

Educational Leadership Programs

Completer Focus Group 2021-2022 Academic Year

The Educational Leadership Programs consist of three programs leading to State of Michigan certification in either Elementary and Secondary Administration K-12 (ES) or Central Office (CO). The Master of Education in Educational Leadership and the Educational Specialist in Leadership both lead to the ES certification and the certificate in Central Office leads to the CO.

Focus Questions:

- 1) Theory to practice design of the program
- 2) Program coursework and internship experience
- 3) Integration of leadership standards
- 4) Components not included that should have been, or should have been emphasized more
- 5) Aspects of the program most beneficial to current and future professional roles

M.Ed.

Three participants, all very recent graduates.

- 1) Program was well scaffolded; theory and practice well-integrated throughout
- 2) Overall, coursework was appropriate. Disappointment in the law class. Participants tended to focus a lot on the internship; good synergy between the internship and the portfolio.
- 3) Standards were overwhelming at first. [These completers didn't really have much to say about the standards].
- 4) One complaint was that the emphasis on APA style seemed to take a lot of time to master, taking away time and energy from more important, practical aspects of the assignments. Participants would have liked a course or at least a component [*I thought about the workshop idea we had pre-pandemic*] on professionalism and searching for administrative positions as a current teacher. Again, complaint about the law class and that special education was not really covered, even though this is increasingly a critical topic in educational leadership. More advising up front (i.e., during the application phase) as to the applicability and fit of the program, especially for someone outside of education.
- 5) The program was seen as being very helpful in developing communication skills and even providing some teacher leadership opportunities. The program gave credibility to one participant's current position. The participants were very complimentary regarding the trustworthiness, responsiveness, and helpfulness of faculty. Two of the three participants were in the accelerated program and really

liked it. One would have preferred the main campus but wanted to accelerate. Participants overwhelmingly said they would recommend our program to others.

NOTE: The participants all expressed that they missed the face-to-face aspect of the program and would recommend returning to in-person as soon as feasible.

Ed.S.

9 participants, graduating from 2015 - 2018

- 1) One participant was adamant that there was too much focus on practice and not enough leadership theory integrated into the program, while others disagreed and said that their subsequent doctoral programs provided the theoretical lens. Another participant noted that he had earned a master's degree from U of M and it was overly theoretical with not nearly enough practice embedded in the program, so he appreciated the practical aspect of the Ed.S. program.
- 2) It was noted that if a student didn't already have an administrative position, some of the practice-based assignments were difficult to manage. It was also noted that it was difficult to get internship hours if someone was not in an administrative role already, although some participants had very good experiences gaining hours and activities with their internship mentors. One participant noted that conflict between having one's work supervisor also serving in the role of internship mentor can be difficult to manage. One suggestion participants made was having a network of potential mentors so students can work with a mentor outside of their own school or work setting [*Again, I thought about the workshop idea*]. Some participants thought that there needed to be more support for mentors and they needed to be given more ideas regarding activities for the internship, although other participants said they felt their internship mentor did a great job of allowing them to learn about the position.
- 3) The ELCC standards came up actually well before the question was asked. Some participants thought the standards were cumbersome, tedious, and meant for the university program rather than for the practitioner. One participant thought that the program should focus on overarching themes of the standards rather than getting caught into the minutiae, and that focusing on the standards tended to get them bogged down rather than capturing the intent of the standards. Not everyone agreed, and more than one participant admitted to never having read the standards or at least not remembering doing so. One participant suggested that the internship might allow students to select components within the standards rather than having uniform expectations of every student. The

participant thought this would allow for differentiation based on career goals and path.

- 4) Some participants thought the program seemed too teacher-centered and discounted the students who already held administrative and leadership positions. In particular, some participants were frustrated with the Curriculum and Staff Development course, saying the textbook and assignments seemed more geared toward lesson planning than curriculum at the district and leadership level. Another participant thought that the staff development portion of the course lacked relevance, and should include newer models such as leadership coaching, etc. Some participants thought the program needed more business and leadership coursework, and there was some discussion about the Human Resources class, with participants reporting varying opinions about the effectiveness of the course. Again, the law class was mentioned, but there seemed to be a lot of variation in experiences and opinions about this class, perhaps depending on the instructor.
- 5) The participants were generally positive about the program, although some participants wished they Ed.S. led to a central office certification rather than a building administrator certification since they had already earned that with their master's degree. This was particularly noted by participants already working in administrative roles. One participant stated that, if he could do it again, he probably would not have taken the Ed.S. but would have gone straight into the EdD program since it didn't give him the central office certification he would have preferred.

