

## Preparing Perform and Impact Ready Instructional Leaders for Improving Urban School Success

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### Abstract

*In an effort to develop and support high quality urban school leaders, this study examined what factors affect pre-service urban school leaders' perception of preparedness for performing instructional leadership activities. The findings revealed that participating in a leadership training program is the only significant factor that predicts urban educators' scores on instructional leadership readiness measures. By examining perception of preparedness of aspiring urban school leaders the findings contribute to our understanding about some perspectives to prepare and develop urban school leaders solve large and complex problems related to the curriculum, instruction and assessment. Implications for preparing performance ready school leaders in high need urban schools are further discussed.*

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## **Introduction**

Research supports the notion that school leaders matter a great deal when it comes to urban student success (Barnett, 2004). Particularly, as Beycioğlu and Aslan (2010) suggest that school administrators along with teachers play crucial roles in promoting change and innovations. In alignment with the recent emphasis on improving urban learning and teaching, the roles and responsibilities of 21<sup>st</sup> century school administrators have shifted from “management” of schools to “instructional leadership” (Fink & Resnick, 2001; Murphy, 2002). The common wisdom today is that urban school principals should serve as instructional leaders to increase achievement for all students (Fullan, 2007). In order to improve school effectiveness and to promote student outcomes in high poverty urban schools, many developed countries, including the USA, adopted a national focus on developing and supporting effective instructional school leaders (Goodwin, Cunningham, & Childress, 2003; Leithwood, Louis, Anderson, & Wahlstrom, 2004). Even though the importance of preparing instructional leaders to increase urban school success and student learning have been well documented, little research exists regarding strategies effective for the development of highly qualified urban instructional school leaders (Darling-Hammond, LaPointe, Meyerson, Orr, & Cohen, 2007; Johnston, Kaufman & Thompson, 2016). Only a few studies to date have directly examined urban educators’ perspectives on performing specific instructional leadership tasks (Marks & Printy, 2003; Neumerski, 2013).

As Frankenberg (2009) indicated, the USA undergoes tremendous racial transition and these trends have a significant impact on urban schools and districts. Compared to other schools, urban schools typically are more diverse, characterized by large enrollments and complexity, many struggling with improving student success. Compared to low income urban schools, “High wealth districts are able to provide for their students broader educational experiences including more extensive curricula, better



facilities. They are also better able to attract and retain experienced teachers and administrators. Therefore, it is crucial to school leaders understand the demographic context of urban schools because the composition of urban students and faculty in schools tend to impact student success. With that said, urban schools have more diverse faculties than other schools although racial composition and teacher experience and stability varies by students' racial composition (Frankenberg, 2009). Therefore, urban leadership can be defined as creating equitable and excellent learning environment for all students in high-poverty urban schools and districts.

Since the number of studies examining urban educators' instructional leadership preparedness is limited, this study provides urban school leader candidates with the opportunity to rate their preparedness for performing instructional leadership tasks (McCormick, Tanguma, & López-Forment, 2002). To this end, the study intends first to explore the impacts of several predictors that might relate to urban school leader candidates' readiness to apply effective instructional leadership strategies. Second, it investigates the development of the candidates' readiness across the years in an educational leadership program. With the compiled results of this study, urban educators, policy makers, and school leaders can translate the concept of readiness into practice and policy associated with effective urban school leader development and preparation.

### **Conceptual Framework of Instructional Leadership**

The main focus of instructional leaders is to foster the highest quality instruction for each and every student in any grade level (Catano & Stronge, 2006). Instructional leadership can be defined as ensuring the academic achievement of all students by developing a shared vision focused on high expectations for every student in every grade level, and by continuously monitoring and systemically improving curriculum, teaching, learning and assessment (Connecticut State Department of Education [CSDE], 2015). Since being an instructional leader is an essential part of one's leadership

style, educational leadership preparation programs are now preparing to meet this need for ensuring all of their candidates are highly qualified in improving instruction and the quality of student learning (Green, 2017; Rigby, 2014).

As Kirst, Haertel, & Williams (2005) indicated school leaders are expected to cultivate the school's vision; and make use of student data to support instructional practices and to provide assistance to struggling students. Since the instructional leadership is considered as a very important task of school leaders, previous studies focus if the graduates of educational leadership programs demonstrate instructional leadership practices that are distinctive and that are associated with more effective schools (Darling-Hammond, LaPointe, Meyerson, Orr, & Cohen, 2007). With the increasing state and national accountability standards, contemporary school administrators are expected act as instructional leaders who are educational visionaries and change agents to improve curriculum, instruction and assessment (Davis, Darling-Hammond, LaPointe, & Meyerson, 2005). Particularly, previous studies on underperforming urban schools indicated the growing demands placed on recruiting, credentialing, training, and supporting effective urban school leaders who are expert to improve teaching and learning in culturally diverse, low-income communities and schools.

According to the Leader Evaluation and Support Rubric (2015) developed by Connecticut Department of Education, instructional leadership has three major dimensions including (a) Shared Vision, Mission and Goals, (b) Curriculum, Instruction and Assessment, and (c) Continuous Improvement. This framework describes the core components of effective instructional leadership and guides school leaders in improving learning for all students. In practice, these indicators do not function independently. However, for the purpose of conceptualization of instructional leadership these indicators are handled both separately and collectively in the present study. Therefore, the following literature review is a selection of previous



studies, which include theories highlighting these three major instructional leadership indicators.

