

**Optimum Learning for All Students**  
**Implementation of Alberta's 2018 Professional Practice Standards**  
**A Literature Synthesis**

**Editors**

Bonnie Stelmach, University of Alberta

Pamela Adams, University of Lethbridge

**Chapter Five**

**SUPPORTING THE IMPLEMENTATION OF STANDARDS**

June 30, 2019

**Chapter Authors**

Bonnie Stelmach and Barbara O'Connor

University of Alberta

<b>Chapter Five .....</b>	<b>101</b>
<b>SUPPORTING THE IMPLEMENTATION OF STANDARDS.....</b>	<b>101</b>
<b>Review Methods .....</b>	<b>103</b>
<b>The Implementation of Teaching Standards.....</b>	<b>104</b>
<b>The Implementation of Leader Standards .....</b>	<b>106</b>
<b>Research on Effective Leadership Development for Principals .....</b>	<b>109</b>
<b>Important Features of Effective School Leadership Development Programs .....</b>	<b>111</b>
Standards grounded in empirical research .....	111
Curriculum coherence .....	112
Field-based internships .....	113
Problem-based learning .....	115
Learning in cohorts .....	116
Mentoring and coaching .....	116
University-school district partnerships .....	117
<b>An Exemplar: North Caroline State Principal Preparation Program.....</b>	<b>119</b>
<b>Research on Effective Leadership Development for System Leaders.....</b>	<b>120</b>
<b>Important Features of Effective System Leadership Development Programs.....</b>	<b>121</b>
<b>Standards as a Benchmark for Evaluating System Leaders.....</b>	<b>123</b>
<b>An Exemplar: University of Washington Leadership for Learning L4L Education     Doctorate.....</b>	<b>125</b>

## **Supporting the Implementation of Standards**

There are various ways standards-based policies can improve an educational system. Standards can serve as benchmarks for performance, to judge whether teachers and leaders meet mandated requirements, to certify and/or license teachers and school leaders, and to accredit institutions who provide teacher and leadership preparation programs. The OECD (2013) report, *Learning Standards, Teaching Standards, and Standards for School Principals: A Comparative Study*, emphasizes, however, that standards-based policies cannot in isolation lead to improvement of teaching, leadership, or student outcomes. Further, standards-based policies...require that adequate resources are allocated in order to achieve them and, in so doing, improve the learning opportunities offered to students, including through capacity building activities aimed at teachers and other actors whose performance have an impact on student learning. (p. 6)

This section of our report sought insights into two questions: (a) What is required for successful implementation of standards for teachers and leaders? (b) What conclusions can be drawn from the research about building capacity vis-à-vis standards?

### **Review Methods**

Several search terms were employed to locate academic, professional, and grey literature related to implementation of standards for teachers and leaders. Search terms such as “implementation + teaching standards”, “teacher preparation + standards”, “principal standards + implementation”, “superintendent standards + implementation”, “school leadership preparation”, “principal preparation”, “principal preparation programs”, “superintendent preparation”, “superintendent preparation programs”, and “educational leadership development” were initially used in Google Scholar to identify key writers and venues. Additionally, we searched for published literature reviews on educational leadership preparation. Crow and Whiteman’s (2016) review of literature on effective preparation of

school leaders, for example, was identified as valuable for mining the bibliography. Based on our initial search we generated a list of 12 peer reviewed and three professional journals that published research on these topics. Further, we consulted the *Handbook of Research in the Education of School Leaders* (Young & Crow, 2016) and *The Wiley Handbook of Educational Policy* (Papa & Armfield, 2018). Finally, we searched professional organizations' websites, such as the Canadian Teachers' Federation, the Alberta Teachers' Association, and the Council of Ministers of Education. With the exception of research regarding Ontario's Leadership Framework (e.g. Winton & Pollock, 2013; Riveros, Verret, & Wei, 2016), American scholarship dominates this topic. This suggests that our study will contribute to knowledge about the implementation of standards and leadership development in a standards-based reform context that is not driven by national expectations.

### **The Implementation of Teaching Standards**

As Finland has demonstrated, teaching standards are not a sine qua non for ensuring excellence in teaching (OECD, 2013) or excellence across an educational system. Nonetheless, for many OECD countries, teaching standards are used to certify teachers at the beginning of their careers, to accredit institutions who provide teacher education and training, and to assess teachers' performance. Based on OECD's review of various member countries, most countries reviewed implemented standards in a high-stakes manner; the consequence for not meeting the standard is the inability to practice. Some countries and American states require teachers to take exams (e.g. Chile, England, California, Texas), and others use a variety of instruments to gather evidence of teaching excellence (e.g. Mexico, New Zealand). The OECD report cites Invargson's (2009) work to emphasize that what is critical for assuring teaching quality is that standards be complemented by accredited teacher preparation programs based on standards, rigorous admission to teacher preparation programs, and consequences when standards are not met. In their review of Alberta's *Teacher Growth*,

*Supervision and Evaluation Policy*, Brandon et al. (2018) concluded in their literature review that high-stakes tests and incentives such as merit pay may disenfranchise teachers from their professional development, and therefore are not necessarily ideal for all educational systems enforcing teaching standards. Teaching standards can be effective when they are meaningful for teachers within their teaching assignments and contexts, are incorporated into their professional growth planning, and guide professional conversations among teachers and school leaders.

