The Comparative Benefits and Outcomes of Enriched Internship Experiences

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Abstract

This article presents the leadership development impact of a multi-cohort state-funded initiative to provide enhanced internships for leadership preparation candidates from low- and moderate-resourced suburban districts. It presents the results for 26 grant-funded and 35 non-grant-funded candidates who completed a two-year leadership preparation program leading to licensure. Grant funding enabled the program and districts to create more extensive and authentic leadership opportunities for funded candidates. While all candidates regardless of funding graduated on time, those with grant support were then more likely to advance to initial school leadership positions than their non-funded peers.

Key Words: leadership preparation, internship, school district, career outcomes, evaluation

Introduction

This article presents the leadership development impact of a multi-cohort state-funded initiative to provide enhanced internships for leadership preparation candidates from low- and moderate-resourced suburban districts.

The aim of the state-funded initiative was to create more and better and higher quality internship experiences than were conventionally available while expanding the pool of well-prepared leadership candidates, and learn how these impacted candidates' leadership development and careers. This paper models research on innovative practice (in this case, encouraging new internship designs) for program improvement and yields usable results applicable to other similar programs and partnerships to improve leader preparation.

About the Program and Grant Support

The basis for this research is a university-based leadership preparation program that was sponsored in partnership with an intermediate education unit and 20+ local school districts in the greater New York City metropolitan area. It was a 30-credit, two-year advanced master's program leading to dual (school and district) certification. It enrolled 20-25 candidates in a two-year cohort-based program that required a concurrent 600-hour internship.

Candidates were recruited through district leader nomination for outstanding performance and leadership readiness. Given this requirement, all candidates were highly motivated and well-supported in their leadership preparation and plans to pursue leadership careers. Once they completed their application and group and individual interviews, selected candidates were assigned to advisors and conference groups of 6-8 candidates each for support throughout their internships.

The program coursework and internship experiences were aligned to existing national standards (Educational Leadership Constituent Council, 2011) and incorporated research-based practices for extensive reflection on leadership practice, field-based course-related projects and a year-long action research study. Candidates and their internship supervisors completed internship plans each semester that mapped out responsibilities in alignment with national standards and a developmental leadership proficiency progression (leading to independent work) (Martin et al., 2022).

Local districts historically supported the program as a means of enriching the pool of highly qualified leadership candidates available locally and, until recently, had shared the tuition costs with the university and candidates. State-required caps on school district budget increases squeezed out this type of staff development support in recent years, adding to students' costs. The program was overseen by an advisory committee of university, intermediate unit and local district leaders, who worked to align the program focus and content to changing school needs and priorities.

For six years (2009-2015), the program was funded in part by a state Title II-A grant, Teacher/Leader Quality Program for enhanced leadership preparation and field experience through a multi-district-university partnership. The funds gave priority to districts with a high percentage of low-income students to support their leadership candidates. In this partnership, the districts were suburban and small-city

communities and an intermediate unit that served an increasingly diverse population. They were often at a competitive disadvantage in recruiting school leaders and being able to offer tuition as an employment benefit.

The grant funds provide tuition support ($7000 per candidate per year) to promising candidates and funds to the districts ($12,000 per candidate per year) to enable more full-time, authentic leadership opportunities for candidates through salary replacement or substitute teacher time. The funds supported 7-9 candidates per cohort for three cohorts (the other candidates did not receive grant support).

These candidates were part of the leadership preparation program, sharing the same coursework, advisement and assessment expectations as their non-grant supported cohort members. The primary difference in their preparation experience was that grant-funded candidates were required to complete 400 additional hours of field work (for a total of 1000 hours), the expectations that their districts would arrange partial release time for leadership responsibilities, and received additional advisor support and guidance.

The theory of action undergirding this use of grant funds was that by having high quality, authentic, and more extensive internship experiences, grant-funded candidates would be better prepared to advance into initial leadership positions.

This article examines the internship experiences for three cohorts of grant-funded candidates and the district approaches to using the funds strategically for quality internships. It compares the career advancement of grant-funded and other candidates in their cohorts to determine the benefits of the enhanced internship on career outcomes. This research,

therefore, investigates whether grant funding can foster high quality authentic internship experiences and whether grant-funded candidates are more likely to advance to initial leadership positions than non-grant-funded candidates.

