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ABSTRACT

Since superintendents are keenly aware of the strengths and weaknesses of active principals, an investigation was conducted of principalship-preparation curricular needs, as determined by superintendents. The subjects included superintendents from 64 parish-school districts and two city-school districts in Louisiana. The survey instrument consisted of a principalship-preparation program course list, and superintendents were asked to select 12 courses that they believed would represent the most effective curriculum and to rank each course in terms of its importance to the curriculum. The 12 courses selected by the greatest number of the 56 superintendents who responded were then ranked according to frequency of responses. The courses are as follows: (1) School Law; (2) Supervision in Elementary and Secondary Schools; (3) Elementary and Secondary Curriculum; (4) Elementary and Secondary Principals; (5) Planning, Organizing, and Decision-Making; (6) School and Community Relations; (7) School Personnel Administration; (8) School Finance and Taxation; (9) Curriculum Planning; (10) Internship; (11) School Plant Facilities; and (12) Evaluation, Accountability, and Policy Analysis Models. The resulting principalship-preparation program was not dramatically different from many principalship-preparation programs presently operating in the state. (RJM)

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# What Do Superintendents Think About Principals Preparation Curriculum?

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## **What Do Superintendents' Think About Principals Preparation Curriculum?**

### **Introduction**

To facilitate quality educational professional preparation programs a balance is needed among stakeholders to set high yet reasonable standards for preservice and inservice preparation programs and activities to advance the profession. The National Association of School Principals recommends that stakeholders involve practitioners in planning and delivering systematic professional activities, and collaborate with universities in the design, delivery, and assessment of preservice preparation programs and activities (National Association of School Principals, 1992).

The Louisiana Board of Elementary and Secondary Education recently approved a departure from a dual system of elementary and secondary principal certification to a K-12 principal certification thereby eliminating the elementary or secondary specialization. Many colleges and universities as well as professional organizations have responded to this as a call to review curricula to improve quality and address relevance in Louisiana's principalship certification and degree preparation programs. To effectively address program quality and change, a balanced perspective is needed from all stakeholders involved in principal preparation and practice. Superintendents are keenly aware of the strengths and weaknesses of principals currently in the field. Therefore, an investigation of the principalship preparation curricular needs as determined by district superintendents would expand the understanding of the knowledge and skills needed by acting principals.

### **Review of Literature**

Scholars have written numerous articles outlining effective educational leadership preparation programs. Although programs vary considerably, many include the need for effective

hands-on experiences and collaborative endeavor. Nearly two decades later, calls for reform include the same.

In the early 1980's as educators called for reform in administrator training, Pitner (1982) recommended that reforms include a thoughtful integration of parties involved such as universities, school districts, and professional administrator associations. At that time the quality of professors was considered a vital strength in the programs, yet the weaknesses were varied and hindered credentialing. Although universities fostered expertise in the "intellectual domain," many such as Hoyle (1985) stressed the need to employ a variety of nontraditional settings such as in academies, workshops, and internships.

As early as 1982, the American Association of School Administrators (AASA) assembled a capacious set of administrator preparation guidelines which were divided into three major sections: (a) seven leadership outcome goals; (b) seven competencies and related skills; and (c) five management system components, seven clinical components, and professionalization and renewal components (American Association of School Administrators, 1982). This ponderous document was initiated administrator preparation reform.

Other professional organizations rallied behind the reform movement. In 1985, the National Association of Secondary School Principals (NASSP) identified the following eight skill areas considered essential to administrator effectiveness: problem-solving, decisiveness, organizational analysis, leadership, sensitivity, stress, tolerance, and communication. This was followed by the National Policy Board for Education Administration's nine major objectives to improve areas of organizational theory, school improvement, research leadership, and policy development and analysis (Twale & Short, 1989).

