ABSTRACT

VANGORDER, ANGELA BOYD. Recruiting and Selecting Effective Aspiring Educational Leaders: A Multiple-Case Study of Exemplary Educational Leadership Programs. (Under the direction of Dr. Jennifer Ayscue and Dr. Bonnie Fusarelli).

Excellent schools do not exist in the absence of excellent school leaders. Over the years, the expanding knowledge base on effective leadership has revealed unique challenges and opportunities for leadership practice. A growing body of research has also shown the importance of school leaders and has demonstrated the need for greater investment in quality school leadership. A focus on school leader effectiveness is crucial, as researchers have found that school leadership is second only to teaching in terms of impact on student success. Knowledge about the critical role of school leaders underscores the importance of recruiting and selecting excellent school leadership candidates. Researchers refer to this process as the leadership pipeline, and it begins with the recruitment and selection of aspiring school leaders into School Leadership Preparation Programs (SLPPs). Although research suggests that rigorous recruitment and selection practices are a vital component of effective SLPPs, systematically collected data on the recruitment and selection practices of programs remain wanting.

The focus of this study was to investigate how five nationally award-winning school leader preparation programs recruit and select aspiring leadership candidates who are likely to be successful as school leaders. This research also explores the knowledge, skills, and dispositions these programs seek in candidates and how their recruitment and selection activities identify individuals with the requisite attributes. This study contributes to our understanding of recruitment and selection by examining the specific recruitment and selection activities and strategies of exemplary school leader preparation programs. Qualitative case study methods were used to describe the recruitment and selection process at five universities that received an
Exemplary Educational Leadership Preparation (EELP) award from the University Council for Educational Administration (UCEA). The EELP award, sponsored by The Wallace Foundation, is awarded to a university-based program that demonstrates exemplary educational leadership preparation and is a national model for supporting the success of future school leaders. Semi-structured interviews were utilized and document analysis was used to examine program documents for information about the recruitment process, selection process, selection tools, and other information about candidate disposition, knowledge, and skills.

These findings provide a more comprehensive understanding of recruitment and selection strategies in EELPs and could serve as a resource to other SLLPs that are geared toward making changes or enhancements to their leadership preparation programs. Additionally, program leaders and educational policymakers could benefit from the insights gained from the recruitment and selection efforts and developments taking place within EELPs. This study highlights the need for discussion in the field of school leader preparation about the importance of more deeply understanding and engaging in robust recruitment and selection processes. The findings could also provide a guidance framework for recruitment and selection policies for Institutions of Higher Education (IHEs). EELP practices and experiences do not provide a one-size-fits-all approach for all SLPPs, and we are still learning about the best and most effective mechanisms for leader recruitment and selection, but research has shown that leadership programs must engage in continuous improvement throughout the duration of their existence if they hope to improve outcomes for all students. The capacity of exemplary of school leadership to improve student outcomes is extraordinary. My hope is that this research inspires and encourages others to advocate for policies that will ensure that every child can share in the benefits of an excellent school led by a well-prepared and highly-qualified school leader.
DEDICATION

This dissertation is dedicated to my husband, Ryan, my dearest love and best friend. Thank you for sharing this journey with me. Your love, encouragement, and unwavering belief in my ability helped me to persevere through this process. And, to my daughter, Abigail, who came into the world in the middle of my Ph.D. program. Your never-ending energy, happy demeanor, and continual stream of questions forced me to take many breaks, but also reminded me to enjoy the everyday splendor of watching you grow. You are a joy and I love you with all of my heart.
BIOGRAPHY

Angie VanGorder has spent more than 10 years in higher education in student affairs, employer relations, and academic program management roles. Originally from South Carolina, Angie holds a Bachelor of Science in business management from Anderson University (SC), a Master of Education in student affairs administration from Clemson University, and a certificate in nonprofit management from the University of Pittsburgh.

During the course of her Ph.D. program in Educational Research and Policy Analysis at NC State University, Angie worked as a Graduate Research Assistant for the Northeast Leadership Academy, served as a Policy Associate for the University Council for Educational Administration, and participated in the North Carolina Education Policy Fellowship Program. She was awarded the Wilcox-Hodnett Doctoral Fellowship for Public School Administrators in North Carolina. Angie also served as a board member for the Friends of Wake County Guardian ad Litem program, a non-profit with a mission to change the lives of abused and neglected children by supporting the work of Guardians ad Litem who advocate for the best interests of foster children in the Wake County (NC) court system. Angie’s passion for education is rooted in its profound impact on society as a vehicle to advance social good.

Before entering her Ph.D. program, she directed MBA employer relations at the College of Charleston and career services at the University of Pittsburgh at Johnstown. She currently works as a Senior Consultant for Summit Search Solutions, a boutique executive search firm focused on serving the unique needs of the higher education and nonprofit sectors. Outside of work, Angie enjoys reading, visiting new coffee shops, jogging, exploring the outdoors, and spending time with her husband and daughter in Raleigh, NC.
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Thank you to my parents, David and Nancy, for your support and encouragement. To my brother, John, I am so glad we became friends. Thank you to my parents-in-law and the vast extended family from both my side and Ryan’s side. Thank you to my friends who offered endless support and encouragement over the years. A list of names is too long to include here in its entirety, but you know who you are.
Thank you to my husband, Ryan, for your love and encouragement and all the sacrifices you made that allowed me to follow my passion and complete this Ph.D. program. You are a dream come true. To our daughter Abigail, you are a beautiful light. You have been a constant source of inspiration and strength during this Ph.D. journey. Thank you for the greatest privilege in the world: being your mom.

Finally, to my Lord and Savior, thank you for the tremendous opportunity to study, learn, and grow. I am so grateful for your goodness and faithfulness. Philippians 3:13-14.
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<td>EELP</td>
<td>Exemplary Educational Leadership Preparation Program</td>
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<td>SLPP</td>
<td>School Leader Preparation Program</td>
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<tr>
<td>UCEA</td>
<td>University Council for Educational Administration</td>
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<td>UIC</td>
<td>University of Illinois at Chicago</td>
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<td>UTSA</td>
<td>University of Texas at San Antonio</td>
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<td>NCSU</td>
<td>North Carolina State University</td>
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<td>DU</td>
<td>University of Denver</td>
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<td>UW</td>
<td>University of Washington</td>
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<td>UEL</td>
<td>Urban Education Leadership Program</td>
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<td>USLC</td>
<td>Urban School Leaders Collaborative</td>
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<td>ELSS</td>
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CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

As research on the role of the school principal has grown, affirming the relationship between student achievement and effective leadership (Leithwood, Louis, Anderson, & Wahlstrom, 2004; Waters, Marzano, & McNulty, 2004), greater policy attention has formed around the recruitment and preparation of aspiring school leaders (Manna, 2015; Wallace Foundation, 2016). Effective recruitment and selection of school leadership candidates continues to be one of the most challenging human resource tasks in educational organizations, due, in part, to the inexact science of attracting, screening, and identifying aspiring candidates to fit the complex leadership needs of schools today (McCarthy, 1999; Pounder & Merrill, 2001; Pounder & Young, 1996; Young et al., 2009; Young & Castetter, 2003). A number of educational initiatives, research, and changing conceptualizations of school leadership have highlighted the importance of recruitment and selection to effective principal preparation (Fuller, Reynolds, & O’Doherty, 2017; McCarthy & Forsyth, 2009). As increasing evidence suggests, school leader preparation programs (SLPPs) influence student outcomes through the effective preparation of leaders (Darling-Hammond, LaPointe, Meyerson, Orr, & Cohen, 2007; Young, 2015), and rigorous recruitment and selection processes are an integral component of effective SLPPs (Browne-Ferrigno & Muth, 2009; Griffiths, Stout, & Forsyth, 1988; McCarthy, 2015; McCarthy & Forsyth, 2009). Thus, research on the process of recruiting and selecting school leadership candidates is critical.

For decades, researchers have been reporting on a lack of robust research on the recruitment and selection of school leaders (Cooper & Boyd, 1987; Fuller, Reynolds & O’Doherty, 2017; Griffiths et al., 1988; McCarthy & Forsyth, 2009; Murphy, 1992). Although there is evidence to suggest that rigorous recruitment and selection processes are a foundational
component of effective SLPPs (Darling-Hammond et al., 2007; McCarthy, 2015), researchers have repeatedly underscored the dearth of research on these two specific areas of school leadership preparation: the recruitment of individuals as candidates for educational leadership programs and the selection of applicants into preparation programs (Fuller et al., 2017; McCarthy & Forsyth, 2009). McCarthy and Forsyth (2009) state that they had “not found comprehensive, systematic research examining the recruitment and admission of school leaders to preparation programs, but occasional observations and data can be found in the literature” (p. 89). In order to raise achievement levels for all students, the field of educational leadership needs more knowledge about the ways in which exemplary programs recruit and select candidates they deem to be effective aspiring school leaders.

**Problem Statement**

Over the years, the expanding knowledge base on effective leadership has revealed unique challenges and opportunities for leadership practice (Young, 2015). Research has shown that a substantial lack of effective and qualified school leaders exist in schools across the United States (US) (Maulding et al., 2010). A focus on principal effectiveness is crucial, as researchers have found that school leadership is second only to teaching in terms of impact on student success (Leithwood et al., 2004). A growing body of research has also shown the importance of school leaders and has demonstrated the need for greater investment in quality school leadership (Grissom, Kalogrides, & Loab, 2015; Leithwood et al., 2004; Orr & Orphanos, 2011; Waters et al., 2004). This investment is required in order to help improve student achievement in our nation’s schools. Moreover, the influence of school leadership is fundamental to the success of educational institutions and is greatest in schools with the greatest need (Hallinger & Heck, 1998; Leithwood et al., 2004).
Little is known about the comprehensive recruitment and selection processes of SLPPs (Anderson & Reynolds, 2015; Crow, Young, Murphy, & Ogawa, 2009; McCarthy & Forsyth, 2009). Although research suggests that rigorous recruitment and selection practices are a vital component of effective SLPPs (Darling-Hammond, LaPointe, Meyerson, & Orr, 2010; Hitt, Tucker, & Young, 2012), systematically collected data on the recruitment and selection practices of programs remain wanting (Baker et al., 2007; Browne-Ferrigno & Muth, 2009; Fuller et al., 2017; Murphy et al., 2009). A lack of quality recruitment and selection strategies is often cited in school leadership research (Murphy et al, 2009; Hess & Kelly, 2005; Levine, 2005) and is discussed anecdotally among university faculty and state and national policymakers, suggesting the importance of the recruitment and selection process in ensuring the quality preparation of aspiring school leaders.

**Significance of Study**

Although the importance of principals is well documented in the literature, there has been less research on the best methods and mechanisms for recruiting and selecting highly effective aspiring principals. Since we know the importance of principals for student success and achievement, it is important that we are also able to ascertain the most effective ways of ensuring that our principal preparation programs recruit and select the best candidates. As increasing evidence exists that principal preparation programs influence student outcomes through the preparation of leaders (Young, 2015), school, district, and state education leaders and policymakers have been more focused on supporting school leadership efforts, including the recruitment, selection, and placement of educational leaders. Rigorous candidate recruitment and selection processes are essential to establishing exemplary educational leadership preparation programs (EELPs) (McCarthy, 2015). This study, therefore, illuminates the recruitment and
selection practices of five EELPs. The findings of the study provide a more comprehensive understanding of recruitment and selection strategies in SLPPs and serve as a resource to other programs that are geared toward making changes or improvements to their leadership preparation programs. Additionally, program leaders and educational policymakers benefit from the insights gained on the recruitment and selection developments taking place within EELPs. The findings also provide a guidance framework for recruitment and selection policies.

**Conceptual Framework**

As research on the role of the school principal has grown, underscoring the relationship between student achievement and effective leadership (Leithwood et al., 2004; Waters et al., 2004), there has been greater policy attention around the recruitment and preparation of aspiring school leaders (Manna, 2015; Wallace Foundation, 2016). Researchers have found that quality leadership matters and that leaders are influenced by the quality of their leadership preparation programs and experiences (Darling-Hammond et al., 2007; Louis et al., 2004). Unfortunately, there is limited research on the selection of candidates in graduate educational leadership programs (Anderson, 2016; Browne-Ferrigno & Muth, 2009; Fuller et al., 2017; McCarthy & Forsyth, 2009).

Despite the call by school leadership scholars (Browne-Ferrigno & Muth, 2009; Fuller, Reynolds & O’Doherty, 2017; McCarthy & Forsyth, 2009; Young, 2009, 2017) for more research on the recruitment and selection of aspiring school leader candidates, SLPPs have not been proactive in conducting research on what other leadership programs do to recruit and select quality leaders. As such, information gathered from this study on the recruitment and selection processes of EELPs is useful for answering the following questions:

- What strategies do EELPs use to recruit candidates?
● What perspectives, priorities, and data inform the development of recruitment materials of EELPs?
● Who participates in the recruitment process and why?
● What strategies, information, and criteria do EELPs use to select candidates for participation in the preparation program?
● How are the selection criteria and process integrated into the EELP’s goals and approach? Who participates in the candidate selection and how (Young, 2015)?

