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The School Leadership Program Communication Hub: Building Actionable Knowledge about Improving Leadership Preparation

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Abstract

Recent critics of university-based educational leadership preparations programs have alleged that the programs are out of touch with the contemporary practices of PK-12 school leaders (Levine, 2005; Murphy, 2005; Walker & Qian, 2006). These complaints about preparation programs have resulted in new and innovative ways to prepare leaders (Crum, Myran, & Clayton, In Press), including the federally funded United States Department of Education School Leadership Program. This manuscript documents the development of a "Communication Hub", which serves as a vehicle to disseminate lessons learned about the United States Department of Education School Leadership Program. While the Communication Hub is still in its early phases of development and finding the best paths to serve the community of SLP grantees, the evidence thus far demonstrates the need for a means of communicating and sharing. The study data suggest the participants see the Communication Hub as adding value to their individual projects as well as having the potential to better disseminate these important lessons learned and helping to increase the quality of educational leadership preparation programs.

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1 Sumario en espanol

Los críticos recientes de universidad-basó programas que educativos de preparativos de liderazgo han alegado que los programas pierden contacto con las prácticas contemporáneas de PK-12 líderes de la escuela (Levine, 2005; Murphy, 2005; Paseante and Qian, 2006). Estos reclamos acerca de programas de preparación han tenido como resultado nuevas y maneras innovadoras para preparar a líderes (Crum, Myran, and Clayton, En la Prensa), inclusive el Departamento federalmente financió de EEUU de Programa de Liderazgo de Escuela de Educación. Este manuscrito documenta el desarrollo de un "Eje de Comunicación", que sirve como un vehículo para difundir lecciones aprendidos acerca del Departamento de Estados Unidos de Programa de Liderazgo de Escuela de Educación. Mientras el Eje de Comunicación es todavía en sus fases tempranas del desarrollo y encontrando que los mejores senderos para servir la comunidad de donantes de SLP, la evidencia así distante demuestra la necesidad para un medios de comunicar y compartir. Los datos del estudio sugieren que los participantes ven el Eje de Comunicación como agregando valor a sus proyectos individuales así como teniendo el potencial para difundir mejor estas lecciones importantes aprendido y ayudando a aumentar la calidad de programas educativos de preparación de liderazgo.

> NOTE: Esta es una traducción por computadora de la página web original. Se suministra como información general y no debe considerarse completa ni exacta.

2 Introduction

Recent critics of university-based educational leadership preparation programs have alleged the programs are out of touch with contemporary practices of PK-12 school leaders (Levine, 2005; Murphy, 2005; Walker & Qian, 2006) and these same programs have been under fire for being ineffective (Dilworth & Thomas, 2001l; Elmore, 2000; NCATE, 2002; Peterson, 2002). "The lack of a clear understanding about what educational leadership preparation programs should be and what content, instructional methods, and structures should frame them is at the heart of this tension" (LaMagdeleine, Maxcy, Pounder, & Reed, 2009, p. 130). These complaints about preparation programs have resulted in new and innovative ways to prepare leaders (Sanzo, Myran, & Clayton, In Press), including the federally funded United States Department of Education School Leadership Program, which will be, in part, the focus of this manuscript and described later.

Innovative preparation programs are crucial to the future of the field of educational leadership. Levine (2005) and Murphy (2005) have highlighted the need for an immediate call to action to high-quality improvements in preparation programs. In order for effective change to take place, there must be a mechanism established for documentation, as well as a process designed to effectively plan for, follow-through, and assess innovative improvements to educational leadership. Innovation and improvement is no small task however, as leadership preparation functions at the nexus between public schools and universities. This space between theory and practice is immensely complex and multidimensional and as such there is a great need for better understanding of how these very different organizations can effectively plan, implement, and sustain authentic and effective leadership preparation programs.

This manuscript documents the development of a "Communication Hub", which serves as a vehicle to disseminate lessons learned about the United States Department of Education School Leadership Program (SLP). We begin by describing some of the criticisms of leadership preparation, followed by an overview of the School Leadership Program the planning and development of the Communication Hub. We will then describe

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[1] http://www.ncpeapublications.org

our research process and findings on the implementation and the initial activities of the Communication Hub. Plans for the next steps in the process and implications for leadership preparation and development will then be discussed.