### **Shared Vision, Mission and Goals**

Developing, implementing, and stewarding a shared vision of improving instruction and the quality of student learning for an entire school can be considered as the first component of instructional leadership (National Policy Board for Educational Administration [NPBEA], 2015). The importance of building a shared vision for school effectiveness and student success is strongly emphasized in the educational and instructional leadership literature (Kurland, Peretz, & Hertz-Lazarowitz, 2010). Furthermore, in this study, creating a shared school vision for school improvement and student success is conceived and operationally defined by three key areas of leadership practices (a) creating high expectations for all students, (b) developing comprehensive school improvement plan, and (c) engaging stakeholders and benefiting from their inputs (CSDE, 2015; Harris & Chapman, 2002).

The first factor of building a shared school-wide vision is setting high expectations for every student. In alignment with the college and career readiness and the common core state standards, school leaders are expected to focus on developing and sustaining a shared vision to improve college, career, and job readiness for all students (College Board, 2010). The standards also emphasize building a shared vision to support and maximize academic development and learning for all students (Conley & Darling-Hammond, 2013; Firestone & Gonzáles, 2007). Moreover, in the 21<sup>st</sup> century, school leaders are accountable for fostering every child's social and emotional readiness by providing personalized support (American School Counselor Association, 2012). Therefore, it is crucial for school leaders to develop an approach that fosters higher expectations for all student from a broader perspective that includes academic, social-emotional and career development of all students.

In order to conceptualize and operationalize school-wide shared vision, instructional leaders are expected to develop staff with the capacity to implement cohesive school improvement plans (CSDE, 2015). With the aim of addressing students' developmental and learning needs in alignment with school goals, instructional leaders focus on creating comprehensive and research-driven school improvement plans that describe a school's strategic framework to raise achievement for all of its students. As Kaufman, Herman & Watters, (1996) indicate, these plans and projects are extremely significant given they generate hope, innovation, and energy by illustrating a planned path to a common destination. Therefore, this is important for urban school leaders to understand and explore the impact of the improvement plans and instructional leadership on student learning and instruction. It is also crucial that school leader preparation programs and school districts develop and use a common language in improving instruction and student learning through comprehensive school improvement plans.

Moreover, as an essential part of effective school improvement, collegiality and professional learning communities are considered as key concepts in ensuring the success and achievement of all students (Bush, 2016). Thus, instructional leaders are expected to develop actionable plans and concrete goals to address school-wide aims through a systemic stakeholder engagement. Particularly, school leaders strive for engaging a broad range of stakeholders including classroom teachers, school counselors, students, parents, community leaders, local colleges, and universities to implement and sustain shared school vision, mission, and goals (CSDE, 2015). Since urban school are in high need of qualified teachers and resources, school leaders are also expected to engage faculty and staff to identify and address barriers to achieving the vision, mission and goals. Even though school leaders are strongly recommended to collaborate effectively with every key stakeholder to make a systemic change, it is acknowledged that establishing a school-wide shared vision of school success through a collaborative effort is often a very



challenging task for today principals (Fullan, 2014). Therefore, to achieve this difficult task, educational leadership training programs are in are in need of a focus on providing their candidates with rich learning opportunities to develop an understanding and foster application and implementation of policies on stakeholder engagement (NPBEA, 2011; Wildy and Clarke. 2008).

### **Curriculum, Instruction and Assessment**

Besides creating shared vision, mission and goals for school improvement and student success, instructional school leaders are required address the educational needs of a rapidly changing global society. Since economic, social, political changes, computer and technological innovations creates profound changes in the way students learn and the manner in which students are assessed, the 21<sup>st</sup> century compels school leadership training programs to emphasize development and support of instructional leaders with knowledge and skills to successfully engage in standards-based curriculum development, effective instructional practices, and authentic assessment strategies (NPBEA, 2015; Scott and Webber, 2008; (Willes & Bondi, 2010).).

In order to serve as an instructional leader to improve the quality of urban teaching and learning, school leaders need to understand the functions and processes of curriculum development (Conley & Darling-Hammond, 2013). With the advent of the Common Core State Standards (CCSS) and digital learning, the curriculum development and implementation process have experienced massive change. These changes create the need to strengthen and prepare both school leaders teachers, in order to ensure a high-quality curriculum design. These preparation duties initially and inevitably fall on the shoulders of school leaders. Therefore, it is crucial that educational leadership programs provide school leader candidates the opportunity to learn ways in which modern curriculum influences education. In order to meet rigorous CCSS standards and to ensure that every student is able to learn, pre-service school

leaders are encouraged to engage in instructional practices and assessment techniques that incorporate important topics in education such as diversity, social justice, and technology. In practice, allowing school leader candidates to practice for establishing consistent processes to design innovative curriculum and instruction will help them act as instructional leaders to work in collaboration with teachers to develop a systemic approach to implement and evaluate comprehensive curriculum (CSDE, 2015; Wraga, 2006).