The answers to these questions provide a robust description and understanding of the recruitment and selection practices of exemplary programs and fill the gap in the existing literature. Additionally, this information serves as a resource for SLPPs and faculty who may be interested in making changes or improvements to their programs. Although much is yet to be learned about how effective or innovative the approaches to recruitment and selection will be, the programs highlighted by the EELP award “signal a shift in the way that university faculty are thinking about, designing, and delivering preparation programs for educational leaders (Young, 2015, p. 8). Figure 1.1 shows the conceptual framework guiding this study and key points along the school leader pipeline. For leaders produced by SLPPs, points along the pipeline include recruitment, selection, and enrollment in SLPPs. My assumption was that the EELPs in this study had exemplary candidate recruitment and selection processes. Therefore, exemplary SLPPs should produce highly qualified graduates and a strong and effective supply of leaders for schools and organizations.

![Figure 1.1 The Conceptual Framework Showing Key Points Along School Leader Pipeline](image)
Overview of Approach

The present research is a descriptive multiple case study that seeks to understand and ultimately describe the recruitment and selection activities of school leadership programs that have been identified as exemplary, a title bestowed from winning the EELP award. The study incorporates the entire population of EELP award winners, as only five programs have been named as exemplary by the University Council for Educational Administration (UCEA) (UCEA, 2018). Specifically, I employed qualitative case study methods to describe the recruitment and selection process at five U.S. universities that have been recognized as being an EELP by UCEA. An EELP award, sponsored by the Wallace Foundation, is awarded when a program demonstrates “exemplary educational leadership preparation and is a national model for supporting the success of future school leaders” (UCEA, 2018). Since I was interested in gaining an understanding of how exemplary programs recruit and select school leadership candidates, my sample included the five SLPPs that have been awarded UCEA’s EELP award. The institutions included in the study are the University of Texas at San Antonio (UTSA), the University of Illinois at Chicago (UIC), the University of Denver (DU), North Carolina State University (NCSU), and the University of Washington (UW). In order to paint a detailed picture of the recruitment and selection process, interviews were conducted with program directors from EELP award-winning programs. Additionally, I interviewed UCEA’s former executive director in order to learn more about the history and context of the EELP award, specifically as it relates to the manner in which recruitment and selection are included in award determination. Finally, I reviewed program websites and asked program directors for their recruitment and selection materials, documents, rubrics, and other sources of data, including the EELP applications from the award-winning programs.
Research Questions

The following research question and four sub-questions guided my study:

1. In what ways do exemplary SLPPs recruit and select candidates who they believe are likely to be successful as school leaders?
   a. What knowledge, skills, and dispositions do programs seek, and what recruitment and selection activities help them in identifying individuals with the requisite attributes?
   b. What are the systematic recruitment and selection plans of EELPs? Do the programs rely on multiple sources of evidence and show deliberate efforts to attract and admit applicants who demonstrate leadership potential? If so, in what ways?
   c. Does a connection exist between stated program values, mission, vision, and intentionally designed recruitment and selection processes? If so, how are they connected?
   d. What are similarities, commonalities, and differences of EELP awardees’ recruitment and selection processes and activities?

Summary

Research on educational leadership preparation has found that highly effective educational leadership preparation programs are distinguishable by their features and influence on their graduates’ learning and career advancement (Orr & Pounder, 2008; Young, 2015; Young et al., 2009). Moreover, rigorous candidate recruitment and selection processes are essential to establishing EELPs (McCarthy, 2015). As school leaders are a key element in ensuring school improvement (Leithwood et al., 2004), examining recruitment and selection
practices from the most highly effective educational leadership preparation programs is
necessary. Despite the call by school leadership scholars for more research on the recruitment
and selection of aspiring school leader candidates (Browne-Ferrigno & Muth, 2009), SLPPs have
not been proactive in researching what other leadership programs do to recruit and select quality
leaders. This study fills this research gap by examining the recruitment and selection processes
of EELPs.

**Organization of the Dissertation**

This dissertation consists of five chapters. In Chapter I, I discuss the purpose of the
research and the problem to be examined. I explain the significance of the study, state my
research questions, and define the key terms used. In Chapter II, I present my critique of the
literature on school leadership and recruitment and selection in school leader preparation
programs. In Chapter III, I detail my methodology, including information about the study
participants, data collection, data analysis, reliability, and validity. In Chapter IV, I detail the
data analysis and findings of the research. In Chapter V, I discuss these findings, conclusions,
implications for policy and practice, and recommendations for further study. The Appendix
includes interview protocols that were used in data collection.
CHAPTER 2: LITERATURE REVIEW

The purpose of this chapter is to review the existing research in three areas of school leadership preparation, in particular, the recruitment of individuals as candidates for educational leadership preparation programs and the selection of applicants into preparation programs. The chapter will review research on the impact of effective school leaders on student achievement. As recruitment and selection practices constitute the initial stages of the leadership preparation pipeline, the chapter will discuss research related to these processes. Reviewing the recruitment and selection practices of school leadership programs is essential to improving practice, informing policy, and providing information for the benefit of university programs. Moreover, in order to better understand the foundational aspects of this study, I explore several leadership topics.

The chapter begins by detailing the importance of school leadership to students, teachers, and schools. Relevant research regarding school leadership and preparation programs will also be addressed. An examination of broad patterns and trends in the literature will provide an understanding of the larger context of the study and the need for further research. A review of the current context of school leadership will precede a discussion on the criticisms of school leadership. Here, relevant historical aspects of school leadership will be reviewed in an attempt to explain the evolution of the profession. A review of exemplary program features will follow in order to understand the broader programmatic context of university preparation programs. Thereafter, UCEA’s EELP award will be described, followed by a description of current recruitment and selection research. This chapter will end with a brief conclusion to the literature review section, and an introduction of the methodology section outlining the research study.
Brief Background

Excellent schools do not exist in the absence of excellent school leaders (Leithwood, Louis, Anderson, & Wahlstrom, 2004). Research has shown that there is a substantial lack of effective and qualified school leaders in schools across the United States (Maulding et al., 2010; Seashore Louis et al., 2010). Strong school leaders are critical for improving school performance (Ikemoto, Taliaferro, Adams, & New Leaders, 2012), and decades of research (Branch, Hanushek, & Rivkin, 2012; Louis, Leithwood, Wahlstrom, & Anderson, 2010; Wallace Foundation, 2012) have established the central role that principals play in turning around troubled schools (Branch, Hanushek, & Rivkin, 2009; Hallinger & Heck, 1998; Leithwood et al., 2004). This assessment of the importance of school leaders has been repeatedly echoed by educators, university researchers focused on school leadership, and organizations interested in ensuring that all students have access to high-quality schools (Branch et al., 2012; Louis, Leithwood, Wahlstrom, & Anderson, 2010; NAESP, 2013; Wallace Foundation, 2012). Louis et al. (2010) contend that, “Leadership is all about organizational improvement; more specifically, it is about establishing agreed-upon and worthwhile directions for the organization in question, and doing whatever it takes to prod and support people to move in those directions” (pp. 9-10). The researchers further elaborate that “leadership effects on student learning occur largely because leadership strengthens professional community; teachers’ engagement in professional community, in turn, fosters the use of instructional practices that are associated with student achievement” (p. 10). Research overwhelmingly highlights the importance of leadership in organizational success and demonstrates the need for greater investment in quality school leadership (Grissom, Kalogrides, & Loab, 2015; Leithwood et al., 2006; Orr & Orphanos, 2011; Waters, Marzano, & McNulty, 2004). A focus on principal effectiveness is crucial, as researchers
have found that school leadership is second only to teaching in its impact on student success, with the impact being greatest in schools with the greatest needs (Hallinger & Heck, 1998; Leithwood et al., 2004; Marzano & McNulty, 2003). “Indeed, there are virtually no documented instances of troubled schools being turned around without intervention by a powerful leader” (Leithwood et al., 2004, p. 7).

In their examination of school leadership, Branch et al. (2012) found that “highly effective principals raise the achievement of a typical student in their schools by between two and seven months of learning in a single school year. Ineffective principals lower achievement by the same amount” (para. 4). The difference between having an average and above-average principal is significant and can impact student achievement by as much as 20% (Ikemoto at al., 2014; Marzano, Waters, & McNulty, 2005). Principal leadership skills explain more than 25% of the variation in student achievement (Marzano et al., 2005).

**Effective School Leaders Influence Student Achievement**

Recent attempts at increasing student achievement and decreasing achievement gaps has focused primarily on teachers, even though school leaders have a powerful, indirect impact on student achievement (Manna, 2015). Hallinger and Heck (1998) note that school leaders have multiple “avenues of influence” through which principals influence both individuals in schools and the systems within which these individuals work, which in turn affect student outcomes (p. 171). School leaders influence student achievement in a variety of ways and can have a stronger effect on all students in a school than their teachers because teachers are only able to affect the students in their own classroom (Branch et al., 2012). A growing body of research has found that principals have a strong influence on teacher quality and, therefore, on student achievement through the recruitment and retention of high-quality teachers (Fuller, Baker, & Young, 2007;
Moreover, studies have found that principals strongly influence teacher turnover, which has a negative impact on student outcomes such as achievement, engagement, and graduation (Darling-Hammond, 2003; Simon & Johnson, 2015). School leaders can create positive conditions for teaching and learning in numerous ways, but one powerful mechanism that impacts student outcomes is their ability to hire and retain high-quality teachers (Branch et al., 2012). Amerin-Beardsley (2012) found that principal leadership is the main reason why teachers report remaining in or leaving a school. Prior research suggests that a school leader has a more positive effect on student achievement the longer they remain at a particular school (Beteille, Kalogrides, & Loeb, 2012). Further, graduates from exemplary preparation programs remained in positions longer and are more satisfied with their career (Darling-Hammond et al., 2007).

**Characteristics of Effective Leadership**

Another strand of research involves the documented actions and practices that differentiate the most effective principals. Specifically, researchers note that effective school leaders develop great teachers and nurture a creative school culture and working conditions that lead to teacher retention (Ikemoto at al., 2012). Clifford, Behrstock-Sherratt, and Fetters (2012) found that principals’ knowledge, motivation, beliefs, dispositions, and actions can directly influence school conditions and professionalism; teacher quality, distribution, and retention; instructional quality; a collegial, team-based culture; the use of data; resource management; and the successful implementation of programs that impact school performance and learning.

Principal effectiveness, as perceived by teachers, involves a variety of leadership behaviors and characteristics that directly influence teachers and their working conditions. These behaviors, listed below, have the strongest influence on teachers’ decisions to remain in or leave
a school (Grissom, 2011; Fuller et al., 2018) and are largely under the immediate control of a principal. Behaviors of effective principals include (Fuller et al., 2018):

- Creating a strong school mission and vision
- Consistent and transparent communication
- Implementation of routines and procedures to establish a predictable and stable environment
- Supporting and encouraging teachers
- Communicating clear expectations
- Prioritizing trust and respect
- Buffering teachers from outside influences that interfere with teaching
- Involving teachers in decision making
- Providing consistent and useful feedback

**The Need for More Effective Preparation**

As stated earlier, effective school leaders lead high-performing and dramatically improving schools. School leadership ranks only after instructional quality in being the most important school-related contributor to what and how much students learn in school (Leithwood et al., 2004). Consequently, policymakers and researchers have actively sought means of strengthening the capacity of school-level leadership, with a particular focus on the design of more effective administrator preparation programs (Manna, 2015). In the U.S., more than 700 principal preparation programs exist (Cheney et al., 2010). Typically, both the federal government and states influence policies surrounding educator preparation. As the main regulators for programs and licensure, governing agencies maintain great influence over the school leadership pipeline; however, researchers have found that most policies adopted by these
governing agencies are geared toward individual candidate certification or licensure rather than preparation programs specifically (Anderson & Reynolds, 2015). Therefore, principal preparation has become a critical factor in addressing these issues.

As research on the role of the school principal has grown and highlighted the relationship between student achievement and effective leadership (Leithwood et al., 2004; Waters et al., 2004), greater policy attention has focused on the recruitment and preparation of aspiring school leaders (Manna, 2015; Wallace Foundation, 2016). As noted above, more than 700 principal preparation programs prepare and certify principals to lead our nation’s schools. Most states require school leaders to graduate from a preparation program to obtain administrative certification, even though the criteria for the design of preparation programs and the methods that preparation programs use to train principals vary nationally (Anderson & Reynolds, 2015), causing concern among policymakers, university faculty, and educators (Levine, 2009). Some programs are becoming more innovative and are developing new approaches to school leadership preparation (Gates et al., 2014), perhaps because recent legislation has propelled program providers to determine whether their programs make a difference in improving student learning. Additionally, states are seeking to understand evaluation methods that show evidence of quality in principal preparation programs (UCEA & New Leaders, 2016). Although research clearly states that principals are critical to school effectiveness, research on many issues related to recruiting, selecting, and preparing great leaders is only just emerging (George W. Bush Institute, 2016).

