

SCHOOL LEADERSHIP DEVELOPMENT PROGRAM



June 2005

TO: SBDM Council Members

FROM: Dr. Tricia Browne-Ferrigno, Project Director, Principals Excellence Program

Among the applications you are reviewing for the open principalship at your school may possibly be those from individuals who participated in the Principals Excellence Program (PEP). This program provided intensive professional development for selected administrator-certified practitioners (e.g., principals, assistant principals, teachers who had completed preservice principal preparation) in Pike County public schools. Following are important elements of the program that helped participants to become more effective educational leaders—and thus make them exceptional principal candidates.

- PEP was designed and delivered through a collaborative partnership between the University of Kentucky and Pike County School District for the purpose of improving school leadership. The ultimate program goal was to assure optimum learning for all students in high-need rural schools.
- PEP participants were recruited and selected through an admission process that required evidence of commitment to public education, prior leadership experiences, and knowledge of P-12 education (e.g., curriculum and instruction, learning assessment, professional activities). District administrators made final decisions about who was invited to participate in the program.
- PEP was delivered through small communities of learners that worked together for 12 months. Cohort members learned skills in group development and community building, broad-based stakeholder collaboration, and comprehensive action research about student learning issues. They worked together **one day each week for an entire academic year**—while also performing their full-time professional work as P-12 educators—and thus developed skills that rarely emerge during preservice preparation conducted solely in university-based settings.
- PEP curriculum focused on the four recurring themes within the ISLLC *Standards*: visionary practices for educational success, collaborative practices for community involvement, instructional practices for learning success, ethical practices for social justice. The participants developed further their understanding of the contemporary principalship by reading professional books, discussing leadership issues and challenges with professors and mentor principals, and using new knowledge and skills in their current practices.
- PEP is recognized nationally as an exemplar in school leadership development. After an extensive review of 60 programs across the United States, WestEd in San Francisco selected PEP as one of six unique initiatives to be featured in the United States Department of Education publication, *Innovative Pathways to School Leadership*.

An important objective of this federally funded program is having graduates selected for administrative positions. As you review the applications for the open principalship at your school, I hope you will consider candidates who were trained through PEP specifically for rural school principalships. I believe that you will discover through interviewing them that they possess unique knowledge and skills that are particularly relevant to your school's critically important goal—high academic success for all students.

The second page of this memo presents additional information about PEP. If you have any questions about the program, please do not hesitate to contact me at the University of Kentucky (phone 859-257-5504 or electronic mail tricia.ferrigno@uky.edu).

Principals Excellence Program (PEP)

- Who:** Cadres of practicing principals, assistant principals, and administrator-certified teachers who worked with leadership educators from the University of Kentucky and administrator practitioners from Pike County School District and Johnson County School District
- What:** An ISLLC *Standards*-based leadership development initiative spanning one calendar year (January to December) that integrated seminar-workshops, school-based disciplined inquiry and findings dissemination, active learning with P-12 educators, professional reading, and structured reflection
- When:** Weekly full-day activities during spring and fall semesters with cohort peers, project instructors, and mentor principals; annual district-wide summer leadership institute
- Why:** To expand the principalship from school management to “balanced leadership”¹ focused on student achievement through four performance themes: vision for success, focus on teaching and learning, involvement of all stakeholders, and demonstration of ethical behavior²
- How:** University-district partnership that addressed specific leadership development needs in high-need rural schools; clearly defined program outcome goals; specific strategies to recruit, develop, and retain school leaders able to assure optimum learning for all students and engage representatives of all school stakeholder groups through visionary collaboration; funded through three-year federal grant from No Child Left Behind (NCLB) School Leadership Development Program

What makes PEP unique?

- PEP selected by WestEd as one of six case study sites (from nearly 60 leadership initiatives nationally) for its promising practices in leadership development, specifically
 - Unique vision to change the principalship
 - Work to establish support for schools and districts in rural Appalachia
 - Innovative integration of theory and practice
- PEP featured in the U.S. Department of Education 2005 publication, *Innovative Pathways to School Leadership* (edpubs@inet.ed.gov)

What two aspects of PEP are most effective?

- Cohort participants were administrator-certified practitioners (administrators and teachers) who worked together for an entire calendar year and explored real problems of practice by conducting comprehensive action research with mentor principals in authentic settings
- Learning cohorts provided risk-safe environment that supported professional networking and relationship building, developed leadership confidence and competence, and stimulated “thinking outside the building” and moving “beyond limited experiences”

For additional information:

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¹ Waters, J. T., Marzano, R. J., & McNulty, B. A. (2003). *Balanced leadership: What 30 years of research tells us about the effect of leadership on student achievement*. Aurora, CO: Mid-continent Research for Education and Learning.

² Hessel, K., & Holloway, J. (2002). *A framework for school leaders: Linking the ISLLC Standards to practice*. Princeton, NJ: Educational Testing Service.