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SCHOOL RESEARCH

# Navigating the Shift to Intensive Principal Preparation in Illinois

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# Background: Illinois' New Principal Preparation Policy

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- **Key components**

- A targeted principal endorsement instead of a general administrative certificate
- Partnerships with school districts in preparation program design and delivery
- More selective admissions criteria
- Curriculum that addresses school improvement and the learning needs of all students, including students with disabilities, ELLs, gifted students, and ECE
- A performance-based internship; and
- Collaborative support for candidates from both faculty and mentor principals.

- **Timeline**

- 2010: New law passed
- Sept 2012: All new candidates must go into new programs
- June 2014: Old programs sunset, all programs must be approved under new rules

# Purpose of Study

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1. Describe how the new policies are being implemented and variation between programs
2. Identify challenges and how programs are addressing them
3. Determine where improvements could be made for the future

# Methodology

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- Two-year, mixed-methods study
- Statewide scan
  - Fall 2014
  - Interviews with 45 key informants
  - Summarized in interim report (IERC 2015-3 available at <http://ierc.education/our-research/publications/>)
- Site visits
  - Spring 2015- Spring 2016
  - Interviews with faculty, staff, administration, students, and district partners in 12 sites
- Document review
  - Syllabi from sample of 14 programs
- Online survey
  - Fall 2015/Winter 2016
  - 75% response rate (21 of 28 programs)

# Overview of Findings

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1. District-University Partnerships
2. Enrollment & Recruitment
3. Curriculum
4. Internships & Mentoring
5. Continuous Improvement

# More shared responsibility between program and district partner

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- Partnership structures vary by program
  - One district vs. several districts/ROE vs. partner advisory board
  - One formal partnership vs. multiple formal partnerships (plus most maintained some informal partnerships)
- Partner's level of involvement also varied
  - High: deep, on-going collaboration, reciprocal relationship
  - Mid: partner provides input to decision-making, assists with implementation
  - Low: minimal involvement, providing feedback, attending meetings

# Shared responsibility has increased and is viewed as beneficial

To what degree has the amount of shared responsibility between your program and your district partner changed since the redesign? Shared responsibility has: ( $n=19$ )

Increased a lot	21%
Increased somewhat	47%
Stayed the same	21%
Decreased somewhat	11%
Decreased a lot	0%

How would you describe this change (or lack of change) in the degree of shared responsibility? ( $n=18$ )

Very Beneficial	33%
Somewhat Beneficial	61%
Somewhat Detrimental	6%
Very Detrimental	0.0%

# Resources are needed to maintain partnering districts' involvement

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- Examples of ongoing involvement
  - Most often with internships, placements, and principal mentors
  - Recruiting and reviewing applicants, participating on advisory boards, providing input for continuous improvement
  - Ongoing communication between program and district personnel
- Funding needed to cover personnel time and travel
- Cultivating meaningful partnerships requires time
  - Districts are faced with accountability requirements and multiple demands on time - “Districts have many other higher priorities”
  - Program faculty/staff also stretched thin
  - Investment of time & resources vs. payoff