Evolving Professional Roles

Professional demands on school leaders are growing as their role changes from a focus on administration to instructional leadership (Davis, Darling-Hammond, LaPointe, & Meyerson,
Currently, school leaders are responsible for executing the complex work of leading instruction, impacting school culture, managing resources, supervising and evaluating teachers, and meeting increased public accountability requirements for school outcomes (Clifford, 2012; Ikemoto et al., 2014). This shift in the nature of the job over the last several decades requires a new type of school leadership candidate than was historically required as well as a new approach to the recruitment and selection of aspiring leadership candidates.

As the role of the school leader has changed, preparation programs have learned valuable lessons and have shifted their focus from developing efficient managers to preparing passionate individuals who can lead schools toward greater student achievement (Olson, 2007). The Southern Regional Education Board (2009) has asserted that for school leaders to be effective instructional leaders, they need to understand how to inspire teachers and staff to develop engaging instruction as well as to engage staff in maintaining a culture of high expectations for all. To better understand the dynamic of school leadership needs today, one must understand the history of school leadership preparation. Murphy (1998) asserts that the lessons learned from school leadership in the last century “may prove helpful to other nations exploring adoption of the U.S. model of preparation” (p. 359), especially because during the early eras, principals were not seen as a critical element of effective schooling (Campbell & Lipham, 1970).

Understanding some of these lessons will help provide a historical context to many of the school leadership challenges in education today. Since leadership is the second most influential factor in student learning, surpassed only by effective classroom teachers (Davis & Darling-Hammond, 2012; Mendels & Mitang, 2013), an awareness of the evolving role and the growth in
roles and responsibilities is important for research on school leadership.

**School Leader Preparation in Historical Perspective**

Educational leadership has evolved dramatically over the past century (Murphy, 1998). The role of school leader, as it is currently understood, is a relatively new phenomenon within the broader history of public education (Kafka, 2009). Much of the history of the development of school leadership as a field is “closely intertwined with the development of public education in general” (Campbell, 1987, p. 125). Thus, as America’s population grew and schooling shifted from a one-room schoolhouse to a more complex, multi-level enterprise, the need for organizational management and oversight also increased (Button, 1966; Murphy, 1993).

The first school leadership role in the U.S. public education system was the school superintendent position, which emerged at the end of the 1800s (Murphy, 1998). However, specific preparation programs for school leaders were not established until around the early 1900s, even though departments of education were established in the 1870s (Cooper & Boyd, 1987). In fact, principals were not seen as a critical element of effective schooling (Campbell & Lipham, 1970), as their work was “based mostly on expediency, and not on the improvement of either learning or school operations” (Rousmaniere, 2013, p. 7). It was not “until the onslaught of widespread acceptance of the scientific management movement throughout the corporate world between 1910 and 1915” (Murphy, 1998, p. 363) that school leadership gained a foothold as a distinct profession and separate training program.

In the 1920s, states began requiring university coursework in educational leadership as a prerequisite for employment as a principal (Murphy, 1998). As a result, universities began establishing formal preparation programs specific to educational administration (Preis et al., 2007). The earliest preparation programs emphasized technical skills with a strong curriculum of
business efficiency (Lashway, 1999). As academic qualifications for school leadership increased, experience in the classroom remained a requirement. Even as aspiring school leaders were increasingly required to submit academic credentials to enter educational administration preparation programs, their experience as teachers remained the primary qualification of program acceptance (Rousmaniere, 2007).

Duncan et al. (2011) note by the 1940s, school leaders were also expected to be democratic leaders, and by the 1950s, they took on the role of applying school law. By the mid-20th century, schools were increasingly replacing the church as the central place for socialization in society, and school leaders became a larger part of American life (Kafka, 2009).

The latter part of the 20th century marked the beginning of another shift for school leadership in the U.S. By the 1980s, scholars began focus on school administration in general and principal preparation programs in particular. In 1987, a report by the National Commission on Excellence in Educational Administration, Leaders for America’s Schools, was arguably the most comprehensive critique of educational administration ever published (Bogotch, 2011). Composed of educational administration professors, deans of education schools, K-12 school superintendents, higher education presidents, education association directors, and then-Arkansas governor Bill Clinton, the commission reported on needed improvements in educational administration. The commission pointed to deficiencies in a range of areas, including the definition of good educational leadership, leader recruitment programs, and quality candidates for preparation programs (UCEA & National Commission on Excellence in Educational Administration, 1987).

Since 1987, critics have argued that traditional principal preparation programs rely mostly on coursework that fails to link theory with practice, does not reflect the demands and
complexities of schools today, and often ignores research on leadership development (Cooper & Boyd, 1987; Murphy, Young, Crow, & Ogawa, 2009; Pounder, Young, & Reitzug, 2002). One of the major reports criticizing principal preparation programs came from Art Levine, the former president of Teachers College at Columbia University. His report, released nearly 20 years after *Leaders for America’s Schools*, found that many of the problems with school leadership programs were still present in 2005. In the report, Levine (2005) asserted that the majority of educational administration programs “range from inadequate to appalling, even at some of the country’s leading universities” (p. 23). The study criticized principal preparation programs and stated that most programs had curricula that were out of touch with the needs of campus leaders and their schools and that there were low admission and graduation standards and insufficient resources and research (Levine, 2005).

One significant weakness highlighted in the report was the recruitment and selection process for aspiring school leaders, described as informal and irregular, leading to candidates self-selecting into programs (Browne-Ferrigno & Muth, 2009; Young, Petersen, & Short, 2002). Murphy et al. (2009) contend that self-selection can distort the instruction taking place in principal preparation programs by spending resources on candidates with no genuine interest in assuming a school leadership position.

Along with *Leaders for America’s Schools*, researchers on university principal preparation programs in the 2000s leveled similar criticisms at programs for being out of touch with current school practices and slow to change (Hale & Moorman, 2003; Hess & Kelly, 2005; Murphy, 2001; Young et al., 2009; Young et al., 2002). These criticisms are even more troubling, as researchers have declared that the quality of leadership provided by school and district leaders is highly dependent on the quality of their leadership preparation experiences.
(Hernandez, Roberts, & Menchaca, 2012; Lynch, 2012). Furthermore, research has noted the need for “vigorous, targeted recruitment and selection” of candidates and the need to seek out expert teachers with leadership potential (Darling-Hammond et al., 2007, p. 6). As research has revealed that leadership can have a positive influence on student achievement (Leithwood et al., 2004, Gates et al., 2014), lawmakers and policymakers have had increasing interest in school leadership in the 21st century. Despite efforts aimed at preparing leaders for 21st century schools, the consensus from graduates, school leaders, researchers, and policymakers is that school leadership program graduates are not ready for the complex role of school leadership (Lashway, 1999). The disconnect between how aspiring principals are selected and trained and the realities of today’s school leadership challenges has forced higher education institutions, policymakers, and school districts across the U.S. to examine school leadership preparation programs (Pannell et al., 2015). As McCarthy (2015) has emphasized, if principal preparation programs are to “survive, thrive, and meet the needs of the next generation of school leaders,” then it is “imperative to be open to different viewpoints and new ideas, to take reasonable – and at times bold – risks, and to question deeply held values and assumptions” (p. 431).

Positive Momentum in School Leadership Research

While criticism of the preparation of school leaders has been growing for decades, a number of events have transpired since the mid-1900s that have had profound effects on the preparation programs for school leaders (Jacobson, 1990). One of the most important events was the formation of UCEA in 1955 (Campbell et al., 1987; Gregg, 1969; Jacobson, 1990; Murphy, 1992). According to Willower (1983), “UCEA helped set directions and had great influence on educational administration in the university world” (p. 181). Wynn (1972) also notes that UCEA “accepted responsibility for the development of instructional materials and the enrichment of
instructional method” (pp. 12-13). In the 1950s and 1960s, influenced by the work of UCEA (Murphy, 1992), preparation programs “began experimenting with a spate of activities designed to diversify instructional strategies, especially to move away from the traditional lecture-discussion format” (Jacobson, 1990, p. 62). Since its inception, UCEA has sponsored conferences and workshops devoted to the extension of knowledge about educational administration as well as launched research journals and the National Commission of Excellence in Educational Administration (Campbell, 1987). Today, UCEA is a consortium of 99 major public and private doctoral-degree granting research universities in the U.S., Australia, Canada, and China, “committed to advancing the preparation and practice of educational leaders for the benefit of schools and children” (UCEA, 2018). UCEA fulfills its mission by “promoting, sponsoring, and disseminating research on the essential problems of schooling and leadership practice; improving the preparation and professional development of educational leaders and professors; and positively influencing local, state, and national educational policy” (UCEA, 2018).

**Exemplary Educational Leadership Preparation**

As mentioned earlier, research has revealed an important relationship between school leadership preparation and school improvement efforts, retention, and leader practices. Exemplary or effective programs evidence a range of program features that collectively contribute to robust leadership preparation (Browne-Ferrigno & Muth, 2009). Orr and Orphanos (2011) compared the leadership practices of principals from an exemplary leadership preparation program with a national sample of principals from conventional preparation programs. The study found that that principals’ preparation background can influence their likelihood of creating school conditions that enhance student learning (Pounder, 2011).
In an effort to celebrate exemplary programs and “cultivate a group of exemplary programs that can help to catalyze and support ongoing program improvement in other universities,” UCEA established the EELP in 2013 (UCEA, 2018; Young, 2015). The EELP award was launched through an invitation to university-based leadership educators to nominate programs “that prepared leaders to lead in elementary, middle, or high schools, or programs focusing on the development of district-level leadership” (Young, 2015, p. 6). This award is a complement to UCEA’s (2018) mission to “advance the preparation and practices of educational leaders for the benefit of all children and schools.” UCEA has published reports documenting both the current landscape of school leader state policies (Anderson & Reynolds, 2015) and what elements are linked to high-quality principal preparation (Winn et al., 2016). Although research efforts are ongoing, a growing amount of evidence (Darling-Hammond et al., 2009; Jackson & Kelly, 2002; Young, Crow et al., 2009) indicates that quality programs have unique features, including:

- Rigorous candidate recruitment and selection strategies
- University-district partnerships
- Clinically rich, course-embedded school internship/residency experiences
- A continuous program improvement process and innovative pedagogy and curriculum

**Recruiting and Selecting High-Quality Leaders**

Knowledge about the critical role of school leaders underscores the importance of recruiting and selecting excellent school leadership candidates. Researchers refer to this process as the leadership pipeline, and it begins with the recruitment and selection of aspiring school leaders into preparation programs (Hitt, Tucker, & Young, 2012). Because of leaders’ influence on schools, “efforts to improve their recruitment, training, evaluation and ongoing development
should be considered highly cost-effective approaches to successful school improvement” (Leithwood et al., 2004, p. 14).

As research describes recruitment and selection as imperative to effective school leadership preparation programs (Darling-Hammond et al., 2007) and suggests that candidate recruitment may be associated with differences in program quality (Meyerson, LaPointe, & Orr, 2010), the need to conduct rigorous candidate recruitment selection strategies is ever more critical. Anderson and Reynolds (2015) found that 43 states require school leadership candidates to complete a state-approved preparation program for licensure. This requirement highlights how programs recruit and select candidates in terms of shaping who can eventually serve as a school leader (Reynolds, 2016). According to Fuller, Reynolds, and O’Doherty (2017), “recruitment encompasses all organizational practices and decisions that affect either the number, or types, of individuals who are willing to apply for or accept a given vacancy” (p. 83). They note that “…selection processes describe the strategies, actions, and decisions associated with screening out—or screening in—prospective candidates for SLPPs (p. 87).

Despite the existing research suggesting the importance of recruitment and selection, there is a dearth of research on recruitment and selection practices (Young, 2017). One notable exception is Young’s (2008), who employed discriminant function analysis and found that Graduate Record Examination (GRE) scores and Grade Point Averages (GPA) were not particularly accurate predictors of school leadership program acceptance or completion. In a description of one redesigned cohort preparation program, Griffin, Taylor, Varner, and White (2012) note that recruitment and selection processes include “selection criteria related to the ability to (a) serve as a school leader of learning, (b) provide effective leadership in challenging schools, and (c) be successful in curriculum and instruction offered by the program” (pp. 65-66).
The limited research on candidates and recruitment and selection processes reinforces the need for a national database on educational leadership program candidates that would enable researchers and practitioners to better understand and focus on recruitment and selection processes in ways that improve preparation programs (Crow, Arnold, Reed, & Shoho, 2012; Crow & Whiteman, 2016). The limited information available in the literature includes calls for stronger and more relevant admission criteria (Browne-Ferrigno & Muth, 2009), as the recruitment strategies of preparation programs have been criticized by numerous researchers. Case studies and anecdotal evidence have led to a widely held perception that “procedures are often informal, haphazard, and casual and that because few programs have formal recruitment plans, prospective candidates are often self-selected” (Murphy et al., 2009, p. 3). These problems persist today because so little has changed for many programs. The American Association of School Administrators (1960) found over 60 years ago that many preparation programs used “admission rather than selection procedures” (p. 83) and that entry into preparation programs only required a “B.A. and the cash to pay the tuition” (Tyack & Cummings, 1977, p. 60). Black (2011) and Hackmann and Wanat (2007) found that programs across two states relied on word-of-mouth, brochures, and websites for recruitment.