Research Background

This article draws on available research on leadership preparation internships. In the last ten years, there has been an increased focus on creating principal pipelines that support the development and advancement of quality school leaders who are effective in improving student learning (Herman et al., 2022). Much of the research and development, however, has been in urban districts, where creating and supporting a principal pipeline is a large-scale endeavor (DeAngelis & O'connor, 2012; Herman et al., 2022; Myung et al., 2011; Turnbull et al., 2013).

Nonetheless, the existing research shows that a combination of high-quality training, strategic selection and hiring, and support are essential to foster a strong principal pipeline. Further, Myung and others (2011) found that principals were capable of effectively identifying and encouraging teachers with strong leadership potential as part of a principal pipeline initiative.

But, as Turnbull and others (2013) found in their study of new district pipelines, there must be a clear relationship between the districts and preparation programs, otherwise the pipeline components exist as independent. DeAngelis and O'Connor (2012) show that many candidates are lost along the way even with concerted district efforts to create a pipeline.

Taken together, such research shows the promising of integrating leadership preparation

and district leadership staffing and support endeavors. Such opportunities and challenges, however, have only been examined in urban districts and not for other smaller districts.

High quality internships were defined (at the time of the study) by the Educational Leadership Constituent Council (ELCC)—the specialized professional association for leadership preparation for national higher education accreditation-- as including six qualities: offers significant opportunities to apply knowledge and develop leadership skills; is substantial, sustained, standards-based, planned and supervised by the university and school district; and earns credits (www.elcc.org).

Other professional associations underscored the importance of high quality leadership preparation and similarly emphasize a concentrated period of study and experience, master mentors, and a continuum of practice for competency mastery (Orr & Pounder, 2010). Creating internships that have these qualities is enormously challenging, primarily because of the lack of funding to enable candidates to be released from teaching responsibilities or to create initial leadership roles.

Yet, research shows that high quality internships are essential to effective leadership preparation and candidates' career pursuits and effectiveness as school principals. A comparison study of 17 leadership preparation programs showed that candidates from more coherent, field-based programs learned more and had more positive attitudes about the principalship as a career than did others (Orr, 2011).

In one national study, surveyed principals who had high quality internship experiences were more likely than those with conventional internships to practice effective instructional leadership and engage in school improvement practices (Orr & Orphanos, 2011).

Moreover, the teachers of principals with high quality preparation reported greater professional development, collaboration and job satisfaction than those with principals with conventional preparation (Orphanos & Orr, 2014). Using California principal survey and student performance data, Campoli and Darling-Hammond (2022) found that principals who had higher quality internship experiences had significantly higher student ELA achievement gains than did others (Campoli & Darling-Hammond, 2022).

Despite these benefits, less attention has focused on how to develop and support these experiences. In recent years, foundations and the federal government have provided funding for clinically-rich paid internships for leadership preparation that enable paid release time for some or all of the candidates' school year (Herman et al., 2022; U. S. Department of Education, 2011) . Much of this support has targeted urban school districts where partnerships and internship placements are negotiated between one school district and one or more universities (Orr et al., 2010).

 Less attention has been given to creating quality internship experiences in small cities and suburban communities. Yet, half or more of US schools are in suburban and rural communities (NCES, 2006).

A smattering of research studies has shown that creating high quality internships—with partial or full-time release from teaching—is logistically difficult for small districts (Frye et al., 2005; McKerrow, 1998;

Southern Regional Education Board; Williamson & Hudson, 2001).

Among the challenges are being able to release the intern for administrative work, provide meaningful learning opportunities and have sufficient high-quality mentors available to guide skill development.

One rural-based leadership preparation program overcame these challenges with federal grant funds for mentor training and a collaboratively shared action research project assignment to facilitated embedded inquiry into practice (Browne-Ferrigno & Maynard, 2005).

While successful, according to mentors and candidates, the program was designed around one district's needs and priorities, and was not sustainable.

Methods
This study uses a multi-cohort preprogram evaluation research design (Creswell & Creswell, 2018) to compare candidate internship and career experiences among three cohorts (2009-2015) and between grant-funded and non-grant funded candidates within these three cohorts.

Sample
The total sample for this analysis is 61 candidates in three cohorts, 26 of whom were grant supported, as shown in Table 1. Seven to 10 candidates were grant funded in each of three cohorts; 10-15 candidates were not.