The Danforth Foundation Program also spurred administrative reform. The Danforth Foundation began funding partnerships between universities and public schools to create collaborative educational leadership preparation programs (Barnett, 1990). Program participants worked in small groups to explore issues such as school reform, teacher morale, and community-parent-school relations. Unique at the time, this program incorporated the cohort support group which completed tasks of governance and decision-making exercising group interaction and critical reflection and incorporating guest speakers, class discussion, field trips, and seminars (Twale & Short, 1989). Today, many universities use cohort grouping for students and some extend this idea of grouping beyond the university setting as faculties form cohorts as well (Lambert, 1995). Notable benefits of graduate cohort grouping include camaraderie, professional collaboration and consultation, enhancement of academic performance, and mentoring before and after graduation (Barnett, 1990; Hill, 1995; Yerkes, 1992).

Toward the late 1980's educational leadership programs began to stress cooperation, interaction, and collaboration. Administrators shared decision-making with faculty. Further interaction between schools of education and practitioners expanded the knowledge of school practices, increased the use of research findings, improved initial preparation, and enhanced faculty development (Barnett, 1990; Goodlad, 1987). Reform advocated change in university preparation courses by recommending that colleges reorient missions, renew their commitment to collaboration, change to new lines of inquiry, and reform curricula (Barnett, 1990).

The National LEADership Network in 1991 called for a reevaluation of university programs resulting in field-based, practical programs to assist administrators. The program, assisted by the Danforth Foundation, was created as a collaboration with California State University, Fresno, and eleven school districts. Superintendents identified potential leaders, most notably minorities, and

implemented formal mentoring programs. Evaluations in the initial program were exceptionally positive (Yerkes, 1992).

The University of New Mexico instituted another successful, nationally recognized licensure program. Courses included extensive field work for students, where internship-contact hours were increased to 600. Additional courses in school law, discipline, decision-making, communication, technology, and conflict resolution were requested by program graduates. However, in overall evaluation, graduates and their supervisors found the experience extremely beneficial (Krueger & Milstein, 1985).

When the faculty in the Department of Education at Northwest Missouri State University found that the department's field experiences were not considered beneficial by the students, it sought changes. Communication was improved among students, supervisors, and professors. The "Handbook for Graduate Practica" was revamped identifying roles for graduate students, on-site supervisors, and university supervisors. Faculty solicited required readings from other institutions for inclusion in the NMSU "Great Books of Educational Administration." Three years after the inception of the revised program, improvement was reported in the areas of role clarification, communication, and practical, beneficial field experience (Graham, 1996).

The California Commission on Teacher Credentialing (CTC) completed a comprehensive study of administrative preparation within its state and throughout the nation prior to establishing a two-tier program. Tier I resembles other programs that also incorporate mentoring and university collaboration with public school sites. A novice administrator issued a Tier I credential has five years to complete the Tier II program. In Tier II, a committee consisting of the novice administrator, a district representative, and a university representative develops a program of initial assessment, mentoring, university course work, elective components, and final assessment. Five

themes that permeate the professional level curriculum are as follows: (a) organizational and cultural environment, (b) strategic issues management, (c) ethical and reflective leadership, (d) public policy analysis and development, and (e) management of information systems and human and fiscal resources (Stine, Lopez & Birch, 1997).

Industry has also been involved in school leadership preparation. W. P. Nilsson (1987), a loaned executive from Hewlett-Packard to California's Commission on the Teaching Profession, outlined a practical, managerial style for administrator training. Nilsson, recommended that universities incorporate activities to emphasize team-building and group-process skills, coaching and counseling skills, managerial skills, technical competency in curriculum and instruction, budgeting and finance skills, and professional staffing and development skills. These and other industry recommendations have been included in many programs.

The educational venue is ripe for highly trained, practical, and thoughtful administrators. Is Louisiana ready to improve its preparation programs through a thoughtful, reflective, collaborative, research-based process? Although universities and public schools in Louisiana are at an exciting juncture to ensure the year 2000 as a landmark year in educational leadership preparation, it is important to remember that change is not synonymous with improvement. A balanced perspective is needed from all stakeholders involved in principalship preparation and practice. The purpose of this study was to determine which courses superintendents consider essential to effective principalship preparation, and in addition, to determine which courses superintendents would select to constitute an effective principalship preparation program of study.