A study of implementation of teaching standards in Australia between 2013 and 2016 emphasizes the above points. The Australian Institute for Teaching and School Leadership (2016) reported that since standards for teachers have been implemented, teachers get more feedback and appraisal about their practice. It also found, however, that teachers did not perceive the standard to be useful. Teachers in rural Australia, for instance, considered some standards not useful, and teachers in other contexts reported that developing the skills to work with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students as the standards dictate would be difficult because their schools did not have many Aboriginal or Torres Strait Island students. This speaks to the importance of standards that reflect professional requirements in a way that allows for local interpretation.

Although it was too early in the implementation of Australia's teaching standard to measure the impact it had on student learning, there were positive impacts on teachers, including enhanced professionalism and collaboration, the creation of a shared language for teaching, and enhanced emphasis on professional growth rather than compliance. The report also emphasized that in the early stages of implementation much of the discussion was about creating awareness of the elements of the standard, but over time the discussion changed to deeper questions of implementation. Considering new elements of Alberta's TQS to be introduced this fall, perhaps a similar implementation pattern can be expected. In Australia,

approximately three years were required to move teachers from an awareness and knowledge stage, to one in which they understood standards as something useful to improve their practice. Critical to this evolution was that teachers had a positive attitude about the standards. When teachers see standards as informing their practice, they were more likely to have a positive attitude. But teachers developed negative attitudes when they perceived the standards as a compliance and surveillance mechanism, or if standards resulted in heavier workloads.

The Australian study is instrumental for understanding factors that might improve the implementation of teaching standards. These include (a) leadership that inspires teachers about the standards and establishes a clear pathway for implementation; (b) investment in implementation through such avenues as resources, financial support, or mentoring programs; (c) high teacher engagement; (d) coordinated and consistent communication about the standards from all levels of leadership so that shared vision and understanding emerges; and (e) alignment of standards with existing practices early in the process to deflect and manage change resistance and reaction.

### **The Implementation of Leader Standards**

Our review focused primarily on school-based leaders because research attention here has been considerable compared to system leaders, who have been virtually ignored. Although we know that system leaders are subject to standards in jurisdictions across Canada and internationally, research on implementation and impact for this group is wanting, except for some research on superintendent preparation. We are not surprised that school-system leaders are understudied given that principals have been identified as the second most important factor next to classroom teaching to impact student outcomes. While this is a limitation in our synthesis, it is at the same time an argument for conducting this study. We

have an opportunity to provide insights into the implementation of standards for leaders at the system level.

In the often cited 2007 McKinsey Report (as cited in OECD, 2013), *How the World Best-Performing Systems Come Out on Top*, the authors claim that establishing standards for principals is a key policy strategy for improving student learning outcomes. The OECD Report cited above characterizes principal standards as the “most relevant” (2013, p. 48) for improving schools. As with teachers, standards for principals and other school-based leaders can serve various purposes, are enforced in different ways, and have different impact. In Texas as noted in the above, meeting the standards is a precondition for eligibility for a principalship. On the other hand, in Chile, standards are a guide, but are inconsequential to one’s career as a school leader (OECD). Across Canada, school and system leaders may require certification through accredited programs and/or post-secondary institutions (e.g. Ontario, New Brunswick), or professional development through a professional organization (e.g. Saskatchewan, Nova Scotia). As we demonstrated in the previous section, however, many provinces and territories claim the standards are not to be used in a prescriptive manner. This does not reflect an international trend that OECD has identified; namely, that more jurisdictions are moving toward increased regulation in the implementation of standards. Indeed, reporting on licensing requirements among all 50 American states, Adams and Copland (2007) long ago suggested American school leaders were caught in a “performance imperative” (p. 154). The trend reflects a growing concern with global positioning and a perceived need for leverage in a competitive educational environment, a consequence of public assurance mechanisms such as PISA and school choice. But Adams and Copland’s study (2007) was also cautionary and is worth considering today. For instance, they describe the growth of a “super principal” as a “troubling side effect” (p. 155) of performance expectations. For example, licensing requirements for principals based on

