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Reforming Preparation Programs for Leadership Improvement: The Case of Texas

ABSTRACT: This article provides a case of how changes in standards for principal certification—as required by the State Board of Educator Certification since its establishment in 1995—were meant to promote changes in principal preparation programs in the state of Texas. The examination considers whether the changes were significant in terms of intended impact to improve the preparation programs for principals entering the workforce, including the admission of candidates, the accommodations of the programs, and the assessment of candidates toward the principalship.

With the purpose of contributing to the knowledge and improvement of the preparation of educational leaders, this article presents a case of state-mandated principal preparation standards and subsequent adaptation of delivery programs. The case focuses on the Texas State Board for Educator Certification (SBEC) since its establishment in 1995 and the changes promoted in principal preparation programs. Our investigation takes place 10 years following the implementation of the SBEC standards, established in 1999. Our findings reveal the SBEC's intended impact to improve the preparation of principals, including rigor in the quality of candidates upon entry, the preparation of professionals through higher-level standards of conduct, and the improvement of strategies for the recruitment and retention of principals within the state. We begin this study by examining historical events that motivated the state of Texas to establish the governing

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board entity. The case study presents the rationale behind the adoption of standards and the subsequent principal preparation program changes as a result of the standards set by the board.

SIGNIFICANCE AND RATIONALE FOR THE EXAMINATION OF PREPARATION PROGRAMS

From 1983—when *Nation at Risk* (National Commission on Excellence in Education, 1983) was published—until 2001 there were many debates and initiatives that attempted to refine components of administrative preparation programs. However, by the 1990s, no significant changes were forthcoming in improving educational leadership programs (Griffiths, Stout, & Forsyth, 1988; Thurston, Clift, & Schacht, 1993). In addition, these discussions led to a later debate, from 1994 to 2001, about an important paradox between leadership versus management (Hallinger & Heck, 1998; Murphy & Louis, 1994; Rost, 1991), suggesting that school administrators should be instructional leaders as well as managers. These discussions were significant in pressing for different expectations in the preparation of school administrators.

When practitioners were approached about the effectiveness of current preparation programs in the state of Texas in the late 1980s, they reported a disconnect between preparation and practice. The National Association of Secondary School Principals' University Consortium for Performance-Based Preparation of Principals (Witters-Churchill, 1988) conducted a study of 5,500 principals and assistant principals in Texas (elementary, middle, and high school), and it concluded that even though their principal preparation courses discussed skills such as problem analysis, written communication, sensitivity, judgment, oral communication, stress tolerance, decisiveness, organizational ability, and leadership, they did little to prepare principals to implement these skills in field-based experiences. Although lecture and discussion were the methods of instructional delivery most often utilized, the program offerings did not often include field-based internship. Witters-Churchill (1988) added,

By far, the dominant theme that prevailed throughout these interviews was the suggestion that all prospective school administrators should receive numerous, varied, intensive, and full-time field-based experiences prior to becoming certified or employed as a principal: all of the respondents voiced that the degree of field-based, practical experiences in preparation programs was largely inadequate. (p. 201)

Additionally, these courses were rarely taught by professors who were active administrators or those with current field experiences.

Later, findings from research conducted by Mercado (2002) supported those of Witters-Churchill (1988) about the value of internship experiences above all other aspects of the program. Mercado studied a nontraditional school administrator preparation program initiated through a collaborative effort between the Houston Independent School District and the University of Houston. Mercado's study reminded districts that for the program to remain effective, district superintendents and principals must not only endorse the program but employ the leaders whom these programs are preparing.

Other studies in Texas equally contributed to the improvement of school administrators' standards and practical expectations. For example, Bravenec's (1998) study of 100 elementary and 100 secondary school principals from 10 districts within the 20 education service center regions of Texas revealed that administrator preparation programs were not fully preparing principals to include the delivery of specific programs, such as special education. More recently, Jackson and Kelley (2002) described six innovative programs and included a Texas alternative (nonuniversity) program that was preparing candidates for the principalship. Jackson and Kelley suggested that a balance of structure, process, and strategy is paramount in the delivery of programs that will help candidates to develop their knowledge base. Their consideration of appropriate structures and pedagogical approaches included problem-based learning, students organized into cohorts, the need to create collaborative partnerships, the inclusion of field experiences, and technology.

