

To: School Leadership Task Force (SLTF)

From: The Illinois Council of Professors of Educational Administration (ICPEA) Special Task Force

Subject: ICPEA Position Regarding the Improvement of School Leadership Programs

Date: December 10, 2007

The ICPEA Special Task Force commends the work of the SLTF and supports the use of the study School Leaders Preparation: A Blueprint for Change as a “platform” for improvement of school leader preparation programs in the State of Illinois. The three major challenges toward program improvement which are identified in that report, strategic recruitment of the best potential leaders, focusing preparation on the improvement of student learning in K-12 schools, and the assurance of quality leadership programs, are recognitions of the systemic nature of program improvement. That is, inputs, throughputs, and outputs must all be addressed if meaningful and sustainable improvement is to occur. Furthermore, the six major recommendations made in the “Blueprint Report,” 1) the restructuring of leadership program admission criteria and the recruitment of high quality candidates; 2) the improvement of school leaders preparation using rigorous assessment data; 3) the provision of meaningful clinical and leadership experiences; 4) the establishment of a rigorous certificate examination; 5) the reservation of a certificate/licensure specific to the principalship; and 6) the coordination of a rigorous program review and approval process are all important recommendations which, if implemented, promise likely improvement in school leaders. While the implementation actions cited in the “Blueprint Report” are not all supported by ICPEA, the general direction of the implementation actions seems worthwhile and well-intended.

The ICPEA Task Force commends the use of data which has characterized the work of the School Leadership Task Force. Analysis of data provides a useful and enlightening backdrop to any recommendations which may be forthcoming. The ICPEA Task Force has welcomed the opportunity to add to this data base.

It is the ICPEA Task Force's position that it is essential that any recommendation be based on the sound recognition of the systemic nature of the process. School leader programs will be improved if students of higher quality are admitted. Such a position seems indisputable. The improvement of leader preparation programs should result in improved school leaders seems obvious. That student improved achievement might occur if school leaders were focused on such achievement also seems apparent. Finally, that school leader programs of high quality could result in better leaders follows logically.

However, ICPEA has concerns regarding some potential solutions/recommendations which have been cited in either the "Blueprint Report" or School Leadership Task Force discussions. First, the apparent lack of a consistent, meaningful oversight model for all school leadership programs in the state presents a serious challenge to student improvement. The existence of school leadership programs which may not conform to a single, meaningful set program quality standard, (NCATE, for example), suggests that such standards are not important or may negotiable. Second, the regularization of admission standards to school leader programs serving Illinois' future leaders is worthwhile and important. Once such admission criteria are identified, can exceptions be limited? Third, ICPEA believes that the model for rigorous oversight of state programs currently exists in the Illinois Board of Higher Education and the Illinois State Board of Education. Fourth, ICPEA recommends additional support and resources to these two existing groups to address review of program quality rather than employing another agency or group to carry out such responsibility. Fifth, ICPEA recommends the alignment of the State Certificate examination to a set of common standards (ISLLC, ELC, etc.) and an increase in the rigor of this examination. Current pass rates and the anecdotal reports by many students that they found the examination less challenging or that they passed the examination prior to completing program coursework, suggests that the examination may not be meeting its intended goal. Sixth, partnerships between school leader programs and school districts should be supported. Corollary to this recommendation is that partnerships will vary in form and quality based on the number of school leader program providers (currently thirty-one in/near Illinois) and the number of school districts (over 800) in the state. Finally, the ICPEA Task Force supports the concept of a "principal only" certificate, coupled with the development of various other certificates to meet school leadership needs. Furthermore, ICPEA suggests the further refinement to such a "principal only" certificate to acknowledge elementary, middle and high school principals. The school leader needs at

these various levels may not be well-served by a single certificate which is applicable to the principalship at any level.

The Illinois Council of Professors of Educational Administration welcomes the opportunity to provide input to the School of Leadership Task Force. ICPEA thanks the School Leadership Task Force for undertaking this important work and looks forward to receiving the report of the Task Force. This position paper should not be considered exhaustive of the response of ICPEA, but rather indicative of a direction for the future.