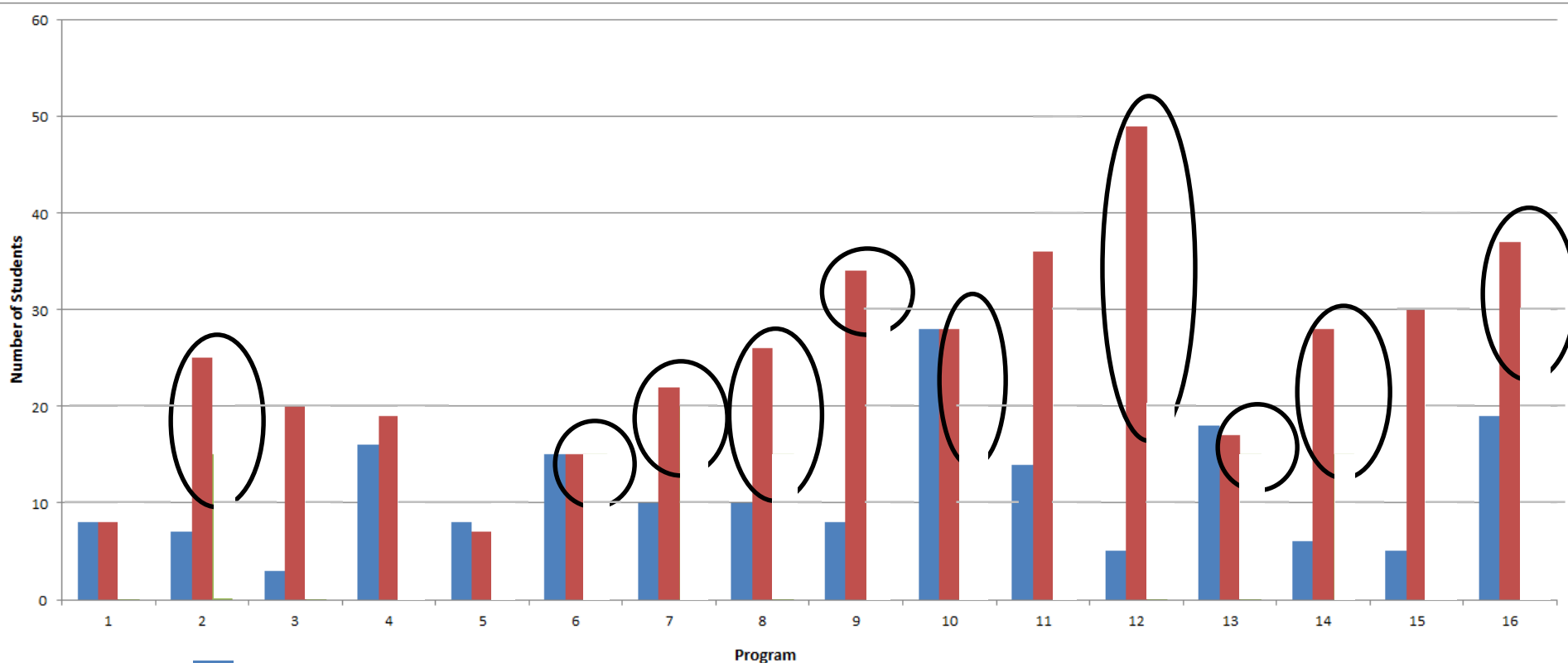


# Enrollments considerably lower than they were for general administration programs

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- **Substantial** decrease at some institutions. Examples:
  - 180 students → 13
  - 100 students → 10
  - 600 students → 140
- Enrollments starting to increase, but not expected to return to prior levels
- Two-thirds of programs surveyed were already at enrollment levels needed for sustainability, and  $\frac{3}{4}$  optimistic they'll have sufficient enrollment within next three years
- ...But three quarters also believe there will be too few qualified candidates to fill principal openings in the next five years

# Enrollments by program



- How many students enrolled during the first full academic year of your redesigned program?
- How many NEW students enrolled in your program during the 2014-15 academic year (include all new student cohorts who began in AY 2014-15)?
- How many NEW students do you believe would need to enroll in your program each year in order to provide the resources necessary for program sustainability?

# A combination of factors inhibited enrollment

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- Low enrollments by design – to some extent
  - Shift from general administration to principal prep – more targeted and selective admissions
- Other deterrents:
  - Program requirements (especially internship)
  - Increased costs
  - Confusion about requirements
  - Questions about marketability of credential
  - Competition from other states/programs
- Some worry that these may discourage potentially high quality candidates from applying

# Programs are being asked to do more with less

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- (Reduced enrollment, lower budgets, and fewer staff) +
- (New requirements, expanded responsibilities, and more expensive to implement) =
- Tension with university administration and doubts about sustainability of policy changes
- Increasing enrollments is a top priority
- Programs enhanced their recruitment strategies to boost enrollment
  - Increased outreach and education efforts
  - Two-stage admissions system
  - Expanding on partnerships
  - Seeking external funding to offset costs
  - Expansion vs. contraction of off-site cohorts and start dates