Nationwide discussions and efforts to improve the quality of preparation programs were certainly an influential factor in the discussions occurring within the state. Scholars across the nation examined the sequence and coherence of programs, highlighting learning modes, curricula, and forms of delivery (Barnett, Basom, Yerkes, & Norris, 2000; Hart & Pounder, 1999; Kelley & Peterson, 2000; McCarthy, 1999; Scribner & Donaldson, 2001). One of the paramount efforts in the examination and recommendations originated from the National Commission on Excellence in Educational Administration, which was sponsored by the University Council of Educational Administration and which led to the establishment of the Interstate School Leaders Licensure Consortium and standards.

With the 2001 accountability demands of No Child Left Behind, administrator preparation programs had to focus not only on school administrators as instructional leaders and managers but also on school improvement through a strong support for teacher and student outcomes (Papa & Baxter, 2008; Young, Fuller, Brewer, Carpenter, & Mansfield, 2007; Young, Petersen, & Short, 2002). In addition, Orr (2006), and Orr and Orphanos

(2007) emphasized the important connections within a preparation program design to the development of leadership in the program candidates and the desired impact in school improvement and performance outcomes. These authors' studies are but a few examples of those that unveiled the pressing need for a review of the preparation and standards expected of school administrators in the state of Texas and around the nation. These studies revealed the complex role of school administrators and the less-than-ideal delivery of programs designed to prepare them.

This research continues to build on the perceived needs of school administrator preparation programs. This examination is an important contribution that can equip preparation program leaders to better prepare practitioners, as well as school administrators to obtain the knowledge and skills necessary to meet the increased expectations to serve as competent educational leaders. The preparation of excellent school administrators who are cognizant of the recent instructional and procedural changes in schools and districts is clearly a significant element in school improvement efforts.

METHOD

Using a case study design, we explored the formation of the Texas SBEC and the intended changes in standards for principal certification. This research was part of a larger study from the University of Texas Center for Collaborative Educational Research and Policy, which asked, what do leadership preparation programs look like in the state of Texas based on the SBEC standards and expectations of high-quality educational leadership program delivery? The exploratory case study reflects the period from 1995 to the present, with two significant dates of inception: the establishment of the SBEC by the Texas Legislature in 1995 and the SBEC's adoption of new principal preparation standards in 1999. The case was developed on the basis of a variety of evidence (Yin, 2008), including public records, program standards, organizational reports, direct observations, and narratives constructed from in-depth and focus group interviews. Questions to the participants included the following: "What substantive changes have you made in your program content?" "What changes have been made related to learning experiences and expectations?" "What changes have been made to better integrate field internships?" and "What changes have been made related to program delivery?"

Data collected for this study include the standards for principal certification adopted by the SBEC in 1999, as well as interviews with an early SBEC official, principal preparation program directors, and chairs from different

preparation programs ($n = 6$). Identification of professional positions were used but masked to protect participants and their affiliations. The program directors were selected on the basis of these myriad program deliveries, including those based on districts, regional education service centers, and universities, as well as online/hybrid programs. For the observation of publicly accessible admissions and program content, we cross-examined principal preparation programs endorsed by the SBEC ($n = 71$). The SBEC approved these programs to prepare individuals for principal certification in the state of Texas.

The analysis followed an interactive and cyclical (Miles & Huberman, 1994) nature of triangulating the SBEC standards, program documents, and interviews. Themes emerged from the data analysis (Merriam, 1998; Yin, 2008), yielding significant information and thereby contributing to knowledge and practice. The present case reports on the participants' perceptions as coupled with historical and documented evidence. The findings are woven into the description with a combination of emerging themes and sequence of events. Study limitations relate to the examination of publicly accessible data, even though it was paramount to consider the accessibility of information from the perspective of the interested aspiring principal in pursuing the degree or certification. Also limiting this study is the sample—namely, aspiring principals and other practitioners—and its perceptions of the changes after the establishment of the SBEC standards; an evaluation of principals currently prepared under the new standards is much needed and thus strongly suggested for further studies.