Overall, participants were very positive about the program. One noted that he had begun an Ed.S. at another institution and that this program was much more organized, integrated, and effective.

Central Office Certificate Program

- 1) Participants commented on the fact that the program required a lot of reading, but the analysis of case studies and reflective discussion was very important. The case studies touched on a variety of social, political, and theoretical frames and provided different viewpoints and lenses through which to consider various issues. One participant mentioned the HR class in particular, and pointed out that, with the current shortage of staff, including teachers, special education teachers, paraprofessionals, guest teachers, and really all positions within the school, it is critically important to be able to engage and develop the staff that currently exists within the school. Need to invest resources into these individuals.

One participant noted that, since she has only ever worked in one district, it was really important to hear the experiences and perspectives of other members of the cohort. The cohort model was mentioned as being very important, along with having cohort mates from many regions within the state, not just the tri-county area. One participant identified the implementing change and program evaluation courses [components?] as being particularly eye-opening. Another participant noted that the vast experience of instructors was critical, and the fact that they could bring a historical lens to understanding current issues was important.

- 2) The portfolio was mentioned, and one participant noted that, in reviewing the portfolio for this focus group, she realized that she uses much of it in her current practice. So, not only doing the work within the program, but sharing the work with the cohort and getting substantive feedback from peers and instructors. A couple of participants mentioned that seeing things through different perspectives beyond their current position, including from a central office as well as MDE level, was valuable and eye-opening. One participant noted that the business course really shed light on how equity is impacted by finance. Cohort model mentioned again in the context of the internship, and learning vicariously through each other's' internship experiences. The cohort was also mentioned as a source of social connection that transcended the program and coursework. One participant mentioned appreciating the flexibility that was built into the internship that allowed her to design the internship that would best fit individual needs and meet students where they are yet stretch them to the next level.
- 3) Participants stated that, while they no longer remember what the standards were, they could appreciate the framework and the learning that took place relative to the standards. Participants again used the term, "tedious" in reference to the standards, although one participant gave a striking example of how the standards helped him understand the discrepancy between how schools / districts should be run versus the reality.
- 4) One participant stated "Not that it was missed, but the world has changed," and went on to discuss the importance of social-emotional learning, anxiety, and trauma-informed learning at the district level. He noted that this is often seen as only important in districts that are "at-risk" whereas most districts are now encountering these issues. Another participant mentioned the need to address building capacity in all areas of staff in the HR class in the face of shortages of all personnel (teachers, psychologists, bus drivers, custodians, etc.). Another mentioned wanting more preparation in staff wellness and allowing staff voices and input become the driver, and reiterative the SEL component both in regard to students but systematically as an organization. Implicit bias, inclusion, and how to navigate community and board relations amidst difficult topics was lacking in

the program. Another participant gave an example of needing to build good community relations beyond formal communication and thought this could be embedded somewhere in the program as well.

- 5) One participant mentioned “summits” where different leadership topics were addressed that helped her envision her career path. Another participant noted that, while he is not thinking about career advancement at the moment, being in the program allowed him to establish strong relationships with those in CO positions in his district because he has much better insight now into where they are coming from. He now thinks about what he can do at the building level to support what is going on at the central level. Another participant stated that the program prepares those who want a future career in public schools in Michigan. However, the participant thought the program could be strengthened with perspectives from other professions and areas within education such as special and early childhood education with a whole-child approach, stating that learning starts in the womb, children’s brains are already “wired” by the time they get to school, and that we need educational leaders who understand this. Diversity in representation of ethnicity, race, language could be strengthened in terms of recruitment. Another participant hoped that factors learned from the pandemic will be included in future content.

Overall, students were very positive about the program and its impact on their understanding of educational leadership. Participants expressed the hope that the program will continue to grow and develop.