In addition to the curriculum development, school leaders are required to build capacity to implement and lead effective instructional practices and strategies to prepare all students for success in college, career, and life, In line with the philosophy of the new standards and learning styles, school leaders are expected to develop collaborative processes to ensure staff utilization of innovative instructional strategies (CSDE, 2015; Webber & Scott, 2010). For instance, in order to prepare effective instructional leaders, current principal training programs are expected to build the capacity of school leader candidates on (a) implementing student-centered, project-based, active learning strategies, and technology enhanced instruction (Kirst, Haertel, & Williams, 2005; Neumerski, 2013). Since understanding and applying the new ways of instructional practices is complex and requires extra time and commitment, authentic instructional strategies must be at the top of the leadership preparation and development programs priorities on a consistent basis (NAESP, 2001).

Finally, in addition to effective curriculum development and instructional practices, principal training programs are also required to focus on building the capacity of school leader candidates to use authentic formative and summative assessments to enhance teaching and subsequently student learning (Darling-Hammond, 2010). Particularly, while school leaders use formative assessments to monitor student progress, they are also required to utilize summative assessments to evaluate student learning compared to common core state standards or benchmarks. Moreover, the leadership preparation



programs should value innovation in assessment and advance the candidates' knowledge in utilizing formative and summative assessments to make informed decisions to improve instructional practices (NPBEA, 2015). Ultimately, school leaders are expected to fulfill these specific requirements in order to ensure every student learning, which again poses the question of the readiness of leader candidates and ways to configure the principal training programs.

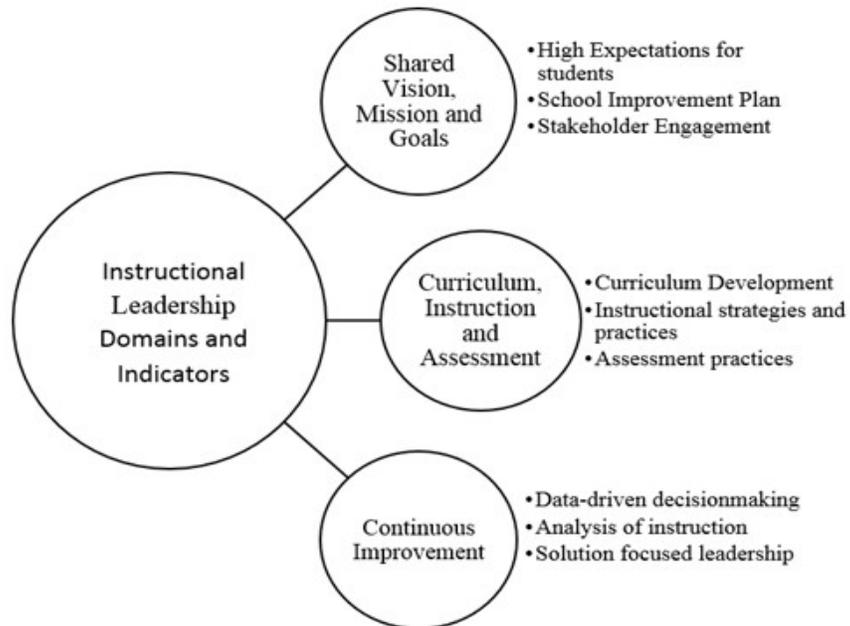
### **Continuous Improvement**

In this study, the final component of instructional leadership is identified as continuous improvement that includes three major indicators (a) solution-focused leadership, (b) analysis of instruction, and (c) data-driven decision-making. Since school leaders have a direct power position and formal authority to utilize fiscal, human, and physical resources, it is crucial that school leaders apply solution-focused and embrace a high-impact leadership mindset to solve large and complex problems in urban schools (Hattie, 2015). As school leaders are in a unique position to form collaborative partnerships with teachers, counselors and school community members, solution-focused leaders are more likely to establish efficient, effective and well-managed systems leading to improved morale, school climate, and student development (Froeschle & Nix, 2009). School leaders who embrace a high-impact leadership mindset are more likely to persist and engage key stakeholders in resolving schoolwide challenges by building a shared vision (Kaufman, Herman & Watters, 1996).

As a part of continues improvement, school leaders are also expected to use data systems and accountability strategies to monitor and evaluate student progress and close achievement gaps (CSDE, 2015). Additionally, instructional leaders constantly observe teacher practices and work hand-in-hand with teachers to analyze instruction in order to develop teacher performance. As a part of the analysis of instruction and systemic data collection, school leaders focus on creating a continuous improvement cycle that may include (1)

identification of areas of improvement (2) development of comprehensive standard operating procedures include program design, curriculum, content, budget, required resources, program leaders and key stakeholders in charge, (3) fostering commitment and build trust, (4) focusing on capacity building, (5) collaborative implementation and monitoring of the plan, (6) learning from the work and use comprehensive data to improve practice, (7) institutionalizing systemic change, (8) celebration of successes (CSDE, 2015; Fullan, 2007; NPBEA, 2015).

Figure 1  
*Instructional Leadership Domain and Indicators*



As indicated in Figure 1, overall the literature reveals that instructional leadership relies on three core dimensions: (1) holding a shared vision, (2) using curriculum, instruction, and assessment and



(3) focusing on continuous improvement, which requires instructional leaders to emphasize data-driven decision-making (Knapp, Copland, Plecki, Portin, 2006). The literature clearly suggests urban educators to build capacity on these skills in order to improve instruction and student learning. Moreover, the existing literature has primarily examined the qualities of effective principal preparation programs and characteristics of instructional leaders on a comprehensive spectrum (Darling-Hammond, LaPointe, Meyerson, Orr, & Cohen, 2007). However, despite this obvious need significant gaps and challenges persist in preparing effective instructional leaders.

