

Practitioners are being viewed by professors as partners in the school improvement process and vice versa.

Influencing Higher Education Through Field-Based Opportunities in TN LEAD

by Ernest Bentley and W. Hal Knight
East Tennessee State University
Johnson City, Tennessee

The primary purpose of the Leadership in Educational Administration Development (LEAD) program has been to improve student performance and achievement through the improvement of the skills of administrators and other supervisory personnel. The approach is in the belief that improved management will contribute to improved effectiveness. Each state has been given leeway to develop its own approach and it is apparent, after over a year and a half of operation, that each state has addressed the problem in a unique manner which reflects its own reform milieu. The purpose of this paper is to briefly discuss how Tennessee's LEAD program (TN LEAD) was developed, how it operates, and, more specifically, how it attempts to utilize the field-based activities, which reflect its "school improvement site" approach to LEAD objectives, to impact higher education programs in the state.

Tennessee leadership development plans, emerging during Lamar Alexander's governorship (primarily his second term, 1983-1987), included a number of elements to improve student performance in schools by improving the performance of the professionals serving in those schools. One of these elements was a career ladder plan, initially allowing recognition of superior teaching and, later, superior leadership personnel including principals, assistant principals, and supervisors. Another element was the enactment of a requirement that every school leader, i.e., every person holding a position labeled as administrative or supervisory, periodically attend a Leadership Academy.

Ernest Bentley is an Associate Professor of Supervision and Administration and Project Director, TN LEAD.

W. Hal Knight is an Associate Professor in the same department and chair, TN LEAD Higher Education Task Force.

It was a fairly natural occurrence when groups representing the various strata of educational administration, and intending to compete for the Leadership in Educational Administration Development (LEAD) funds, coalesced around the idea that Tennessee's effort should be a cooperative and site-based approach. As envisioned, it would serve as a continuing support mechanism, allowing individuals successfully completing their Leadership Academy experiences and desiring technical assistance (including fiscal support), to implement an improvement idea in their local school. It would also foster a linkage between the local school personnel and the state's public training programs. This link was formalized by the state's requirement that all faculty in teacher and administrative preparation programs devote six days per year to schools.

This idea of a follow-up network to the Leadership Academy was conceptualized in a marathon planning event over three consecutive days/nights. Representatives of the two higher education systems involved in preparatory activities for supervisors and administrators (State Board of Regents' system, which includes Austin-Peay, East Tennessee State, Memphis State, Middle Tennessee State, Tennessee State, and Tennessee Technical Universities, and University of Tennessee system representing the University's campuses at Knoxville, Chattanooga, and Martin); top level officials from the Tennessee Department of Education's Leadership Academy; and members of the American Association of School Administrators' state level affiliate (Tennessee Association for School Supervisors and Administrators) all bargained over the most promising ways to purposefully impact leadership skills at the building level in the short term and to restructure higher education involvements in preparation and maintenance over the longer term.

The approach chosen is, in fact, a large-scale simulation, though none of the participants in the planning process verbalized it at that time. It capitalizes on the field impacting higher education approaches to leadership personnel preparation, while we in higher education believe that we are the one's doing the impacting through TN LEAD. The group recognized the need to reestablish a working relationship which had eroded during the state's rush to reform public school education. Most of the participants in the planning process, higher education and school representatives alike, had lamented that Governor Alexander's reform team had ignored, bypassed, or otherwise avoided most of the higher education programs and personnel. They believed that LEAD should provide a vehicle to build a stronger contact.

The TN LEAD simulation works like this: local schools compete for the limited dollars—this year \$3,000 in matching funds per site for 16 schools, scattered in a systematic, geographic distribution; their action plan must include an advisory committee that must include at least one member of the business community; their liaison to the technical assistance resources is a preparatory program person from a university in or near their state development district; a common experience is required for the site leader—usually, a three-day exposure to a topic like communication, leader vision, or school climate; monitoring techniques include a review of all changes with their LEAD liaison; every school improvement plan must feature efforts to shape the climate and to learn more about participatory management/human relations; every school improvement plan must include work in one additional leadership skill area—largely derived from effective schools reports; the technical assistance center furnishes mini-grant preparation assistance/information as requested; resources are compiled and made available in a technical assistance catalog; local sites im-

plement plans that are approved, using their local and LEAD funds to improve their leadership skills, while influencing some performance area(s) important to them.

