



Ready to Lead: Designing Residencies for Better Principal Preparation

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Each school deserves a great principal who is well prepared to inspire and manage change. This message has been written in countless policy statements and research reports, and it is a point on which students, teachers, families, policymakers and district leaders can agree. Most will agree, also, that we've changed our expectations about what it means to be a great principal over the past 10 years. Principals can no longer afford to be office-bound and disengaged from social, emotional, and academic issues affecting individual students. Today's school leader continues to manage staffing and buildings; serves as an instructional leader, teacher evaluator, data guru; and is strategically positioned to provide daily support and professional development to teachers, and to create safe, supportive learning environments for students.

Changes in principal responsibilities have ramifications for principal preparation. While new principals may have ample theory and technical knowledge to lead, new principals report that they lack the wisdom and know-how necessary to make them ready to lead. As novices, it is natural that new principals feel they have more to learn during their first year, but new principals' concerns coupled with high new principal attrition rates—which top 30 percent in some studies—point to the need for better leadership preparation and talent management.

“Once a principal might have been considered a solid performer solely by being a competent building manager...Today, there is growing consensus that principals must do much more, most notably ensuring the spread of effective instructional practices to every classroom.”

—Lee Mitgang, *Districts Matter: Cultivating the Principals Urban Schools Need* (2013), p.7

Aspiring principal residency is a promising approach to initiating principal candidates into school leadership practice and has become a part of some comprehensive principal preparation programs over the past twenty years. Principal residencies reinvent the traditional internship experience, which has often been the capstone experience in principal preparation. **Residency immerses principal candidates in rigorous apprenticeship experiences that are designed to advance leadership and management practices, as well as emphasize data analysis, action, reflection, and accountability.**

While high-quality principal residency programs can appear very diverse, a common definition and set of practices unite them. *Ready to Lead: Designing Residencies for Better Principal Preparation* does the following:

- Provides clarity on the purpose of the principal residency experience as a core part of a preparation program,
- Introduces the *Essential Elements* as a set of key characteristics that should inform the design of effective residency experiences,
- Discusses current research on principal residency that points to its promise for building future principals,
- Gives examples from well-designed residency programs drawn from across the United States, and
- Asks provocative questions to support conversation among K–12 educators, university faculty and staff, nonprofit organizations, and communities that will help these stakeholders develop or advance residencies within their region's educational leadership pipeline.

Ready to Lead is intended to help state policymakers and district administrators to make strategic decisions about allocating federal funding (ESSA, 2015) to principal preparation improvements; principal educators seeking approaches to train principals; district leaders seeking more effective partnerships with their principal preparation partners; and

researchers seeking to gauge the impact of principal preparation and residency programs.

According to a recent report by the George W. Bush Institute on principal talent management, making successful principals requires new, comprehensive approaches by school districts, universities, states and others who pull together to train and support principals. Thoughtfully designed and implemented principal residency programs can be a powerful piece of this comprehensive and collaborative approach to training future educational leadership.





In 2013, NYCLA formed the Residency Design Initiative (RDI) with representatives from 14 principal preparation programs training future principals in urban, suburban and rural contexts throughout the United States.¹ This group of individuals contributed their collective knowledge and experience with residencies to contribute to the field. Working with American Institutes for Research (AIR), NYCLA used the information gathered with RDI to develop a framework for principal residency that can be used as a guide for designing and improving principal preparation. The framework includes seven essential elements that, taken together, define the characteristics of a well-designed principal residency.

