

IMPROVING ADMINISTRATIVE INTERNSHIP PROGRAMS: PERCEPTIONS OF ILLINOIS PRINCIPALS*

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Abstract

As the efficacy of educational administration programs has come under increased national scrutiny, one area which has received particular attention is the administrative internship component. In Illinois, various professional, governmental, and state-supported organizations such as the Commission on School Leader Preparation, Illinois Council of Professors of Educational Leadership, and the Wallace Foundation have focused attention on the internship experience. A recent report to the Illinois General Assembly by the Illinois School Leader Task Force included a series of recommendations to improve the quality of school leadership programs. One of the recommendations suggested improvement of the administrative internship. There is a growing body of research which confirms the difference highly effective principals can make. Therefore, this study was designed to gather important information from the perspectives of Illinois principals about the nature and scope of Illinois university K-12 administrative internship programs. Principals presented recommendations regarding the types of experiences that should be included in the internship to adequately prepare administrators for their first administrative position. In addition, principals offered professors of education administration suggestions to improve other internship components. This manuscript reports the results of this research study.



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1 Introduction

The impact effective principals have on both school improvement and increased student achievement cannot be overestimated. In fact, a growing body of educational research continues to confirm the difference highly effective principals can make (Darling-Hammond, LaPointe, Meyerson, Orr, & Cohen, 2007, Marzano, Waters, & McNulty, 2005; Murphy, 2002; Schmoker, 2001; Davis, Darling-Hammond, LaPointe, & Meyerson, 2005; Leithwood, Seashore Lewis, Anderson, & Wahlstrom, 2004). Yet, at a time when researchers are documenting their positive impact, school district superintendents may worry that they will be unable to find experienced and highly effective principals to meet the growing demand.

This concern is well founded. The US Bureau of Labor (2008) (USBL) projects continuing employment growth for school principals over the next decade. Similarly, the American Association for Employment in Education (2008) (AAEE) reports a nationwide shortage of principals in its latest research on educational employment. Through 2012, the Illinois State Board of Education (ISBE) estimates that over 3,400 administrators will be required, making administration the fourth ranked projected need in education (ISBE, 2008a). These findings highlight the reality that school district superintendents, in some areas of the country, may need to employ more novice rather than experienced principals, many of whom may have recently completed their administrative certification.

Not surprisingly, the quality of education administration preparation programs has come under increased scrutiny. More than ever, educational administration professors are expected to ensure that their graduates, many of whom are entering administration with minimal years of teaching experience, are well prepared to assume sophisticated leadership positions. Simultaneously, some educational and political leaders are challenging the quality of administrative preparation programs and even proposing changes which they contend will strengthen the profession (Darling-Hammond, et.al., 2005; Levine, 2005). One component of administrative certification programs often targeted for improvement is the internship.

The administrative internship is typically a required component for principal preparation as part of the master's degree program and state licensure. It is the major field-based clinical experience required of future principals. Well designed internship experiences expand the knowledge and skills of principal candidates, and expose them to authentic experiences. By examining the internship experience, higher education will be able to meet the needs of aspiring principals, and work to improve their preparation.

2 Improving Administrative Leadership Programs

It is well documented that principals are regarded as the instructional leaders of their schools, and in that role are charged with leading the essential work of school improvement (Waters, Marzano, & McNulty, 2003; Brown, 2006). The essential competencies that are required of principals include:

- a comprehensive understanding of school and classroom practices that contribute to student achievement;
- the ability to work with teachers and others to design and implement a system for continuous student achievement; and
- the ability to provide the necessary support for staff to carry out sound school, curriculum and instructional practices (Southern Regional Education Board, 2005, p.12).