THE CASE OF THE SBEC AND THE PRINCIPAL PREPARATION PROGRAMS IN TEXAS

In 1995, the Texas Legislature established the SBEC and charged the board with rewriting the rules for educator preparation in Texas, which included the preparation of principals and superintendents. This comprehensive modification of Texas public and higher education laws was the impetus for significant impact on educational institutions in the state. The legislature aimed to afford Texas educators the same control available to other accomplished, skilled, proficient professionals who were able to preside over the standards of their vocation. Responsible for regulating and overseeing all aspects of the preparation, certification, continuing education, and standards of conduct of public school educators, the current mission of the SBEC (2008a) is “to ensure the highest level of educator preparation and practice to achieve student excellence” (“Agency Mission” section).

There was a political context and impetus for the Texas legislature to create the SBEC in 1995. One former high-ranking SBEC official explained that despite the different perspectives on the rationale for the creation of the board, the primary motivation was to “bring awareness and attention to the preparation of educators.” Traditionally, this task was a responsibility of the Teacher Education Agency. Support from the legislature was influential on the impact to improve the quality of educators—primarily, the teachers. At the time of the creation of the SBEC, the Democratic Party controlled the Texas legislature under a Republican governor. This political combination resulted in a tremendous amount of collaboration between the two groups. The official recalled that “it was a cooptive venture”; as a result, the SBEC received support from both the Republicans and the Democrats, and both sides took credit for the successes.

During the time that legislation was being passed to enable the SBEC, those responsible for educator preparation programs feared that the reasoning behind the SBEC was to infuse greater state control into the affairs of public and private higher education institutions or perhaps even reduce the role of universities in the preparation of educators. Before the rewrite of the administrator preparation rules, the state strictly prescribed the required number of semester credit hours required for principal and superintendent certification as well as the courses that were needed to fulfill these requirements. As such, administrator preparation was substantially, if not entirely, university based, with little variation in curricular content. As a result of the rewrites, semester credit hours and courses are no longer required, but a standards-based curriculum now governs the preparation of administrators, giving other entities (e.g., alternative certification providers, school districts, and regional education service centers) the option of preparing and certifying administrators. After the standards were in place, the major question became, how are entities doing in relation to the standards? University leaders echoed this concern and emphasized the need to have an executive director at the SBEC who was familiar with the teacher certification process and the problems that needed address.

With officials from the Texas Higher Education Coordinating Board, SBEC officials spent the next 2 years crafting out this new position. The certification board initially comprised 15 members, including 12 voting members. Appointed by the governor with the advice and consent of the senate, each member was to serve for 6 years. All together, voting members included 4 public school teachers, 2 public school administrators, 1 public school counselor, and 5 citizen members (3 of whom had been out of the education field for the previous 5 years whereas the other 2 had no experience in education). The 3 members who did not have a vote

included 1 employee of the Texas Education Agency, 1 employee of the Texas Higher Education Coordinating Board, and a dean of a Texas college of education. In 2003, as a result of minor legislative changes, the membership of the SBEC was reduced to 14 members, with 11 having a vote; as well, the number of citizen members was reduced from 5 to 4.

The vision and goal of the SBEC after its establishment were to establish rules and regulations, develop strategies to maximize the potential for every educator, and ensure that every preparation program produce high-quality educators. Many of the tasks being assigned to the SBEC were under the authority of the Texas Education Agency. The principal and superintendent certificates were among the first revised, with the revisions designed to integrate the Texas Essential Knowledge and Skills and educator preparation standards, “ensuring that each candidate . . . is of the highest caliber and possesses knowledge and skills necessary for success” (19 T.A.C. § 241.1). In addition, administrator preparation rules were revised to become standards based and not coursework based; specifically, they required “structured, field-based practicum with experiences at diverse types of campuses must be focused on actual experiences with each of the standards identified” (19 T.A.C. § 241.10).