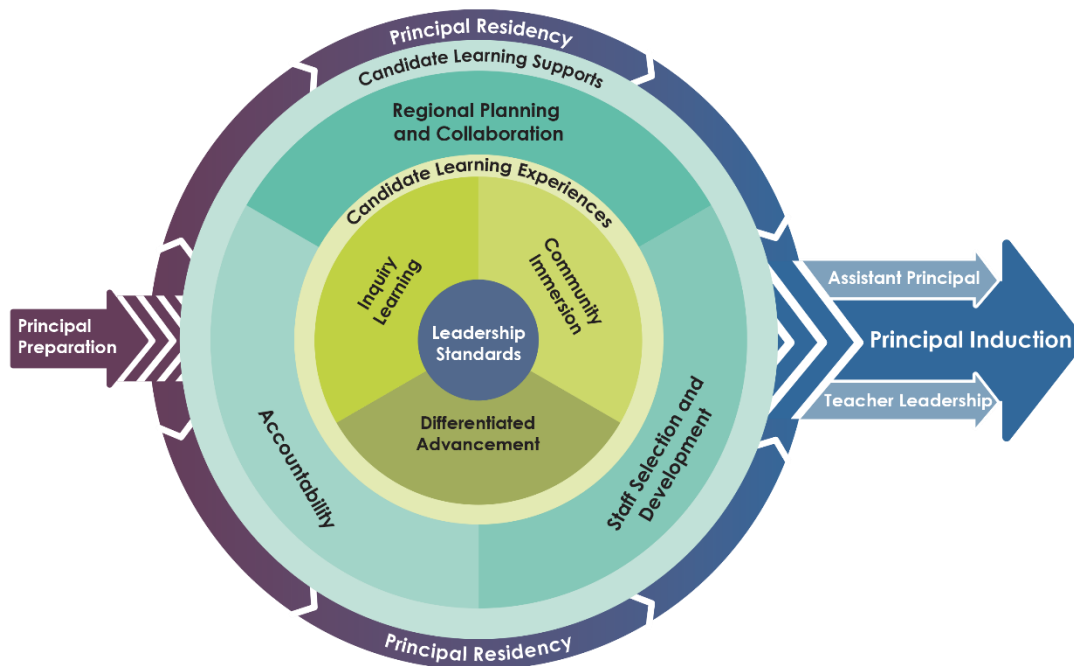
¹ The NYC Leadership Academy gratefully acknowledges the leadership and financial support of the George W. Bush Institute's Alliance to Reform Education Leadership in the convenings of experts in school leadership.

The *Essential Elements* are organized into two categories:

- **Candidate learning experiences** describe what principal candidates learn about and how they learn it.
- **Candidate learning supports** describe what partners-in-residency (i.e., universities, states, school districts, nonprofits) do to create conditions and hold themselves accountable for consistent, rigorous candidate learning.

The relationships among the *Essential Elements* are illustrated in Figure 1. As the diagram shows, residency is a part of comprehensive principal preparation that must include state accreditation, as indicated by the left arrow. During residency, candidates engage in learning experiences driven by leadership standards and include inquiry learning, differentiated advancement, and community immersion. Each aspect of candidate learning experience is supported by program administrative processes that

Figure 1. Principal Residency Essential Elements



help to ensure candidates receive a consistently rigorous training. Successful completion of residencies within preparation programs is considered by many states to be a prerequisite to certification in school administration, which provides minimal qualification to candidates for principal positions. Although the goal of residency is to ready candidates for principal positions, many newly certified administrators become assistant principals or teacher leaders prior to obtaining principal positions.

The following are the *Essential Elements for Principal Residencies*:

- 1 Leadership Standards:** Candidate performance expectations are written in behavioral terms to reflect candidates' future job responsibilities and national standards. Leadership competencies anchor the entire preparation program, including candidate assignment or "match" to the residency school and mentor, curriculum, advancement, and evaluation.
- 2 Differentiated Advancement:** Each principal candidate has an individualized learning plan that reflects his/her strengths and weaknesses, as determined by selection and performance assessment information that moves candidates from guided learning and practice to more substantive leadership responsibilities. Principal candidate learning experiences scaffold skill and identity development, allowing candidates to learn content, experiment with leadership practice, and learn from mistakes. Formative assessment and feedback based on observation of candidate performance in the residency guide and accelerate candidate growth and development.
- 3 Community Immersion:** During the residency, principal candidates learn through immersion in two communities simultaneously. One is the professional community cultivated among the cohort of candidates in the preparation program. The second is the school community, where immersion includes participation in sustained, substantive, job-embedded learning experiences with opportunities for schoolwide decision making and assuming responsibility for authentic leadership work.