## Methodology

### Subjects

This descriptive study included as subjects the population of superintendents from the sixty-four parish school districts and two city school districts in Louisiana.

### Instruments

The survey instrument used in the investigation was designed by the researcher. Information regarding masters level principalship preparation programs was requested from departments of educational administration and supervision in fifty-eight colleges and universities. An exhaustive principalship preparation program course list was compiled from the information received. After each course was categorized and duplications were eliminated, the survey instrument was composed of the remaining fifty-two course titles. If any course could not be considered a clear duplication of another, it was included on the survey. Each superintendent was asked to select 12 courses that he or she believed would represent the most effective principalship preparation curriculum and to rank each course in terms of its importance to the curriculum. Also, it was emphasized that the subjects consider each selection as a complete course and not just as a topic to be addressed.

### Procedure

Surveys were mailed to each of sixty-six superintendents along with a cover letter explaining the purpose of the study. Thirty-nine (59%) superintendents responded to the initial survey. Approximately ten working days later, a second mailing was sent to those who had not responded. Seventeen (26%) superintendents responded to the second mailing resulting in a total of 56 responses representing an eighty-five percent (85%) survey response rate.

## Results

### Frequencies

The twelve (12) courses selected by the greatest number of superintendents were ranked according to frequency of responses. As indicated in Table I, the two courses selected by the greatest number of superintendents was School Law and Supervision in Elementary and Secondary Schools which garnered forty-three (77%) and forty-two (75%) responses respectively. Elementary and Secondary Curriculum occupied the third position selected by thirty-eight (68%) superintendents. Four course titles, School Personnel Administration, School and Community Relations, Elementary and Secondary Principalship, and Planning, Organizing, and Decision-making, occupied the fourth position with thirty-five (63%) responses. In the fifth position, School Finance and Taxation received thirty-four (61%) responses. Curriculum Planning followed with a frequency selection rate of thirty-three (59%). The course titled Internship was chosen by twenty-eight (52%) subjects and occupied the seventh position. Evaluation, Accountability, and Policy Analysis Models; and School Plant and Facilities tied with frequencies of twenty-six (46%) to complete the program of twelve courses. Only the following three of the fifty-two course titles were selected by none of the superintendents: Social Psychology in Education, Sociology of Education, and Seminar in Educational Classics. According to these findings, when limited to twelve 3 credit hour courses, Louisiana superintendents preferred the following principalship preparation program below listed according to frequency.

#### Top Twelve Courses Listed In Rank Order According to Frequency

1. School Law
2. Supervision in Elementary and Secondary Schools
3. Elementary and Secondary Curriculum

4. Elementary and Secondary Curriculum\*
  - 5.5 Elementary and Secondary Principalship\*
  - 5.5 Planning, Organizing, and Decision-making\*
  - 5.5 School and Community Relations\*
  - 5.5 School Personnel Administration\*
  8. School Finance and Taxation
  9. Curriculum Planning
  10. Internship
  - 11.5 School Plant and Facilities\*\*
  - 11.5 Evaluation, Accountability, and Policy Analysis Models\*\*
- \*tied for 4<sup>th</sup> position
- \*\*tied for 11<sup>th</sup> position

### Importance

Each superintendent was asked to rank his or her twelve selections using “one” to represent the most important course and “twelve” to represent the least important course. Averaging the rankings of the top twelve course selections resulted in an inexact, yet interesting representation of the selected courses in terms of perceived importance. The averages ranged from a mean of 3.77 for the perceived most important course to a mean of 9.62 for the perceived least important selection. As indicated in Table II, Elementary and Secondary Principalship with a mean of 3.77 was perceived by the respondents as the most important course. This was followed in importance by Elementary and Secondary Curriculum, Curriculum Planning, School Law, and Supervision in Elementary and Secondary Schools with means of 4.18, 4.85, 4.91 and 4.98 respectively. When ranking courses superintendents placed Planning, Organizing, and Decision-Making as sixth and