The researches selected to utilize the Leader Evaluation and Support Rubric (2015) developed by Connecticut Department of Education, because this model has very similar concepts and approaches with other significant models in the literature. For instance, parallel with this model Hallinger & Murphy (1985) also focus on creating an 'academic press' that fostered high expectations and standards for students, as well as for teachers. Consisted with Leader Evaluation and Support Rubric (2015), Hallinger and Heck 2002, emphasized the importance of the vision, mission and goals to improve the student and school success. Finally, aligned with this model, Hallinger & Murphy (1985) also encourages leaders to engage in curriculum, instruction and the classroom to enhance student learning.

Particularly, to date little attention has been given how urban educators' background and their participation in leadership training programs impact their future instructional leadership performance as indicated by their readiness for these tasks. Since there is little consensus on how to develop and support urban instructional leaders to address the challenges facing students in urban schools, the findings of this study offer valuable contribution to the practice and literature by offering research-supported effective strategies and practices for urban leadership preparation and development.

### **Purpose of the Study and Research Questions**

In an effort to develop and support high quality urban school leaders, this study examined what factors affect pre-service urban school leaders' perception of preparedness for performing instructional leadership activities. This research is not a program evaluation study. Aligned with the purpose of the article, this quantitative explorative study is designed to investigate the aspiring school leaders' perception of preparedness. Specifically, the finding of the study might contribute to the educational leadership field by providing a framework that can help specify what the needs of urban educators to serve as instructional leaders. In this respect, the research questions the study addresses are as follows:

**Research question 1.** To what extent do urban educators perceive themselves ready to implement instructional leadership activities?

**Research question 2.** What are the psychometric properties of the Connecticut Leader Evaluation and Support Scale?

**Research question 3.** How well do participants' gender, years of teaching experience, age, race, participation in the educational leadership program, previous leadership experience, school level and school size predict their perceived readiness to perform instructional leadership activities?

**Research question 4.** Is there a significant effect of the EDL program on participants' feelings of preparedness to perform instructional activities?

**Research question 5.** Do the number of the years spent in the educational leadership program make a difference in their preparedness levels?

### **Method**

#### **Research setting**

The data investigated in this study was collected from urban school educators who were enrolled in an educational leadership



certification program in the USA. This leadership preparation program is designed to prepare future school leaders and combines a comprehensive set of theoretical courses with intense internship. The two-year educational leadership certification program consists of 6 core courses (18 credits) including: Educational Leadership Perspectives, Leadership Development, Learning Theory, Curriculum Development, Supervision and Staff Development and Organizational Development. In addition to six core courses, every candidate completed a field-based internship I and II that allowed for the application of theory to the world of practice.

During the internship experience, candidates were required to complete a minimum of 200 total, with 100 hours required during the first semester. The intern is supervised throughout the internship by a faculty member and a certified site mentor to successfully implement an internship learning goal and participate in and reflect on several field experience activities. Internship courses are designed to provide the intern with a practical leadership experience in an actual educational setting. The interns have the opportunity to synthesize prior coursework and incorporate content into an operational framework. If candidates successfully complete all leadership program requirements they earn a certificate to serve in school administrative position ranging from coordinator, assistant principal, and building principal to assistant superintendent of a public-school system.

Table 1

*Participants' Demographic Information*

Variables	Frequency (N)	Percent (%)
Gender		
Female	51	68.9
Male	23	31.1
School level		
Elementary School	31	41.9

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Middle-High School	43	58.1
Race		
White	63	85.1
Other	11	14.9
Age		
20-32	30	40.5
32-60	44	59.5
Teaching experience		
1 - 6 Year Teaching Experience	28	37.8
7 - 30 Year Teaching Experience	46	62.2
Leadership experience		
New Candidates	24	32.4
1 <sup>st</sup> Year Candidates	25	33.8
2 <sup>nd</sup> Year Candidates	25	33.8

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In total, approximately 150 of candidates have been invited to participate in the study. In the final round, with a return rate of 50, the study participants comprised of 74 candidates who study at different levels in the educational leadership program: (a) new educational leader candidates (e.g., candidates newly enrolled in the program), (b) 1<sup>st</sup> year educational leader candidates (e.g., candidates who have completed their first year in the program), and (c) 2<sup>nd</sup> year educational leader candidates (e.g., candidates who have completed their second year in the program). Participants' demographic profiles are reported in Table 1.

### **Instrumentation and Data Collection**

Aligned with the national Interstate School Leadership Licensure Consortium (ISLLC) Standards, the Connecticut State Department of Education developed the Connecticut Leader Evaluation and Support Rubric in 2015. This comprehensive rubric has been used for the evaluation and support of school and district leaders. Particularly, to



date there is no reported research-based data to measure educational leader candidates' perceived readiness related to perform the instructional leadership tasks that are listed in the Connecticut leader evaluation and support rubric. Therefore, in this study, as shown in Table 2, all survey questions were obtained from the official Connecticut Leader Evaluation and Support Rubric (2015). It aspires to test the internal consistency and construct validity of the Connecticut Leader Evaluation and Support Scale

The items of the scale describe an activity or behavior an instructional leader might perform to improve curriculum, instruction, and/or learning. The scores obtained from 14 items measured on a 4-point rating scale helped indicate the level of preparedness. The highest possible overall score that can be obtained across the readiness scale is 56.00, and higher scores indicate higher levels of preparedness to carry out educational leadership activities.