3 School Leadership Preparation

There has been an ongoing debate for decades over what constitutes effective leadership preparation (Hackmann & Wanat, 2007; Preis, Grogan, Sherman, & Beaty, 2007). The current high-stakes accountability environment has increased the attention given to institutions that prepare individuals to become PK-12 school leaders. One of the primary concerns of critics is the failure of university-based preparation programs to effectively bridge the leadership theory taught in courses with the reality of the lived experiences of practitioners (LaMagdeleine, Maxcy, Pounder, & Reed, 2009; Levine, 2005; Portin, Schneider, DeArmond, & Gundlach, 2003).

These critics argue that the on-the-job training required to connect the theory is lacking from many preparation programs (Clayton, Crum, and Myran, 2010) and that program completers at times feel "shortchanged" by their programs (Portin, Schneider, DeArmond, & Gundlach, 2003). In order to counteract arguments, many programs have made major transitions in their programmatic approaches, both in terms of course design and delivery modality. Several states, including Kentucky and Alabama have sunset or are in the process of sunsetting all leadership preparation programs and requiring a complete overhaul and redesign of their aspiring leadership preparation program. A major facet of these programs is the integration of the district voice in the development and design of the program, as well as in program participant selection (Browne-Ferrigno, 2010; Reed, 2010).

Universities are not the only entities preparing educators to take on the reigns of school leadership. School districts themselves have undertaken this task, as have private organizations including New Schools for New Leaders and the New York City Leadership Academy. According to Crow (2006) "[e]vidence regarding the quality of university preparation programs is scant, and most arguments resort to anecdotal evidence or have questionable methodologies" (p. 312). This has led to the proliferation of alternate preparation programs (Grogan, Bredeson, Sherman, Preis, & Beaty, 2009).

One hallmark of the majority of the alternate programs, as well as a growing number of university-based preparation programs, is partnerships with school districts. While a growing number of preparation programs have established partnerships with districts, creating and maintaining effective partnerships to support educational leadership preparation and development is difficult (Borthwick, Stirling, Nauman, & Cook, 2003). Part of this is attributed to the variety of beliefs and ideologies by participants, as well as reasons for involvement in the partnership (Borthwick, Stirling, Nauman, & Cook, 2003; Munoz, Winter, & Ricciardi, 2006).

Additionally, "flawed planning, implementation, and evaluation processes" (Miller and Hafner, 2008, p. 69) and unequal distributions of power between the stakeholders can impact partnership relationships. According to Munoz, Winter, and Ricciardi (2006) there are "relatively few examples of successful partnerships" to serve as models (p.13).

In this respect universities are no longer the default route for leadership preparation. Alternative preparation program and school/university partnerships have broadened the options as well as the resources, experiences, skills and knowledge that our field has access to. However, access alone doesn't assure that the quality and effectiveness of leadership preparation is improved. What is needed are robust means beyond the tradition knowledge dissemination routes of the academy that better capitalize on our shared intellectual and experiential capital, Creating and sustaining such an enterprise is no small task as the cultures of universities, public school and not for profit organizations have very different promotion and reward systems. As Fullan (1991) has pointed out, the individualistic norms of education as a profession can be a barrier to such a robust means of communication and sharing of knowledge.

One means that teacher education has drawn from to overcome the limitations of the traditional university knowledge dissemination routes have been establishing communities of practice, which situate learning within the context of the actual practice of teaching (Lave & Wenger, 1991). Similarly, the concepts of

learning communities and professional development schools have been used as well as means of shifting from individualistic and positivistic notions of learning to more social constructivists orientations. Much less has been written in the leadership preparation literature about communities of practice. This is likely, at least in part, because creating such communities of practice among aspiring school leaders, current leaders, professional developers and university faculty do not naturally occur in the same ways as groups of teachers working together. In addition, because pervious views of school leadership were more hierarchical, social constructivist orientations about learning were at odds with this perspective. Therefore, it is critical to share lessons learned about professional learning community structures in the field of educational leadership, such as the Communication Hub.

Today, the integration of high expectations and accountability, efficacy and support and the engagement of stakeholders (Wahlstrom, Seashore-Louis, Leithwood, & Anderson, 2010) capture the contemporary notions of school leadership that are far more focused on instruction and collaboration. In today's climate, collaboration among the all the various stakeholders is a central component all aspects of leadership preparation (Davis, Darling-Hammond, LaPointe & Meyerson, 2005., 2005; Orr, 2006).

