Implications From UCEA

Student Assessment in Leadership Programs: Hopeful Signs and Cautions

Research indicates that leadership is an important element in student and school success (Darling-Hammond, et al.2007) This has been a factor in calls to implement extensive changes in how principals are recruited and prepared (Murphy, 2006), An essential element in this redesign is assessing the students that enter and graduate from it.

Assessment in Educational Leadership Programs

Assessment is a comprehensive process by which members of an academic community analyze data and use that information to revise programs to assure student success. (Kochan and Locke,2009). Most student assessment efforts in educational leadership programs have been program specific, dependent upon faculty interest and expertise, and have not been not a part of the research agenda of the field as a whole. During the last decade there have been calls from groups within and external to these programs to urge them to create comprehensive student assessment programs which will help determine who is admitted to the program; measure progress throughout matriculation; evaluate student abilities at program completion; and assess leadership skills and practice after graduation

Factors that Hinder and Facilitate Assessment

There are factors that hinder educational leadership programs from implementing comprehensive student assessment endeavors. One is a lack of consensus on standards. A closely related issue is defining leadership-which forms the basis from which outcomes are

measured.. A third barrier is that there are limited assessment tools available to measure outcomes., In addition, although universities and colleges often require some type of program or student assessment, resources are seldom allocated to implement them.

There are also some elements that are fostering student assessment efforts. Among them are increasing calls for change from internal and external elements; public questioning of the value of higher education; and the rise of alternative preparation programs.

Hopeful Signs and Cautions

One area in which student assessment appears to have made progress is the student selection process. In the past, most students who applied to leadership programs got accepted, leading to low esteem for these programs and a questionable student body in terms of quality. Most program redesign processes include a call for multiple selection processes and recent research suggests a majority of programs are now using them (Lad et al, 2007).

Work is being done by various groups such as UCEA (including its new National Center for the Evaluation of Educational Leadership Preparation and Practice), the ITEL-SIG Taskforce on Evaluating Educational Leadership Preparation, and the AERA Teaching in Educational Administration Special Interest Group, to enhance program evaluation and the drive toward revising and encouraging the use of national standards. This work, as well as the extensive redesign efforts being

conducted at programs across the country, are hopeful signs that this area is gaining strength.

A recent review of dissertation abstracts indicates a growing body of research examining program outcomes about student learning. Unfortunately, since most of these appear to be case specific and focused on one program element, this may limit our capacity to build a meaningful research base.

Although we are making some progress in screening students who enter educational leadership programs, we still do not have a comprehensive view of what is being done in the area of student assessment. Nor do we have the tools needed to engage in these efforts in a cohesive manner.

Implications for Future Research

If educational leadership programs are to gain credibility and assure that they are preparing principals to effectively lead schools, it will be essential that comprehensive student assessment processes be implemented and evaluated. It would be helpful for UCEA to develop initiatives to overcome the issues related to implementing student assessment programs and begin to develop comprehensive tools that can be piloted around the country to determine the degree to which we are preparing principals who can make a difference. It would likewise be of value for this group to develop a research agenda around this topic and initiate a set of studies to address this issue.

References

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