the former Interstate School Leaders Licensure Consortium (ISLLC) includes 196 expectations, and these are adopted and/or adapted at the state level. They found that regulatory expectations ranged from one requirement in Hawaii to 435 in Arkansas. The median was 18. Their point is that while regulation can be effective, one must question at what number of expectations in the form of competencies, indicators, or specific skills or behaviours will a system face diminishing returns? And more importantly, what can we realistically expect principals – or teachers and system leaders for that matter—to achieve without compromising their personal and professional well-being? Interestingly, Lambert and Bouchamma’s (2019) comparison of leadership standards in Alberta, Quebec, Australia, and the United States pointed out that Alberta’s former leadership framework was the only one among the four jurisdictions studied that did not include a standard for principals regarding maintaining a balanced personal and professional life, and ensuring this among their staff. While there is no intention for Alberta’s professional practice standards to serve as a checklist, audit and accountability characterize educational systems today, and it will be an aim of our study to discern whether and to what extent the standards are interpreted within such a zeitgeist.

One final note from Adams and Copland’s (2007) study that is useful for providing a balanced perspective in this synthesis is that while standards can be useful for licensing and assessing a leader’s managerial competency, leadership is not a technical performance. Citing Hart & Bredeson (1996) they write: “Leadership...is a social process...it’s authority must be socially and morally earned....no one licenses “leadership”” (p. 157). While managerial functions cannot be isolated from educational leadership, our study will give us insight into how Alberta educators position themselves and approach their practice with respect to management, administration, and leadership.

As Adams and Copland (2007) noted, “while [jurisdictions] may anchor leadership development in licensing, the emergence of real capacity requires additional investments and a conscious, purposeful plan” (p. 158). Indeed, there has been considerable research about leadership development, especially with respect to principals’ preparation. Given that this is a critical aspect of implementation of standards-based policies, we provide an overview of the research on leadership development programs for school and system leaders in the next sections.

### **Research on Effective Leadership Development for Principals**

Principal effectiveness is mediated by many variables, so drawing a direct link between school leadership and student learning is a precarious enterprise. What we do know, however, is that leaders impact upon student achievement by the work they do with their teachers. Building trust among teachers, for example, motivates teachers to improve their teaching practice (May, Huff, & Goldring, 2012). Overall, the literature suggests key activities in which principals engage that influences student achievement include:

- framing and sustaining a vision for school improvement;
- analyzing student data;
- supporting teachers’ growth and professional learning;
- establishing organizational structures that enable teacher leadership and collaboration;
- cultivating a culture of high expectations; and,
- investing in hiring and retaining qualified teachers.

These factors shape conditions for teachers to excel, so that students can excel (May, Huff, & Goldring). These factors are reflected in the standards that we reviewed. The concern then, is how can principals be supported to develop capacity in these areas?

In the past eight years two prominent journals in the area of educational leadership have published special issues on leadership preparation, which is testimony to the rising importance of this as a research topic in its own right. These include the 2011 special issue in *Educational Administration Quarterly*, and the 2016 and 2019 special issues in the *Journal of*

*Research on Leadership Education*. Both of these journals are sponsored by the University Council for Educational Administration (UCEA), a “consortium of higher education institutions committed to advancing the preparation and practice of educational leaders for the benefit of schools and children” (n.d. para. 1) since 1954. UCEA has been extensively involved in evaluating and acknowledging excellent leadership programs, and it is no wonder that it has been a key player in advancing scholarship on the topic. There is convergence in the literature that effective principals emerge from effective leadership development programs, and so much research has been concerned with examining the effectiveness of principal preparation programs.

LaPointe, Darling-Hammond, and Meyerson (2007) distinguish between pre-service and in-service leadership development programs. In the American context from which they write, pre-service programs are provided by universities, and in-service programs are provided by school districts. This seems to align with Alberta practice as many school authorities have developed leadership pathways to support the development of aspiring and practicing school leaders, using the previous leadership framework or other organizing concepts. LaPointe et al. suggest a continuum of practices can be beneficial. There are many providers of leadership programs in the American context, and in some provincial cases in Canada, too. In Ontario, for example, providers of the Principals’ Qualification Program include universities, Ontario Principals’ Council, Catholic Principals’ Council of Ontario, and a teachers’ union (Winton & Pollock, 2013). In their literature review about effective programs, Crow and Whiteman (2016) claimed that university-sponsored programs have been the focus of research despite the existence of other providers. Our review focused here for this reason.

### **Important Features of Effective School Leadership Development Programs**

There is a relationship between how leaders are prepared and how they lead (Orr, 2011). Because our study is concerned with implementation of professional practice standards, we were most interested in the research findings espousing the important features of leadership development programs. Leadership development is the conduit for supporting school leaders in achieving professional standards. There are a number of important features of effective leadership programs: research-based standards, curriculum coherence, field-based internships, problem-based learning, cohort structure, mentoring coaching, and university-school district partnerships (LaPointe et al., 2007; Orr, 2011; Orr & Orphanos, 2011; Perez, Uline, Johnson, & James-Ward, 2011). We discuss these, along with examples of exemplary practice and programs.