Research over the past two decades continues to examine the impact of leadership practices on student achievement with the belief that the principal contributes a measurable amount of influence on school

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effectiveness and improvement (Hallinger & Heck, 1998). According to Leithwood, Louis, Anderson, and Wahlstrom (2004), of all the factors that contribute to student learning, leadership is second only to classroom instruction. In their quantitative synthesis of the research, McREL identified 21 categories of principal behaviors referred to as responsibilities that are correlated to student achievement. Using the methodology of a meta-analysis, the Mid-continent Research for Education and Learning (McREL) examined over 69 research studies conducted at 2,802 schools to identify specific responsibilities related to principal leadership. The value of this research was the affirmation that a principal, who demonstrates expertise in these areas, will be highly effective and more successful in improving student achievement (Waters, et.al, 2003; Marzano, et.al, 2005). Among the 21 responsibilities include the principals willing to challenge the status quo as a change agent, establishing effective communication with and among teachers and students, establishing clear goals, demonstrating flexibility to meet the needs of the situation, and direct involvement in curriculum, instruction, and assessment (Marzano, et.al, p. 42-43).

In light of these findings, universities will need to examine the design and delivery of educational leadership programs in order to develop quality candidates equipped to lead school improvement efforts. In addition to the need to align course curriculum and program requirements with the principal responsibilities in mind, an examination of the administrative internship, which is often the culminating experience prior to obtaining a principalship, is necessary.

With concerns for the quality of higher education programs on the rise, many factors may contribute to a “disconnect” in the design and delivery of administrative preparation with what is needed to improve schools. These factors include curricular coherence, rigor, pedagogy, and the blend of course work with “on the job” training obtained through field experiences, primarily the principal internship (Jackson & Kelley, 2002; Southern Regional Education Board, 2005). The internship experience has come under scrutiny as the examination of administrative preparation programs has heightened in response to concerns raised regarding program quality (Levine, 2005). The call for improvement of meaningful clinical experiences has challenged higher education programs to evaluate current practices, and restructure internship components (ISBE, 2006).

The Commission on School Leader Preparation in Illinois Colleges and Universities in their report, *School Leader Preparation: A Blueprint for Change* (2006), recommends seven areas be included in internship requirements. These include:

- extending the internship experience to an entire year;
- requiring that the internship be a degree requirement with candidates allowed to begin their internship after passing the state certification exam;
- creating university-school partnerships to improve field experiences;
- providing mentor training at the university level;
- employing clinical faculty at the university level to supervise interns and assess their field performance relative to the goals of the preparation program;
- finding internship funding sources;
- designing key best practice internship assessments; and,
- revising the ISLLC-based Illinois Standards for School Leaders so that field experience requirements and evaluations, as well as internship requirements, are consistent with Educational Leadership Constituent Council (ELCC) standards. (ISBE, 2006, p. 10-11).

Research conducted by the Illinois Council of Professors of Educational Administration (ICPEA) reported that, in fact, all National Council for Accreditation of Teacher Education (NCATE) approved programs do have internship standards that provide guidance to universities in designing internship activities (ICPEA, 2007). Activities, which define candidate experiences, are often in alignment with NCATE standards and standard elements. Additionally, experiences must be in diverse settings beyond the intern’s home school, for at least for one semester. Many NCATE approved programs often have oversight of the internship experience by both a district mentor and college supervisor. The internship experience is often awarded graduate credit, therefore, making it a graduation requirement.

By utilizing a standards-based approach, internship programs, as well as the entire administrative preparation program, provide universities with a focus on the leadership knowledge and skills necessary to improve student learning. In a report to the Illinois General Assembly, the Illinois School Leader Task Force (2008), suggested additional recommendations to improve the quality of school leadership programs. This report examined Illinois data, as well as, existing research to create a strategic initiative that will impact the higher education community in Illinois (Illinois School Leader Task Force, 2008). Among the recommendations was the charge to “create meaningful clinical and internship experiences” that support the recommendations made in the *School Leader Preparation: A Blueprint for Change* (2006). With the goal of improving student achievement across the state of Illinois, the stakes are high in raising the bar to improve internship programs. The challenges that exist, therefore, have created the need to provide insight into the administrative internship experience so that higher education programs can begin to examine the issue of internship improvement.