In spite of the broad recommendations and calls for the reform of preparation programs regarding recruitment and selection, Brown-Ferrigno and Muth (2009) found that many programs continue to “use nonselective approaches to determining admissions” to educational leadership programs (p. 212) and fail to use research or standards “for neither identifying recruits nor establishing selection criteria that focus on what successful principals do and how they do it” (p. 213). Programs have historically admitted students as long as they met minimum academic criteria, which usually included their GPA, GRE or standardized test scores, in-house
assessments, academic transcripts, letters of recommendation, and, occasionally, writing samples or interviews (Browne-Ferrigno & Soho, 2003). McCarthy and Forsyth (2009) and Browne-Ferrigno and Muth (2009) have cautioned SLPPs against utilizing such admission measures to select candidates and have expressed concerns about the overreliance on standardized measures of academic potential such as the GRE and GPA, since research has not found either measure to be a predictor of leadership potential (Young, 2017). Other researchers have found that the best candidates with high professional proficiency examination scores often fail in their attempts to lead organizations because their leadership approaches or professional skills do not move people to action. However, candidates who may not appear strong on paper often succeed as leaders (Sessa, Kaiser, Taylor, & Campbell, 1998).

Karanxha, Agosto, and Bellara (2014) have highlighted some of the admission issues evidenced in the lower number of minority candidates and graduates in most leadership preparation programs. These researchers found that the disproportionate rejection of underrepresented applicants serves a hidden curriculum in some preparation programs. As Darling-Hammond et al. (2007) found, rigorous recruitment was a key factor in the success of exemplary programs, specifically citing the benefit of expanding the racial, ethnic, cultural, and gender diversity of candidates. These programs also sought individuals with experience as teaching coaches and those who demonstrated commitment to service in high-need areas.

Consequently, in light of the current research on suggested recruitment and selection practices, reformers have encouraged the field to wean themselves “from the admissions and teaching-learning mess that we have created that uses our standards for neither identifying recruits nor establishing selection criteria that focus on what successful principals do and how they do it” (Browne-Ferrigno & Muth, 2009, p. 213).
What Effective Programs Do

Although principal preparation research is in the relatively early stages of development (Ni, Hollingsworth, Rorrer, & Pounder, 2016; Orr and Barber, 2016), researchers assert that effective leader training programs are characterized by: selective admissions, a focus on change leadership and instruction, partnerships with districts that hire their graduates, pre-service training that extends to early years on the job (with a focus on mentoring), and states making better use of their authority (Wallace Foundation, 2012). Researchers have also identified several attributes of an effective principal preparation program: strong university-district partnerships, purposeful and rigorous recruitment, a curriculum that stresses what principals need to know and be able to do, clinical experiences and internships with strong mentorships, the use of data to improve instruction, and states willing to take a stronger stance in shaping principal preparation and program evaluation policies (Sutcher, Podolsky, & Espinoza, 2017; Wallace Foundation, 2016). Many researchers cite leadership potential as a measure worth including in selection activities (Davis & Darling-Hammond, 2012), and “an increasing number of programs are using more rigorous and research-based strategies” in their selection activities (Murphy et al., 2009, p. 3).

Collectively, these strategies are rigorous and all-encompassing, which contribute to the recruitment of strong candidates and diverse cohorts (Darling-Hammond et al., 2007). However, not all states require programs to meet such standards (Anderson & Reynolds, 2015), and the specific methods and mechanisms of how programs recruit and select are not well known. Murphy et al. (2009) note that “it is unclear what procedures or decision rules drive [leadership preparation programs] selection processes today” (p. 3). Taken together, the need for more research on the recruitment and selection practices of programs that have been identified as
exemplary suggest that this study will contribute to our understanding of how to prepare effective school leaders (Cheney et al., 2010; Darling-Hammond et al., 2007; George W. Bush Institute, 2016). This study addresses these gaps in the existing research by targeting the recruitment and selection practices of five programs that have been identified by UCEA as exemplary. UCEA judged the EELP award-winning programs on “the extent to which the programs are: a) aligned with research and scholarship about exemplary and effective leadership preparation, and b) have evidence of program effectiveness and impact” (UCEA, 2018; Young, 2015). They also state that “the 2012 research-based document titled UCEA Institutional and Program Quality Criteria provides an accounting of features, content, and experiences associated with effective leadership preparation—all of which are criteria for this award” (UCEA, 2018).

Young et al. (2009) maintain that programs should develop selection tools and practices that establish the prerequisite knowledge, skills, and dispositions needed to be effective school leaders. UCEA asserts that high-quality programs utilize academic criteria and assessments, documented evidence of successful teaching, and evidence of leadership potential in their selection activities. In terms of selection practices, Browne-Ferrigno and Muth (2009) offer several suggestions, including the requirement of an advanced degree, the completion of prior teaching experience, documentation of prior leadership experience, and demonstrated commitment to school leadership or “prior successful work with adults in educational settings” (p. 215). Additionally, the alignment with program goals and regional context has been found to be important in recruitment and selection activities. In their review of preparation programs, Murphy et al. (2009) have criticized programs for a lack of connection between stated program values, mission, and vision and intentionally designed selection processes. According to Murphy et al. (2009), a lack of alignment between goals and outcomes with selection decisions may not
produce candidates with the prerequisite characteristics to match the program’s desired outcomes or the needs of the students, teachers, and communities that the graduates are intended to serve. This finding is particularly relevant, because prior research has shown that less-qualified principals often serve in lower-achieving schools (Branch et al., 2009; Papa et al., 2002). The inequitable distribution of principal quality is of particular concern, since students who most need effective leaders are often the least likely to have them, bearing in mind that effective school leaders play a critical role in turning around low-performing schools (Hallinger & Heck, 1996). McCarthy and Forsyth (2009) assert that the most critical questions to be answered are “what knowledge, skills, and dispositions are required for minimal competent practice, and what selection and preparatory activities most certainly will produce individuals with the requisite attributes” (p. 88). Moreover, UCEA (2012) maintains that the “key to effective preparation is intentionality,” suggesting that researchers must be more intentional about studying the recruitment and selection practices of effective programs (p. 1).

**Differences among Educational Leadership Preparation Programs**

The importance of evaluating leadership preparation programs has become an increasingly important component of university faculty roles charged with preparing educational leaders (Crow & Whiteman, 2016). Importantly, Meyerson et al. (2010) have found variation in preparation programs, and while variation is not inherently bad, “variation without intention or variation generated within the gaps of what we do not yet know about effective leadership preparation may be problematic” (Crow & Whiteman, 2016, p. 2). Recently, two events have intensified the importance of program evaluation: the creation of the Council for the Accreditation of Educator Preparation (CAEP) and the current consideration by the Council of Chief State School Officers (CCSSO) of the revision of the Interstate School Leaders Licensure...
Consortium (ISLLC) standards (CAEP, 2013; Canole & Young, 2013; Young & Mawhinney, 2012). Research examining program evaluation practices has increased, undoubtedly because of the high stakes nature of these programs (Crow & Whitman, 2016). Researchers are beginning to assess how principal preparation programs relate to school improvement and student learning outcomes (Fuller et al., 2011; Ni, Hollingworth, Rorrer, & Pounder, 2016; Orphanos & Orr, 2013; Orr & Orphanos, 2011). UCEA as well as the AERA-Teaching in Educational Administration Special Interest Group taskforce have worked to design assessment frameworks and encourage the development of appropriate instruments for program assessment (Ni et al., 2016; Orr & Pounder, 2006; Pounder, 2012). Orr and Barber (2013) note that there is now a “foundation of research on the presence or absence of key program features (such as rigorous selection and cohort structures) and essential content (such as attention to special education and technology)” (p. 491). Faculty interest and commitment to learning more about best practices and the effects of preparation on leadership practices remain the primary drivers for advancing program evaluation research (Orr & Barber, 2009).

As noted earlier, quality leadership preparation is essential to quality leadership practice. Moreover, the existing research has revealed an important relationship between preparation and school leaders’ career outcomes, practices, and school improvement efforts. Thus, this study seeks to determine how exemplary leadership preparation programs recruit and select aspiring school leaders. According to UCEA:

To celebrate exemplary programs and encourage their development, UCEA has established the EELP Award. The award is sponsored by The Wallace Foundation. Applications are judged on the extent to which the program: 1) reflects UCEA’s research-based UCEA Institutional and Program Quality Criteria on the features, content, and
experiences associated with effective leadership preparation, and 2) has demonstrated evidence of program effectiveness. A UCEA Selection Committee made up of individuals with strong expertise in educational leadership preparation review and evaluate the nominees (UCEA, 2018).

**Conclusion**

Little doubt seems to exist that efforts aimed at improving the recruitment and selection of aspiring school leadership candidates should be considered a worthwhile exercise in successful school improvement. Following a thorough analysis of the current literature, many preparation programs do not have robust recruitment and selection practices, and an urgent need exists to explore specific details about promising and effective recruitment and selection practices. A need also exists to examine promising recruitment and selection processes of effective educational leadership programs. This study fills the research gap on promising practices of recruitment and selection involving the next generation of leaders. These efforts will be increasingly productive as research provides more robust understandings of how successful leaders are recruited and selected into exemplary preparation programs. The next chapter will address the research methods I utilized to determine the recruitment and selection practices of UCEA’s EELP award winning programs.
CHAPTER 3: METHODOLOGY

As the review of literature illuminates, little is known about the comprehensive recruitment and selection processes of SLPPs (Anderson & Reynolds, 2015; Crow et al., 2009; McCarthy & Forsyth, 2009). Although research suggests that rigorous recruitment and selection practices are a vital component of effective SLPPs (Darling-Hammond et al., 2010; Hitt et al., 2012), systematically collected data on the recruitment and selection practices of SLPPs remain wanting (Baker et al., 2007; Browne-Ferrigno & Muth, 2009; Fuller et al., 2017; Murphy et al., 2009). Nevertheless, school leadership researchers often cite a lack of knowledge about quality recruitment and selection strategies (Hess & Kelly, 2005; Levine, 2005; Murphy et al., 2009). Furthermore, university faculty along with state and national policymakers often anecdotally discuss the topic, suggesting the importance of the recruitment and selection process in ensuring the quality preparation of aspiring school leaders.

The purpose of this research study is to understand how exemplary SLPPs conduct rigorous recruitment and selection processes for aspiring K–12 school leaders. Specifically, the study will investigate how five award-winning programs in the U.S. recruit and select aspiring leadership candidates who are likely to be successful as school leaders. The study also explores the knowledge, skills, and dispositions that these programs seek in candidates and how their recruitment and selection activities identify individuals with the requisite attributes. The study contributes to our understanding of recruitment and selection by examining the specific recruitment and selection activities and strategies of exemplary SLPPs. The findings provide a framework to guide SLPPs’ recruitment and selection activities and policies at both the state and university preparation levels.
This chapter outlines the methodology of the study, including an overview of the research design and research questions, a rationale for the use of qualitative inquiry, site selection and sampling criteria, and data collection and analysis. I will also discuss the research validity, reliability, reflexivity, subjectivity, and study limitations. Specifically, I utilize qualitative case study methods to describe the recruitment and selection process at five U.S. universities that were recognized as exemplary by UCEA. An EELP award, sponsored by the Wallace Foundation, is granted when a program demonstrates “exemplary educational leadership preparation and is a national model for supporting the success of future school leaders” (UCEA, 2018) (see sampling section for more information about the EELP award).

**Research questions.** This study will qualitatively address the following research question and sub-questions:

1. In what ways do exemplary SLPPs recruit and select candidates who they believe are likely to be successful as school leaders?
   a. What knowledge, skills, and dispositions do programs seek, and what recruitment and selection activities help them in identifying individuals with the requisite attributes?
   b. What are the systematic recruitment and selection plans of EELPs? Do the programs rely on multiple sources of evidence and show deliberate efforts to attract and admit applicants who demonstrate leadership potential? If so, in what ways?
   c. Does a connection exist between stated program values, mission, vision, and intentionally designed recruitment and selection processes? If so, how are they connected?
d. What are similarities, commonalities, and differences of EELP awardees’ recruitment and selection processes and activities?

