TAKING CHARGE OF PRINCIPAL PREPARATION:

A Guide to NYC Leadership Academy's Aspiring Principals Program Executive Summary

Commissioned by

NYC Leadership Academy's first class of Aspiring Principals

EXECUTIVE
SUMMARY

School leadership is a crucial lever of school change. Successful principals are responsible for shaping the culture of their schools, setting clear expectations, and cultivating and leading teams of teachers who can deliver high-quality instruction. As states and districts implement the Common Core standards and new teacher evaluation models, principals play an ever more critical role in supporting and evaluating teacher practice in the classroom.

While once seen as a building manager position, the principal's job has become highly demanding, complex, and urgent, as school leaders are held accountable for transforming schools and improving student outcomes. As research and practitioners in the field confirm the important role that school leaders play in advancing student achievement, there is a growing chorus of support for rethinking how the next generation of principals is trained and supported to ensure they can hit the ground running and meet the demands of the position.

For more than a decade, NYC Leadership Academy's Aspiring Principals Program (APP) has taken a standards-based, experiential learning approach to developing the breadth and depth of skills that aspiring school leaders need to succeed on the job. Unlike traditional educational leadership programs that equate readiness to lead a school with the completion of an established number of credit hours, this rigorous, accelerated 14-month leadership development program only graduates participants who demonstrate that they meet clearly articulated leadership performance standards. Much of the training takes the form of simulations and team

activities, frequent feedback, and a substantial clinical experience under the guidance of a carefully selected and trained mentor principal.

What makes APP powerful is its laser-like focus on designing a practice- and research-based leadership development model that prepares aspiring principals for the real-world challenges they will face. Underlying APP is a set of clear standards that specify what school leaders need to know and do to succeed. APP faculty are veteran practitioners with years of experience leading schools; they design the hands-on, job-embedded curriculum that gives aspiring school leaders a variety of opportunities to grapple with a wide range of challenges and master the necessary knowledge and skills. Maintaining a close partnership with the New York City Department of Education also allows program faculty to purposefully integrate evolving school system priorities and initiatives into the school-based immersion experiences to ensure that each year graduates are well-versed in district expectations.

APP begins with an intensive simulated school experience for six weeks in the summer, followed

by a school-based residency during the school year that augments classroom-based coursework. These dual applied learning opportunities allow aspiring principals to gain theoretical ideas, put them into action, and see and manage the consequences of those actions as they play out in school settings. Mentor principals support, coach, and reflect with the aspiring principals to ensure that they can perform important leadership tasks such as giving feedback to teachers, analyzing data, problem solving in the moment, building community, and implementing needed reforms. As a result, program participants build the habits and dispositions of strong leaders.

This guide provides an in-depth look at the core research-based elements of APP and why they are critical to preparing and graduating effective principals. It offers **existing leadership preparation programs and programs just getting started** a sequence of clear, concrete action steps they can follow to strengthen school leadership preparation and improve school and student outcomes. **District leaders** considering investments in school leadership development can make use of the tools and strategies for mapping how they currently source principals to their local school leadership needs. **State policymakers** can incorporate lessons learned on the value of practice-based principal preparation as they devise policy responses to the school leadership challenge.

NYC Leadership Academy partners highlighted in this guide demonstrate how APP has been adapted to a variety of other contexts. These partners include:
- Denver Public Schools (Colorado)
- iLeadAZ/Arizona State University (Arizona)
- Innovative Schools Development Corporation (Delaware)
- Sandhills Regional Education Consortium (North Carolina)
- Teachers21 (Massachusetts)

NYC Leadership Academy is proud of its accomplishments preparing effective school leaders and grateful to its partners in this work, including the New York City Department of Education, The Wallace Foundation, and others who have joined in this work nationally. This guide is intended to spur innovation in existing principal preparation work, inspire new programs, and strengthen the overall practice of principal preparation by providing insight into NYC Leadership Academy's model and helping others learn from their experiences in adapting APP to fit local circumstances, needs, and objectives.

For the full report and additional resources, please visit **www.nycleadershipacademy.org/ news-and-resources/tools-and-publications.**

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