STANDARDS-BASED ADOPTIONS IMPLEMENTED IN 1999

Several of the concerns related to the disconnect between the practitioners and their preparation programs were addressed with the new requirements for the principal certificate. The Texas Administrative Code (Title 19; SBEC, 2008b) provides a chapter for the principal certificate requirements (Chapter 241). The chapter includes the following sections:

§ 241.1: General Provisions

§ 241.5: Minimum Requirements for Admission to a Principal Preparation Program

§ 241.10: Preparation Requirements

§ 241.15: Standards for the Principal Certificate

§ 241.20: Requirements for the First-Time Principal in Texas

§ 241.25: Requirements for the Issuance of the Standard Principal Certificate

§ 241.30: Requirements to Renew the Standard Principal Certificate

§ 241.35: Assessment Process Definition and Approval of Individual Assessments

§ 241.40: Implementation Dates

The chapter addresses numerous important issues, including a comprehensive set of standards that established benchmarks and required in-

stitutions to structure the assessment of candidates to the principalship certification. The minimal requirements for admission into a principal preparation program include the following: (1) a baccalaureate degree from an accredited institution of higher education, (2) a rigorous screening process to determine the candidate's suitability for the program, and (3) that once admitted students be permitted to substitute experience and professional training for the standards listed in the criteria and procedures stipulated by the Texas Administrative Code.

The standards for the principal certificate provide a comprehensive guideline of the knowledge and skills expected of principal candidates. The standards also provide guidelines for educator preparation programs when developing curricula, coursework, and assessments. The standards are divided into seven learner-centered areas:

- Values and ethics of leadership
- Leadership and campus culture
- Human resources leadership and management
- Communications and community relations
- Organizational leadership and management
- Curriculum planning and development
- Instructional leadership and management

These standards were carefully crafted to enhance principal candidates' preparation by defining the areas in which the candidates are to develop applicable knowledge and skills. In the administrative regulations, each area is accompanied by a clear and detailed description of itemized expectations in the preparation of candidates, with a learner-centered emphasis in the development of these knowledge and skills.

The original preparation rules provided for two levels of principal certification: the provisional or conditional certificate and the standard certificate. Furthermore, the certificates were no longer issued for life. For a provisionally certified candidate to achieve standard certification, he or she was required to complete an induction period of at least 1 year. In 2001, however, the requirement that a candidate complete an induction period was dropped from the requirements for standard certification; today, although the induction period is still required, it is not required for the standard principal certificate. In addition, there is no longer a two-tiered system of principal certificates. Still remaining in effect is the requirement that all principals certified on or after September 1, 1999, complete at least 200 hours of continuing professional education related to the learner-centered standards, every 5 years, to be eligible to renew their certificates.

REWRITING PRINCIPAL CERTIFICATION REQUIREMENTS

Several principal organizations strongly supported the development of high standards for principal certification standards, given that their main focus was recruiting, training, and retaining quality principals. These administrator groups advocated for passing rates on the state certification tests that were somewhat higher than what the board was initially willing to permit. Debates during this time revolved around the various certificates, including those for superintendents, principals, and classroom teachers. One heated debate involved the establishment of renewable educator certificates and whether those who were licensed on lifetime certificates before September 1, 1999, would have to convert to renewable certificates. In the end, those with lifetime educator certificates were allowed to remain in that status, and all those certified on or after September 1, 1999, were issued 5-year renewable certificates.

As the rewrites of the principal certification requirements shifted from a course-based system to a standards-based system, performance metrics were developed to assess the candidates' readiness. Principal preparation programs were expected to be aligned with nine principal competencies of the TExES (the state certification examination, including a specific principal certification exam) in the areas of school community leadership, instructional leadership, and administrative leadership (Texas Education Agency, 2006). The modifications occurred when the popular belief was that individuals with management business backgrounds were better suited to occupy principalship positions than were those who rose through the ranks of education. That principals have at least 2 years of creditable teaching experience as a requirement for certification was the SBEC's unequivocal statement that experience in education is an important qualification for the principalship. As such, the tide turned and emphasis ebbed on bringing in persons from outside of education to serve as principals.

