

# **Student Perceptions of Superintendent Internship Topics/Activities Associated with National Educational Leadership (NELP) Standards**

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*Educator preparation programs for school district leaders are encouraged to review internship topics and activities for relevance in today's changing educational climate and programing. The National Educational Leadership Preparation (NELP) standards are research-based standards that have been approved to assist advanced programs at the master, specialist, and doctoral levels in the preparation of district leaders (National Policy Board for Educational Administration, 2018). In this study, students nearing completion and recent completers in two leadership preparation programs, one in Texas and one in Arizona, were asked to complete a survey seeking their perceptions of topics and/or experiences included in their internship program. Survey items included two questions associated with each of the first seven NELP standards for district leadership. The results of the survey provided meaningful feedback for educator preparation program improvement and insight to the challenges facing current district leaders. Findings and conclusions identified in this study may be helpful to district level educator preparation programs seeking field experience information associated with Leadership Training K-12.*

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Clear and consistent leadership standards assist all educational stakeholders in understanding the expectations for campus and district leadership in providing for the academic success and personal well-being of every student (Canole & Young, 2013). The first set of national standards for educational leaders was adopted by the National Policy Board of Educational Administration (NPBEA) in 1996 and revised in 2008 and 2015. These standards were created to guide states in developing policies for expectations and evaluation of school and district administrators. The 2015 revision was named the Professional Standards for Educational Leaders (PSEL). Three years after each revision, key professional educational leadership organizations collaboratively develop and adopt standards for university and other preparation programs. This set of standards was renamed the National Education Leadership Preparation (NELP) Standards in 2018 to guide program design, accreditation review, and state program approval (NPBEA, 2018). The PSEL standards provide broadly stated performance expectations for beginning level building and district leaders whereas the NELP standards were developed specifically with the principalship and superintendent position in mind (NELP Companion Guide, 2018).

NELP standard 8 stipulates that preparation programs require students to serve in an internship and incorporate the content of the first seven standards with the supervision of knowledgeable, expert practitioners, by engaging candidates in multiple and diverse school settings, and providing candidates with coherent, authentic, and sustained opportunities to synthesize and apply knowledge and skills identified in NELP standards 1-7 (NPBEA, 2018).

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

The purpose of this study was to explore the perceptions of superintendent certification program candidates in two university preparation programs concerning internship activities associated with the NELP Standards in order to improve their programs. Program improvement based on candidate feedback is an important element for professors of educational leadership programs in designing content that promotes continuous improvement and complies with requirements found in NELP Standard 8. Forty superintendent certification completers, or candidates nearing completion of the program, responded to a survey designed to measure perceptions of which internship activities associated with the NELP standards were most relevant/meaningful and which topics and activities would they liked to have spent more time for the purpose of gaining greater understanding.

### **Research Questions**

The study was guided by the following research questions:

1. What is the perception of superintendent certification program candidates as to which internship topics and activities associated with NELP Standards are most relevant and meaningful?
2. What is the perception of superintendent certification program candidates as to which internship topics and activities associated with NELP Standards would the candidate liked to have spent more time for the purpose of gaining greater understanding?

## **Methods and Procedures**

The population reviewed in this study consisted of forty superintendent certification program completers or candidates nearing completion of their preparation program. Those surveyed were from two separate superintendent preparation programs housed at two different regional universities, one in Texas, the other in Arizona. The superintendent certification program in Texas has a nine-month internship and the Arizona superintendent certification program has a six-month program. Internship activities and requirements include culminating experiences at both university programs. Most, if not all, of those surveyed were practicing school administrators who also hold certification or licenses as campus principals. The anonymous survey used in this study was designed to measure perceptions of students regarding internship activities aligned to NELP Standards. The first three questions of the survey used multiple choice responses to garner contextual demographic information for analytical purposes. The survey concluded with fourteen questions related to activities aligned to seven identified NELP Standards. Two questions related to each NELP Standard were presented and each question provided a textbox for open-ended individual narrative responses. This survey was deemed valid as it solicited open-ended perceptions of internship activities related to published NELP Standards. All reviewers had direct experience with assisting students during internship activities, and one reviewer was certified as a field supervisor. Five professional educators reviewed the content of the survey and four of the reviewers have extensive experience as a school superintendent. All survey reviewers were graduate faculty members in educational leadership programs and have direct knowledge and experience with using NELP Standards.