The Qualitative Approach

The purpose of this study is to understand the nuanced recruitment and selection activities and processes of exemplary educator preparation programs; thus, a qualitative approach is an appropriate means to collect and analyze the data (Creswell, 2013; Merriam & Tisdell, 2016; Miles, Huberman, & Saldaña, 2014; Patton, 2015). According to Creswell (2013), qualitative approaches are best suited for research questions requiring a complex and detailed response and comprehensive understanding of an issue. The qualitative method allows a researcher to generate answers that cannot be expressed numerically. Qualitative inquiry is often seen as being well suited for exploring new phenomena and developing hypotheses (Miles et al., 2014). Creswell (2009) notes that “qualitative researchers try to develop a complex picture of the problem or issue under study. This process involves reporting multiple perspectives, identifying the many factors involved in a situation, and generally sketching the larger picture that emerges” (p. 176). Additional features of qualitative research were utilized in this study include: the role of the researcher as the primary instrument; the use of patterns and themes as findings; the inclusion of rich and thick description; the epistemological framework which accepts multiple realities; and the use of words and their meaning as both data and elements in the analysis (Creswell, 2013; Merriam & Tisdell, 2016; Miles, et al., 2014). Qualitative approaches allow for in-depth investigations and the ability to unearth fine details and contexts (Patton, 2015). Although qualitative research has countless applications and constructs, all qualitative research should “tell the story of the project, richly convey the views of others, and detail implications” (Drisko, 2005,
In this study, I utilize a case study design to examine the recruitment and selection processes of EELP award-winning programs.

**Case Study Design**

Qualitative study approaches empower participants to share experiences (Creswell, 2013). Moreover, a case study design is well suited to describe and expand understanding of a phenomenon, and researchers often use it to study people and programs (Stake, 1995; Yin, 2014). Yin (2009) describes a case study as an “empirical inquiry about a contemporary phenomenon (e.g., a ‘case’), set within its real-world context—especially when the boundaries between phenomenon and context are not clearly evident” (p. 18). Case studies can be explanatory (to understand the “why” of a phenomenon), exploratory (to understand something new or not previously well understood), or descriptive (to understand the “what” and/or “how” of a phenomenon) (Creswell, 2013; Yin, 2012). The present research study is a descriptive multiple case study, as I sought to understand, and ultimately describe, the recruitment and selection activities of school leadership programs that have been identified as exemplary on account of winning the EELP award. The study will incorporate the entire population of EELP award winners, as only five programs had been named as exemplary by UCEA at the time of this study (UCEA, 2018).

In addition to providing flexibility and fluidity to studies, case studies allow for selective sampling strategies, employ multiple methods of data collection, and provide a richer understanding of the study topic (Creswell, 2013; Merriam, 2009; Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). Creswell (2009) states that “case study research involves the study of an issue explored through one or more cases within a bounded system (i.e., a setting, a context)” (p. 73). In essence, a limit to a study must exist, either by the setting, number of participants, or both (Merriam, 2009;
A multiple case study (also known as a collective case, cross-case, or multisite case) typically examines between four and 10 individual cases that share a commonality or have some form of contrast (Merriam, 2009; Yin, 2014). Yin (2014) asserts that “evidence from multiple cases is often considered more compelling” (p. 57). The EELP award winners bound this study and follow Stake’s (2005) conceptualization of case study research as being a choice of what to study instead of being a particular methodology. Merriam (1998) contends that a case study can reveal “knowledge we would not otherwise have access” (p. 33). Additional strengths of the case study include the ability to “retain the holistic and meaningful characteristics of real-life events” (Yin, 2009, p. 4) and to use “a full variety of evidence—documents, artifacts, interviews, and observations” (p. 11). Due to its many strengths, the case study is as particularly appealing design for applied fields of study such as education (Merriam, 2009). Therefore, I examined the recruitment and selection processes and activities of EELP awardees through a case study so as to generate understanding that could affect and perhaps even improve practice (Merriam, 2009). Although this study does not seek to generalize, Merriam (2009) notes that the issue of generalizability stands larger in case study research than in other types of qualitative research.

**Conceptual framework.** In theoretical discussions of school leadership, many factors must be considered, including the qualities of successful leaders (Leithwood et al., 2004), the development of these qualities (Davis et al., 2005), and the relationship between effective leadership and organizational success (Winston, 2001). An important aspect of educational leadership includes the recruitment and selection of individuals who exhibit the qualities of successful leaders (Young, 2017). As states play an important role in cultivating a pipeline of effective school leaders, the process of discovering the most promising criteria and processes for
recruiting and selecting aspiring school leaders can help them achieve their school leadership goals. However, discovering the most promising criteria and processes for recruiting and selecting individuals who are likely to be successful as school leaders can be a challenging process. A review of scholarly studies on leadership suggests that a wide variety of theoretical approaches exists in explaining the complexities of leadership success (Northouse, 2016). However, there is a consensus among methodologists that the case study method is an excellent approach through which to conduct constructivist examinations (Lincoln & Guba, 2013; Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). Consequently, I align with the following statement by Lincoln and Guba (2013):

The case study is perhaps the only format that can remain true to the moral imperatives of constructivism, that is, to serve as a credible representation of the various local constructions encountered and of any consensus construction (if such can be attained) that has emerged; that can adequately identify and reflect the voice or voices that influence the outcome; that can enlarge the understandings of respondents while at the same time serving the purposes of the inquiry; and that can stimulate and sustain local action by respondents (for which the inquirer acts as orchestrator and facilitator) as well as in other sites through the medium of the case report’s readers. (p. 80)

Despite the call by school leadership scholars for more research on the recruitment and selection of aspiring school leader candidates, SLPPs have not been proactive about researching what other leadership programs do to recruit and select quality leaders. In addition to my research questions, this study fills the gap in the literature by examining the recruitment and selection processes of EELPs and uncovering answers to the following questions raised by Young (2015):

- What strategies are used to recruit candidates?
● What perspectives, priorities, and data inform the development of recruitment materials?
● Who participates in the recruitment process and why?
● What strategies, information, and criteria are used to select candidates for participation in the preparation program?
● How are the selection criteria and process integrated into the program’s goals and approach? Who participates in the candidate selection and how?

The answers to these questions provide a robust description of the recruitment and selection practices of exemplary programs and will fill a gap in the existing literature. Additionally, this information serves as a resource for SLPPs and faculty who may be interested in making changes or improvements to their programs. Although much is yet to be learned about how effective or innovative the approaches to recruitment and selection will be, the programs highlighted by the EELP award “signal a shift in the way that university faculty are thinking about, designing, and delivering preparation programs for educational leaders” (Young, 2015, p. 8). Figure 3.1 below shows the conceptual framework guiding this study and key points along the school leader pipeline. As mentioned previously, my assumption is that the EELPs in this study have exemplary candidate recruitment and selection processes. Therefore, exemplary SLPPs should produce highly qualified graduates and a strong and effective supply of leaders for schools and organizations.

Figure 3.1 The Conceptual Framework Showing Key Points Along School Leader Pipeline

Hesse-Biber and Leavy (2011) define reflexivity in qualitative research as “the awareness that all knowledge is affected by the social conditions under which it is produced; it is grounded
in social location and the social biography of the observer and the observed” (pp. 28-29). As a qualitative researcher, I am the primary data collection instrument for this study. Since “the primary instrument in qualitative research is human, all observations and analyses are filtered through that human being’s worldview, values and perspective” (Merriam, 1998, p. 2).

**Subjectivity statement.** For four years, I was a graduate assistant within the Northeast Leadership Academy (NELA) at NC State University (NCSU). NELA is a Master of School Administration (MSA) program housed in the Department of Educational Leadership, Policy, and Human Development (ELPHD) at NCSU and is designed to improve the quality of K–12 schools by preparing leaders who are dedicated to educational excellence and equity. Graduates are expected to use leadership strategies that will improve student performance in high-need, hard-to-staff schools in North Carolina (NC). In my position at NCSU, I was involved in candidate recruitment, selection, development, and support for NCSU MSA programs. I firmly believe in the importance of preparing effective school leaders for our nation’s schools and in the critical components of school leader recruitment and selection to ensuring that effort. This belief aligns with research that supports placing a greater emphasis on quality in school leader preparation (Manna, 2015) as well as the continued search for enhanced knowledge into innovation and the most effective candidate recruitment and selection strategies (Young, 2017). Additionally, I attended a UCEA Convention (in 2016) and met program directors from EELP award-winning programs. Moreover, NCSU’s NELA program was the 2014 recipient of the EELP award and is a case in my study. Thus, I must acknowledge my potential biases as a researcher, take appropriate actions to engage ethically in the research process, and maintain a high level of awareness for potential biases (see section on Issues of Bias and Ethical Issues for additional information). Rather than attempting to control my values through bracketing by
assumptions, I examined “personal assumptions and goals” and clarified “individual belief systems and subjectivities” (Russell & Kelly, 2002, p. 2) through reflective journaling and conversations with my dissertation co-chairs.

**Sampling Procedures and Criteria**

Patton (2002) provides context regarding the difficult choices a researcher must make in the site selection and sampling process, “the extent to which a research study is broad or narrow depends on purpose, the resources available, the time available, and the interests of those involved… [these] are not choices between good and bad but choices among alternatives, all of which have merit (p. 228).

Since the purpose of qualitative research is to conduct an in-depth examination of a particular context, the priority in selecting a sample is to ensure that the selected participants can contribute to further understanding the phenomenon (Patton, 2015). Because UCEA designated only five programs as exemplary by the EELP award, my sample is the entire population of exemplary SLPPs, as defined by UCEA. According to Gay and Airasian (2003),

> The key to ‘sampling’ in qualitative research is to choose good participants who can provide the insights and articulation needed to attain the desired richness of qualitative data. This population will provide information about how EELPs recruit and select candidates who they believe are likely to be successful as school leaders. The focus on participant selection is to identify those who can provide such information (p. 195).

Program directors from EELP programs are best suited to provide information about recruitment and selection because these areas fall under their purview. Stake (1995) asks an important question: “Which cases are likely to lead us to understandings, to assertions, perhaps even to
modifying of generalizations?” (p. 4). The unit of analysis for my study are EELP award-winning programs. The study includes perspectives from program directors and information gleaned from a review and analysis of program documents. The EELP programs, or cases, lead to new understandings about the recruitment and selection of aspiring school leader candidates.

**Purposive sampling.** This multiple case study analyzes the recruitment and selection processes and strategies of EELP award-winning programs. As such, the selection process must incorporate cases that match the criteria. Therefore, I chose the site and selection for this study based on purposeful sampling strategies (Creswell, 2013; Merriam, 2009; Merriam & Tisdell, 2016; Mertens, 2010; Patton, 2015). The term “purposive sampling” assumes that the researcher wants “to discover, understand, and gain insight” through analysis, therefore selecting a sample from which “the most can be learned” (Merriam, 1998, p. 61). My sampling strategy is unique, in that, the participants exemplify a similar characteristic, as they have all been recipients of UCEA’s EELP award. This sampling strategy is also referred to as criterion-based selection (LaCompte & Schensul, 2010), since the researcher identifies specific criteria that are considered essential for the study and identifies participants who meet these criteria (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). Since I was interested in gaining an understanding of how exemplary programs recruit and select school leadership candidates, my sample included the five SLPP recipients of UCEA’s EELP award (as described in study limitations, the 2019 EELP was announced after this study was completed). The institutions included in study are the University of Illinois at Chicago, the University of Texas at San Antonio, the University of Denver, NC State University, and the University of Washington. Table 3.1 below describes the EELP programs in this study in greater detail.
Table 3.1 EELP Award-Winning Programs

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>University</th>
<th>Program</th>
<th>Public or Private</th>
<th>MSA or Ed.D.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2019</td>
<td>***University of Washington</td>
<td>***Danforth Educational Leadership Program</td>
<td>Public</td>
<td>MSA</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2016</td>
<td>University of Washington</td>
<td>Leadership for Learning (L4L) Program</td>
<td>Public</td>
<td>Ed.D.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2014</td>
<td>University of Denver</td>
<td>Richie Program for School Leaders</td>
<td>Private</td>
<td>MA</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2014</td>
<td>NC State University</td>
<td>Northeast Leadership Academy (NELA)</td>
<td>Public</td>
<td>MSA</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2013</td>
<td>University of Illinois at Chicago</td>
<td>Ed.D. in Urban Education Leadership</td>
<td>Public</td>
<td>Ed.D.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2013</td>
<td>University of Texas at San Antonio</td>
<td>Urban School Leaders Collaborative</td>
<td>Public</td>
<td>MSA</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Two awards were presented in 2013 and 2014.
** No awards were given in 2015, 2017, and 2018.
*** The 2019 award winner was awarded after this study was completed.

Among the five universities, four can be described as public research universities and one a private research university. The five programs are located in five states: Colorado, Illinois, North Carolina, Texas, and Washington.

The EELP Award

The EELP award began in 2013 with an invitation to university-based leadership educators to nominate their programs in early 2013. According to Young (2015), UCEA judged nomination portfolios on two key criteria: “the extent to which the program (a) reflected the
current research on the features, content, and experiences associated with effective leadership preparation (Darling-Hammond et al., 2007; Young et al., 2009) and (b) has demonstrated evidence of program effectiveness” (pp. 6-7). Portfolios included descriptions of program purpose and practices, with descriptions provided in the following 11 areas: program focus, recruitment, selection, learning experiences, knowledge and skills, internship, supportive structures, partnerships, candidate assessment, program improvement, and faculty. The programs also included information about course content, fieldwork, and a description of evidence of program effectiveness (Young, 2015). The selection committee for the award consisted of educational leadership researchers with expertise in educational leadership preparation, who have all “contributed significantly to the research base of effective leadership preparation through their research, writing, editing, and program development work” (p. 8).