3 Problems and Purposes

As the focus on preparing highly effective new school leaders becomes an increasingly important issue, especially given the complexity of school administration today, professors responsible for designing and delivering principal preparation programs can benefit from the experiences and advice of practicing principals. Although administrative certification programs include a variety of courses and field-based experiences, one particular component which typically links theory and practice is the administrative internship. This study was designed both to gather information about the administrative internship experiences of Illinois principals, and to identify their recommendations in order to improve administrative internship programs.

This study sought to answer the following questions about Illinois principals’ administrative internship experiences:

- Did their administrative certification programs require an internship?
- How was their administrative internship program structured?
- What components were most frequently included in their administrative internships?
- What requirements were they expected to meet?
- How many internship hours were they expected to complete?
- How often did their university supervisors conduct on-site visits?

In addition to describing their internship program experiences, this study asked Illinois principals for recommendations on how to improve administrative internships through the following questions:

- What experiences should be included in an administrative internship program to adequately prepare aspiring principals for their first administrative position?
- What advice would principals offer professors of education administration to improve administrative internships?

4 The Research Study

Context

In Illinois, 2,118,692 students are served in 871 school districts configured as K-8 elementary, 9-12 high school, or K-12 unit school districts in rural, suburban, and urban settings. Minority students make up 41.5% of the public school K-12 population (Ruiz & Koch, 2008). Principals can earn their state-approved administrative certification at any of thirty-two Illinois public and private universities (ISBE, 2008b).

Participants

The target population for this study was experienced Illinois principals. Since the email addresses of Illinois public school principals were available from the Illinois State Board of Education, 3,483 principals were emailed a link to a web-based questionnaire. Six hundred and fifty-one principals responded, resulting in

an 18.69% response rate. The actual response rate was probably higher since some school districts blocked email accounts and other email addresses proved invalid. Also, since the survey was administered during the summer, some principals were no longer employed in their positions due to job changes and retirements. Of those who responded, 22.2% of the principals were from rural, 48.6% from suburban, and 29.1% from urban school districts.

Questionnaire

A three-part questionnaire was developed and tested with a panel of education administration professors, all of whom had experience as school administrators. After the instrument and procedures were modified, the questionnaire was approved by the university Institutional Review Board.

In Part I, principals provided demographic data including grade level of their school, years of administrative experience, and district setting.

Part II contained six items which focused on various aspects of the administrative internship program including whether an internship was required, the structure of the internship experience, internship components, internship requirements including internship hours, and number of on-site visits. Five of the six items required a forced choice response and are reported as a frequency percentage of the total response for each item. For the one item with multiple response options, data are reported as a percentage of principals who responded to the item.

In Part III, principal were asked two open-ended questions:

- What experiences should be included in an administrative internship program to adequately prepare administrative interns for their first administrative position?
- What advice would you have offer professors of education administration to improve administrative internship programs?

Data Collection

This study, which was completed during July and August, 2008, utilized a modified Dillman (2007) web-based survey method for data collection. Principals were emailed a cover letter which included contact information for the researchers and a link to the web-based survey.

Data Analysis

Data were entered into Microsoft Excel 2003 to obtain frequencies and percentages of closed-end responses. Data were analyzed to identify any trends that might appear within the categories (Maxwell, 1996). Through an inductive analysis (McMillan & Wergin, 2006), “data are gathered first and synthesized inductively for understanding. Conclusions are grounded from the bottom up” (p.94). In the Results section of this report, any unique differences attributable to one of the underlying demographic characteristics are reported.