The survey received university approval and made use of Qualtrics software. Data from the survey were analyzed using a qualitative method design and identified themes from student responses regarding individual perceptions of topics and/or experiences in the internship activities with their superintendent preparation program.

## **Review of Literature**

### **NELP Standard 1 – Mission, Vision, and Improvement**

This standard focuses on three important topics necessary to school district continuous improvement; research related support emphasizes the importance of district leadership having the knowledge and skills to promote the success of every student through collaborative leading, designing, and implementing a district mission, vision, and process to achieve improvement, district leadership awareness of the importance of collaboratively developed mission and vision statements, and the importance of a social climate that promotes organizational learning and improvement (Finnigan & Daly, 2012). The ability for a district leader to demonstrate a collaborative process and to provide evidence is a skill that is needed by the district superintendent and other central office staff. A review of the literature and study of evidence identified the use of evidence supporting district decision-making is complex, spans multiple sub-activities, and requires local knowledge (Honig & Coburn, 2018). Associated with district improvement is the ability and willingness for district leadership to promote reform. Successful reform is contingent upon building trusting relationships between district leadership and school site personnel. Understanding the importance of social construct and networking in the reform process is also important, particularly in cases of underperforming schools (Daly & Finnigan,

2011). Continuous improvement is an appropriate goal for all school systems and the knowledge and skills of the district superintendent are important to leading the improvement process. Understanding the improvement element in NELP standard one is important to district leadership.

### **NELP Standard 2 – Ethics and Professional Norms**

Sustaining a positive professional culture is important to achieving school effectiveness and the development of networks among schools contributes toward student learning and instructional improvement (Lee, Louis, & Anderson, 2012). While cooperation among schools is important, individual professional conduct and behavior by district leaders is also a key element in providing effective leadership. Superintendents are expected to keep themselves familiar with changes in the law related to conflict of interest and to also be sure that each board member is updated regularly with changes and issues related to superintendent responsibility (WSSDA, 2016). The greatest challenge to maintaining composure and ethical behavior is during times of stress. In a study of school superintendents, more than half of school superintendents experience high levels of stress on a frequent basis (Hawk & Martin, 2011). In addition to individual behavior, it has been found that the superintendent's ability to encourage organizational properties that lead to cognitive and social-emotional development of faculty and students will ultimately lead to effective schools. Three characteristics, or properties, were found in a study to impact differences in student achievement: collective efficacy, collective trust in parents and students, and a schoolwide emphasis on academic achievement (Hoy, 2012).

### **NELP Standard 3 – Equity, Inclusiveness, and Cultural Responsiveness**

The issues of equity, inclusiveness, and cultural responsiveness are complex, particularly the aspect of understanding each in relation to improving student learning. Extending our understanding of educational reform by providing instructional leadership, reorienting the organization to emphasize equity and cultural understanding, establishing policy that supports these objectives, and maintaining a focus on equity serve as a foundation for improving achievement and advancing equity (Rorrer & Skra, 2008). Superintendents should be a catalyst for campus leadership improvement by being supportive of improved working conditions and encouraging change for the purpose of improving achievement. Empowering principals while establishing a clear focus and strategic plan for improvement are important leadership traits (Bottoms & Fry, 2009). Inclusiveness is perhaps the opposite of segregation and although we have laws requiring desegregation, studies indicate de-facto segregation in our school systems. Findings of a qualitative study in which Black superintendents were interviewed indicated the perception that many school systems have never truly integrated and continue school program inequality (Horsford, 2011).