Four additional candidates started the program but never finished due to family, health and other circumstances and are excluded from this analysis. See Table 1.

Table 1

Number of Candidates by Cohort and Grant Status

Cohort	Grant-funded	Non-grant funded	Total
1—2009-2011			19
2—2011-2013	10*	10	20
3—2013-2015	7**	15**	22
Total	26	35	61

*Two additional candidates never finished; **one additional candidate started and stopped.

Data sources and measures
Data compiled for this study include graduate survey reports on internship attributes and career outcomes, New York state School Building Leader and School District Leader assessment scores (https://www.nystce.nesinc.com/), information compiled by program staff on internship experiences and graduates' career advancement (based on graduate reports and internet

searches), district annual reports on the use of grant funds, program director and co-director notes (over six years), and district reports on funding.

Within six months of graduation, program graduates are asked to complete an on-line survey about their program experiences (including their internship) and their career outcomes.

Annually, grant funded candidates are asked to submit a report on their grant funded internship experiences. During the two-year program, they are required to keep separate internship plans and logs for their grant -funded internship experiences and to submit these annually to the program director.

Candidates complete the state assessments during or just after program completion and their results were compiled from the university's state reports.

Annually, district officials submit a narrative report on how the grant funded internships benefited the districts. These reports have been compiled for the districts of the 26 candidates over the 6-year grant period. This information was compiled for all 26 grant-funded candidates.

Data coding and analysis
Coding. To begin the analysis, candidates were coded based on their type of internship position and their initial school leadership position.

Type of internship: using candidate and district information, candidates' internship experiences were coded as one of three types during the two-year program—part-time release from teaching responsibilities for internship work; full-time release by combining grant funds with other funds; and intermittent release from

teaching responsibilities for leadership activities.

Initial school leader position: Candidates' work history following program completion was coded as an initial school leader position if the position required a school or district leader certification. This included assistant principal, principal, special education supervisor, and district-level directors (such as art, programs for English Language learners).

For purposes of analysis and given the small sample size, school and district level positions were combined.

Analysis. The candidates' career outcomes results were compared descriptively by funding status and cohort to determine the experiences and benefits for candidates.

The candidates' internship experiences were analyzed by cohort using qualitative content analysis techniques for types of internship arrangements and responsibilities. The total state assessment scores were compared statistically by cohort, internship status and year.

Findings
The findings below present the results of three cohorts of grant-support candidates' internship and career advancement, with comparison to their non-grant supported cohort members and among the districts across cohort periods.

About the districts
As shown in Table 2, nine districts had grant-funded candidates in one or more of the three cohorts. These are suburban and small city communities that range in size from 2,600 to 8,000 students, in 2015. Two experienced increasing populations and five decreasing, with one remaining stable. They range widely

in child poverty, from a low of 15% to a high of 79% of their students identified as economically disadvantaged. Between 3-19% of their students are English language learners.

Taken together—changing student numbers, poverty, and language diversity need—these districts were all experiencing several challenges.

Table 2

Grant Partner Districts by Student Characteristics

District	Change in student population	Number of students	% economically disadvantaged	% ELLs
B District	Constant	4354	24%	10
C District	Declining	3060	50	2
H District	Declining	2402	22	2
K District	Increasing	3077	79%	19%
M District	Declining	3014	67%	3
O District	Increasing	4467	52%	10
P District	Na			
V District	Declining	8060	73%	8
Y District	Declining	1777	16	1

Source: NYSED School Report Cards 2015; Note: P district includes a series of special education and vocational programs serving students from other districts.

Most of these districts lacked sufficient numbers of school leaders to address their schools' and students' academic needs. According to district leaders, when preparing the funding application, they were anticipating leadership turnover and needed more, better prepared school leaders. All nine districts were currently experiencing school leader turnover, through retirement or departures. As shown in Table 3, eight of the nine districts had high leader: student ratios that far exceeded NYS averages. Thus, the districts were faced with three challenges—need for more school leaders, need for leaders who are better

prepared to support school improvement and serve high needs students, and the need to strengthen the capacity of current leaders, particularly to address the achievement and opportunity gaps.

