

## Themes Emerging from 22 Focus Group Sessions Conducted March 3 - April 10, 2017

When asked, "What explains why many are certified but few are ready" focus groups participants offered seven possibilities.

- Mismatch between what is needed to be a successful principal, what is taught in SBL programs, and what it takes to be certified
- Rapidly shifting expectations of principals (changing laws, technology, demography) puts SBL programs in a catch-up mode
- Increasingly principals must adapt to changing conditions; this make job complex and the design of SBL programs difficult
- There is wide variability when it comes to the knowledge, skill, talent, and motivation of candidates enrolled in SBL programs
- In too many universities, there is a dearth of recent practical P12 experience among the faculty who teach SBL candidates
- Inadequate opportunities for candidates to lead projects in P12 settings so they can apply the skills they acquired in SBL programs
- Lack of a consistent state-wide mechanism to make SBL certification contingent on field-based demonstrations of competency

Asked, "Should the goal of preparation programs be to equip candidates to improve the schools they lead", participants said this.

- Yes but ability of first-time-ever principals to improve the schools they lead often depends on the support they get in the job
- Without mentors to turn to, first-time-ever principals tend to avoid asking for help (this sets off a dangerous downward spiral)
- Improving schools is the aim, but it is short-sighted to ascribe sole responsibility to a principal; it takes a lot of collaboration
- While most agree school improvement is proper aim, there is wide difference of opinion on what constitutes "improvement"
- Some educators scoff at and reject idea that improvement is the proper aim; instead they say their school is as good as it gets

How do we ensure principal preparation is more than a pay-to-play proposition?

- At a third of focus group meetings, a reference was made to "diploma mills" or "paper factories" that just churn out degrees
- Most SBL programs (not those solely seeking to make a buck) act in a way that shows they see school districts as consumers
- SBL programs that view the district as consumer are more likely to collaborate with district in placing candidates in internships
- Candidate success depends on extended internship and working under a seasoned, successful, practicing school administrator
- State role is to: (a) set standards to certify people/programs, (b) assure quality; (c) build capacity; (d) provide funds/incentives
- Mentoring quality varies widely; in some places it is a "lick and a promise" or nonexistent but in other places it is healthy

Potentially, this presents a choice. Which of the following is true (and which of these claims do we think should be true)?

- The initial SBL certificate represents that holders have what it takes to be principal.
- An initial SBL certificate solely prepares holders to be assistant principal; further training is needed before they can be principal.

In a way, we face a crossroads. Which business do we want to be in . . .

- Knowingly producing SBL certificate holders who many view lack the skill and experience needed to be a successful principal.
- Revising current SBL programs so observers widely agree that initially-certified individuals are ready to step into a principal role.