THE IMPACT OF THE SBEC IN PREPARATION PROGRAMS IN TEXAS

All program chairs and directors agreed that preparation programs today are producing higher-quality leaders than they did 10 years ago, especially because of the benchmarks defined by the SBEC standards. The SBEC

Table 1. Principal Preparation Programs Endorsed by the State Board of Educator Certification

<i>Program</i>	<i>n</i>
District based	2
Alternative certification	
Region service centers	12
Other	3
University based	54
Total	71

currently endorses 71 programs, divided into district-based programs, alternative certification programs, and university-based programs. Alternative centers are subdivided into two categories: region service centers and other (Table 1).

Even though delivery programs originate from different types of institutions and centers, cross-collaborations between institutions are common. For example, district-based programs oftentimes partner with universities to complete program requirements. Furthermore, regional education service center–based alternative certification programs may require students to obtain a limited number of university credits to complete their requirements. Similarly, university-based programs have developed partnerships with districts and regional education service centers, with some programs funded by grants that emphasize collaborative partnerships.

ADMISSIONS

In the original rules, the SBEC clearly defined the minimum requirements for admission to a principal preparation program, which remain today even though they have changed. Chief among the changes was the 2001 removal of the requirement that a program applicant, in addition to holding a baccalaureate degree from an accredited institution, demonstrate “an acceptable combination of a score on a nationally normed assessment and grade point average, as determined by the preparation program” (§ 241.5). Using arbitrary distinctions among admissions requirements on a range from *high* to *moderate* to *low*, one can see (through publicly accessible websites) how some programs minimally follow the eligibility requirements, whereas others are more rigorous in their admissions. The majority of programs are moderate in their prerequisites for admissions (Table 2).

Table 2. Admissions and Internship Requirements in Principal Preparation Programs Sponsored by the State Board of Educator Certification

	<i>Requirements</i>		
	<i>High</i>	<i>Moderate</i>	<i>Low</i>
Admissions			
Prior classroom teaching experience	Three or more years of classroom teaching experience before entrance into the program	At least 2 years of classroom teaching experience before entrance into the program	< 2 years of classroom teaching experience before entrance into the program
Prior school leadership experience	Two or more years of school leadership experience (e.g., assistant principal, vice principal, academic dean)	At least 1 year of school leadership experience	< 1 year or no demonstrated leadership experience
Degree/certification prerequisite	Teacher certificate plus master's degree or working on master's degree (at least 18 hours) from accredited institution	Teacher certificate plus bachelor's degree from accredited institution	Bachelor's degree only
Internship experience	200–300 hours or yearlong residency	100–199 hours or two or more semesters	< 100 hours or last semester only
Credit/contact hours ^a			
University based	54 credit hours	36 credit hours	44 credit hours
Alternative certification	500 or more contact hours	400–499 contact hours	< 400 contact hours
District based	36 semester hours or at least 2 years of training and preparation	30–35 semester hours or at least 1 year of training and preparation	< 30 semester hours or < 1 year of training and preparation

^aCredit/contact hours listed according to each program's way of determining contact intensity.

CURRICULUM

According to program directors and chairs, the majority of program curricula was redesigned around the core competencies: “Since 1999 we have changed the names of almost all of our courses within our program and we have actually reduced a number of courses for the principal preparation program,” attested a program chair. “We just wanted to make sure we were covering the standards. Not that the standards were necessarily the focus of the program, but we wanted to make sure that they were incorporated into the program,” stated another program director. An SBEC official believed that the discontinued delivery of “a willy-nilly set of courses” was perhaps the most significant change in administrator preparation since the rules were enacted: “The days in which principal candidates studied leadership based on examples such as Churchill, or Eisenhower, or Patton as good leaders, were not sufficient to provide school leaders what they needed to know to administer a school.”