The increased criticisms of leadership programs, the call and need to establish models of successful administrator preparation partnerships, along with the need for greater collaboration among stakeholders and more authentic knowledge dissemination routes, have resulted in a tipping point in school leadership preparation and development. It is evident that we can no longer teach preparation courses in isolated "silos," disconnected from the day-to-day practice of school administrators. Preparation entities must be able to sustain quality partnerships in order to develop school leaders who can work within schools and districts to promote positive student achievement. One example of an effort to create models of leadership preparation partnerships is through the School Leadership Program sponsored by the United States Department of Education. In this example we have taken on the role of facilitating agents, collaboratively and democratically creating a structure that provides a community of practice among leadership preparation stakeholders.

4 United States Department of Education School Leadership Program Communication Hub

In 2002, the United States Department of Education (US DoE) under authorization by the Elementary and Secondary Education Act of 1965 [as amended, Title II, Part A, Subpart5 – National Activities; 20 U.S.C. 2151(b) and 6651(b)] began the School Leadership Preparation Program. In part as a result of the call for change in leadership preparation, $10,000,000 in grants were initially awarded to 20 three-year projects to support the development and implementation of leadership preparation and development programs. "This program provides grants to support the development, enhancement, or expansion of innovative programs to recruit, train, and mentor principals (including assistant principals) for high-need LEAs" (U.S. Department of Education, 2010). Since the inception of the grant program in 2002, a total of 90 grant awards have been provided, representing $145,020,528 in appropriated federal funds.

In order to capitalize on the collective lessons learned from these grant-funded activities, a proposal was put forth and funded to create the U.S. DoE SLP Communication Hub. The purpose of the Communication Hub is to disseminate lessons learned about the U.S. DoE SLP and school leader development, as well as to provide a venue to share project implementation, challenges, solutions to challenges, and to document project progress and effectiveness. The Communication Hub also provides a forum to explore next steps in leadership preparation planning and development to ensure sustainability of effort.

The planning effort for the Communication Hub was based upon the experiences of two Project Directors' meetings in January 2009 and February 2010. As a result of these meetings, the need for further and ongoing communication related to the SLP projects was identified. Early feedback from the SLP Program Officer and grantees indicated a desire for identifying and sharing promising practices and better leverage the experiences, expertise and resources of these programs. In this way particular value was placed on developing "usable knowledge" (Glaser, 1998; Lagemann, 2002), or what some have called, "action knowledge" (Goldkuhl, 1999), by collaborating in the community of practice.

In order to better meet the goal of sharing "usable knowledge" with the field, development of the structured

phase-in of the Communication Hub activities was developed through stakeholder feedback via surveys and focus groups, in addition to consulting the existent literature and experts in the field of educational leadership. The overall structure for the Communication Hub phase-in process is broken into five steps:

1. Information gathering
2. Summarizing and validating
3. Identifying target areas for collaboration
4. Application of collaborative activities
5. Sharing research findings and identifying next steps

Current Communication Hub activities include: 1) monthly scheduled Webinar meetings hosted by educational leadership faculty at Old Dominion University; 2) a Wiki which provides a forum for ongoing SLP participant collaboration; 3) a website designed to share information and serve as a resource for promising practices for leadership preparation; 4) a newsletter designed as an additional means of sharing information and inviting participation; 5) participation in the National Center for the Evaluation of Educational Leadership Preparation and Practice; and (6) facilitating the dissemination of research-based findings from grantees in peer-reviewed journals and presentations at national/international conferences.

The grantees are provided monthly opportunities to network with their peers regarding issues and topics related to the U.S. DoE SLP grant in an online venue. Using Adobe Connect software, video conferences – or Webinars – are facilitated by the Communication Hub directors. On alternating months, grantees meet in an optional collective meeting to discuss topics germane to the grant and school leadership preparation, while other months Project Directors are given the opportunity to meet in the online forum during one meeting and Program Evaluators during another meeting to address specific issues related to their roles and responsibilities.