Table 3

Number of School Leaders and Ratio by District

District	Number of principals	Number of assistant principals	Number of school leaders per pupil	Ratio to state rate
B District	7	6	1 per 335 students	76%
C district	6	4	1 per 306 students	83
H district*	5	3	1 per 328 students	77
K district	5	4	1 per 342 students	75
M district*	5	6	1 per 360 students	71
O district	6	8	1 per 319 students	77
P District	NA			
V district	16	16	1 per 251 students	100
Y district	3	3	1 per 296 students	86

Based on 2013-14 New York State Report Cards; Note: the statewide average was 1 administrator per 254 students.

The districts varied in the number of grant-supported candidates they had among the three cohorts. In most cases, the districts were offered the opportunity to have two candidates enroll in a given cohort, but were not always able to do so. Two districts had candidates in only one cohort while the rest had candidates in two, as shown in Table 4. Their total number of candidates ranged from 1-4 candidates.

Table 4

Number of Grant-funded Candidates by District and Cohort

Cohort	1--2009	2--2011	3--2013	Total
District B	2	2	--	4
District C	2	--	--	2
District H	2	2	--	4
District K	--	1	1	2
District M	--	1	--	1
District O	--	2	3	5
District P	1	2	--	3
District V	2	--	1	3
District Y	--	--	2	2

The Internship Experience

The grant-proposed enriched, full-time internship was designed to offer several options for using grant funds to create intensive, full-time equivalent internship experiences (in addition to the two-year 600 internship candidates were required to complete). Each district received $12,000 per candidate per year to arrange for internship-related release time, and candidates received $7000 per year for tuition. The program director worked with each district to design internship experiences that best fits its priorities, resources, and contractual commitments, as well as the needs of its students and aspiring leaders, that aligned to their expectations for leader recruitment, preparation and hiring. These enriched internships were expected to expand the leadership resources available to the districts in the short-term, providing critical help in school improvement and student support. The responsibilities were to be developmental, building to performing independent leadership work. Table 5 shows the type of grant-support internship arrangement created by cohort.

Table 5

Number of Candidates by Nature of Grant-supported Internship Experiences and Cohort

Type of internship arrangement	1-2009	2-2011	3-2013	total
Partial release during the school year	3	7	2	12
Combined funding to create a full-time leadership position during the program	2	2	3	7
Intermittent release time during the school year	4	1	2	7

The internship arrangements changed across the three cohorts, based on how the program director and districts learned to use the funds and support quality internship experiences. Initially, three districts were reluctant to arrange for candidates to be released from their teaching or other responsibilities and thus used the release funds intermittently for specific administrative tasks.

Two districts used the funds strategically by combining them with district funds to create a full-time leadership position. The program director encouraged districts to take advantage of a certification option that would enable candidates to work in supervisory roles after they had completed 50% of the program.

By the second and third cohorts, more districts did, enabling candidates to take on full-time leadership positions or have a partial release time position with supervisory responsibilities.

Eventually, most grant-supported candidates had partial or full-time release during the school year for their internship work. Typically, during these internships, they served in assistant principal-like roles, managing all aspects of school operations, sometimes on their own while their principals were away at meetings or out sick.

They also were involved in supervising school aides, interviewing and hiring new teachers, meeting with parents and helping to develop schedules, school budgets, and professional development. They also would handle typical operational issues, such as supervising lunch, handling discipline, conducting assemblies, and serving on various school committees.

Some interns were assigned to supervise a specific grade or content area, working with teachers on implementing new curriculum, developing new units of study, differentiating instruction and facilitating small group instruction. Some served as coordinators for new special education programs, like Response to Intervention (RtI), or new student behavior programs, like Positive Behavior Intervention Services (PBIS) or anti-bullying curriculum. Some also supervised summer school (including all aspects of school operations) or

implemented and supervised summer transition programs.

Challenges to Creating High Quality Internships

Working with districts to use the paid release time to create high quality internships even after the first cohort presented several challenges. Each district had complex rules and regulations governing allowable release time and summer work for teachers, board of education contract review, and timing to advertise positions for part-time staff (to replace released staff).

Several of the lower performing districts experienced other challenges, including teacher layoffs, funding shortfalls, building and district leadership turnover, and state reviews of low performing schools. These challenges disrupted internship plans and delayed finding solutions, sometimes for many months.