- 4 Inquiry Learning:** Individual candidate and candidate cohort learning is organized around cycles of inquiry, action, and reflection on the impact of leadership on students, staff, schools, and communities, with a primary focus on the schools in which immersion experiences occur.
- 5 Regional Planning and Collaboration:** Preparation program planning and collaboration occur through a formalized partnership among preparation program faculty and staff, district representatives, K–12 educators, principal associations and other stakeholders. The success of this collaboration relies on clearly defined decision-making authority and considers how well the program meets regional leadership workforce talent needs. Curriculum, instruction, mentoring, and assessment decisions are informed by all partners, who share responsibility for ensuring candidates have rigorous, meaningful, and consistent learning experiences.
- 6 Staff Selection and Development:** All program faculty members, including mentor principals who support in-school residency experiences, demonstrate the requisite knowledge and skills to support candidates effectively. Intentional selection, training, and evaluation processes for facilitators, mentor principals, and coaches are in place and reflect the experience and skills needed to facilitate candidate learning, with an emphasis on participant assessment and feedback. Program leaders match principal candidates carefully with the mentors, coaches, and residency sites that are best positioned to meet their specific learning needs.
- 7 Accountability:** The program maintains systems and processes to collect, analyze, and maintain longitudinal data on candidate perspectives on program quality, candidate progress, candidate performance after graduation, and candidate retention during and after graduation for the purposes of monitoring and improving program coherence with standards, consistency across implementation contexts over time, and continuous program improvement.

Residency Requires Systems Change: Meeting Challenges Through Partnership

The *Essential Elements for Principal Residencies* broadly describe learning experiences and supports common to all successful programs involved in the Residency Design Initiative. *Ready to Lead* provides the elements as a starting point for conversation among those who prepare aspiring principals and those who employ them about how best to design residency experiences—or how to improve those that already exist. As partners become committed to a shared vision for a well-designed residency program, they also will have to consider state laws and rules, institutional histories, financial agreements, human and financial resources, and other contextual factors. The point of the elements, however, is to provoke thinking and discussion about how residency program stakeholders can navigate those challenges and address them intentionally. For example:

- School districts may need to provide special support to mentor principals so they have time to lead candidate learning; allocate staff time to engage with and as principal educators and residency supporters; or launch post-certification residencies for all educators seeking to become principals in a district.
- University or nonprofit principal preparation programs working within a region may need to form memoranda of understanding to effectively place candidates with mentor principals and share information. Both types of organizations may need to change internal staffing processes and incentives to allow faculty time to design and implement residency models, and may need to invest in changes to alumni data systems to provide information for continuous residency improvement.

- State education agencies may change funding allocation processes to spur residency program development through partnership, invest in longitudinal data systems that follow candidates through their careers in education leadership and administration, and adjust administrative rules on principal certification to better support residency.
- State policymakers may reconsider principal certification requirements and modernize principal preparation and certification standards; provide funding for candidates to complete paid, extended residencies in schools; heighten preparation program accountability or mentor principal requirements; or allocate funding to study the impact of new, innovative principal residency initiatives.
- Researchers and those who fund research must use appropriate methods to document the degree to which principal preparation programs, as residencies specifically, achieve desired outcomes and work closely with residency partners to describe learning processes and contexts.

Designing and improving principal residencies as part of a comprehensive approach to principal preparation is likely a multiyear journey, for most. As committed partners work together, *Ready to Lead* provides ideas and examples developed through the successes and missteps of principal preparation program staff throughout the United States. The guidebook also is an invitation to engage with NYCLA, AIR and others in a professional community to improve principal residency.

Ready to Lead: Designing Residencies for Better Principal Preparation is available on our website at <http://bit.ly/ResidencyDesign>. For more information or to receive a copy, please contact NYCLA at alerts@nycleadershipacademy.org.

For more information about NYCLA and our services to support the design and delivery of effective residencies, please visit our website at www.nycleadershipacademy.org.