Given the importance of knowledge sharing, the School Leadership Preparation Wiki provides a forum for ongoing collaboration. The SLP Wiki is designed to support several key elements of successful research to practice models (Burkhardt & Schoenfeld, 2003)[2] , namely a robust mechanism for taking ideas from concept to scale, a stable theoretical base, and size and longevity. In conjunction with other Communication Hub activities, the SLP Wiki helps create multiple two-way feedback loops to share, refine, validate, apply, and disseminate promising practices that support more effective leadership preparation. Other electronic means of communicating are also in use, including a website dedicated to the overall SLP project and a monthly newsletter.

In addition to the above mentioned electronic activities, Communication Hub directors and other SLP grantees actively participate in the National Center for the Evaluation of Educational Leadership Preparation and Practice. Results from ongoing research related to the projects are disseminated at the semi-annual Center meetings, as well as other forums. This provides an additional network to share the results of the efforts of the projects and to solicit feedback from scholars and practitioners in the field of educational leadership. Several journal articles related to the grants have also been published to further disseminate information about the activities in the projects.

The SLP Communication Hub has become an integral part of the overall vision of the U.S. DoE efforts in the area of leadership preparation. Through a developmental process, that is scaffolded to add layers of participants over time in meaningful ways, the communication among principal investigators, program evaluators, and participants will be enhanced. As this process continues, we will continue to conduct ongoing research to examine the effectiveness of communication hub efforts, as well as to examine themes emerging from the various modes of communication that demonstrate commonalities of challenges and lessons learned among projects.

5 Methodology

This study examines the findings from initial steps in the first two phases of the Communication Hub: information gathering and summarizing. As McMillan (2004) explains, the purpose or goal of research

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[2]http://edr.sagepub.com/content/32/9/3.refs.html

should be rooted the intended use of the findings. Because our purpose is the application of knowledge to improve leadership preparation, our work falls largely under the broad applied research category.

Because of our interest in usable (Glaser, 1998; Lagemann, 2002), or action (Goldkuhl, 1999) knowledge, we draw on action research methods, a specific type of applied research. In action research questions of practice are addressed for the purpose of improvement (McMillan & Wergin, 2006), differing from the purpose of traditional research which is to generate conclusions. In action research the purpose is a decision or action, the focus is on practice and the standard is usefulness (McMillan & Wergin, 2006). Action research is by its very nature iterative and emergent, accumulating understanding over time through cycles of planning, action, data collection and analysis, and reflection. It begins with broad ideas and questions and through each iteration the focus and applicability of the findings increases (Dick, 2003). Because our work with the Communication Hub is in its early phases, we have utilized qualitative data collection and analysis methods drawing in large part from grounded theory (Glaser & Strauss, 1967). Grounded theory is an appropriate model to draw from in an applied action research project as it shares the central characteristics of being emergent and iterative.

Research participants included the Principal and Co-Principal investigators, Program Directors and Program Evaluators across 46 SLP sites across the country. Data were collected from grantees across the SLP sites. All grant sites were asked to participate in an eletronic survey (see Appendix A for example), with 24 of the 46 responding, giving a response rate of 52 %. We were not able to track data on non-responders, but have taken care to ensure that future surveys will allow us to track that information. Additional sources of evidence included feedback forms from the annual SLP Project Directors meeting, notes from scheduled webinars, researcher debriefings, information obtained from the project's Wiki environment and other electronic communications, site visits, and participant interviews.

For the purposes of this study, validity and trustworthiness were ensured through triangulation of data sources, research members, member-checking, and constant comparison. Grounded theory was used to ascertain the larger concepts of the first two phases of the project. Open coding was used to not target one issue too early. Constant comparison was then used to continue to update the list of codes and possible eventual themes or categories. This framework provides a standardized manner to examine and analyze collected data.

In order to create focused scaffolding for the initial phases of information gathering and summarizing, we asked SLP grantees at the 2009 SLP Project Directors' Meeting to list their various needs and interests in terms of implementing and maintaining successful leadership preparation programs. Based on this feedback we generated an initial list of questions and topics grantees identified as important. We also gathered feedback from grantees during the Communication Hub's early webinars, as well as sending out surveys that asked for participant feedback about the effectiveness of the Webinars and suggestions for refinements and improvements to future Communication Hub effortsThe researchers also gained additional feedback from stakeholders through phone calls, email correspondence and site visits. Field notes, researcher debriefings, and member checks were used to assure the emergent topics accurately reflected the feedback from the SLP grantees.