Evaluation, Accountability, and Policy Analysis Models as seventh in importance with means of 5.03 and 6.35. School Personnel Administration followed with a mean of 6.43. Constituting the last four courses, Internship and School Finance and Taxation reported means of 6.71 and 7.74 respectively. Ranked as the least important two courses of the most frequently selected twelve were School and Community Relations with a mean of 8.94 and School Plant and Facilities with a mean of 9.62. In regard to importance, Louisiana superintendents ranked the courses in the following order.

Top Twelve Courses Mean Ranked as to Importance

1.	Elementary and Secondary Principalship	3.77
2.	Elementary and Secondary Curriculum	4.18
3.	Curriculum Planning	4.85
4.	School Law	4.91
5.	Supervision in Elementary and Secondary Schools	4.98
6.	Planning, Organizing, and Decision-making	5.03
7.	Evaluation, Accountability, and Policy Analysis Models	6.35
8.	School Personnel Administration	6.43
9.	Internship	6.71
10.	School Finance and Taxation	7.74
11.	School and Community Relations	8.94
12.	School Plant and Facilities	9.62

**Discussion and Conclusions**

The resulting principalship preparation program created by superintendents is not dramatically different from many principalship preparation programs presently operating in the state.

When limited to twelve courses or thirty-six credit hours of course work, superintendents appear to support many courses that comprise current graduate principalship degree programs as well as state principalship certification requirements. Although it would be simple for other stakeholders to assert that programs cover an extensive assortment of topics, it is important to note that these results are indicative of areas that superintendents deem essential and worthy of 3 credit hours of course work. If other stakeholders concerned about the leadership in our schools respond in similar fashion, then consensus concerning the training of future educational leaders could possibly be achieved with slight program adaptations and minor adjustment. Furthermore, these findings indicate strength in present programs because no substantial program reconstruction needs were apparent. It appears that the primary outcome of this study is that superintendents view typical principalship curricula positively, but also maintain that some modifications may be in order to provide the most effective principalship preparation curriculum.

Many educational administrative academicians as well as practitioners regard Internship as one of the most highly recommended courses. In terms of importance, superintendents ranked it as tenth. This indicates a differing view of the importance of the internship by superintendents and perhaps suggests that superintendents are doubtful of the provision of adequate and appropriate internship experiences. Two curriculum courses were included in the program designed by superintendents: Elementary and Secondary Curriculum, which suggests study of curriculum at elementary and secondary levels; and also Curriculum Planning, which suggests a focus on the process of curriculum development. Apparently superintendents want principals to be well versed in this area. At present, state principalship certification requirements can be satisfied by candidates completing either a course in school plant and facilities or a course in school and community

relations. These findings indicate that superintendents believe both are necessary for effective principalship preparation.

It is interesting to note the courses not represented by the top twelve selections. Some of these are found in both graduate principalship degree programs and in state principalship certification requirements. As indicated in Table I, course titles concerning the subjects of statistics, research, advanced supervision, psychology, sociology, diversity, history, philosophy, and human resources accumulated fewer responses. In addition, Foundations of Educational Administration, a course title often used for introductory administrative survey classes, was chosen by only five superintendents. This finding suggests that superintendents preferred titles that were specific and specialized.

A balanced perspective is needed from all stakeholders involved in principalship preparation and practice. Superintendents can provide an insightful perspective that can contribute to an all-inclusive discussion of the knowledge and skills needed by principals in the field. By incorporating their input with information collected from others involved in the principalship preparation process, programs can be designed to better address the preparation and development of principals for tomorrow's schools.