**Standards grounded in empirical research.** Standards are what Smylie (2010) calls an improvement technology, part of the infrastructure of supporting school leaders in continuous learning. Leadership standards are powerful tools for setting expectations for leadership practice, reflecting on one's practice, and targeting professional growth (Cosner, 2019; Forde, McMahon, Hamilton, & Murray, 2016). Effective leadership development programs are framed by professional standards that are grounded in empirical research (LaPointe et al., 2007). In our review of standards across various jurisdictions, we noted consistent reference to research claims regarding the role of school principals in impacting student achievement outcomes.

Instructional leadership is the primary focus of leadership standards for principals. Filippi & Hackmann (2019) suggest there are five dimensions of instructional leadership, or what they call leadership for learning, and these provide the rationale for principals to integrate current research as a way of developing excellence and meeting leadership standards. One dimension they mention is that whatever principals do should be focused on

student learning. The standards we found are geared towards that goal. This means that principals must situate themselves at the site of learning, and understand from research what promotes student learning.

A second dimension related to standards has to do with theory. In citing research on effective leadership development, Orr (2011) and Orr and Orphanos (2011) state that a well-defined theory for school improvement is necessary to frame a leadership program. This is important so that leaders' practice is based on principles that are empirical, rather than ideological, or based on belief, personal preference, experience, and prescription (Heck & Hallinger, 2005). The challenge, of course, is that educational leadership is not understood through one grand theory, and so principals must become adept at synthesizing a large body of theory to understand what will work in their context (Roegman & Woulfin, 2019). A set of standards that corresponds to research findings about excellent teaching, nonetheless, is an important foundation for principal development.

**Curriculum coherence.** Effective leadership preparation and practice depends on a coherent relationship among a leader's professional learning goals (as related to standards), learning activities in the program, and how the learning is assessed. Recent research on programs designated as "exemplary" in the United States, a designation given under the UCEA's Educational Leadership Preparation Program (ELPP) suggest effective leadership development programs have an impact logic—a focus on ensuring that leadership development leads to positive changes in leadership practice—rather than a response logic, which results in programs that are simply a response to an external accountability expectation (Cosner, 2019).

In a review of 60 studies on leadership practices, Gonzalez, Glasman, & Glasman (2002) found that principals' impact on student achievement was connected to the work they did around culture, organizational management and collaboration. These are elements in

standards that we reviewed in various jurisdictions, and this speaks to the importance of establishing a curriculum connection to what is known empirically about how principals can make a difference to student achievement. It is also important that curriculum evolve. Knowledge and skills in education are constantly developing, and principals are expected to engage in continuous learning for this very reason (Hackmann, 2016).

A key question for leadership program developers—whether at a district or university level—is should the program hinge on a set of courses or topics, or a set of skills and knowledge? A report by the Wallace Foundation (2016) found a mismatch between topics taught in leadership development programs, and the job that principals have to do, thus recommending that curriculum develop to align with practice. When the University of Denver was revising its leadership development program, one that has been acknowledged by UCEA as an exemplary program, it did not start out with a list of courses. Rather, curriculum development launched from a vision of the type of leader that was needed for schools and that they wanted to graduate from their program. Based on this, school contexts were explored, common descriptions of graduates were drawn up, and the Colorado Principal Standards, the then ISLLC standards, and district needs were the guide to creating curriculum (Korach et al., 2019). Thus, standards have a central role in the development of coherent curriculum in leadership development programs. Following from this, participants and programs themselves are effective when they focus in terms of how well participants achieve the competencies rather than simply considering a principal “prepared” because they have completed courses (Wallace Foundation, 2016).

**Field-based internships.** Practice is the work of practitioners, and it is how leadership is enacted. Use of internships has broad support in the research (Christian, 2011; Darling-Hammond, Meyerson, LaPointe, & Orr, 2010; Duncan, Range, & Scherz, 2011), and is most effective when principal candidates are paired with experienced mentors – practicing

principals and/or faculty mentor when possible. Orr also suggests that internships are the single most important determinant for whether aspirants actually pursue a principal position.

Internships can be effective as they provide opportunity for enhanced problem-solving, application of knowledge, and reflection. There is a social benefit as well, including reducing principals' sense of isolation, and increasing their confidence (Crow & Whiteman, 2016). Importantly field work must align with the standards, and if done well, field-based inquiry and practice can help leaders understand more fully the complexity of the role (Perez, Uline, Johnson, James-Ward, & Basom, 2011). In a study exploring whether internships had an impact on acquisition of skills related to leadership standards, Ringer, Rouse, and St. Clair (2012) used program student assessments and surveys of supervising principals and university faculty to find that instructional leadership and managerial leadership were most often enacted during internships. This highlights the importance of internships. Further, whereas in-class preparation offers participants a chance to engage in productive inquiry and authentic inquiry, field-based inquiry supports teachers' transition to leadership. Specifically, through field-based internship, uncertainty is reduced, and teachers become more confident and goal-oriented (Perez et al., 2011).