6 Findings

The purpose of this initial study was to assess the effectiveness of the early phases of the Communication Hub for the U.S. Department of Education School Leadership Program and to determine the direction for the next phases of Communication Hub implementation. Feedback was solicited from the participants of the Communication Hub webinars, as well as from key stakeholders from forty-six grants. Findings from the analysis of data revealed areas for improvement for communication efforts amongst the grantees, as well as components of the communication process that participants found beneficial. The data also revealed key topics of interest the grantees wish to further explore related to leadership preparation and development, as well as a keen interest in exploring the role of program evaluation in the grant-funded programs.

The School Leadership Program Communication Hub survey indicated that 60% of the survey respondents had participated in one or more of the Communication Hub Webinars. Of those who had not yet participated,

all indicated a desire to participate in the future. Their lack of participation was attributed to scheduling or other conflicts by the respondents. When asked to rate the effectiveness of the Webinars, nearly 70% indicated they were effective with the remaining to be minimally effective. By allowing respondents to comment on the effectiveness rating, we were able to better understand how participants defined effective. Generally, the participants discussed the effectiveness of hub meetings related to project relevance via implementation, research, and evaluation. Additionally, some mentioned the notion that their rating of effectiveness may have been reduced based upon technological challenges experienced in the web-based format, and not the meeting content. One person indicated that communication prior to the sessions asking about issues and concerns and building the agenda and topics from stakeholders interests would improve the effectiveness. The program evaluator will better define effectiveness by allowing participants to rate various areas with regard to effectiveness in future surveys.

When asked what aspects of the Communications Hub's Webinars they found most useful, participants reported they appreciated opportunities for feedback from those more experienced; hearing common leadership preparation and grant implementation concerns and issues, as well as ideas, solutions and best practices; being provided a means of asking questions and getting feedback and additional information regarding how to report data on the required federal reports; and learning about leadership development in diverse settings.

Survey participants provided feedback about improvements to the Webinars to make the meeting sessions more effective. Feedback fell into two categories: (1) overcoming technological barriers and (2) providing more detail about Webinar topics and outlines for the meeting's agenda. Respondents suggested that technical issues could be addressed and solved for participants by doing a quick review of technical issues at the beginning of each meeting, providing more opportunities for participants to "play" in the video conferencing setting to get used to its functionality, and creating a protocol to keep speakers' contributions brief and to the point to keep the agenda moving forward. Participants also suggested the project directors provide meeting outlines, topics, and protocols to help give the Webinars greater focus and structure.

Participants indicated they would like the Webinars to continue to address specific topics they felt were critical to better capitalize on their U.S. DoE SLP grant funding. The identified topics were: pedagogy, university-school district partnerships, state policy, sustainability, evaluation, successful practices ("best practice"), how to generate long term funding beyond the grant period, sharing challenges and barriers, recruiting, and technical support. One central theme that ran throughout the feedback on Webinar topics of interest revolved around the importance of sharing experiences, successes, frustrations, and lessons learned. One survey participant stated "I'd like to hear about successful practices and ideas to make our programs stronger. What are people learning from their projects?".

Throughout the early webinars, participants were also asked about future topics of interest to focus on for the Communication Hub activities. The topics the participants shared echo many of the salient topics of focus in contemporary educational leadership preparation and development research. Across feedback from grantees, we found common interest in answering the core question of *what can we learn from each other about leadership preparation that will help our field?* Specifically, questions the grantees indicated were important for further exploration were: How do we:

- Develop a common framework for assessing leadership quality?
- Use this information to make improvements to leadership preparation programs?
- Improve the image and reputation of leadership prep as a field?
- Improve the gaps between theory and practice?
- Improve school university partnerships?
- Create policy agendas that have the weight of the larger group(s)?
- Move leadership training and practice beyond first order change?
- Identify the "choke points of change"?

When asked what particular activities they felt would be effective during the webinars, survey respondents suggested more visuals, more sharing opportunities, opportunities for program directors and evaluators to talk practically about findings and overviews of the programs, and more focused conversations. One survey respondent indicated there needs to be more opportunities during the Webinars to "hear periodically from

program staff about program news, other funding opportunities, new and exciting events, etc" and another suggested, "sharing of powerful leadership resources that others have found to be most successful". A great deal of interest has revolved around the program evaluation component of the U.S. DoE grants. In fact, one of the more notable topics grantees indicated they would like to see addressed through the Communication Hub was clarifying and strengthening the role of program evaluation.