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**TABLE I**  
**COURSES LISTED ACCORDING TO FREQUENCY**

<b><u>43</u> School Law</b>	<b><u>5</u> Psychology of Classroom Interaction</b>
<b><u>42</u> Supervision in Elementary and Secondary Schools</b>	<b><u>5</u> Educational Statistics</b>
<b><u>38</u> Elementary and Secondary Curriculum</b>	<b><u>5</u> Theory and Design of the Curriculum</b>
<b><u>35</u> School and Community Relations</b>	<b><u>5</u> School Auxiliary Services Management</b>
<b><u>35</u> Planning, Organizing, and Decision-making</b>	<b><u>5</u> Foundations of Educational Administration</b>
<b><u>35</u> School Personnel Administration</b>	<b><u>4</u> Organizational Theory and Behavior in Education</b>
<b><u>35</u> Elementary and Secondary Principalship</b>	<b><u>4</u> Human Resources in Educational Organizations</b>
<b><u>34</u> School Finance and Taxation</b>	<b><u>4</u> Education, the Workforce, and Public Policy</b>
<b><u>33</u> Curriculum Planning</b>	<b><u>4</u> History of Education</b>
<b><u>28</u> Internship</b>	<b><u>4</u> Education as a Moral Endeavor</b>
<b><u>26</u> School Plant and Facilities</b>	<b><u>4</u> Developmental Psychology</b>
<b><u>26</u> Evaluation, Accountability, and Policy Analysis Models</b>	<b><u>3</u> Educational Policies in a Political Context</b>
<b><u>21</u> Communications in Educational Leadership</b>	<b><u>3</u> The Sociological Aspects of Leadership</b>
<b><u>18</u> Business Administration of School Systems</b>	<b><u>2</u> Contemporary Philosophies of Education</b>
<b><u>16</u> Computer Applications in Educational Administration</b>	<b><u>2</u> Anthropology of Education</b>
<b><u>15</u> The Psychology of Instruction and Learning</b>	<b><u>2</u> Theory and Practice of Educational Planning</b>
<b><u>14</u> Multicultural Diversity and Educational Leadership</b>	<b><u>2</u> Transition to Leadership</b>
<b><u>14</u> Educational Leadership: The Individual</b>	<b><u>2</u> The Dynamics of Educational Organizations</b>
<b><u>13</u> Educational Research</b>	<b><u>2</u> Collective Bargaining and Contract Administration</b>
<b><u>12</u> Advanced Supervision</b>	<b><u>2</u> Management of Labor Relations in Education</b>
<b><u>11</u> Organizational Change in Education</b>	<b><u>1</u> Analysis of Educational Concepts</b>
<b><u>10</u> Human Factors in Education</b>	<b><u>1</u> Social and Cultural Foundations of Education</b>
<b><u>10</u> Leadership Beyond the Classroom</b>	<b><u>1</u> Seminar in the Economics of Education</b>
<b><u>9</u> Administration of Pupil Services in Education</b>	<b><u>0</u> Social Psychology in Education</b>
<b><u>7</u> Policy Formulation and Educational Decision-making</b>	<b><u>0</u> Sociology of Education</b>
<b><u>7</u> The Psychological Aspects of Leadership</b>	<b><u>0</u> Seminar in Educational Classics</b>

## TABLE II

### TOP TWELVE COURSES LISTED ACCORDING TO MEAN IMPORTANCE

1. **3.77 Elementary and Secondary Principalship**
2. **4.18 Elementary and Secondary Curriculum**
3. **4.85 Curriculum Planning**
4. **4.91 School Law**
5. **4.98 Supervision in Elementary and Secondary Schools**
6. **5.03 Planning, Organizing, and Decision-making**
7. **6.35 Evaluation, Accountability, and Policy Analysis  
Models**
8. **6.43 School Personnel Administration**
9. **6.71 Internship**
10. **7.74 School Finance and Taxation**
11. **8.94 School and Community Relations**
12. **9.62 School Plant and Facilities**



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