Another benefit of field-based internships is that it supports participants' understanding of the link between theory and practice. As Roegman and Woulfin (2019) report, students tend to be critical when a leadership program focuses on theoretical ideas that are seemingly disconnected from "real-time challenges" (p. 5). Intensive field-based internships create a bridge between theory and practice. It is thus critically important that what principal candidates do during an internship is mapped to leadership standards (LaPointe et al. 2007).

Most of the American principal preparation programs that are deemed effective include paid internships for a prolonged period. Delta State University's program is state-

funded, allowing participants to spend a full year's worth of time at an elementary, junior, and senior high school, and two weeks at central office. Candidates have opportunities to observe teacher evaluation processes, conferences with teachers, and other events or tasks involving instructional leadership. Similarly, the University of San Diego received money from a foundation grant to pair interns with administrators. The grant was used to release principal candidates from teaching. Without funding, LaPointe et al. (2007) reported that some programs create internships for those who are in an assistant principalship, or use teachers' vacation time over a two-year time span. Paid internships, however, seems to be the hallmark of principal development programs that are deemed exemplary.

**Problem-based learning.** Byrne-Jimenez, Gooden, and Tucker (2017) advocate for leadership development programs for principals that incorporate active pedagogies such as problem-based learning, simulations, and case-based learning. Problem-based learning affords participants an opportunity to identify problems from within their job context, thus designing their learning around an exploration of the problem (Taylor, Cordeiro, & Chrispells, 2009). Case-based learning and simulations similarly draw upon principals' real-world contexts by either replicating or creating work-related situations around which learning occurs (Cosner, De Voto, & Rah'man, 2018).

Such approaches align with the philosophical foundations of adult learning (e.g. Knowles, Holton, & Swanson, 2005; Mezirow, 1997). Kolb's (1984) experiential learning theory, for example, suggests that experience is an important platform upon which adults' learning takes place. Situated learning theory (Lave & Wenger, 1991) is relevant here, too, as it emphasizes that learning is a social event, and heeds the social and environmental conditions that shape learning situations. Considering this, it makes sense that the most effective leadership development programs are developed around problem-oriented courses, rather than subject-centered courses. Starting with issues and developing content around that

heeds adult learning theory in terms of linking to learners' existing knowledge, scaffolding new knowledge onto existing knowledge, providing opportunities to reply and continually reflect (LaPointe et al., 2007).

**Learning in cohorts.** Principals' leadership development happens best in cohorts (Crow & Whiteman, 2016; LaPointe et al., 2007). Teamwork and collaboration are modelled in cohorts, and learners develop a supportive social and professional network. Huang et al. (2012) found that cohorts strengthen professional skills, increase participants' sense of readiness to take on leadership roles, and increase the likelihood of program completion.

The relational approach to leadership development also supports reciprocal learning; everyone is a learner, including faculty. In the University of Denver's acclaimed program, all cohorts are led by a faculty member and an instructor. Each cohort is composed of eight students, so that access to and interaction with the faculty member leading the cohort is easy (Korach et al., 2019).

**Mentoring and coaching.** Mentoring and coaching are important features of effective leadership development because mentors and coaches model effective questioning about practice, and they provide supervision and feedback necessary to promote professional growth. Mentors and coaches are critical to successful internships; careful pairing of mentors that include faculty as well as school-based and district-leaders is essential for reinforcing research-informed, critical reflection on leadership practice. Clayton, Sanzo, and Myran (2013) also found that mentoring is more effective if the mentor and protégé are focused on a project, as this provides a focus for discussion, reflection, and planning of supports. Fusarelli, Fusarelli, and Drake (2019), reporting on North Carolina State University's UCEA recognized exemplary stated, "If the preparation of school leaders is to be a transformative experience, it must be grounded in a set of contemplative, rigorous, interactive experiences that enhance personal growth and development" (p. 12).

Throughout the one-year certificate program for principals at the University of Denver, students are mentored. The mentorship team is composed of a faculty member, the cohort instructor, and a mentor principal. The benefit, as reported by Korach et al. (2019) is that “students leave the program with a network of cohort members, faculty, mentor principals, and program alumni who serve as critical friends and supports as they navigate their roles as leaders” (p. 40). Mentorship and coaching, then, transcend the program itself because of the relationships that have been developed not only through the mentorship partnering, but through the cohort model as well.