One of the more interesting observations from a review of the challenges and solutions identified by the webinar participants for program evaluation is that they generated far more challenges than solutions, and most of the challenges had either no solutions offered or very few suggested by participants . The only exception was the challenge of *communication, continuity, and opportunities for formative feedback* which generated a number of related solutions by grantees. This suggests this is a particular area that program evaluators and project directors have addressed in their work thus far. Tables 1 and 2 provide an overview of the challenges and solutions identified by webinar participants.

Program Evaluation Challenges

Problem resolution
Linking evaluation activities with programs' activities
Challenges of understanding and utilizing models developed by others
Fear on how the results will be used
Communication, continuity and opportunities for formative feedback
Buy-In
Resistance or other challenges getting needed data from school divisions
Process and conceptual challenges
Maintaining objectivity and reliability – insider/outsider perspectives
Continuity of policy and practice
Management Challenges
Annual Performance Report (APR) Issues
The gap between the technical nature of program evaluation and formative improvement
Continuity in evaluation and reporting formats

Table 1

Program Evaluation Solutions

Program staff and program evaluators work collaboratively on APR
Develop a storage system for data that is usable by project personnel and program evaluators
Persistent communication with district personnel about the need and purpose for evaluating school and personnel performance as a means for improving student achievement
continued on next page

Meeting with external and internal evaluators on a monthly basis for methodological discussions
Regular "check-in" calls
In-person advisory committee meetings
More formalized planning meetings to reduce ambiguity
Proactive communication by project directors and program evaluators
One-page summaries to disseminate to partner districts

Table 2

Finally, participants were asked what type of follow-up activities would help make the webinars more useful or effective. A number of suggestions were provided, with most centered on the enhancement of the Communication Hub website, including posting the materials from the Webinar and linking resources to other websites such as UCEA. Similarly, some suggested the Webinars be used to help summarize lessons learned and best practices from projects that are then cataloged and available on the Communication Hub's website, as well as sending out a summary of each Webinar's activities.

In summary we found that the Communication Hub participants addressed technical and communication concerns, identified key topics of interest and articulated the need for greater opportunities for dialog, sharing and feedback. The central theme identified about the importance of sharing experiences, successes, frustrations, and lessons learned we find particularly important and likely to be the bigger challenge. Overcoming the technical challenges and coming to agreement on the key topics are fairly strength forward and issues we've already made significant strides in addressing. In contrast to this however is the larger challenge of creating and growing an infrastructure that facilitates substantive and sustained communication that actually produces actionable knowledge that can be shared beyond the SLP grantees. The "how do we" questions demonstrate that grantees are hungry for purposeful and actionable answers to questions of practice linked to their own contexts.

7 Discussion and Implications

It has been argued that leadership preparation programs are out of touch with the contemporary needs of PK-12 leaders (LaMagdeleine, Maxcy, Pounder, & Reed, 2009; Levine, 2005; Portin, Schneider, DeArmond, & Gundlach, 2003). Calls for changes in leadership preparation have resulted in a variety of new and innovative programs that do not always involve university personnel, increasing the number of alternative preparation programs (Grogan, Bredeson, Sherman, Preis, & Beaty, 2009). The United States federal government has, over the past decade, become more involved in the development of PK-12 school leaders through the United States Department of Education School Leadership Program. Until now, the various grant partners have not had an opportunity for ongoing collaboration to capitalize on the successes of the various grants, as well as to address areas for improvement and utilize the collective knowledge and experiences of the entire SLP group to address changes in program implementation to positively impact participants, and ultimately the students they serve. Additionally, there has been no collective means to share the results of the grant efforts with the wider national education audience beyond the scope of the grantees. The U.S. DoE School Communication Hub provides that vehicle for collaboration, communication, and research dissemination.

The participant suggestions that the Webinars be used to help summarize lessons learned and best practices highlights the identified need for creating a community of practice that goes beyond simply disseminating ideas, and one that puts leadership preparation programs in more direct contact with the contemporary needs of PK-12 leaders. In general, much of the pre-service training and in-service professional development that school leaders participate in leaves the implementation of general theory and practice up to the individual, leaving them with good ideas without time or resources to generate specific plans to utilize these ideas in context. The Communication Hub not only addresses this issue, but also addresses the need for greater communication and collaboration that allows for more robust and dynamic means of sharing contextually relevant information and actionable knowledge.