### **NELP Standard 4 – Learning and Instruction**

Researchers advocate the need for major school reform if schools are to advance the teaching/learning process and if students are to acquire 21<sup>st</sup> century thinking skills (Resnick, 2010). Grissom & Harrington (2010) emphasize the importance of relevant professional development for principals in a study including a national sample of schools. Professional

development is often the basis for reform as administrators seek improvement in the areas of teaching and learning. Policy is another concept used to advance educational reform. Policy makers increasingly include provisions aimed at fostering professional community learning initiatives as part of school reform. The mediation of policy and the influence of social networking were found to affect school instructional innovators, an important element for change acceptance (Coburn & Russell, 2008). District leadership has greater opportunities to influence policy decisions than leaders at the site-level and acceptance of district decisions at the site-level often are influenced by teacher acceptance in which social networking has played a role. A study by Neumerski (2013) identified three distinct literatures: (a) the traditional instructional leadership model primarily centered on the principal, (b) the teacher instructional leadership model, and (c) the coach instructional leadership model. The effectiveness of each model (literature) varies based on knowledge and skills of the individuals and the study concluded that it is necessary to assess what scholars do and do not know about instructional leadership in order to identify which literature will be best at a particular school.

### **NELP Standard 5 – Community and External Leadership**

It is important for superintendent candidates to understand the importance of communication and being an advocate for the district by using multiple formats and district environments in order to communicate with stakeholders in the larger organizational, community, and political contexts of the school setting (Trust, Carpenter, & Krutka, 2018). Research suggests that schools' capacity to successfully implement and sustain reform programs may rest, in part, with district-level facilitation. The importance of district-level leadership has been established for a variety of educational reforms, including school, family, and community partnerships (Sanders, 2009). Constituent diversity may increase the need for superintendent focus on networking and partnership efforts. A study of Texas school districts identified the amount of time devoted by superintendents to networking activities. The study found a positive correlation in district diversity to increased amount of time dedicated to working with constituents (Owens & Kukla-Acevedo, 2012). Studies have also shown that district leaders significantly impact success of school reform initiatives and leadership understanding of socio-cultural and organizational theory is important to district improvement (Epstein, Galindo, & Sheldon, 2011). Organizational theory includes extending ownership of key initiative that require broad support. A study in Ohio, utilizing a snowball sampling technique and coding of individual responses, found that districts that heavily engaged community members and created a sense of urgency, yielded greater success at the polls than "central office campaigns" (Ingle, Johnson, & Petroff, 2012).

### **NELP Standard 6 – Operations and Management**

The superintendent's ability to transform the work and basic services of central office personnel to an environment that supports the goals of each school is an important function of managing and aligning district resources (Honig, Copland, Rainey, Lorton, & Newton, 2010). In a study of 407 schools in 24 districts, strong empirical support was found for the importance of sociocultural and organizational theories in studying school improvement and that direct district leader facilitation contributes to the quality of school programs (Epstein, Galindo, & Sheldon, 2011). District decision-making affects numerous constituents and organizations and creates a political atmosphere for the superintendent. While some decisions must be made expeditiously, others will

require thoughtful reflection and input from others. Almost every challenge will require some degree of political thinking and behavior. In terms of the superintendent/principal relationship, the superintendent should create working conditions that support and encourage change for improving school achievement (Bottoms & Fry, 2009). Improving school achievement has several different elements and variables between districts depending on circumstances.

### **NELP Standard 7 – Policy, Governance, and Advocacy**

Improving school performance is aided when central office personnel support principals with working conditions consistent with improving teacher effectiveness and student performance. As a result of multiple studies, a report by the Southern Regional Education Board identifies seven key strategies for improving high schools: (1) Establish a clear focus on core beliefs, effective practices and goals for improving student achievement; (2) Organize and engage the school board and central office in support of schools; (3) Provide instructional support; (4) Invest heavily in instruction-related professional development; (5) Provide data that links student achievement to classroom practices; (6) Optimize resources to improve student learning; and (7) Invoke key school and community leaders in shaping a vision for improving schools (Bottoms & Schmidt-Davis, 2010). District governance is enhanced when the superintendent works to develop collaborative relationships with local business communities (Bennett & Thompson, 2011). Generating support for improvement strategies is a critical element and the use of data-driven decision-making validates governance and other decisions.