In the space below, a representation of the preparedness ratings is presented. This scale was adapted from Diffley's Four Levels of Readiness Framework (2006).

- (1) *Not Ready at All*: Candidate has no awareness and knowledge about performing the leadership practice.
- (2) *Awareness and Knowledge-Ready*: Candidate can acquire concepts, information, definitions, and procedures. Candidate can also interpret and integrate the leadership practice but has little or no readiness to apply it or measure its impacts without coaching or guidance.
- (3) *Performance Ready*: Candidate can apply knowledge and skills but is not ready to create innovative solutions and/or evaluate the impacts of his/her leadership practices.
- (4) *Impact and Accountable Ready*: Candidate can apply knowledge and skills to solve large and complex problems and make systemic changes, which include innovative solutions and their associated impact.

### Research Design and Data Analysis

The present study has a quantitative correlational research design that *is set to* explore the variables that predict to urban school leader candidates' readiness to perform effective leadership strategies. Since there are few earlier studies studying relevant context, the study is also exploratory in nature. Particularly, the study investigates the development of the candidates' readiness across the years in an educational leadership program. Since both internal and external factors have potential to impact leadership readiness of the candidates. The following predictors are selected for this investigation such as gender, years of teaching experience, age, race, participation in the educational leadership program, previous leadership experience, school level and school size.

To determine the participating urban educators' readiness levels in terms of instructional leadership skills and yield information about the competencies instructional leader candidates need to develop, descriptive statistics were generated. To further address the three research questions, the following set of analysis has been conducted.

To identify the psychometric properties the Connecticut Leader Evaluation and Support Scale, an Exploratory Factor Analysis was utilized. Consequently, a Multiple Linear Regression was conducted to understand how well (1) participants' gender, (2) years of teaching experience, (3) age, (4) race, (5) participation in the educational leadership program, (6) previous leadership experience, (7) school level and (8) school size predicted their perceived readiness to perform instructional leadership activities. Finally, a one-way MANOVA was carried out to explore whether the program had significant effect on participants' feelings of preparedness to perform instructional activities and whether the number of the years spent in the educational leadership program make a difference in their preparedness levels. All through the data analysis procedures



undertaken, Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS Version 22.0, IBM Corp., 2013) has been used.

## Results

### Descriptive statistics

In order to better understand urban educators' instructional leadership perceived readiness scores the descriptive statistics were explored. Analysis of the descriptive statistics revealed three major points. First, the statistics indicated that participating in an educational leadership training program is positively related to the instructional leadership perceived readiness scores. Specifically, urban educators who stayed in the educational leadership certification program for a longer period of time appeared to be more likely to feel ready to perform instructional leadership activities.

Second, urban educators who just started the educational leadership certification program reported slightly lower awareness and knowledge about instructional leadership activities ( $M = 2.46$ ,  $SD = .09$ ), than the 1<sup>st</sup> year participants ( $M = 2.77$ ,  $SD = 1.12$ ); however, the readiness scores of urban educators who completed their 2<sup>nd</sup> year in the leadership certification program indicated that they felt more competent and ready to implement the instructional leadership activities ( $M = 3.06$ ,  $SD = .014$ ) than the rest of participants. Empirical evidence for these implication will be provided in the inferential statistics sections.

The third and perhaps one of the most staggering outcome from the comprehensive instructional leadership readiness assessment was that only 17 % of urban educators who held educational leadership positions were found accountable and ready to solve large and complex problems. Further, the aforementioned educational leaders were found to not feel ready to make a systemic change that included innovative solutions and their associated impact ( $M \geq 3.5$ ).

**Psychometric Properties of the Leadership Self-Assessment**

In order to be able to address the second research question, the researchers first revealed the factor structure of the comprehensive instructional leadership self-assessment scale. The Principal Axis Factoring method with a Direct Oblimin rotation technique was utilized. The Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin (KMO) measure was higher than .90 and Bartlett's test of sphericity was significant, indicating a common latent factor structure.

The exploratory factor analysis results showed that all items clearly loaded on three factors with coefficients beyond the rule of thumb criterion of .32 (Tabachnick & Fidell, 2013). The three-factor structure explained a total of 77.65% of variance. These findings validated that the construct was by far and large has been measured and that the items and the content structure well represented the sense of preparedness to carry out instructional leadership activities.

Results from the Exploratory Factor Analysis suggested that the items focused on (1) building a shared vision, mission and goals, and involving school stakeholders in the visioning process loaded to Factor 1 and measured the Shared Vision, Mission, and Goals of CSDE.