**Participant recruitment.** In order to paint a detailed picture of the recruitment and selection process, interviews were conducted with program directors from EELP award-winning programs. If a program director declined to be interviewed, I asked whether they were willing to suggest a program faculty member who may be able to answer questions about the recruitment and selection process. In two instances, an EELP program director suggested another administrator to participate in the interview. No program directors declined to participate in the study. Additionally, I interviewed UCEA’s executive director in order to learn more about the history and context of the EELP award, specifically how recruitment and selection are included in award determination.

Immediately following approval by the Institutional Review Board (IRB), I began recruiting participants for the study. To inform participants of my study, I sent an email to the directors of the EELP award-winning programs and the UCEA executive director to introduce
myself and describe the research project (Appendix A). To ensure transparency, I attached an informed consent form to my emails to participants (Appendix B). My email, sent from my NCSU email account, was personalized for each program director as “personalized requests will receive larger and more committed responses from potential participants” (Marshall & Rossman, 2016, p. 107). Within 10 business days, I received a positive response to my request from all EELP program directors. Participants were assured of the voluntary nature of their participation in the study. Taken together, the steps employed in selecting the case study sites and participants ensured that a valuable and meaningful discussion ensued from the analysis.

Data Collection

In keeping with the constructivist paradigm and the tenets of sound case study research, I served as the primary research instrument for the data collection (Mertens, 2010; Yin, 2009). Although researchers vary in their proposed rules for effective data collection in a case study context (Creswell, 2013; Stake, 1995; Yin, 2014), general agreement exists that case study research is best executed when multiple forms of data are collected (Creswell, 2013; Merriam & Tisdell, 2016; Patton, 2015; Yin, 2014). For this work, I collected data from program director interviews, an interview with UCEA’s executive director, individual recruitment and selection documents, and applications for the EELP award.

Merriam and Tisdell (2016) maintain that in the interest of accuracy and depth, interviews are the best method for collecting information for qualitative studies. The interviews with UCEA’s executive director was conducted prior to those with the program directors because the executive director is a key informant who could “provide the case study investigator with insights into a matter and also initiate access to corroboratory or contrary sources of evidence” (Yin, 2009, p. 107). The three main types of interviews are structured, semi-structured, and
unstructured (Creswell, 2013; Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). Structured interviews are a “written survey” and are often aimed at collecting demographic data, with little room for elaboration or in-depth descriptions (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016, p. 110). The interviews with the study participants were semi-structured, which are similar to structured interviews because they both seek to answer predetermined questions. However, researchers regard the semi-structured interview as more of a guide, as it allows greater flexibility in how the questions are presented and in asking probing or follow-up questions (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016; Patton, 2015).

Unstructured interviews are more conversational in nature and are often used if a researcher is constrained from asking predetermined questions due to a lack of sufficient knowledge on the subject (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016; Patton, 2015). The primary purpose of these interviews was to help answer my research questions regarding the recruitment and selection of aspiring school leaders.

To answer the research questions, I used semi-structured interviews with each participant (Appendix C). The use of a semi-structured interview protocol allowed for specific questions to be addressed, but with an open-ended approach that permitted participants to guide the discussion (Creswell, 2013; Merriam, 1998). Merriam (1998) adds that a semi-structured interview “allows the research to respond to the situation at hand, to the emerging worldview of the respondent, and to new ideas on the topic” (p. 74). Stake (1995) notes the concept of “progressive focusing,” which encourages altering the interview design if questions are not working well or if new issues arise. The option to adjust questions was useful, given the diversity of programs and directors. Bernard (1988) argues that semi-structured interviews are particularly appropriate when “you won’t get more than one chance to interview someone” (p. 204). During the interviews, I took notes to add contextual insights and points of interpretation (Merriam,
2009). Once an interview ended, I also took reflective notes on the participant’s response to my questions and any observed non-verbal communication “to describe what I saw, heard, felt” (Cherry, 2000, p. 67) and any initial thoughts or interpretations I had. Current research on leadership preparation (Young et al., 2017) and UCEA’s Institutional and Program Quality Criteria guidance (Young, Orr, & Tucker, 2012) informed my interview protocol. The rubrics in the guidance document reflect UCEA’s membership standards and research on effective educational leadership preparation. I asked interviewees about evidence of a systematic plan for recruiting and selecting candidates who demonstrate leadership potential, the use of an explicit set of strategies for attracting and recruiting applicants, and selection criteria that clearly articulate and offer applicants multiple methods to document leadership potential. I also wanted to understand the extent to which programs use multiple sources of evidence for admission decisions and the attention they give to the diversity of students entering their program.

**Interview procedures.** Once a participant agreed to participate in the study, we scheduled an interview. The participants were interviewed via Zoom Video Conference and were asked to be audio recorded. Prior to commencing the interview, the participants were again provided with a copy of the informed consent. We then discussed the study, how the data would be collected and stored, and the ways in which I would maintain confidentiality. Finally, I fielded any questions or concerns before starting the interview. Interviews ranged from 45 to 60 minutes. A total of seven interviews were conducted. Upon completion of the interview, I loaded the audio recording into a password-protected folder on a password-protected laptop. The interviews were transcribed by a third-party transcription company and saved to the same secure folder on the same laptop. For data safety seasons, recordings and transcripts were also stored in a folder in the NCSU Two-Factor Authentication Google Drive.
**Pilot interview.** To ensure high-quality interviews, I conducted one pilot interview via Zoom Video Conference. The interview was scheduled with a nationally prominent school leadership researcher who was not a study participant (Appendix E). The pilot interview informed modifications the interview protocol by highlighting questions that were unclear, redundant, or in need of being rewritten for clarity and concision. The pilot interview also provided an opportunity for me to grow comfortable with the interview process and to allow for a more effective and natural interview process for participants (Majid et al., 2017).

**Document analysis.** Drawing from the research tradition of content analysis (Weber, 1990), the collection and analysis of documents, both paper-based and electronic, are “a ubiquitous aspect of the formation and enactment of contemporary life” (Rapley & Rees, 2018, p. 428). As a research method, document analysis is an important tool and an invaluable part of most schemes of triangulation (Bowen, 2009). The term document analysis spans the written elements of texts as well as images, photographs, graphs, diagrams, and other artifacts and aspects of culture (Rapley & Rees, 2018). For this study, I reviewed program websites, journal articles, and asked program directors for their recruitment and selection materials, documents, rubrics, and other sources of data, including EELP applications from award-winning programs. Some of the information contained in the EELP applications is already publicly available (see Jacobson, McCarthy, & Pounder, 2015). I examined the documents for information about the recruitment process, selection process, selection tools, and other information about candidate disposition, knowledge, and skills (Appendix F).

**Data Analysis Procedures**

In an effort to fully understand the recruitment and selection process of exemplary SLPPs, I examined artifacts and documents related to the recruitment and selection efforts of
EELPs. This triangulation during data analysis allowed me to more fully understand and document the participant’s recruitment and selection efforts. The use of multiple sources provided a rich dataset for each participant, adding greater validity to the analysis. Data sources included semi-structured interviews and examination of artifacts including: EELP applications, email correspondences to candidates, professional development documentation, newsletters, selection rubrics, recruitment flyers, and research articles. According to Merriam and Tisdell (2016), “data analysis is the process used to answer your research question(s)” (p. 202).

Specifically:

Data analysis is the process of making sense out of the data. And making sense out of the data involves consolidating, reducing, and interpreting what people have said and what the researcher has seen and read—it is the process of making meaning (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016, p. 202).

Prior to and during each interview, I asked participants if they were willing to share relevant recruitment and selection artifacts and/or their EELP application. I received artifacts from all but one program, though each EELP shared different documents. If I did not receive certain materials from a program, it does not mean that the program does not utilize the particular documentation, it simply means they did not share it with me. Table 3.2 below details the documents submitted by participants.

Table 3.2 EELP Documents submitted

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Program</th>
<th>Recruitment</th>
<th>Selection</th>
<th>Other</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>NC State University</td>
<td>Recruitment flyers</td>
<td>Evaluator’s agenda</td>
<td>UCEA EELP Award Application</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Cohort demographic infographic</td>
<td>Evaluator’s directions for role plays</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Table 3.2 (continued).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Email to NELA graduates regarding Candidate Assessment Day</th>
<th>Interview rubric for evaluators</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Candidate selection process flowchart</td>
<td>Evaluator’s rubrics for role plays</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NELA Twitter Profile</td>
<td>Evaluator’s rubric for response to feedback</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Information session PowerPoint</td>
<td>Evaluator’s rubric for fishbowl activity</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Email describing phone call outreach to prospective candidates</td>
<td>Candidate’s agenda</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Email to district partners discussing recruitment</td>
<td>NCSU Honor Pledge</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Email to prospective candidates</td>
<td>Candidate writing prompt</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Email to prospective candidates</td>
<td>Candidate video prompt</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>List of recruitment practices</td>
<td>GRIT Scale</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>University of Illinois at Chicago</td>
<td>HEXACO-PI-R (personality inventory)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Applicant interview invitation</td>
<td>Candidate self-evaluation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Recruitment plan</td>
<td>Selection packet for interview panel members</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>University of Denver</td>
<td>Continuous improvement brief on candidate selection</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>List of selection criteria</td>
<td>UCEA EELP Award Application (recruitment and selection sections)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

47
To determine which documents should be included in my analysis, I utilized the criteria set forth by Merriam (1998). Researchers (Merriam, 1998; Mertens, 2010; Yin, 2014) assert that to be included and analyzed, a particular document must contain “information or insights relevant to the research question . . . [and] can be acquired in a reasonably practical yet systematic manner” (Merriam, 1998, p. 153). In light of this, I made efforts to collect as many useful and appropriate documents as possible to expand my understanding and triangulate my findings.

Based on Patton’s (2015) recommendation, I began my data analysis as I received transcripts. Using ATLAS.ti’s qualitative analysis software, I uploaded the transcripts and began the process of analysis. Since I received documents at random intervals following a scheduled interview, I reviewed each document within 48 hours of receiving it. Since I started analyzing data as I conducted interviews, I was able to begin identifying patterns and noteworthy findings early, even prior to reviewing some documents (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). To capture thoughts and other relevant information, I used the memo feature in ATLAS.ti. As I progressed with
analysis of transcripts, I highlighted the words, phrases, or sentences that I found to be interesting, noteworthy, and/or relevant to the literature (Saldaña, 2016, pp. 20-21).

In conducting a document analysis, researchers can become overwhelmed with the amount of material to analyze. Rapley and Rees (2018) suggest that researchers “seek to refine the material to produce something that is both practically manageable as well as analytically rich” (p. 431). Prior (2003) asserts that researchers should avoid solely analyzing the context of documents in order to have a greater appreciation of the ways in which documents are developed and used. It was important that as I gained access to documents, I assessed the kind of documents that would “be of value to the research question” (Rapley & Rees, 2018, p. 433). I asked whether the document contained “information or insights relevant to the research question and whether it [could] be acquired in a reasonably practical yet systematic manner” (Merriam, 2009, p. 124). If these two questions could be answered in the affirmative, I deemed the data source appropriate for use in this study (Merriam, 2009). As programs were willing to share different forms and types of materials, there was variation in the number and type of documents I analyzed. I consistently looked for evidence of the following materials:

- A narrative description of plans, timelines, and documents used in annual recruiting efforts, including a diversity plan.
- A list of the criteria and a description of the procedure(s) followed to select students for participation in the program.
- Indicators used for candidate screening, such as racial designation, gender, dispositional qualities, etc.
- Demographics of the community served.
O’Leary (2014) cautions against bias in terms of the author or creator of the document being reviewed and the researcher. Bowen (2009) adds that a researcher must evaluate the original purpose of the document, such as the target audience. O’Leary (2014) suggests that researchers should pursue an interview technique whereby the researcher “asks” questions and then highlights the answer within the text. I recorded my decisions as I progressed in the study so as to provide justification for my choices and searches (Rapley & Rees, 2018). After examination, if no documents existed or were meager or uninformative (Lincoln & Guba, 1985), the findings nevertheless were used to inform the analysis, the value placed on the topic, and the resources and support mechanisms that existed (or not). Therefore, even incomplete or uninformative documents were enlightening and provided insights to support the rich, thick descriptive components of this study. O’Leary (2014) outlines an eight-step planning process that I utilized in my document analysis. Table 3.3 describes my document analysis planning guide used in this study.

Table 3.3 Document Analysis Planning Guide

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Tip</th>
<th>Description</th>
<th>This Study</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Create a list of texts to explore (e.g., population, samples, respondents, participants)</td>
<td>I created a document analysis protocol to guide my inquiry (see Appendix F).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Consider how texts will be accessed with attention to linguistic or cultural barriers</td>
<td>I realized that UT San Antonio’s program focused on working with students from Latino backgrounds. I have a basic understanding of both spoken and written Spanish.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Acknowledge and address biases</td>
<td>I acknowledged that I brought a bias to this research, but I set parameters in my methodology that enabled me to remain objective and thorough in the research process.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>Develop appropriate skills for research</td>
<td>I read and studied seminal works in the field in order to strengthen my research skills.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Table 3.3 (continued).