### **Findings of the Study**

An analysis of the survey responses to the two research question prompts for each of the seven NELP Standards indicated key findings concerning the perspectives of university interns in regard to the relevance of chosen district-level internship activities and the desire for additional activities or greater depth of chosen activities to better prepare for an entry-level position of superintendent. Due to the high degree of similarity and no ascertained differences between responses from the sample of interns from Texas and Arizona, the findings are presented as one larger group. Duplicate responses and responses not directly related to the research question prompts are not reported.

Further analysis of the responses yielded emergent themes or more general topics that surfaced from the list of responses under each NELP standard. The researchers therefore have grouped responses under the subheadings of theme or general topic for greater clarity and organization. Responses that were not directly related to a theme or general topic but relevant to the overall standard are presented under the subheading of ‘Other’.

### **NELP Standard 1: Mission, Vision, and Improvement**

*What topics and/or experiences associated with this NELP standard did you find to be relevant and meaningful in your internship experience?*

#### ***Vision and Mission***

1. Analyzing data relevant to the district mission and vision including the relationship to district goals and budget

2. Developing a plan to communicate the mission and vision to multiple constituencies
3. Observing, interviewing, and understanding the importance of the superintendent promoting and projecting the mission and vision of the district to multiple stakeholders
4. Reviewing and comparing mission statements of various school districts

***Culture and Climate***

5. Data analysis based on culture and climate surveys

***Improvement Plan***

6. Reviewing the District Improvement Plan and process
7. Aligning the campus and district improvement plans to the mission and vision statements of the district
8. Understanding the role of the superintendent in school improvement

***Collaboration***

9. Collaboration in designing a shared mission and vision statement for the district
10. Collaborating with other administrators in the district to evaluate the district mission and vision statements and goals related to data use, technology, values, diversity, digital citizenship and community
11. Understanding the importance of collaboration between the superintendent and board for communicating the district's mission and vision

***Other***

12. Attending administrative meetings every two weeks to discuss district initiatives and goals
13. I was allowed to create a Strategic Plan for our CIP during the internship
14. Reading and learning the guidelines for the superintendent and school board was beneficial
15. Details about reporting gifts and conflict of interest disclosures

*What knowledge or skill associated with this NELP standard would you have liked to have spent more time for the purpose of gaining greater understanding?*

1. Developing skills to create committees for new mission statement
2. More about the vision of the school board
3. More time in school improvement and the systems in place at the state level
4. More time studying district data on improving the district
5. More hands-on activities in working with the District Improvement Plan
6. Working with strategic planning committees
7. More time is needed to evaluate existing improvement processes
8. Researching district-wide improvement efforts
9. Shadow the superintendent more
10. More practice working to build consensus among stakeholders
11. More time discussing how to engage diverse stakeholders

## **NELP Standard 2: Ethics and Professional Norms**

*What topics and/or experiences associated with this NELP standard did you find to be relevant and meaningful in your internship experience?*

### ***Professional Norms and Culture***

1. Being assigned grade level leader to work on professional norms
2. The work to cultivate professional norms and build organizational culture.
3. The importance of the district staff understanding expectations for district culture
4. Administrative meetings in which district culture and ethical decision-making was discussed

### ***Reflection***

5. Self-reflection and life-long learning
6. Ethics and self-reflection are two areas that I learned a deeper appreciation for
7. Self-assessments, reflections, and interviews were all viable components of learning this standard
8. Seeing my mentor conduct reflective conversation with groups was very powerful

### ***Ethics***

9. Reviewing the Educator Code of Ethics
10. Sharing information about ethical decisions with fellow cohort members
11. Understanding the importance of leading with integrity, transparency, and trust and how to keep politics out
12. Discussing the importance of student well-being and advocating for ethical decisions
13. The emphasis that was placed on the welfare of every student
14. Interview questions for district leaders that pertained to ethics
15. The importance of leaders sharing their views about expectations for ethical behavior
16. Understanding the importance of modeling correct behavior and to cultivate ethical behavior in others
17. Understanding that superintendents' main focus is to always do what is best for students

### ***Superintendent/Board Relations***

18. Superintendent/Board relations
19. Studying the roles, responsibilities, and working relationship of the superintendent and board has been the best activity to learn this standard