How has the impact on higher education programs taken place? While this large-scale simulation unfolds across the state, preparatory program personnel act as key players in technical assistance. This "forced" interaction puts the higher education representatives into the field on a regular basis and in the role of "partner" in TN LEAD activities. In some cases this contact has made it clear that some programs and/or preparatory programs are not held in the level of esteem believed by the preparers. However, in other settings, these local involvements have resulted in new cooperative endeavors such as the organization of special course content activities (such as working effectively to build community support where it is currently weak) being offered for credit in the local school facility. (In this case, many school faculty enrolled and the school was quite effective in reshaping community support through their TN LEAD involvement).

The program also used a *Technical Assistance Catalog* as a sourcebook so that local school personnel and advisory committees could identify appropriate resources for the provision of specific school improvement services. The catalog included offerings of personnel at the institutions of higher education as well as private industry services. There were more than sixty specific consultations or in-service workshops provided during the first year. Three-fourths of these were conducted by approximately 25 different faculty at state institutions of higher education. For many of these faculty, the experience provided the opportunity for re-acquainting themselves with school needs as well as providing a specific, school-initiated service. The sites also benefited from the state's mandate that each person engaged in the preparation of teachers or administrators spend six days each year in the schools.

The formal mechanism for fostering a reciprocal impact between the local school sites and the preparatory program has been the Higher Education Task Force. The Task Force is comprised of the seven LEAD agents, each of whom is on the faculty of an institution of higher education in educational administration. During the first year its focus was primarily toward determining the state of the preparation programs at the state's public institutions. That is, within the state certification guidelines how did each institution operate? A study was completed by Knight and Herring (please refer to the "Additional Information" listing at the end of this article for supporting materials) comparing these institutional requirements and was presented to the Task Force members. As a follow-up, the Task Force members communicated their specific program thrusts and generated considerable discussion regarding ways of standardizing program content. A second approach was to provide educational administration faculty at each of the institutions with a summary of each TN LEAD school site and its school improvement plan so that professors could use the schools as sites for field-based instruction or modeling. Additionally, the participating principals in cycles I and II have become a panel of experts to review state certification criteria and to identify what they believe to be the primary educational needs of beginning school leaders. Three recommen-

dations, along with those of the Task Force members will be communicated to the appropriate personnel at the State Department of Education. A fourth focus, which the Task Force began this year, was to identify alternate models for the preparation of school administrators, especially those which were field based. Complementary to this activity has been the involvement of two of the state's institutions of higher education (East Tennessee State University and the University of Tennessee-Knoxville) in the Danforth Preparation Program for School Leaders. The primary thrust of the Danforth program is to make preparation program revisions in a way that will be more responsive to actual principal needs through extensive use of experiential and field-base instruction. Although variations exist in the two programs, both of these institutions intend to individualize student assessment and instruction. This is based, in part, on input from practitioners who provide a liberal use of simulation and case studies, and require an intensive, mentored internship. Each will utilize participating LEAD schools in their programs as "laboratories" of good practice.

The eventual impact of TN LEAD on the preparation programs is difficult to ascertain at this stage. What is obvious is this: Professors have more contact with practitioners than they did prior to TN LEAD. Practitioners are being viewed by professors as partners in the school improvement process and vice versa. Faculty in preparation programs are actively experimenting with curriculum revision to reflect the needs of beginning administrators as well as the continuing educational needs of school leaders using their experiences and suggestions as a starting point. While TN LEAD may run its course, the lasting impact on the education of school leaders in this state will be through the project's impact on the preparation programs.

Additional Information

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