# Current candidates viewed as more committed, stronger, and no less diverse overall

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- 75% of program coordinators say candidates more committed to becoming principal
  - 50% say “substantially more”
- 70% say candidates are stronger in terms of overall capabilities
  - 0% say weaker
- No overall negative impact on diversity reported
  - 60% say no change, 30% say more diverse
  - But still viewed as area for improvement

# Moving from General Administration to Principal Prep Curriculum

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- Generally viewed as a welcome change
  - Some programs completely revamped, others merely tweaked
- Strong focus on instructional leadership
  - This was business as usual for most institutions
  - Some concern that pendulum has shifted too far away from management content
- School improvement and data literacy & analysis become established components of the curriculum
  - Especially around teacher evaluation and development
  - 85% say ability of graduates to lead school improvement has increased, 75% say data skills have improved

# Increased quality of training for leading special student populations – but is it enough?

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- Special education is “ubiquitous” and candidates can learn a lot from their classmates
- All programs now include early childhood education content and experiences
- ELL content is well-integrated, but placements are difficult in some regions
- Only 5% believe quality has declined in these areas, but 25%-40% say focus has not increased

# Typical format of internship has not changed

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- Typical internship
  - Unpaid, part-time, 2 to 3 three semesters, at candidate's school, with candidate's principal as mentor
- Internships in some programs differ
  - Length/duration: Full-time/full year
  - Setting: new school, two different schools (elementary & HS), multiple settings
  - Mentor: new principal, assistant superintendent, etc.
  - Paid

*Many candidates would prefer paid, full-time, year-long residency*



# Internship experiences are viewed as deeper and more authentic

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- More substantial, authentic preparation for principalship
  - More instructional leadership opportunities, direct leadership rather than observation
  - Wider variety of experiences
  - More time in internship (even though based on competencies rather than hours)
- Better mentorship
  - Increased supervision, better feedback, better training for mentors

# Challenges to implementing successful internships

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- Difficult to find placements for all grade levels and all student populations
- Difficult to find qualified faculty supervisors and principal mentors due to new requirements
- Less ability to customize internships due, more prescriptive
- Intensive amount of time required to implement internships
  - Program: Paperwork, documentation, and assessment
  - Candidate: Juggling teaching responsibilities with internship

# Continuous improvement is not yet realized for most programs

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- Typically informal
- Most programs collect data on current candidates, but few collect systematic data on graduates
- One outlier program has detailed continuous improvement processes in place
  - Data collected on candidates from application → participation → completion → employment as assistant principals or principals
  - Data analyzed to help improve various components of the program in a continual feedback loop

# Summary

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- Redesign has strengthened partnerships, but implementation varies widely
- **More shared responsibility requires more resources for sustainability**
- Enrollments are considerably lower than they were for general administration programs, but candidates are viewed as stronger, more committed, and no less diverse
- **Programs have enhanced their recruitment strategies, but small numbers have already affected programs**
- Increased coverage of special student populations, but still worry that current preparation (particularly for ECE and ELL) will be insufficient preparation
- **Instructional leadership a clear focus, and school improvement and data literacy and analysis well-established, but these are not necessary new**
- Field experiences linked to coursework have increased authenticity, but concern that management has been de-emphasized
- **Little change to the format of the internship, but content is much improved despite numerous challenges**
- Outcome data for continuous improvement is currently lacking

# Implications

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- High-engagement partnerships can be beneficial to both programs and districts, but they require high levels of resources and supports.
- Steps need to be taken to ensure that there are enough high quality candidates to fill principal vacancies in both the short- and long-term.
- Many argue that candidates need strong preparation in both instructional leadership *and* organizational management.
- Principal preparation must strike a balance between comprehensiveness and specialization.
  - Continual professional development could provide additional opportunities for principals to acquire specialized knowledge and skills
- Many argue for transitioning from a compliance mindset toward a focus on performance.
  - A state-level office of school leadership could assist in collecting a range of quality indicators to assist programs' continuous improvement efforts.



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