### ***Other***

20. The interview with the Executive Director of Finance offered me a great opportunity to evaluate complex issues
21. Working in HR assisted me in understanding the importance of this standard
22. Dealing with upset parents
23. Conducting professional learning committees

*What knowledge or skill associated with this NELP standard would you have liked to have spent more time for the purpose of gaining greater understanding?*



1. More on cultural responsiveness, social justice, and restorative justice
2. More experience with dealing with upset parents and staff
3. Evaluating ethical behaviors in other districts
4. More time on approaches to organizational culture
5. How the superintendent works to improve the moral direction for each school and promote ethical behavior
6. Analyze case studies and identify best practice in approaching different ethical dilemmas
7. More time is needed in cultivating professional norms in others
8. How to systematically cultivate new professional norms
9. Advocating for legal and ethical decisions
10. More time studying the politics of the district and decision-making
11. I would have liked to dive into the logistics of the laws
12. Discuss some court cases focusing on ethics and professional norms
13. There is a need for more transparency and digital citizenship on all campuses
14. The opportunity to communicate with more stakeholders
15. To know how the staff feel after training on personal conduct and ethical behavior

### **NELP standard 3: Equity, Inclusiveness, and Cultural Responsiveness**

What topics and/or experiences associated with this NELP standard did you find to be relevant and meaningful in your internship experience?

#### ***Equity***

1. The equity audit
2. Two important aspects – 1) your own bias and 2) the difficulty in maintaining equity
3. The importance of recognizing diversity and equity
4. Discussing the importance of equitable access to educational resources
5. Attending board meetings and watching the process of equity and inclusiveness

#### ***Cultural Responsiveness***

6. Demonstrating the capacity to evaluate and cultivate district inclusiveness and culture
7. Processes for evaluating district culture and processes for fostering cultural change
8. Building unity, diversity, and culture in the school district
9. The huge role that superintendents have with cultural responsiveness
10. Using research and data to improve district culture
11. Superintendents must have a support network to promote a positive culture
12. Understanding your own cultural bias

#### ***Other***

13. I attended one meeting that dealt with SPED and gifted
14. Participated in numerous educational annual goal committees – IEP, 504, accommodations
15. Working with the early college program for all students

*What knowledge or skill associated with this NELP standard would you have liked to have spent more time for the purpose of gaining greater understanding?*

1. Working with parents on cultural responsiveness for emotional/wellness curriculum
2. More restorative justice and cultural-responsive leadership
3. More time working with departments
4. More historical court decisions
5. Cultural-responsive instruction and behavioral support practice
6. More discussions about Mexican and Central American families seeking asylum in our border towns and how to handle the difficult decisions about fairness and equity
7. Explore more ways to cultivate cultural competence
8. Additional opportunities to explore equity and cultural responsiveness
9. Working with district-level public relations
10. More emphasis on working with diverse cultural contexts of a global society
11. Closing the achievement gap in our schools
12. Evaluate sources of inequality and bias in terms of allocation of resources
13. More time should be spent on the policies concerning misconduct
14. Studying a district that has different demographics than mine
15. More research on district cultures
16. Advocating for equitable access
17. More activities related to special education
18. Advocating for behavior support practices among teachers and staff
19. More time with finance and equity issues
20. More time looking at sources of bias and educational opportunities

#### **NELP Standard 4: Learning and Instruction**

*What topics and/or experiences associated with this NELP standard did you find to be relevant and meaningful in your internship experience?*

#### ***Data Analysis / Assessment / Curriculum Development***

1. Using research and data to evaluate coherence and relevance of district support systems, coaching and professional development
2. Experiencing a PLC meeting and working with assessment data
3. Data driven analysis and professional learning plan
4. Attending the meetings of the curriculum department and campus principals
5. Evaluating, developing, and implementing quality curricula
6. Accountability related to student performance
7. Analysis that supports instructional improvement
8. Evaluating curriculum, the use of technology, and coordination among systems and supports
9. "I wrote and equity audit and gave assessment training."