Thus, preparation programs accordingly revised and renamed courses and, according to university-based program directors, changed their focus to the field and professional learning communities. “Courses such as total quality management were replaced by value-driven leadership courses such as emotionally intelligent leadership,” affirmed another coordinator. “There has now been a greater emphasis on concepts such as instructional leadership, data management, and social justice,” noted a program chair, who continued:

Learning experiences continue to be delivered through a combination of a field-based practicum and on-site workshops, but if I had to define by percentages, I believe that before it was 40% hands-on and 60% theory, and now those figures have totally changed. It became 60/40. There was a deliberate attempt to make university learning experiences more genuine and authentic to what the students were going to experience as administrators.

Notable variability in course delivery involved off-campus classes, satellite campuses, cohort models, weekend delivery programs, variability in credit/contact hours requirements, and field-based practicum opportunities (e.g., mentoring, on-site coursework delivery and experiences, on-the-job opportunities). Institutions listed their intensity of contact opportunities differently. For example, university-based programs used credit hours, whereas alternative certification programs used contact hours. Districts may be using semesters (as they do in K–12 calendars) as well as years of training and preparation according to school years (instead of calendar years).

MASTER'S DEGREE OR CERTIFICATION?

University program chairs articulated a continuous dilemma between granting a degree and a certification. One of the chairs explained,

If you're only dealing with certification then there is that clear expectation. But in a master's degree, we don't necessarily perceive our degree as just based on preparing principals for the SBEC standards. We see the degree as more than that, and that's where there's some tension among candidates in terms of content rigor. We're trying to deliver a quality master's degree but at the same time we're trying to prepare people for credentialing, and that's a constant struggle in terms of content delivery.

Program chairs that offer both master's degrees and principal certification perceive that there must be a balance with context-based fieldwork: "I am not sure that all of the changes in moving toward more of a field-based experience are necessarily good," affirmed a program chair. He affirmed that districts and emerging administrators were more focused on their own campus problems instead of "good leadership in any campus." He continued,

I'm afraid that some of the changes that we went to with some of our field-based experiences may have narrowed our delivery as opposed to broaden it. So, I'm not saying it's all good, but I'm not saying it's all bad either.

In addition, the emphasis on field experiences for school administrators generated a dilemma for those granting master's degrees to candidates seeking the degree and principal certification. A program director of a regional education service center for alternative certification stated,

The standards articulate the necessary skills—they've been developed; they already articulate what the core beliefs should be in the State of Texas. Now for programs that haven't got that figured out yet, they provide a good base. But that's what it should be—the base and not an end. So, those are lessons that come from learning how to maintain equity and excellence for professional practitioners—which the standards don't do anything about.

FIELD-BASED EXPERIENCES

The requirement that preparation programs employ field-based experiences is evidenced by programs that require these experiences over the length of 1 full school year, 2 semesters, or 9 months. Most programs require fewer than 100 hours of internship or field-based experiences during the last semester of the program, whereas others require but one internship course. These internship hours—in some cases, practicum hours—

are spread out over several months. Credit/contact hours vary among the programs, with university-based programs requiring on average of 36 to 44 semester credit hours; alternative certification programs, 500 or more contact hours; and district-based programs, up to 2 years of training and preparation. According to the coordinator at one of the region centers, candidates are required to be employed in a leadership position before being accepted into a program. In terms of quality internship experiences, the directors talked about “getting more prescriptive, more definitive, and more precise in what people do during their internship.”

The review of each preparation program, along with the information provided by the participants, was not sufficient to reveal any criteria by which preparation programs accepted experience in exchange for program credit as related to the requirements for a principal preparation program (§ 241.5.d), since modified to permit (but not require) educator preparation programs to develop and implement criteria for the substitution of credit for experience. Opportunities to substitute experience for professional training seemed to be granted within the parameters of expediting certification instead of evaluating for knowledge and skills. Certification-only programs (for those individuals who already have master’s degrees; e.g., teachers) include an average of 27 university credits, in some cases delivered in as short as 6 months. One university reduced the number of credit hours from 45 to 39.

“To be competitive, we’ve also reduced the number of hours required for both degree and certificate. Well, the degree stayed at 36 but the certification dropped from 47 to 39 credit hours.” “We’re actually expected to do more with those candidates with fewer hours,” recognized the coordinator. A leadership center director added, “The question is to better integrate the field experiences into the certification program.”