**University-school district partnerships.** Korach et al. (2019) argue that conventional university programs do not have the same level of impact on the advancement of educational leaders as those programs that are co-created between universities and school districts. Partnerships are more effective for a variety of reasons. First there is better bridging of theory and practice, and students have more opportunities to work on context-specific problems. Second, “co-construction allows districts to share current practice and build contextual understanding while university faculty ensure theoretical and conceptual anchors and promote critical thinking” (p. 32). Third, according to the Wallace Foundation (2016) strong university-district partnerships ensure that quality field experiences are embedded into the leadership program, ensuring that the program is not limited to courses, and reflects the reality of the job. For example, the University of Denver’s program is considered exemplary because it works “across institutional boundaries [such as] universities, districts, and states” (Korach et al. 2019, p. 31). All courses in Denver’s program are codesigned and co-led by a team that has at least a school or district leader and a faculty member.

In addition to the above factors, there are other features that contribute to the effectiveness of leadership development. With respect to university partnerships, it matters that the right faculty are engaged with leadership preparation programs. Cosner (2019)

describes the value of faculty collaboration, but acknowledges that standards for tenure and promotion devalue collective work such as program development for school leaders compared to research and publishing. Furthermore, she argues that faculty require a durable funding source to support collaboration. Crow and Whiteman (2016) also found that faculty professional development is a significant gap in the development of leadership development. Given that schools and reform trends change at a rapid rate, professional development for faculty seems critical, yet it tends to be overlooked. Another feature that seems common among what are deemed exemplary principal preparation programs is that school leadership candidates are recruited to participate, they do not self-select to enter a leadership program (Lapointe et al., 2007; The Wallace Foundation, 2016).

On an interesting final note, some of the above findings correspond with what is noted in the business literature. For example, in an article in the *McKinsey Quarterly* (2014), Gurdjian, Halbeisen, and Lane (2014) listed four reasons why leadership development programs fail in the corporate sector. First, programs overlook context and assume that a leader who is successful in one context can be successful in others. This point suggests that those jurisdictions whose leadership development considers the needs of rural or Catholic leaders, as in the case of the University of Denver's (Korach et al., 2019) and Ontario's leadership development, respectively, are on the right track. A second reason why leadership development programs fails is that the leadership training is decoupled from the leadership job itself. Internships, job-embedded inquiry, and action research are ways that educational leadership programs have created relevance and continuity between learning and practice. A third reason why leadership programs fail according to Gurdjian et al. (2014), is that they focus on trying to change behaviour without addressing mindsets. Leaders should feel 'stretched' and uncomfortable when learning, as learning requires accessing and examining one's assumptions and beliefs, and understanding how assumptions drive practice. Reflection

then, is a key component for effective leadership development. And finally, leadership programs fail because results are not measured. In the education arena, improved student learning is the end goal, and so it matters not simply that principals participate in leadership development through formal education or professional development, but school systems must attend to whether and/or how leadership development influences excellence in teaching, and ultimately, excellence in student learning. Our study is specifically designed to gain insights into this.

### **An Exemplar: North Carolina State Principal Preparation Program**

Much of the research cited in the above section emerges from a growing interest in the United States about what makes an exemplary program. “Exemplary” is a formal designation that UCEA has coined through its Exemplary Educational Leadership Preparation Program Award. Programs such as those offered by the University of Denver and Washington State University have been mentioned, and in this final section we highlight North Carolina State’s Principal Preparation Program. On its website it claims that of 774 principal preparation programs in the United States, only five earn the distinction of exemplary by UCEA (North Carolina State University (n.d.)). We highlight this program because it is reported that over 80% of first year principals who completed the program exceed growth in high needs schools. This compares to 75% of experienced principals. NELA, for example, is one cohort of the program that targets principal preparation for rural, high needs, hard-to-staff schools.

At the end of the two-year program, participants receive a principal license and a Masters in School Administration. Following graduation, principals must commit to serving for three years in a high-needs school. There is a financial incentive for this. Graduates sign a promissory note for the amount of the principal development fellowship, and a third is forgiven at the end of each year that they serve.

A key reason for NC's success is its rigorous selection process. Candidates undergo a one-on-one chat with a high school student in the form of a role play. They also must draft a letter to parents in response to a crisis that has been manufactured for them. After watching teaching videos, candidates have a discussion with teachers, which is an assessment of their ability to communicate constructive feedback. They additionally are asked to respond to question prompts in a video booth, and then are individually interviewed by separate members of the admissions committee. Finally, candidates complete the GRIT scale (Duckworth, 2016).

NC students are supported by principal mentors in schools where they complete a residency at a school. Residency may involve attending class a couple of days a week as well. Principal mentors are assigned to each resident, and are paid a stipend of \$500 per semester. Students also have the support of an executive coach, who has a non-supervisory role and serves as an external support during residency. The executive coach could be a retired educational leader with a proven track record. During the program students are focused on a Personal Leadership Development Plan that connects to the leadership standard, and they complete weekly and monthly logs, and collect evidence for each standard in an electronic portfolio. NC employs a cohort model, with fewer than 20 students. NC is regarded as a comprehensive program and leadership succession plan that is founded on research, and attentive to specific contextual conditions. This latter feature is perhaps why it is considered innovative, and therefore highly regarded. It is clear that NC's Principal Preparation Program has the features of successful leadership preparation programs that we have outlined above.

