences modeled by PRN staff back in their school communities. The use of an ongoing cycle of inquiry designed through this study can be shared with participants as a way to model this important leadership practice to move an organization further toward a compelling vision of success and achievement.

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