5. Consider strategies for ensuring credibility

I triangulated my document analysis findings with other sources of data, which added to the credibility. By triangulating information, an objective representation of the data was demonstrated (Marshall & Rossman, 2006).

6. Know the data one is searching for

Again, I created a document analysis protocol to guide my inquiry (see Appendix F).

7. Consider ethical issues (e.g., confidential documents)

I thoroughly evaluated and investigated the subjectivity of documents and my understanding of their data in order to preserve the credibility of my research (Bowen 2009; O’Leary, 2014).

8. Have a backup plan

Some documents were not available or easily accessible. I was aware that I might encounter challenges or gaps when employing document analysis and designed multiple data collection efforts to account for this hurdle.

*Adapted from O’Leary (2014).

Self-reflective journal. I used a self-reflective journal to record my thoughts, feelings, perceptions, and discoveries (Merriam, 2009) and to improve my learning process as I progressed through the research study (O’Connell & Dyment, 2011). The journal enabled me to look for potential biases. The journal was kept confidential and saved on a password-protected laptop.

Data Analysis Procedures

The goal of data analysis, according to Stake (1995), is to “understand behavior, issues, and contexts with regard to our particular case” (p. 78). To understand each case, I first conducted a within-case analysis of each program and then conducted a cross-case analysis of all programs. I pre-coded information as I progressed through the study and utilized ATLAS.ti software to analyze my data. Saldaña (2013) has discussed the importance “of circling, highlighting, bolding, underlining, or coloring rich or significant participant quotes or passages.
that strike you” (2013, p. 19). My aim in the data analysis was to “collect, present, and analyze data fairly” (Yin, 2014, p. 3). Throughout the data analysis process, my objective was to concentrate on emergent themes and patterns in the data. I cross-referenced interviews and document analysis to analyze findings and answer the overarching research questions (Mertens, 2010; Yin, 2014). Cross-referencing was an important element of the study, as it examined self-reported information from participant interviews, insights from submitted documents, and readily available public documents that were retrieved using a standard protocol for consistency (Mertens, 2010; Yin, 2014). All findings were coded, sorted, and detailed with an audit trail.

Since data analysis is the process of making sense of one’s data (Merriam, 2009), I followed Patton’s (2015) “Twelve Tips for Ensuring a Strong Foundation for Qualitative Analysis” to ensure that my data analysis is thoughtful and thorough (p. 523). This framework offers researchers a multitude of strategies to help ensure that data is organized and safe and that analysis is thoughtful and thorough. Table 3.4 lists each tip, along with a description, and aspects of my study that will align with Patton’s recommendations.

Table 3.4 Twelve Tips for Ensuring a Strong Foundation for Qualitative Analysis

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Tip</th>
<th>Description</th>
<th>This Study</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Begin analysis during field work: search for emergent themes while still in the field</td>
<td>I began data analysis in the ATLAS.ti qualitative analysis software and took notes during all data collection activities to discover possible themes.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Inventory and organize the data: label, date, and complete all notes regarding data collection</td>
<td>I secured folders to store all transcripts and recordings and uploaded all information as soon as it was completed. I used a standard naming convention for the files.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Fill in the gaps in the data: While information is fresh, fill in any gaps and take steps to recover missing documents</td>
<td>Field notes and a self-reflective journal helped keep information fresh.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td><strong>Protect the data: Backup all data and ensure it is secure</strong></td>
<td><strong>Files were stored in a secure folder on my password-protected laptop and stored on NCSU Google Drive.</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>---</td>
<td>---</td>
<td>---</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td><strong>Express appreciation: Thank the individuals who participated in the study as quickly as possible</strong></td>
<td><strong>I sent an email after the interview/observation to thank the participant. I also follow-up with a handwritten thank you note.</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td><strong>Reaffirm the purpose of your inquiry: Regularly restate the purpose of the inquiry and purpose of analysis</strong></td>
<td><strong>My research question was affixed on my computer monitor. I explained the purpose and intent of the study prior to each interview. I kept my research questions at my desk as I progressed through analysis.</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td><strong>Review exemplars for inspiration and guidance: Reexamine classic works in the field and keep exemplars nearby to reinvigorate</strong></td>
<td><strong>I frequently referred to seminal works and award-winning dissertations for inspiration and motivation.</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td><strong>Make qualitative analysis software decisions: Take time to practice data entry and some simple analysis. Leave time and mental space to learn</strong></td>
<td><strong>I experimented with several qualitative software packages in my doctoral classes. I used ATLAS.ti qualitative analysis software for this study and watched tutorials on advanced analysis so as to maximize its use for this study.</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9</td>
<td><strong>Schedule intense, dedicated time for analysis: Make time and set a realistic schedule</strong></td>
<td><strong>I blocked out chunks of time on my calendar for data analysis and writing each week. My husband committed to watching our daughter more on the weekends to allow me time for data analysis.</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10</td>
<td><strong>Clarify and determine your initial analysis strategy: Decide a strategy and reconnect with the theoretical and strategic framework</strong></td>
<td><strong>I developed an initial list of a priori codes (Saldana, 2013) derived from the conceptual framework, list of research questions, problem areas, and my prior knowledge of the research subject.</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11</td>
<td><strong>Be reflective and reflexive: Monitor your thought process and decision-making criteria</strong></td>
<td><strong>Again, field notes and a self-reflective journal were utilized for this purpose.</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12</td>
<td><strong>Start and keep an analysis journal: Decisions, ideas, false starts, dead ends, breakthroughs, eureka moments, and what I am learning.</strong></td>
<td><strong>See notes above. I also used the memo feature in ATLAS.ti to make notes about particular aspects of my data.</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Adapted from Patton’s Twelve Tips for Ensuring a Strong Foundation for Qualitative Analysis, 2015, p. 523.*
In keeping with Patton’s recommendations, I started analyzing data as soon as I received interview transcripts and documents. I began to identify themes, patterns, and noteworthy findings early on (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016) so that I could continue with a second round of coding after the data collection was completed. During this second cycle of coding, I looked for repetitions in the data, emergent categories, similarities, differences, and connections with my conceptual framework (Bernard & Ryan, 2010; Miles, Huberman & Saldaña, 2014).

**Qualitative Research Validity and Reliability**

According to Merriam (2002), “Reliability refers to the extent to which research findings can be replicated” (p. 27). As noted by Johnson and Christensen (2017), when “qualitative researchers speak of research validity, they are usually referring to qualitative research that is plausible, credible, trustworthy, and, therefore, defensible” (p. 282). The process of data interpretation should be uninhibited by preconceived ideas or bias. Reliable and valid findings are dependent on a researcher demonstrating high moral standards (McNabb, 2016). I created a case study database to further substantiate the findings which include the raw data, which is available for independent inspection (Yin, 2009). I searched for disconfirming evidence, or negative cases, as this extra layer is considered a valuable strategy for assessing the credibility or validity of qualitative research claims (Booth, Carroll, Ilott, Low, & Cooper, 2013; Denzin & Lincoln, 2011). I also searched for disconfirming evidence toward the end of my study, as it was then possible to identify conflicting data. This additional round allowed me to refine themes to better represent the theoretical ideas resulting from the study (Antin, Constantine, & Hunt, 2015; Booth et al., 2013).

Triangulation, a validation approach based on the search for convergence of the results obtained by using multiple methods, data sources, and/or theoretical perspectives, was utilized
(Johnson & Christensen, 2017). By studying various forms of data, I was better able to draw important themes and insights. I made efforts to establish a well-organized and thorough audit trail by maintaining electronic files organized chronologically. I utilized Google Drive to organize interview spreadsheets, note-taking documents, and audio files. After the transcripts were created, I shared the information therein with participants via a Google folder. Finally, I also archived my thoughts about interpretations, themes, and insights in my reflective journal.

As Creswell (2013) states, “ethical validation means that all research agendas must question their underlying moral assumptions, their political and ethical implications, and the equitable treatment of diverse voices” (p. 248). Throughout my interviews, document analysis, and writing, I asked and answered this question: What am I learning? This question helped shape my moral assumptions, political implications, and equitable treatment of diverse voices. Lincoln and Guba (1985) explain that the trustworthiness of a research study is crucial when evaluating contributions to scholarship. For this study, I used multiple methods, which are recommended for credibility, transferability, and dependability. Multiple methods include: triangulation, thick description, inquiry audit, and reflexivity (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). To ensure trustworthiness, I rigorously monitored the implementation of the research methodology and made changes where necessary throughout the research process (Denzin & Lincoln, 2017).

**Issues of Bias**

As stated earlier, I am currently a Ph.D. candidate and a former graduate research assistant in the NCSU Department of Educational Leadership, Policy, and Human Development. My involvement in NCSU’s MSA program may give the appearance of a conflict of interest, bias, and the perceived inability to separate myself from my research study (Marshall & Rossman, 2016). Though a valid concern, my overarching goal in conducting this inquiry was to
examine how EELP programs recruit and select candidates who are likely to be successful as school leaders. Consequently, I approached this study with the objective of teasing apart some of the nuanced processes and activities that exist in the initial stages of SLPPs. Given the nature of the research questions I asked, study participants were able to share both positive and negative comments, concerns, areas for improvement, and hopes for the future of this work. A need exists to confront both the weaknesses and promises of SLPPs. I believe that program leaders want to learn more about how other programs are innovating, where they are finding success, as well as insights into the best ways to respond to areas for possible improvement within their own programs. According to McCarthy (2015), if school leadership programs are to “survive, thrive, and meet the needs of the next generation of school leaders,” then it is “imperative to be open to different viewpoints and new ideas, to take reasonable—and at times both—risks, and to question deeply held values and assumptions” at the foundation of the field (p. 431).

**Ethical Issues**

The data collection process for this study did not begin until the study was approved by the NCSU IRB. The IRB process works to protect human subjects during research studies. The process required me to summarize the contents of my research proposal and provide copies of the instruments I used to collect data as well as any consent forms I asked research participants to sign.

As a qualitative researcher who collected data from people and organizations responsible for the education of students and future school leaders, I upheld my duty to use the most ethically appropriate measures to protect the individuals and institutions that took part in this study. On the importance of holding oneself to the highest ethical standards during the research process, Stake (1995) notes that qualitative researchers “are guests in the private spaces of the world.
Their manners should be good and their code of ethics strict” (p. 165). I addressed additional issues of ethics in my subjectivity statement.

Limitations

Limitations are discussed in chapter 5.

Chapter Summary

This chapter provided a description of how I conducted a qualitative, multiple case study designed to understand how EELP award-winning programs recruit and select candidates who are likely to be successful as school leaders. My design enabled me to take an in-depth approach to qualitative inquiry on this subject. By using interview data, document analysis, and observation conducted through an iterative coding process, I was able to present a rich, thick description of recruitment and selection processes at nationally renowned school leadership programs. The following chapters describe the themes uncovered in the data and implications for educational leaders, researchers, and policymakers to better recognize and more positively address effective recruitment and selection processes for aspiring school leader candidates.
CHAPTER 4: FINDINGS AND ANALYSIS

The purpose of this study was to describe the recruitment and selection activities of school leadership preparation programs that have been identified as exemplary, a title bestowed from winning the Exemplary Educational Leadership Program (EELP) award by the University Council for Educational Administration (UCEA). The study explored the recruitment and selection practices of five EELPs. The findings provide a more comprehensive understanding of recruitment and selection strategies in School Leader Preparation Programs (SLPPs) and could serve as a resource to other programs that are geared toward making changes or improvements to their leadership preparation programs. Additionally, program leaders and educational policymakers could benefit from the insights gained on the recruitment and selection processes taking place within EELPs. The findings could also provide a guiding framework for recruitment and selection policies. The following research questions framed the study:

1. In what ways do exemplary SLPPs recruit and select candidates who they believe are likely to be successful as school leaders?
   a. What knowledge, skills, and dispositions do programs seek, and what recruitment and selection activities help them in identifying individuals with the requisite attributes?
   b. What are the systematic recruitment and selection plans of EELPs? Do the programs rely on multiple sources of evidence and show deliberate efforts to attract and admit applicants who demonstrate leadership potential? If so, in what ways?
c. Does a connection exist between stated program values, mission, vision, and intentionally designed recruitment and selection processes? If so, how are they connected?

d. What are similarities, commonalities, and differences of EELP awardees’ recruitment and selection processes and activities?