Open-ended qualitative responses were analyzed through data reduction, display, conclusion creation, and triangulation to identify trends (Berkowitz, 1997). Two of the researchers independently completed data reduction, display, and triangulation to develop conclusions. They shared their data-identified themes with each other following this process. Though this does not guarantee reliability and validity, it does provide “dependable results” (Guba & Lincoln 1981, p. 146) that can be replicated and retested to increase reliability and validity (Merriam, 1988).

5 Results

In Part II, principal responses in each table are reported as a frequency percentage of total responses for each item. For items in which unique differences were noted for any sub-group, these are discussed in the analysis.

Required Internship

Principals report that an internship experience is common although not required for all programs. Overall, 73.8% reported participating in internship experiences (see Table 1). Inclusion of an internship requirement is not a recent requirement since 55.6% of respondents with more than 15 years administrative experience indicated that their administrative certification programs required an internship. However, 86.7% of those

with one to four years experience had a required internship that shows the increased value educational leadership preparation programs are placing on field-based internships.

Required Internship

Response	Percentage
Yes	73.8%
No	26.2%

Table 1

Internship Program Structure

Participants reported a variety of internship program structures (see Table 2). The most common model was a one semester internship course (39.0%); however, 25.8% of principals said that they were required to complete internship activities through program coursework. Of the 8.4% who responded “Other,” most described a school-based experience driven only by their school administrator without a direct connection to a university program. These findings demonstrate the variance in internship program structures which exists among Illinois universities.

Structure of Internship Program

Response	Percentage
One Semester	39.0%
Two Semesters	21.5%
Integrated into Coursework	25.8%
Full/Part-Time Paid	5.3%
Other	8.4%

Table 2

Internship Components

For those educational administration certification programs which included an internship, the study sought to identify what components were included in the program. Since participants could provide multiple responses, data for each component are reported as a percentage of principals who responded to the item. As a result, the higher the percentage; the more it was mentioned by participants. A large majority of programs (see Table 3) required candidates to maintain a time log (90.6%) and to prepare written reflections on their internship experiences (81.1%). Either traditional or digital portfolios were required of 72.6% of the respondents indicating that a portfolio is increasingly expected. For those with over 15 year’s experience, 60.1% had to complete an internship portfolio. Of these, only 3.8% were digital. In contrast, 93.2% of those with 1 – 4 years experience had a portfolio requirement, including 21.2% digital.

For those who responded “Other” (7.2%), the most commonly mentioned items were the requirement of a “major” paper or project or a series of outside readings. Others said that they received internship credit without the course requirement because they were already in administrative roles such as a coordinator or assistant principal.

Internship Components

Response	Percentage
Internship Contract	54.1%
Time Log	90.6%
Written Reflection Paper(s)	81.1%
In-Class Presentation	41.0%
Traditional Portfolio	64.1%
Digital Portfolio	8.5%
Other	7.2%

Table 3

Internship Hours

Those who completed an internship requirement were asked to identify the number of required hours. Although the most common response was 51 – 100 hours (38.0%), a wide variance was noted (see Table 4) ranging from 14.6% who said they were expected to complete 50 hours or less to 11.2% who indicated 200 hours or more.

Required Internship Hours

Response	Percentage
50 or Less	14.6%
51 – 100 Hours	38.0%
101 – 150 Hours	21.0%
151 – 200 Hours	15.2%
>200 Hours	11.2%

Table 4

Variances were noted in total internship hours required based upon years of administrative experience. Those with the least years of experience were expected to complete the more internship hours (see Table 5) than administrative certification candidates from even a few years before. These findings indicate that universities are increasing internship requirements.

Required Internship Hours Based on Years of Administrative Experience

Hours Required	1 – 4 Years	5 –10 Years	11 –15 Years	>15 Years
50 or Less	7.8%	13.8%	17.2%	24.1%
51 – 100	27.9%	42.5%	39.4%	43.0%
101 – 150	27.1%	21.8%	16.1%	15.2%
151 – 200	17.1%	14.4%	20.2%	7.6%
> 200	20.1%	7.5%	7.1%	10.1%

Table 5**University Internship Supervisor Visits**

Although the most common response was a requirement of two on-site visits per semester (32.2%), over a quarter (26.7%) reported no visits (see Table 6). No substantial difference in on-site visits rates was noted based on years of administrative experience.