Some university chairs suggested that even with district support, the internship benefits the candidate only when the district can provide an organizationally healthy environment for emerging principals.

ASSESSMENT OF CANDIDATES

There was no real controversy surrounding the original principal preparation standards because the SBEC wanted them to be global. There was one area of disagreement, however. Some of the early committee members advocated for a list of items encompassing what they believed administrators ought to know and be able to do, whereas others were concerned about creating an assessment for applicability of knowledge and skills. This “was probably the most difficult part of it all,” one official noted, indi-

cating that in the final analysis, “the standards were fairly well accepted, as long as there was an understanding regarding the difference between ‘the standards’ and ‘the test.’” Testing, he recalled, was a crucial issue.

As a result, one of fundamental issues that the SBEC and the Texas State legislature addressed in depth was the accountability system of testing, which came to be known as Accountability System for Educator Preparation, and the impact on principals, superintendents, and educator preparation programs. The board was aware from the onset that some sort of accountability system would have to be established. Decision makers were also cognizant of the dire consequences of such a system and thus struggled to answer several key questions: Would the test be formative or summative? What should be included in an accountability system? What can the state do to support (or remove) teachers or principals who were underperforming? An early SBEC official noted that many people were under the false impression that there is a concrete method by which to establish the cutoff score. If the cutoff score is too high, there will be a shortage of principals and superintendents; if the bar is set too low, it will defeat the purpose of preparing high-quality educators.

The first educator preparation assessment, which included the assessment for principal certification, was called the Examination for the Certification of Educators in Texas, and it was incorporated almost immediately after the principal preparation rules were implemented. The collection of exams across all certification areas was used to publicly rate educator preparation programs in Texas. Even before the turn of the century, educator preparation programs were placed on warning on the basis of their preparation exam scores, as reported in aggregate, for each examination area, and for gender and ethnic subgroups.

In the fall of 2002, the TExES was launched. The instrument tested the content and professional knowledge required of an entry-level principal or assistant principal. After its launch, many programs used results of the TExES to further modify principal preparation programs. Concerned with passing rates, master’s degree-granting institutions and certification preparation programs enhanced candidates’ preparation for the exam. One of the coordinators affirmed,

Preparation for this exam was once delivered in the courses and practicum over the 2-year program, but specific test preparation was also provided. In the past, this was limited to one review session. Currently, this system has been modified such that participants receive a review session, followed by a practice examination. Those participants who score 85% or better are cleared to take the exam. Those scoring below 85% attend another review session (with a different instructor) before being cleared for the exam. Finally,

participants are given a set of review materials. Should a participant fail the TExES exam, they then receive one-on-one tutorials and are given additional review materials before taking the test a second time.

The importance of passing rates in attracting more candidates to their programs enticed more competition among program delivery institutions. “Some institutions wouldn’t even let candidates be admitted unless they had a good Graduate Record Examination to guarantee passing rates in the TExES exam,” reflected a university chair.

ACCESSIBILITY OF PROGRAMS

Access is a key component in principal preparation programs. Although the SBEC standards initially caused the changes in the delivery, content, and internships of principal preparation programs, competition was the stronger motivator for change. Unfortunately, competition also caused the reduced number of coursework and field internship hours required by most programs. Variables that encouraged or curtailed the application of candidates into these preparation programs included mode of delivery (classroom, online, or both), length of program, and cost. Owing to educators’ time limitations, many candidates have opted for hybrid or online programs. Traditional program coordinators still question online programs, highlighting that principals must “deal with people, and interactions are important skills to be developed.” Because of the enhanced competition, face-to-face interactions are now combined with simulcast, online, and wiki communities in a number of principal preparation programs.