#### ***Technology for Instruction***

10. Integrating technology across the district
11. Digital learning and selecting a school-wide dashboard to be used for homework and system accountability
12. Discussions about technology and online delivery of instruction

### ***Professional Development***

13. Research-based planning for professional development
14. Understanding the importance of professional development
15. Professional development targeted district goals
16. The assignment to evaluate professional development

### ***Superintendent Role / Policy***

17. Learning board policies associated with teaching and learning and the impact of school culture
18. Working with the administrative team in our district to evaluate our performance in the district to keep our “A” rating
19. Activities that promoted administrators as true instructional leaders
20. The politics of education and to work with the school board in a positive way
21. Reviewing policies related to curriculum development
22. Understand what the superintendent should know about curriculum, teaching, and learning

### ***Other***

23. Attending grade level meetings
24. Being able to participate in textbook adoption for the district
24. To know research-based strategies for supporting district and school collaboration
25. Implementation of programs for early college high school

*What knowledge or skill associated with this NELP standard would you have liked to have spent more time for the purpose of gaining greater understanding?*

1. State testing data interpretations and relation to professional development
2. Learning about the rules for purchasing curriculum, state testing, budgets, etc.
3. Current trends in education
4. Instructional technology and its use
5. Differentiated and personalized instruction
6. School culture and physical buildings impact on learning
7. Curriculum audits
8. More time in our district’s planning meetings
9. More time analyzing data trends
10. Learning how to evaluate district programs
11. Developing culturally responsive and accessible assessments
12. The pandemic - more knowledge about technology assisted instruction
13. Reading and math programs at the elementary level

### **NELP Standard 5: Community and External Leadership**

*What topics and/or experiences associated with this NELP standard did you find to be relevant and meaningful in your internship experience?*

### ***School/Community Relations/Partnerships***

1. Work in school-community relations
2. Discussion board posts from other cohort members was a great way to share information about engaging community with the district
3. Evaluate our buildings for safety and a healthy school environment – then share information with the community
4. Activity that required me to come up with ideas to engage diverse families
5. Developing strong partnerships with our community
6. The importance of cultivating relationships with families and constituents
7. Learning the importance of advocating for district needs to the community
8. Engaging community members and developing a committee to support bond issues
9. Discussing community leadership with my superintendent
10. Working with parents about special education issues
11. The latitude to work on cultivating collaboration to benefit students and families
12. Develop a joint school/business event with the local Chamber of Commerce
13. Having the ability to increase parent involvement and impact student growth

### ***Role of the Superintendent***

14. Learning about the role of the superintendent as being a community leader
15. Interviews with the superintendent made me keenly aware of how important it is to communicate with outside stakeholder and community
16. Interviews with the superintendent and learning about the role as instructional leader
17. Board related activities and the importance of involving all stakeholders
18. Speaking to district administrators about the last bond election
19. Community safety and health protocols during the pandemic

### ***Other***

20. Leadership networking with high school and neighboring private school
21. Engaging the support of diverse families is important to the district to benefit students
22. Working with Head Start and community services
23. Being a part of SEL curriculum for district use

*What knowledge or skill associated with this NELP standard would you have liked to have spent more time for the purpose of gaining greater understanding?*

1. Allow more time to analyze governance with community partnership (MOU)
2. How do you work with community members when they disagree with you?
3. More time working with strategies to involve the community with the district
4. Working with the board and community involvement
5. How to plan meetings for the purpose of involving the community
6. How to involve parents at the high school level
7. Engaging diverse families
8. Involving parents with students who have disabilities
9. Additional opportunities to work with community groups
10. More visibility in the community
11. Have an activity with the superintendent and a business leader

12. More time with public relations
13. Learning cultures and languages in the community
14. More activities that involve teacher learning and understanding of diverse families
15. Having access to district communication templates would be helpful

### **NELP Standard 6: Operations and Management**

*What topics and/or experiences associated with this NELP standard did you find to be relevant and meaningful in your internship experience?*

#### ***Budgeting***

1. Budgeting work and interview with CFO
2. Topics of purchasing
3. School-based budgeting
4. Research and best practices involving budgeting and operations