On-site Visits Each Semester

Response	Percentage
None	26.7%
1	17.2%
2	32.2%
3	10.9%
4 or More	10.1%
Other	2.9%

Table 6**Open-Ended Responses**

In the second part of the study, participants were asked to draw upon their experiences to respond to two open-ended questions. A first question asked: What experiences should be included in an administrative internship program to adequately prepare administrative interns for their first administrative position?

Overall, approximately one-third of the respondents suggested that internship experiences be highly practical, hands-on, and personally meaningful to the candidate. Other respondents held that a wide-breadth of experiences linked to specific leadership standards should focus on all aspects of the principalship. A number of responses indicated that job shadowing should be included, and consideration should be given to a one-year full-time paid internship position.

The respondents also suggested specific types of experiences that should be included within a sound administrative internship. These comments became the basis for two emerging themes: management and leadership. For the management theme, the focus was on the operation of the school from a business or operational standpoint. Experiences that focused on long-term or instructional planning were placed under the category of leadership.

Management. The most frequently identified recommendations focused on finance and budgeting skills. Over one-third of respondents felt that internships should increase the number of opportunities or the depth of fiscal management. In addition, other suggestions from principals included increased exposure to discipline related issues and processes, more opportunities to work with parents or parent groups, and the development of class schedules.

Substantial numbers of responses indicated that increased experiences with human resource functions would be useful. Principals noted that exposure to hiring, employee supervision, personnel problems, and working through employee or parent complaints would be beneficial to interns' development. Responses also suggested that the internship should increase the number of opportunities to develop personal communication with parents, staff members, and community stakeholders.

Respondents suggested that supervision of "bus duty," the cafeteria, or after school activities be fully included in the internship. Similarly, principals recommended that interns should conduct committee meetings, prepare state reports, and be briefed on legal issues that affect the functioning of the school. Attending board meetings and exposure to facility management received minor mention.

Leadership. When it came to leadership experiences, one-half of the respondents resoundingly cited teacher observation, supervision, and evaluation as the most important activity for the internship. This leadership-based activity far outpaced other responses.

The second leadership area most frequently mentioned was professional development including curriculum and instruction planning opportunities for faculty and staff. Curriculum dedicated to special education, response to intervention (RTI), and 504-plan development was noted. An almost equal number of respondents suggested interns need more experience in assessment and data analysis.

Some respondents focused on the importance of interns being able to participate on School Improvement Planning (SIP) teams. Other recommendations included increasing an intern's exposure to problem solving or conflict resolution case studies, leading a specific school based project, and participating in long-term planning projects.

The second open-ended question asked: What advice would principals offer professors of education administration to improve administrative internship programs? The responses yielded four categories.

Emphasis on practical applications. An overwhelming majority of respondents suggested that professors create practical, hands-on, and relevant experiences that would apply to the real world of administration. A good number of respondents afforded value to practical skill development such as meaningful decision-making opportunities, especially ones that involved problem-solving. Many of these suggested less emphasis be placed on “logging hours, constructing portfolios, and writing papers” with the onus placed on job-based, “nuts and bolts” tasks that were less academic in nature. Recommendations of practical tasks to be included in the internship related to finance, law, school climate, relationship building, scheduling, and staff development. According to these respondents interns should be required to actually apply themselves in these areas rather than simply observe others doing them. Lastly, when coursework was mentioned the respondents believed that case studies centering on actual scenarios should receive more emphasis in the curriculum, rather than administrative theory.