### **Research on Effective Leadership Development for System Leaders**

There is considerably less documentation of how standards for system leaders are used, or what are their effects on student outcomes. Our review included literature on superintendent training programs, as well as evaluations of superintendents, in connection

with the implementation of standards. Much of what we found regarding principal preparation and what constitutes effective superintendent preparation aligns.

### **Important Features of Effective System Leadership Development Programs**

Five critical features of effective superintendent preparation programs are evident in the literature, and they have implications for creating and evaluating programs to prepare system leaders. The first noted feature has to do with congruence between program content and what superintendents actually do, as is the case for principals. Dufour (2016), for example, gathered perceptions from participants of preparation programs in New York State and found that superintendents perceived their programs to be misaligned with practical problems, and did not reflect the depth and complexity of superintendents' decision-making. Superintendents felt the programs lacked in quality, rigour and relevance to their particular contexts.

A second related important feature of system leader development programs is the need for a balanced combination of both theory and practical application as noted by Tripses, Hunt and Watkins (2013), and Denecker (2016). This may include problem-based explorations, simulations, and case analysis (Dufour, 2016). In Pennsylvania, Fowler and Cowden (2015) reported how a cohort program turned their courses into practicums. The course design was rooted in the former Interstate Leaders Licensure Consortium (ISLLC) standards in order to best prepare those seeking to write the superintendent's exam for licencing. The program used mentors and university faculty, and had a heavy emphasis on practical application. This approach has been shown to give participants not only theory grounded in research, but insight into and understanding of how theory relates to practice. Rigorous and relevant practical internships and mentorships (Dufour, 2016; Johnson, 2016) are considered essential in order for system leaders to keep abreast of rapid changes and challenges within their school districts (Tripses, Hunt & Watkins, 2013).

A third aspect critical for program effectiveness is flexibility and creativity in delivery. In Kansas, Augustine-Shaw (2013) reported on the state's Educational Leadership Institute (KELI), a program created through collaboration with professional leadership organizations with the aim towards a more meaningful licensure process. The program included mentoring for all superintendents, resources to support their work, opportunities to build networks with colleagues, and reflective learning activities. The program was committed to the notion that active engagement in learning through providing learning support and practice with theory within the context of their school districts, and this was positively received by superintendents. Although the program has not undergone formal evaluation, a principal preparation program is being developed to align with the features of the superintendent program.

Fourth, superintendent preparation programs need to be grounded in standards of practice. In the American context, Tripses et al. (2013) report that superintendents deem knowledge and application of standards is critical for superintendent preparation programs. Without a national evaluation system, individual states, districts and professional organizations have created a nested set of standards to direct, support and evaluate district leaders and inform training programs. The drawback is these various standards sometimes only implicitly guide training, and some superintendent preparation programs are simply an extension of principal preparation programs (Johnson, 2016). The programs sometimes meet legal requirements, but do not focus on the moral, ethical or professional expectations for system leaders (Brigham, 2017). Thus, the connection between standards and the content of superintendent preparation programs is not always transparent, and in some cases appear not to be the foundation of superintendents' program experiences.

Lastly, a critical feature of effective leadership preparation programs for system leaders is the opportunity to discuss knowledge with colleagues and hone skills alongside a

wide range of colleagues who lead school systems in varying contexts. Learning how to lead diverse groups and to engage people in a collaborative manner when opinions differ is imperative for leadership (Tripses, Hunt, Kim, & Watkins, 2015). This speaks to the values that undergird leadership. Approaching leadership from an asset base was highlighted by Murphy, Louis and Smylie (2017). They refer to the essential need for superintendents to exude integrity and trustworthiness in their personal relationships and interactions. Given the diversity that system leaders face, especially in larger school district, superintendents require highly developed interpersonal skills (Tripses et al., 2015); therefore, while it is important that a leadership program for system leaders support the development of their managerial roles, such as negotiating and understanding contract law (Ellis, 2016), the ability to promote among school leaders and teachers generative conversations and collaboration, and to inspire team leadership throughout a school division ultimately defines effective system leadership (Adams, 2016) and should therefore be the focus of school system's leadership development.

### **Standards as a Benchmark for Evaluating System Leaders**

We considered research that focused on the evaluation of system leaders because Alberta is embarking on uncharted territory in this regard with the SLQS implementation in September 2019. Multiple interacting factors have created uncertainty in the evaluative process of superintendent roles, and is a key concern in the literature. For example, in the United States, a national evaluation system does not exist for system leaders, and so there is unclear or questionable alignment between standards for superintendents and how superintendents are evaluated. To exacerbate the situation, little research in this area is available. For example, Powers (2017) found there is little new research on evaluating superintendents in New York State. In 71 of this state's school districts, the standards are not explicitly stated in the evaluation procedures, creating a process of evaluation that is not well

understood and one that does not clearly depart from agreed-upon standards. In the state of Missouri, the situation is similar and complicated by the huge learning curve required by school board members to understand the content and depth of standards in applying them to superintendent evaluations (Brigham, 2017).