Table 2

*Summary of Items, Factor Loadings and Descriptive Statistics for the Connecticut Leader Evaluation and Support Scale (N = 149)*

Factors and Items	Factor loadings			M (SD)
	1	2	3	
<i>Factor 1: Shared, Vision, Mission and Goals (α = .90)</i>				
1. create high expectations for students including vision college- and career readiness for all students	.88			2.98 (.77)




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2.	create, implement and evaluate cohesive school improvement and/or action plan	.84	2.63 (.79)
3.	identify and address student and staff learning needs and barriers to achieving the vision, mission and goals	.60	2.87 (.77)
4.	develop, implement, sustain and steward the shared vision, mission and goals of the school and district.	.56	2.77 (.83)
5.	apply effective methods and relevant theories for involving school stakeholders in the visioning process.	.53	2.67 (.80)

*Factor 2: Continuous Improvement ( $\alpha = .93$ )*

1.	create a continuous improvement cycle to identify and address areas of improvement	.92	2.68 (.82)
2.	develop a system to support individual, team, school and district improvement goals.	.88	2.62 (.79)
3.	create and implement effective solutions to schoolwide or districtwide challenges related to student success and achievement.	.82	2.68 (.81)
4.	understand and apply effective strategies to celebrate improvements and successes improvement	.58	2.65 (.83)

*Factor 3: Curriculum, Instruction, Assessment ( $\alpha = .93$ )*

1.	understand, create and evaluate a comprehensive, rigorous, and coherent curricular	.91	2.81 (.80)
2.	work collaboratively with school staff to improve teaching and learning	.90	2.97 (.78)

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3.	understand and successfully apply standards for high-quality teacher, principal, and district practice.	.88	2.80 (.81)
4.	design the use of differentiated instructional strategies, curriculum materials, and technologies to maximize high-quality instruction	.71	2.89 (.78)
5.	utilize evidence-based instructional strategies, formative and summative assessment tools to address the diverse needs of students	.68	2.90 (.80)
<hr/>			
Factor Correlations			
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Factor 1		--	
Factor 2		.71	--
Factor 3		.68	.59 --

Items that emphasized creating a continuous improvement cycle, implementing effective solutions and celebrating improvements and successes, and instructional leadership activities associated with developing a shared understanding of effective practices in curriculum, instruction and assessment loaded to Factor 2, they appeared to have fit the Curriculum, Instruction and Assessment domain of the CSDE.

Finally, items accumulated to Factor 3 appeared to focus on creating comprehensive, rigorous, and coherent curricular, improving teaching and learning, maximizing high-quality instruction, utilizing formative and summative assessment tools and using a wide-range of data to guide ongoing decision-making, reflecting accountability strategies to improve schools as well as creating high expectations for students, developing school improvement plans; therefore the factor perfectly referred to the Continuous Improvement dimension of CSDE.



The factor correlation presented in the table matrix indicates a strong positive relationship among the factors, likely confirming the 3-factor structure, as well as measuring a single latent variable: The readiness to implement CSDE's 3 leadership quality benchmarks. Additionally, high reliability scores with alpha coefficients of .90, .93, and .93 per scale dimension indicated a stable factor structure (See table 2).

### **Predictors of Perception of Preparedness to Perform Instructional Leadership Activities**

A Multiple Linear Regression (MLR) was conducted to understand how well (1) participants' gender, (2) years of teaching experience, (3) age, (4) race, (5) participation in the educational leadership program, (6) previous leadership experience, (7) school level and (8) school size predicted their perceived readiness to perform instructional leadership activities. The sample size was appropriate for MLR since it satisfied the rule of thumb of 5 observations per variable, which requires a minimum of 40 data according to Hair (2014).

According to the results of the F-test (ANOVA) and model summary indicators, the overall model with 8 predictors is significant,  $R^2 = .22$ ,  $F(8, 73) = 2.31$ ,  $p < .05$ . Results of the analysis revealed that among those 8 variables, only the status of participation in the educational leadership program significantly predicted participants' readiness to perform instructional leadership activities (Table 2). These findings clearly showed that participating in the EDL program positively and significantly explained leadership candidates' readiness for leadership. In total, the model explained 22% of variance.

Table 2

*Regression Analysis Summary for Variables Predicting Readiness for Instructional Leadership*

Variable	B	SE B	$\beta$	t	sr <sup>2</sup>
Gender	-1.80	2.40	-.09	-.75	.007
Age	1.41	2.93	.08	.48	.003
Race	-.79	2.97	-.03	-.27	.001
School size	.01	2.27	.00	.00	.000
School level	1.29	2.39	.07	.54	.004
Program participation	3.97	1.28	.36	3.11*	.116
Teaching experience	2.31	3.14	.12	.73	.006
Leadership experience	2.44	2.36	.13	1.04	.013

Note. R<sup>2</sup> = .22 (N = 74, \*p < .05)

**Exploring the Factors that Impact Aspiring Urban Educators' Perceptions of Preparedness to Carry out Instructional Leadership Activities**

A one-way MANOVA was conducted to explore whether a significant relationship existed among the years spent in the EDL program and the three factors of instructional leadership: (1) Shared Vision and Mission and Goals, (2) Continuous Improvement, and (3) Curriculum, Instruction and Assessment.

The results of the multivariate test showed that the program's overall effect on the candidates' readiness to implement leadership activities was significant, Wilk's  $\lambda = .76$ ,  $F(6, 138) = 3.42$ ,  $p < .05$ ,  $\eta^2 = .13$ .