Professor involvement. A substantial number of responses called for professors to collaboratively plan with the site supervisor and the intern a “more focused” internship experience that is clearly communicated. Notably, respondents held that heightened levels of communication between the intern and the professor would be appreciated, especially in the form of site-based project advisement. A substantial number of responses also spoke to the notion of increased professor visibility. According to respondents, the professors should visit cooperating districts and schools, with special emphasis placed on the need to visit challenging urban based sites. In the minds of some respondents, heightened visibility would create a more collaborative environment benefiting all stakeholders. Some even suggested that professors simply spend more time in the field so that they can remain currently aware of new state-based reforms and cooperating district level initiatives that impact practical concerns.

Accountability. Respondents also suggested that professors create experiences that carried higher levels of accountability for the intern. Professors should collaboratively plan standards-based activities with “more rigorous expectations” – as one respondent expressed that attend to focused criteria. This would be a departure from interns simply “logging hours” on a particular task. Some felt that professors should “set the tone” and initiate the conversations about rigor and provide “honest feedback” as the semester unfolds.

Expand Internship. The last major set of responses centered on the length of the internship itself and/or when it should begin. In general, the majority commenting on this topic plainly held that the internship should be longer. Many felt that professors should simply increase the numbers of hours and/or that the internship should be conducted over a longer period of time. Some specified that the internship should cover the full year. This recommendation suggests internships should begin early to experience the opening of the school year and end later to assist in the end of the school year tasks. Many suggested that the internship experience be a full year “paid” experience or one that incorporated a significant degree of release time from the interns’ respective current teaching positions.

6 Limitations

Since this study was state specific, generalizations beyond Illinois are limited. Also, although all Illinois principals included in the Illinois State Board of Education database were surveyed, caution should be used in drawing conclusions from the data. Even though responses were received from 651 principals, they represented only 18.69% of those surveyed. Those who did not complete the survey may have responded

differently. Finally, qualitative responses may be somewhat inconsistent. Only through replication of the study, both in Illinois and other states, may transfer of findings be possible.

7 Summary

This research study sought to examine the views of Illinois principals in regard to their administrative internship experience, in order to better understand the design, implementation, and efficacy of the internship experiences as it relates to “on the job” needs. The results served as the basis to garner insight into the administrative internship experience, so that education administration professors will review the components of the internship experience in their own settings. The administrative internship should be a required component in educational leadership, for both degree completion and administrative certification. It is well documented that higher education has to do a better job of relating theory to practice, and the vehicle to do this is embedded in the field based, internship experience (Cunningham & Sherman, 2008; Levine, 2005).

In Illinois, 73.8% of the principals in this study were required to complete an administrative internship. Principals with more than 15 years administrative experience indicated they met this requirement; however, the data showed that higher numbers of principals with one to four years experience had an internship experience. Even with the increased internship requirement it is apparent, based on this research study, that internship requirements are inconsistent among universities. To examine these requirements, findings fall into two areas: internship components (required elements), and internship field based activities.

Required Internship Components

Universities need to clearly define and examine the required components of the administrative internship. In this research study, elements include length of time with the average being one semester, as well as, required internship hours with the majority of subjects indicating 51-100 hours. The trend appears to indicate the required number of internship hours is on the rise, and with state-wide and national recommendations to move to a one-year principal internship, required internship hours will certainly increase (ICPEA, 2007, Illinois School Leader Task Force, 2008).

Over 50% of the principals reported the development of a time log, a written reflection paper, a traditional portfolio, and an internship contract. The consistency of these components indicates that documentation of the internship experience is extremely important. The need for a reflection requirement is strongly recommended so that the administrative intern can internalize field-based experiences within the context of their developing leadership skills (Cunningham, 2007). Reflection may also be a component of a required portfolio, since the portfolio documents evidence of how the intern is able to apply administrative theory to the field based internship experiences. According to York- Barr, Sommers, Ghery, and Montie (2001), “reflective practice is a vital resource for significant and sustained school improvement. Experience by itself is not enough. Reflection is a means for examining beliefs, assumptions, and practices” (p. xvii).