The results of an analysis of the initial phases of the Communication Hub have shown components to be successful, while leaving room for growth in some activities. The study has also revealed specific areas educational leadership preparation and development grantees feel are key focal points that need to be furthered explored via the Communication Hub efforts to answer questions that were raised related to the grant's goals and objectives. These areas are critical not only for the grant projects, but they also open a window to the concerns of leadership preparation personnel at a national level. In order to help answer those questions and improve practice, grantees are interested in leveraging the knowledge, experience and insights from the larger group. Based in the analysis of common area of interest we developed the Skills and Practices for Effective Leadership Preparation and Development framework.

8 Skills and Practices of Effective Leadership

1. Implementation Concerns

    a. Program Designs
    b. Mentors
    c. Internships
    d. Recruiting, Retention, and Continuity
    e. Rural, Urban, and Suburban Issues

2. Theory into Practice
    3. K-12 and Higher Education

    a. Partnership Issues
    b. Alternative Preparation Programs

4. Assessment, Measurement, and Evaluation

    a. Using Assessment Feedback for Program Improvements
    b. Turning the Evaluation into Usable Research
    c. Relationships between Program Directors, Practitioners, & Evaluators

The framework was developed based upon the expressed leadership preparation and development shared topics of interests and concerns by the SLP grantees related to the project. These provide a mechanism to organize the shared Communication Hub resources in a meaningful way, as well as to craft a research framework that reflects the needs of the grantees. It is suggested that leadership preparation programs conduct their own assessment of the preparation and development concerns of their PK-12 stakeholders and develop a similar framework to use in their specific programs. This does not detract from the national standards espoused via ISLLC and other national organizations, rather it serves as a compliment to these and helps illuminate the needs of their own constituents, enabling them to better serve their education community by meeting national expectations while addressing local needs and concerns.

Overall, the results suggest there is enthusiasm for the webinars as a means for communication and collaboration and the SLP Project Directors and Program Evaluators see great promise in the Communication Hub's ability to help maximize the potential of the individual and collective projects. While some of the research participants indicated the webinars were only minimally effective, this rating appeared to be largely due to technology issues. Survey participants indicated they particularly appreciated hearing from their peers about common concerns, lessons learned, and suggestions for program improvements. It was evident across the survey results that the SLP directors and evaluators felt there was a strong need for a means of sharing and communicating among SLP grantees. Participants in the survey also made constructive suggestions for improvements to the webinars in terms of technology improvements, organization of the meetings, and important topics that should be addressed. The following suggestions are made to enhance the effectiveness and usability of the Webinars. While these suggestions are written specifically for the webinar, they can easily be modified to reflect a collaborative effort at the local level by educational leadership personnel interested in facilitating a similar communication effort.

1. Continue providing opportunities for sharing among SLP grantees
2. Enhance opportunities for asking questions and getting feedback
3. Make improvements to overcome any technological barriers
4. Provide greater detail about Webinar topics
5. Provide clearer meeting agendas.
6. Continue to address the following topics

    a. Pedagogy
    b. university-school district partnerships
    c. state policy
    d. sustainability
    e. evaluation
    f. successful practices ("best practice")
    g. how to generate long term funding beyond the grant period
    h. sharing challenges and barriers
    i. recruiting and technical support.

7. Make resources available on the Communication Hub's and partnering organization's websites.

It is evident from findings that SLP grantees believe there is great value in a forum for colleagues to share information and receive feedback. While the Communication Hub is still in its early phases of development and finding the best paths to serve the community of SLP grantees, the evidence thus far demonstrates the need for a means of communicating and sharing. The study data suggest the participants see the Communication Hub as adding value to their individual projects as well as having the potential to better disseminate these important lessons learned and helping to increase the quality of educational leadership preparation programs. One participant, for example, reported, "We look forward to our webinars as a way to better understand what prior grantees have done with challenges, as well as how they are sustaining their work post-grant." Without such a means of communication the effective practices that are developed, refined and validated over the course of the various projects are at risk of not being adequately shared with the larger leadership development community.

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