After applying Bonferroni correction based on Levene's test results, the univariate tests revealed that the program did not significantly change participants' *Vision, Mission and Goals* measures ( $F(2, 73) = 3.50$ ,  $p > 0.017$ ). However, significant changes in the leadership candidates readiness scores were observed on both the *Continuous Improvement* ( $F(2, 73) = 6.33$ ,  $p < 0.013$ ) and the *Curriculum, Instruction and Assessment* ( $F(2, 73) = 6.06$ ,  $p < 0.017$ ) measures, accounting for 15% of variance each (See Table 3).



Table 3

*Multivariate and Univariate Analyses of Variance Main Effects of Training Type on Factors*

Variable	Univariate <sup>b</sup>											
	Multivariate <sup>a</sup>			Vision			Improvement			Curriculum		
	<i>F</i>	<i>p</i>	$\eta^2$	<i>F</i>	<i>P</i>	$\eta^2$	<i>F</i>	<i>p</i>	$\eta^2$	<i>F</i>	<i>p</i>	$\eta^2$
Years in EDL	3.42	.00	.13	3.50	.04	--	6.33	.00	.15	6.06	.00	.15

Note. Multivariate *F* ratios were generated from Wilk's  $\lambda$  statistic.

<sup>a</sup>Multivariate *df* = 6, 138. <sup>b</sup>Univariate *df* = 2, 73.

### **The Effect of the Number of the Years Spent in the Educational Leadership Program on Preparedness Level**

The follow-up the Scheffé post hoc test of the one-way MANOVA indicated that urban educators who completed the two-year EDL program had significantly higher instructional leadership readiness levels in the *Continuous Improvement* domain ( $M = 3.08$ ,  $SE = .15$ ) than those who just started the program ( $M = 2.38$ ,  $SE = .15$ ). The pattern was the same for the *Curriculum, Instruction and Assessment* dimension. Particularly, the 2<sup>nd</sup> year urban educators' readiness scores were significantly higher ( $M = 3.82$ ,  $SE = .16$ ) than the instructional leadership candidates who had just enrolled in the EDL program ( $M = 3.04$ ,  $SE = .17$ ).

Interestingly, however, on both the *Continuous Improvement* and the *Curriculum, Instruction and Assessment* dimensions, candidates' readiness scores did not significantly differ between those who newly enrolled in the program compared to those who had completed their 1<sup>st</sup> year or those who were 1<sup>st</sup> and 2<sup>nd</sup> year program completers.

### **Discussion**

The purpose of this study was to investigate urban school leader candidates' readiness to perform effective leadership strategies. In order to determine this, the study first investigated the urban educational leaders' readiness levels, as well as the potential impact of several other variables was explored. The descriptive findings revealed that urban educators did not feel accountable and prepared to solve large and complex problems. In fact, only 17% of the participants felt impact ready to apply knowledge and skills to solve large and complex problems. This is a crucial finding for urban school leaders and policy makers. If the curricula of current educational leadership training programs do not reflect urban principals' real and complex jobs, future leaders will not be able to lead a systemic change in their urban schools. In other words, if the traditional educational leadership courses solely focus on building knowledge and awareness through lecturing, school leader candidates will be able to acquire instructional leadership concepts, information, and definitions about urban teaching and learning. Therefore, this traditional course style will likely result in little or no impact on urban educators' readiness to solve complex problems and change achievement outcomes for urban low socio-economic students (Johnston, Kaufman, & Thompson, 2016).

The inferential findings showed that among variables such as: (1) Gender, (2) Years of teaching experience, (3) Age, (4) Race, (5) Participation in the educational leadership program, (6) Previous leadership experience, (7) School level and school size, that only participation in the EDL program significantly and positively contributed to urban educators' perceived readiness for performing instructional leadership activities. The readiness scores were found to improve drastically after urban educators attended the educational leadership training program. Therefore, providing both pre-service and in-service urban school leaders with comprehensive, coherent, and relevant professional learning activities are crucial to develop



and support instructional leaders who can ultimately improve teaching and learning in urban schools (Orr, 2006).

Moreover, in terms of years spent in the program, this great progress was evidenced between the readiness of newly enrolled candidates and those who completed 2 years of training. This suggests that the 2-year instructional leadership program made a significant difference. The finding also support the research of the Wallace Foundation (2016). The Wallace Foundation (2016) asserts that educational leadership training programs can develop the knowledge, skills and dispositions candidates need in order to be effective leaders by putting more emphasis on instructional leadership activities. Since instructional leadership is a critical aspect of school improvement and student learning, the findings encourage pre-service leadership training programs to build the capacity of candidates to develop and implement effective instructional strategies and solutions to schoolwide challenges related to school success and student achievement (CSDE, 2015).

Interestingly, however, for both Continuous Improvement and Curriculum, Instruction and Assessment dimensions, candidates' readiness scores did not significantly differ between those candidates newly enrolled in the program and those who had already completed their first year. This relationship was not an expected effect of the first-year program participation, but poses important implications for practice. Specifically, school leader educators should possibly consider revising their first-year curriculum and instructional strategies. Particularly, the prospective school leaders should be given more learning opportunities to gain preparedness to perform instructional leadership skills required of today's leaders (Hess & Kelly, 2007). Moreover, the curriculum and content of the first four core courses (Leadership Perspectives, Leadership Development, Learning Theory, and Curriculum Development) are required to emphasize the skills instructional leaders most need.