#### ***Facilities***

5. Learning about facilities
6. The interview of the Director of Facilities
7. Facilities management and budgeting
8. Process to improve facilities
9. I led the district safety committee

#### ***Operations***

10. Data informed operations systems
11. The process of evaluating operations and management systems of the district
12. Interviews with Deputy Superintendent
13. Reviewing transportation policies
14. Evaluating and implementing laws and policies for this topic area

#### ***Technology***

15. Use of technology for administrative purposes – interviews
16. Learning about technology applications for district

#### ***Personnel***

17. Budget, facilities, and personnel
18. Detailed procedures for staff
19. Master scheduling and conflict management among students and staff
20. Policy and procedures on student/parent and staff handbook
21. Recruiting, hiring, supporting of personnel
22. Creating a professional development plan

*What knowledge or skill associated with this NELP standard would you have liked to have spent more time for the purpose of gaining greater understanding?*

1. Federal and state policies

2. A deeper understanding of school finance and budgets
3. More training about cyber-bullying
4. More experience with laws and regulations
5. Building maintenance processes
6. Community partnerships
7. Go in person to our operations departments
8. Work on a TRE (Tax Ratification Election)
9. Shadow and interview the Director of Operations
10. More time learning about recruiting
11. More time developing a staff development plan
12. Professional health and well-being of faculty and staff
13. Managing fiscal and physical facilities
14. More time shadowing the CFO
15. Learning about district and school level resources

### **NELP Standard 7: Policy, Governance, and Advocacy**

*What topics and/or experiences associated with this NELP standard did you find to be relevant and meaningful in your internship experience?*

#### ***Board Relations / Meetings***

1. Attending school board meetings
2. Understanding the importance of the relationship between the superintendent and school board
3. Building relationships among the board members

#### ***Role of Superintendent***

4. The superintendent as district advocate
5. The superintendent and board roles in policy and governance
6. Communication strategies – negotiation strategies
7. Developing priorities for discussion and collaboration with elected officials
8. Superintendent role in preparing for board meetings
9. Selecting and hiring staff, professional learning
10. Staff evaluation processes

#### ***Board Policies***

11. Reading the district policies
12. Policies regarding contracts, renewals, terminations
13. Policy study and understanding governance issues
14. The importance of workplace conditions and staff productivity

#### ***Other***

15. Meeting with the ATPE district representative
16. Our internship work in HR
17. Plan to develop School/Community Relations

*What knowledge or skill associated with this NELP standard would you have liked to have spent more time for the purpose of gaining greater understanding?*

1. The opportunity to study process of state governance decision-making
2. HR guidelines, HR hearings, HR investigations
3. Superintendent's role in driving policy
4. Recruiting personnel
5. Trips to the state capital during a legislative session
6. Research and data related to personnel recruitment
7. Researching the emerging trends in education
8. More time working with board members
9. Advocating in the larger context
10. To have learned more about conflict resolution
11. Professional learning and development of staff
12. Develop a plan to implement laws and policies
13. More discussion about the implications of policy

The wide array of responses listed under each NELP standard suggest that interns begin the internship with varying degrees of experience and level of competence in each NELP standard and are afforded or limited by varying degrees of opportunity to conduct intern activities in their particular district setting. Further disparities may arise due to differences in mentoring and oversight of the district intern supervisor.

### **Limitations of the Study**

The study collected perceptions of relevant activities for preparation for the position of superintendent and recommendations of additional activities from students that recently completed a superintendent internship. The responses and recommendations, however, can only be perceived from a student perspective since none of the responders had actually served in the position. The study used a small sample from students in two southwestern, non-union states. Additionally, the survey limited responses for internship improvement to meeting NELP standards. It is unclear whether a part of the internship experience that occurred during the COVID-19 Virus outbreak had any effect.

### **Implications for Future Research**

Future research on superintendent internship activities should utilize a larger sample of survey responders and from states in various areas of the nation. Studies should also include respondents from union and non-union states. For a wider array of responses, the survey should solicit responses for NELP standards and other items not covered by NELP, including leadership style, emotional intelligence, etc. Future research studies should also include individual student interviews or focus groups for greater depth of understanding and candidate responses from programs that have varying internship length and number of internship hours required.