The combination of these internship components supports the development of the administrative intern as an emerging leader who can, in fact, relate theory to practice in meeting the needs of the school site where the internship is conducted. Examination of all internship requirements, therefore, is vital in order to maintain clearly defined expectations that the intern can strive to reach.

Data also indicated the need to provide support for the intern by both an on site mentor/supervisor (a practicing administrator, often the principal) and the university professor. The vehicle to provide this support is the on-site visit, which ranged from none to four or more over the course of the internship. The relationship between the intern, site supervisor, and university professor is a critical component to support and guide the intern in developing meaningful internship experiences. Collaboration is key so that clear roles and responsibilities are defined that support the development of a quality internship experience. This might also entail establishing an on-site site supervisor-training program, as well as, staff development for all university professors who supervise interns. In order to accomplish this, departments of educational leadership will need to develop stronger relationships with local school districts and strive to develop partnerships that seek the same goal in prepare aspiring administrators (SREB, 2005).

Internship Field-Based Activities

“Research suggests that clinical activities led by practicing administrators and university coaches that are

meticulously planned and arranged prove to be meaningful learning opportunities and experiences that interns highly value” (Cunningham & Sherman, 2008, p.312). Principals in this research study substantiated the importance of meaningful, practical, hands-on internship experiences. Classified as either “managerial” or “leadership” type activities, a recommendation made was to link activities to specific leadership standards. This is encouraging since most educational leadership programs are accountable to address the *Interstate School Leaders Licensure Consortium (ISLLC) Standards for School Leaders* (Council of Chief State School Officers, 2008; Waters & Grubb, 2004).

Managerial activities that were suggested by principals in this research study included management of the following: budgets, hiring, personnel, student discipline, class schedules, and parent groups. It is worth noting that the researchers were somewhat surprised by the overwhelming numbers of responses that centered on finance and budgeting concerns. This may be due to the fact that future administrators were classroom teachers before assuming their principal position and were most likely never required to contribute to the district or school finance/budgeting process. The data suggest that principals highly recommend the need to include fiscally related experiences in the internship.

Management of specific principal duties included: bus schedules, after school activities, meetings, and state reports. What was surprising was the fact that none of the responses mentioned technology, which can be seen as related to managing human resources, as well as, the instructional program. Additionally, a recommendation to require internships over the course of the school year would also include the numerous tasks associated with the opening or closing of the school year.

Leadership activities suggested were closely related to supervision and evaluation of teachers. Activities that centered on curriculum and instruction included professional development. Although these areas relate to school improvement initiatives, university professors in collaboration with on-site mentors, need to strategically encourage and support administrative interns to design authentic experiences that place them in a leadership role that focuses on the specific implementation of projects designed to improve student achievement (Darling-Hammond, et. al, 2007; Cunningham & Sherman, 2008). Many internship programs may provide opportunities for observation or group participation, but fail to encourage and require the intern to lead important work related to school improvement (SREB, 2005).

The researchers found it interesting that none of the leadership-based responses alluded to the internship as an avenue to become a change agent. Principal responsibilities involving school culture and climate, openness to innovative ideas, or ethical decision-making were not mentioned (Marzano, et.al., 2005). Lastly, it was noted by the researchers that ethical decision making, which is a significant and important component in principal responsibilities, was not mentioned by any of the participants. This appears to be one of the ISLLC standards not addressed in the internship experience (Council of Chief State School Officers, 2008) that may need to be more closely addressed by involving the intern in authentic problem solving activities.

In conclusion, the examination of the administrative internship experience needs to be a high priority for educational leadership programs. In order to prepare school leaders, particularly the principal, higher education needs to put more emphasis on designing quality internship experiences that align with the growing needs of K-12 schools. The challenge to improve schools though increased student achievement, will require leaders who have had the benefit of a strong educational leadership program that views the internship experience as vital preparation.

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