The value of the paid internship time for districts varied throughout the two years, from its highest value at the beginning and end of the grant periods to its lowest value when district officials faced challenges such as budget votes and personnel change. Thus, it was often challenging to leverage district attention to plan for effective use of the grant resources to arrange for quality internship responsibilities.

Finally, it became clear that multiple actors are involved in accepting the internship resources (typically the superintendent) and in arranging and supporting the interns' work (typically their principals and assistant principals).

Based on this experience, the program director began working with districts as they nominated candidates for participation to consider how they would arrange for internship experiences. Several districts in turn could begin to plan for the release time of candidates as part of their budgeting process and build in the internship release time with their staffing plans. Several districts also began planning for new leadership positions, either anticipating turnover or creating new positions, using the internship resources.

Consequently, by the second cohort, three candidates were in assistant principal-like positions that the districts anticipated would evolve into regular assistant principal positions once the candidates had finished. This arrangement was repeated again for two candidates in the third cohort and three other candidates were identified as likely candidates for anticipated openings in the coming year.

Thus, both the program director and the district leaders began to learn how to plan better for the internships and to follow up with all levels in the internship supervision process: at both the building and district levels. At the same time, the districts began to experience less district leadership turnover creating fewer problems in supporting the internship plans.

Leadership assessment

The grant funding appeared to have had little effect on program completion and state leadership assessment scores, since all candidates did well. Almost all candidates who began the program, finished (regardless of funding). All candidates who completed the program also successfully passed all state assessments (school building and district leader assessments), regardless of grant support.

Career advancement

The grant funding appears to have had a positive effect on graduates' career outcomes. Overall, 73 percent of the grant-supported graduates had ever had a leadership position

after graduation, in comparison to 54 percent of the non-grant-supported graduates, as shown in Table 6. For two of the three cohorts, grant-

supported graduates have been far more likely to ever advance to a leadership position than have non-grant supported graduates.

Table 6

Percent of Graduates of Three Program Cohorts Whoever Advanced to Leadership Positions, by Cohort and Grant-funded Status

Cohort	Funded	Unfunded	total
1—2009-2011	55%	80%	68%
2—2011-2013	80	50	65
3—2013-2015	86	40	55
Total	73	54	62

The impact on the participating school districts varied. Most districts had high advancement rate among their grant-supported candidates, while three did not, as shown in Table 7. These three districts were not able to create partial or full-time release for their candidates and instead used the funds for more intermittent release, which may have contributed to the candidates' lack of readiness

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for advancement. A surprising outcome, however, was that only five of the nine districts had candidates advance to leadership positions in their districts and only two (both of which had the largest number of candidates) had most who did. The two districts with the highest advance rate had created full-time positions while their candidates were in the program, using the release time funds

Table 7

Number of Grant-Funded Candidates and Percent Who Advance into Any Leadership Position, by District Partner

District	Total candidates	Percent who advanced to any leadership position	Percent who advanced to a leadership position in the district
District B	4	75%	75%
District C	2	50	50
District H	4	25	0
District K	2	100	0
District M	1	100	0
District O	5	100	100
District P	3	67	33
District V	3	67	33
District Y	2	50	0

Discussion, Conclusions, and Implications

The results reveal the benefits of designing and supporting high-quality, experience dense internships for leadership candidates and their small districts. The modest amounts of grant funding used for these internships ($12,000 per candidate per year, plus $7000 per year for tuition) appear to have yielded significant results both during the internships and afterwards as graduates were more likely to advance to initial school and district leadership positions. Creating authentic leadership roles through the internship appears to prepare candidates better and enable them to be readier to advance to an initial school leadership position. Holding all other factors constant—district nomination, program content and internship support—having the paid release time and expectations for full time leadership work seems to make a difference in both the nature of the internship experiences during the program and enabling advancement into leadership positions upon completion.

Changing expectations for leadership interns as administrative support in schools appears to be fostering a more positive climate for districts to create quality internships and for building leaders to be receptive to using interns to complement their own work, enabling more robust experiences.

More important, it appears that when districts view paid internships as part of a leadership progression into a full-time initial school leadership position, they are more likely to identify and support high quality candidates.

For small districts, it takes a more coordinated but feasible effort between the district and leadership preparation program, in concert with other districts, to create quality internship opportunities and candidates who are ready for initial positions. Working collaboratively through the partnership and advisory structure made this feasible.

Author Biography

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