Finally, the findings revealed that the educational leadership training program did not alter the perceived readiness scores of the urban educators on performing the Shared Vision and Mission tasks. In other words, there was no statistically significant difference found between the perceived readiness of the first and second year program completers. A number of factors may have accounted for this lack of significant difference including the amount of and quality of core courses and the field-based internship experience and mentoring. The implications of this finding for policy and practice is that urban school leader preparation programs might update their internship requirements to match the instructional leadership responsibilities of today's school leaders. Since prospective school leaders are more likely gain skills and build perception of preparedness through hands-on and active learning instructional strategies, educational leadership training programs can consider providing candidates with rich experiential project-based learning opportunities throughout their internship (Silberman, 2007).

The findings also suggest that to increase the perception of the preparedness of candidates, school leader educators need to re-examine and differentiate projects and assignments provided for prospective urban school leaders. As Johnston, Kaufman, & Thompson (2016) indicate principal preparation programs need to provide urban candidates with genuine job-embedded, professional development opportunities, as well as hands-on instructional leadership challenges to meet the daily requirements of school principals. Specifically, in order to help urban educators improve their instructional leadership skills, the following project based learning activities can be integrated into the leadership curriculum including (1) Building shared visioning, (2) Using survey management, (3) Establishing professional learning system, (4) Developing school or district improvement plan, (5) Managing student learning and educator evaluation data, (6) Creating comprehensive communication system and social media project, (7) Establishing vertical and horizontal teaming, (8) Writing curriculum



development and assessment guide, (9) Conducting informal or formal observation project (Barnett, 2004; CSDE, 2015).

Table 2.

*Sample Concepts for Teaching Instructional Leadership*

<b>EDL Course Names</b>	<b>What to Assess</b>	<b>How to Assess it</b>
Educational Leadership Curriculum	Key Areas of Instructional Leadership	Potential Sources of Evidence for Instructional Leadership Practices
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Leadership Perspectives</li> <li>• Leadership Development</li> <li>• Learning Theory</li> <li>• Curriculum Development</li> <li>• Organizational Development</li> <li>• Supervision and Staff Development</li> <li>• Educational Law</li> <li>• Finance</li> <li>• Field-based Internship</li> <li>• Seminar in Educational Leadership</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• High Expectations for students</li> <li>• Improvement Plan</li> <li>• Stakeholder Engagement</li> <li>• Curriculum Development</li> <li>• Instructional strategies</li> <li>• Assessment practices</li> <li>• Data-driven decisionmaking</li> <li>• Analysis of instruction</li> <li>• Solution focused leadership</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Shared school vision</li> <li>• Professional learning plan</li> <li>• School improvement plan</li> <li>• Student learning data</li> <li>• Educator evaluation data</li> <li>• Communication system</li> <li>• Stakeholder engagement</li> <li>• Social Media</li> <li>• Vertical teaming</li> <li>• Community collaborations</li> <li>• Parental involvement</li> <li>• Data team</li> <li>• Curriculum guides</li> <li>• Student learning goals</li> <li>• Leadership team</li> <li>• Scheduling</li> <li>• Feedback system</li> <li>• School governance council</li> </ul>

In order to prepare the impact-ready school leaders that our urban schools need, it is suggested that each candidate be required to prepare an evidence-based instructional leadership portfolio that covers every dimension of instructional leadership in depth, and breadth. In addition to pre-service formal leadership training school leaders need to continue to benefit from local, state and national professional development activities throughout their leadership careers (Darling-Hammond, LaPointe, Meyerson, Orr & Cohen, 2007). Such continuing development activities are necessary in order for urban educators to stay up to date on emerging leadership

practices and instructional technology. Aligned with the CT Leader Evaluation and Support Rubric (2015), a sample leadership preparation program curriculum model is presented in Table 2.

### **Conclusion and Educational Significance**

In this study the essence of effective instructional leadership was described by the researchers using the 3-dimensional CSDE framework: (1) Shared Vision, Mission and Goals, (2) Curriculum, Instruction and Assessment, and (3) Continuous Improvement. These three dimensions of instructional leadership can also serve as a guide to support urban school leaders in improving teaching and learning for all students. Since the findings indicated that each dimension is a very highly correlated with instructional leadership skills, principal preparation programs should hold their candidates accountable to provide clear, consistent and convincing evidence of proficiency in each instructional leadership dimension.

Given the mean readiness scores of the participants educational leadership programs were shown to have a significant impact on improving urban educators' preparedness to perform instructional leadership activities. However, pre-service urban school leaders still did not feel prepared enough to address the complex problems facing urban school systems. Therefore, it is crucial for urban educators and policy makers to understand the differences between preparing knowledge-ready, performance-ready and impact-ready leaders. Specifically, urban school leader training programs need to consider revising their curricula, assessments, requirements of internships, and the presentation of instruction strategies, to help candidates exercise leadership skills and apply their knowledge purposefully to improve instruction and student learning. The findings suggest this study is particularly timely for promoting and preparing effective instructional leaders for urban school success and student learning. Further investigations on preparing performance and impact ready leaders to improve curriculum, instruction and assessment in urban schools based upon the results of this study are warranted.



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