## **Conclusions and Recommendations**

Superintendent preparation programs that seek national accreditation, or simply adopt NELP standards, must demonstrate adequate coverage and assessment of the required skills in each of the standards in field-based settings. Preparation programs, however, have little or no control over the setting, i.e., rural/urban/suburban, district demographics such as district wealth, size, and location. This fact, along with the varying levels of expertise of the intern and district internship supervisor and varying levels of opportunity, suggest that a one-size-fits-all internship design may not meet the needs of all program candidates.

The findings show that superintendent interns are not satisfied with a cursory exposure to the superintendent's role in meeting standards. Their responses indicate the need for a hands-on, in depth experience of meeting the standard and the broader scope of how the standard fits with the overall goals and responsibilities of the superintendent. Responses indicate that some students need additional time, mentoring, and remediation in meeting different standards. Although individualization and flexibility in the design of the internship are needed, the findings do show a consensus of general recommendations for activities for each standard.

### **NELP Standard 1: Mission, Vision, and Improvement**

#### Relevant Intern Activities (Themes)

- Vision and Mission – data analysis and comparative analysis of collaboration, development, implementation, and evaluation
- Climate and Culture – analysis of survey data and recommendations
- Improvement Planning – collaborative process and alignment with vision and mission
- District Professional Development – development and implementation

#### Additional Desired Experience (Examples)

- More time is needed to evaluate existing improvement processes
- More practice working to build consensus among stakeholders
- Spend more time learning how to engage diverse stakeholders

### **NELP Standard 2: Ethics and Professional Norms**

#### Relevant Intern Activities (Themes)

- Professional Norms and Culture
- Reflective Practice
- Code of Ethics
- Student Centeredness
- Superintendent/Board Relations

#### Additional Desired Experience (Examples)

- More experience with dealing with upset parents and staff
- More time is needed in cultivating professional norms in others
- More time studying the politics of the district and decision-making



### **NELP standard 3: Equity, Inclusiveness, and Cultural Responsiveness**

Relevant Intern Activities (Themes)

- Equity Audits
- District Culture
- Role of the Superintendent

Additional Desired Experience (Examples)

- Explore more ways to cultivate cultural competence
- Closing the achievement gap in our schools
- Study a district that has different demographics than mine
- More activities related to special education

### **NELP Standard 4: Learning and Instruction**

Relevant Intern Activities (Themes)

Data Analysis / Assessment / Curriculum Development

Technology for Instruction

Professional Development

Superintendent Role / Policy

Additional Desired Experience (Examples)

1. Technology and its use
2. Curriculum audits
3. Differentiated and personalized instruction

### **NELP Standard 5: Community and External Leadership**

Relevant Intern Activities

- School/Community Relations
- Community/Business Partnerships
- Role of the Superintendent

Additional Desired Experience (Examples)

- More time working with strategies to involve the community with the district
- Engaging diverse families
- More time with public relations

### **NELP Standard 6: Operations and Management**

Relevant Intern Activities (Themes)

- Budgeting
- Facilities
- Operations
- Technology
- Personnel

Additional Desired Experience (Examples)

- A deeper understanding of school finance and budgets
- Building maintenance processes

- More time learning about recruiting
- More time shadowing the CFO

### **NELP Standard 7: Policy, Governance, and Advocacy**

#### Relevant Intern Activities (Themes)

- Board Relations / Meetings
- Role of Superintendent
- Board Policies

#### Additional Desired Experience (Examples)

- HR guidelines, HR hearings, HR investigations
- More about conflict resolution
- Superintendent's role in driving policy

The above list of recommended internship activities from this study is certainly not exhaustive but does show the perspectives of students completing an internship suggesting greater depth and breadth of experience are desired in various activities for differing interns. The survey results and analysis suggest the importance of including required activities in each identified theme. Additionally, preparation programs should allow extensive individualization of activities to meet the needs of each candidate. Finally, it is recommended that preparation programs solicit periodic student evaluations of the internship experience for program improvement.

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