To take a Canadian perspective, Saskatchewan directors of education undergo evaluation by their school boards. And although LEADS has established informal standards for directors and superintendents, and prescribes modules to support their development, nowhere in the evaluation policy are the standards mentioned. It is up to the board to decide on the evaluation processes. Evaluation is one of the key questions that Alberta faces. In the Alberta study of teacher growth, supervision and evaluation, Brandon et al. (2018) asked participants, including teachers, school and system leaders, whether they believed a standard for principals and superintendents was a good idea. While the qualitative data showed a positive response to the idea, one of the uncertainties was around who was best positioned to evaluate superintendents.

Research by Adams (2016), and Leithwood & Azah (2016) suggest that it is the collective leadership of a school system that determines its performance and outcomes. This is also apparent in the Alberta Teachers' Association (2016) report on the role of superintendents. This sentiment is shared internationally as well. Based on research from Kuwait, Aldaihani (2017) argues for partnership synergy, a focus on cooperation and compatibility across multiple layers of administration to ensure quality implementation of standards for school and district leaders. Training programs for superintendents can capitalize on this synergy by promoting coordination of the implementation of standards across levels of leadership. Adams' (2016) work with school districts is informative here. By including all district staff in professional learning, using an inquiry-based model and generative communication professional learning, systems create a common expectation for how

leadership is understood and developed. Also important is that system leaders have a regular and sustained presence in schools so that they have continuous, real-time understanding of school contexts. Alberta is positioned for this kind of synergy because there is closed alignment in the LQS and SLQS competencies.

There is also caution in the literature that professional development programs for system leaders not solely focus on performance standards, but also consider how leaders develop dispositions of leadership over time. Based on a district leadership competency model in Georgia, Welch and Hodge (2018) suggest a core set of dispositions, as well as skills and competencies. Additionally, system leaders, like teachers and principals, need to follow a model of sustained professional learning.

### **An Exemplar: University of Washington Leadership for Learning L4L Education Doctorate**

The University of Washington's Leadership for Learning L4L Education Doctorate is considered an exemplary program, according to UCEA standards. Honig and Walsh's (2019) study about the revisions that the program underwent highlight what system leadership development effectiveness looks like. After 20 years in operation, L4L transformed from a program that was incoherent, to one that was focused around key areas in alignment with the state's leadership standards for superintendents and the former ISLLC standards.

L4L is a three-year program that incorporates class instruction on Fridays and Saturdays for nine months, and a week-long summer residency. It follows a cohort model, with cohorts ranging in size from 25 to 35 students. It is self-sustaining through tuition. Those pursuing an Ed D have the option to pursue superintendent certification if they complied with the state regulation to complete 360 internship hours with a superintendent.

In its original inception L4L culminated in a capstone project, which was deemed to have no or negligible impact on leadership practice. The program was revised to focus on

instructional leadership action that was specific and measurable. For example, an action that students could take would be to lead a conversation about educational equity with stakeholders and colleagues. All courses were developed around a conceptual framework of four strands that aligned with the standards, but standards were not ‘covered’ individually throughout the program; L4L employees an integrated approach. Assignments were “authentic products from their leadership” (p. 62) rather than academic papers or reading reflections. This ensured a theory-to-practice link was established, and that students reflected on how their academic learning could inform their leadership practice. In the first two years, students are also expected to engage in extended projects using what Honig and Walsh (2019) call a cycle-of-inquiry that connects their learning to the job reality. Students annually contributed to a portfolio that contained their active learning, and evidence of achievement in terms of the leadership standards. Course assignments could constitute evidence of achievement, but on-the-job learning and action were also considered.

The success of the program relates to the features of principal programs; programs that connect learning to the actual work of superintendents, encourages application of learning to practice, is supported by mentorship and colleagues in a cohort structure, and is aligned with research-based rigorous standards supports superintendents’ capacity building.

To summarize, though there are distinct roles and responsibilities for school and system leaders, developing leadership capacity is not fundamentally different. Though the literature on system leaders is nascent, strong parallels can be drawn between what we know about effectiveness in principal preparation and the way system leader capacity can be developed. At the heart of our study is the question of how the LQS and SLQS will be operationalized, how this will impact upon leaders’ effectiveness, and how this will translate into improvements at the classroom level. This study holds the potential to fill a noticeable

gap in the area of system leadership, and will broaden scholarship on school leadership by including the perspective of a Canadian province.