Cost is another important determinant in the candidates’ selection of programs, ranging from \$119.00 to \$1,191.00 per credit hour. For example, one university-based program cost \$1,191 per credit hour and required 2 years of teaching experience, including a master’s degree, 12 internship hours, and 45 credit hours, whereas another cost \$551 per credit hour and required 2 years of teaching experience, 30 internship hours, and 39 credit hours. One alternative certification program cost \$4,400, lasted 54 weeks, and required 3 years of classroom teaching experience along with a master’s degree, a minimum of 5 years of campus- or district-level experience, and 11 on-site sessions; another cost \$7,850 (with probable additional costs of \$836) and required 3 years of teaching experience and 500 hours of principal program training, including coursework, seminars, and administrative internship. Endorsement by districts or region centers may also affect the way that educators are being prepared to obtain certification. Program costs seem to broaden or restrict the ways in which emerging

principals are applying to different programs. Most important, cost variability cannot be connected with the quality of delivery.

Nonetheless, without financial support from their employers, aspiring principals are bound to choose programs that offer an attractive combination of less time and financial commitment, even before considering program quality. "I think we ought to spend more time in the state investigating some of the models like what North Carolina has done, where the state is providing paid internships and the candidates apply with the state," reflected a program coordinator. Especially for first-time principals,

we don't even know sometimes when students are going to have that first job. . . . They come through the program, they finish the program, then they pass the TExES exam, but they may take 3 or 4 years before actually becoming an assistant principal, or a principal.

DISCUSSION

This case study provided information regarding the expectations and application of standards for leadership preparation programs in Texas over the last decade. This foundational piece intended to highlight the landscape of principal preparation programs and generate important conversations related to the support and improvement of school administrators. The case study included the changes generated by the SBEC over the past 14 years and considered whether the changes were significant in terms of intended impact to improve the preparation of principals for the workforce.

We recognize that the standards for principal certification required by the SBEC are paramount in defining next steps in the development of qualified professionals in educational leadership. Some notable changes that resulted from the national and state trends included and focused on enhanced field experiences, inclusion of courses focusing on instructional leadership, data management, and social justice. In an investigation of preparation of programs around the nation, Hess and Kelly (2007) recognized that few programs and course syllabi addressed accountability (2% of 2,424 course weeks). In Texas, program coordinators and program course plans similarly reflect limited focus on data management and accountability, especially as a result of increased pressure generated by No Child Left Behind (Peterson & Young, 2004). Equally important is the focus on social justice and the analysis of student achievement based on the effects of race/ethnicity, special needs, and school poverty (Theoharis, 2008, 2009; Vanderhaar, Munoz, & Rodosky, 2006).

According to the program coordinators interviewed, an important debate in the state with regard to preparing quality principals is related to

competition to provide programs of low cost and short time to completion. University chairs are concerned with the pressure of shortcutting the master's degree academic preparation of educators for the sake of competing with new modes of delivery. Online delivery programs are popular in the state, even though the effects of this preparation are to be determined. Continued research is needed to closely evaluate each institution's plans and quality of delivery, especially in online-only programs. Further research is also needed to assess how principals are performing after the efforts of the SBEC to improve the quality of educational professionals in schools. Program leaders perceive entrepreneurial support as benefiting the preparation of principals within the state. One SBEC official thought that large organizations such as Exxon would have already created principal preparation programs. He highlighted, however, that educator preparation programs are generally expensive endeavors.

The enormous demands placed on today's educators attract few qualified individuals to assume the responsibilities of leadership positions (Papa, Lankford, & Wyckoff, 2003; Walker & Qian, 2006), particularly at the high school level. As a result of data-driven climates and high-stakes accountability measures, pressures have increased the job stress of principals. Owing to the shortage of professionals in the field, many districts, regional education service centers, and universities may be pressed to sacrifice quality over time in preparing principals. Our hope is that a balance is reached between effective preparation and manageable time for such preparation, in favor of the quality of professionals without a sacrifice in the knowledge and skills that principals need to survive the job. In addition, future school principals should feel confident that they are supported with the time necessary to develop these essential skills to become effective social agents and advocates for their schools and communities. Similarly, students and their communities highly benefit from school principals who are completely and adequately prepared to lead school efforts and who will therefore be the best hope for children to become successful citizens in society.

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