The focus of this study was to investigate how five nationally award-winning SLPPs recruit and select aspiring leadership candidates who are likely to be successful as school leaders. This research also explores the knowledge, skills, and dispositions these programs seek in candidates and how their recruitment and selection activities identify individuals with the requisite attributes. This study contributes to our understanding of recruitment and selection by examining the specific recruitment and selection activities and strategies of exemplary SLLPs. I used qualitative case study methods to describe the recruitment and selection process at five U.S. universities that received an EELP Award from UCEA. The EELP award, sponsored by The Wallace Foundation, is awarded to a university-based program that demonstrates exemplary educational leadership preparation and is a national model for supporting the success of future school leaders. According to Cosner (2018), exemplary leadership preparation “represents a stretch goal for the field of educational leadership” (p. 2). As of July 2019, only five leadership preparation programs in the U.S. have received the formal designation of exemplary by UCEA. This study centers on understanding the ways in which the five EELPs recruit and select candidates they believe are likely to be successful as school leaders. Table 4.1 shows a summary of how research questions were answered, along with corresponding themes.
Table 4.1 Research Question Table

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Research Question</th>
<th>Data Sources</th>
<th>Summary of Data</th>
<th>Theme(s)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>In what ways do exemplary SLPPs recruit and select candidates who they believe are likely to be successful as school leaders?</td>
<td>Interviews with program administrators, EELP applications, Recruitment PowerPoints &amp; flyers, Research articles, Program websites</td>
<td>Relationships with programs and districts, prospective candidates, community members, and alumni help facilitate recruitment and selection. These relationships developed through a variety of efforts including individual conversations with district partners, social media messaging, and word of mouth recruitment. While maintaining different methods, visions, and processes, the five EELPs highlighted in this study all believe in the importance of being forthright with prospective candidates about the missions of their organizations and their commitment to equity. Four out of five programs use rubrics during their selection events and invite multiple stakeholders into the process in an effort to ensure candidates are identified and assessed in a multidimensional way (USLC does not hold a selection event).</td>
<td>Formal and Informal Relationships as a Multifaceted Contributor to Recruitment and Selection. Equity Focused Leadership as the Foundation for Identifying and Selecting Prospective Candidates.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>What knowledge, skills, and dispositions do programs seek, and what recruitment and selection activities help them in identifying individuals with the requisite attributes?</td>
<td>Interviews with program administrators, EELP applications, Research articles, Program websites</td>
<td>Each participant offered a unique perspective of equity, yet all programs expressed an overarching commitment to recruiting and selecting leaders who possess a mindset of valuing and advocating for socially just outcomes for all students. Uniformity seems to exist in the experience of having candidates self-select in or out of EELPs, although the way self-selection materialized differed from program to program.</td>
<td>Equity Focused Leadership as the Foundation for Identifying and Selecting Prospective Candidates. The Evolution of Candidate Self-Selection as EELPs Developed Over Time.</td>
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</tbody>
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Table 4.1 (continued).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Research Question</th>
<th>Data Sources</th>
<th>Summary of Data</th>
<th>Theme(s)</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>What are the systematic recruitment and selection plans of EELPs? Do the programs rely on multiple sources of evidence and show deliberate efforts to attract and admit applicants who demonstrate leadership potential? If so, in what ways?</td>
<td>Interviews with program administrators, EELP applications, Recruitment PowerPoints &amp; flyers, Research articles, Program websites</td>
<td>Participants often referenced their specific processes (formal graduate school applications, writing samples, scenario-based assessment events, dispositional observations, etc.); however, participants also discussed candidate self-selection or filtering as a contributor to why a prospective applicant might choose to apply or not apply to their program. Uniformity seems to exist in the experience of having candidates self-select in or out of EELPs, although the way self-selection materialized differed from program to program. Many ELPPs had recruitment and selection processes that always consisted of items such as word of mouth recruitment, flyers, a required nomination from current leaders, co-selection process with district leaders, and a team of people conducting the candidate assessment. Yet, all programs discussed how their recruitment and selection have progressed over time as they learned how to recruit and select school leaders more effectively. Implementing changes to selection processes demanded that EELP program administrators revisit and evaluate any changes to determine if they succeeded with the intended results. All EELPs have at least one program administrator working on continuous improvement work in recruitment and selection. Major changes included four out of five EELPs adding a scenario-based activity in their selection events.</td>
<td>The Evolution of Candidate Self-Selection as EELPs Developed Over Time. Continuous Improvement in Recruitment and Selection.</td>
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Table 4.1 (continued)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Research Question</th>
<th>Data Sources</th>
<th>Summary of Data</th>
<th>Theme(s)</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Does a connection exist between stated program values, mission, vision, and intentionally designed recruitment and selection processes? If so, how are they connected?</td>
<td>Interviews with program administrators, EELP applications, Recruitment PowerPoints &amp; flyers, Research articles, Program websites</td>
<td>All EELPs have a form of candidate self-selection, where a prospective applicant is engaged very early in conversations about unique and rewarding areas of the program and potentially challenging aspects of the program. All EELPs have a goal to recruit and select prospective students who are capable and align with the specific program mission and values. Advertising a program brand is a compelling venue to help candidates self-select and determine if they are the right fit for a program. Helping prospective students self-select by advertising a mission, promoting a culture, selling benefits, and using unique recruitment tools helps EELPs achieve their recruitment and selection goals. All programs indicated, to varying degrees, their work to amend or change university policies which negatively affect their ability to recruit and select leadership candidates as they deem appropriate.</td>
<td>The Evolution of Candidate Self-Selection as EELPs Developed Over Time. Higher Education Politics and Bureaucracy as an Inhibitor to Change, Innovation, and Shared Values in Recruitment and Selection.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Research Question</td>
<td>Data Sources</td>
<td>Summary of Data</td>
<td>Theme(s)</td>
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<td>---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>What are similarities, commonalities, and differences of EELP awardees’ recruitment and selection processes and activities?</td>
<td>Interviews with program administrators</td>
<td>All programs place value on leadership recruitment and selection but convey differing methods and philosophies regarding their recruitment and selection. Findings suggest that most EELPs express heightened attention on selection activities, as recruitment efforts were discussed less frequently in interviews and fewer recruitment documents were collected. UEL has a structured recruitment and outreach plan and comprehensive selection process including multi-day training of selection evaluators and a research team aiding in the creation of selection rubrics.</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>EELP applications</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Recruitment</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>PowerPoints &amp; flyers</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Research articles</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Program websites</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>On the other hand, USLC does not have a formal recruitment plan, relies on informal conversations for recruitment and selection, and has an open-access approach to candidate selection. NELA, DU, and UW utilize district partnerships, word-of-mouth recruitment, and electronic communication to aid in recruitment and have comprehensive selection plans and processes. Participants noted that their specific partnership, geographical location, program mission, budgetary constraints, and faculty/staff model influence their approach to recruitment and selection.</td>
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</table>
**Participants and Context**

The five EELP programs are university-based programs that prepare leaders to lead in elementary, middle, or high schools or are a program focusing on the development of district-level leadership. The Urban School Leadership Collaborative (USLC) is a master’s level, cohort-based principal preparation program at the University of Texas at San Antonio (UTSA) dedicated to developing leadership capacity within the San Antonio Independent School District (SAISD) and districts in South Bexar County (TX). The doctorate in education program (Ed.D.) in Urban Educational Leadership (UEL) at the University of Illinois at Chicago (UIC) is designed to prepare and develop principals who are able to lead significantly improved teaching and learning in urban schools, many of whom lead in Chicago Public Schools (CPS). The Ritchie Program for School Leaders: Executive Leadership for Successful Schools (Ritchie ELSS) at the University of Denver (DU) is a Master of Arts (MA) program to prepare candidates for leadership roles by focusing on the development of school leadership competencies with a focus on turnaround leadership. A Master of School Administration (MSA) cohort-based program, NC State University’s (NCSU) Northeast Leadership Academy (NELA) seeks to increase student achievement by preparing and retaining principals in high-poverty, hard-to-staff, and historically low-performing schools in North Carolina (NC). The Leadership for Learning (L4L) Ed.D. at the University of Washington (UW) is a three-year, cohort-based program designed for educators who lead in a range of school, policy, and related educational settings. Table 4.2 summarizes the main components of EELPs.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Program</th>
<th>Launched</th>
<th>Degree/ certification</th>
<th>Program structure</th>
<th>Program candidates</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>University of Illinois at</td>
<td>2002</td>
<td>Doctor of Education/EdD.</td>
<td>Students complete coursework in 3 ½ years with as much as one additional year to</td>
<td>Applicants who are outstanding teachers and assistant principals seeking to transition to school leadership positions, as well as principals desiring to take their schools to the next level.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chicago</td>
<td></td>
<td>PK-12 principal certificate after 18 months, including the 12-month principal residency and 44 hours of coursework.</td>
<td>complete the doctoral research project, for a total of 4 ½ years.</td>
<td>Actively working in urban schools, mostly in Chicago.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Eligibility for a Certificate of Advanced Study, after 20 more hours of coursework and passing grades on a series of authentic performance assessments.</td>
<td>15-20 candidates per cohort. Self-sustaining program supported by direct tuition dollars.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>UT San Antonio</td>
<td>2003</td>
<td>MSA</td>
<td>Two-year program.</td>
<td>Educators seeking to become transformational leaders committed to social justice advocacy who can work effectively in diverse, ambiguous and challenging contexts.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Texas Principal Certification</td>
<td>15-18 candidates per cohort. Self-sustaining program supported by direct tuition dollars.</td>
<td>Actively working in Texas.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>University of Denver</td>
<td>2003</td>
<td>MA in Educational Leadership Colorado Principal License</td>
<td>30-quarter-hour curriculum for the Certificate, leading to a principal license, integrates coursework with an internship.</td>
<td>Applicants who are outstanding teachers seeking to transition to school leadership positions or current school principals seeking to transition to district leadership.</td>
</tr>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>10-15 candidates per cohort. Self-sustaining program supported by direct tuition dollars.</td>
<td>Actively working in Colorado.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
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Table 4.2 (continued).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Program</th>
<th>Launched</th>
<th>Degree/ certification</th>
<th>Program structure</th>
<th>Program candidates</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| NC State University           | 2010     | Mater of School Administration  
|                               |          | NC Principal License (certification) | Two-year program with full-time internship in the second year  
|                               |          |                         | 10-15 candidates per cohort.  
|                               |          |                         | Grant funded program. Since 2010, NCSU’s program has been supported by over $27 million in grant awards.  
|                               |          |                         | Exemplary teachers with high leadership potential seeking to become school leaders in high-need, hard-to-staff schools in NC.  
|                               |          |                         | Graduates make a three-year post degree commitment to lead high-need schools in NC. Graduates sign a promissory note for the amount of the tuition fellowship with the provision that one-third of the obligation will be forgiven at the end of each year of subsequent employment in the partner districts.  
| University of Washington      | 2002     | Doctor of Education/EdD  
|                               |          | Washington State Super-intendent Certification (optional)  
|                               |          | Washington State Program Administrator Certification (optional) | Three-year program.  
|                               |          |                         | 25-35 candidates per cohort.  
|                               |          |                         | Self-sustaining program supported by direct tuition dollars.  
|                               |          |                         | Mid-career educational leaders in various roles with a master’s degree and demonstrated experience leading for equity at a systems level.  
|                               |          |                         | Actively working in Washington.  

Recruiting and Selecting Educational Leaders: Within-Case Analysis

University of Illinois at Chicago Ed.D. in Urban Education Leadership. The inquiry into recruitment and selection practices revealed a program that places paramount importance on rigorous recruitment and selection. The Ed.D. in Urban Education Leadership (UEL) program administrator discussed multiple sources of evidence for their recruitment and selection and detailed various mechanisms for the ways UEL recruits and selects candidates. As the major categories of recruitment and selection emerged through analysis, two overarching themes materialized in significant ways.

Theme 1: Relationship building as a focus of recruitment strategy. Relationship building at UEL serves as the foundation for recruitment strategy and execution. The recruitment strategy is manifested through a structured recruitment plan complete with specific outreach targets for people, organizations, and communities. Through a continuous recruitment cycle, UEL seeks to reach prospective candidates through a variety of online and in-person events and meetings. By designing innovative networking processes and practices, UEL highlights its program alumni while also expanding the network of stakeholders who know of and value the UEL program and candidates. Faculty and staff involved in the UEL share responsibility for various aspects of recruitment, however, specific staffing structures are put in place to ensure a robust and sincere effort to identify, recruit, and enroll the most promising candidates.

UEL recruitment responsibility. In 2001, faculty at UEL began to ask themselves “What would it take to consistently prepare urban school leaders to measurably improve student learning in high-need schools?” (Cosner, 2012, p. 127). After more than a decade, UEL was able to create a role for a staff member who devotes a significant amount of time to the recruitment of prospective candidates. This role is an important facet of candidate recruitment strategy and
execution at UEL. According to the program administrator, the primary recruitment goal for the program is to locate and attract individuals who demonstrate the greatest potential to transform the high-need schools they are eventually expected to lead. While recruitment is technically an aspect of every position with UEL, the primary task falls heavily on one program administrator in UEL. Prior to their position, recruitment was haphazard and inconsistent.

**Targeted recruitment.** UEL has a strategic written recruitment plan to guide the program in recruitment activities throughout the year. Their recruitment plan places significant importance on the cultivation of relationships as a source of prospective candidate recruitment:

Really there was not a written plan when I came on board, so it involved a lot of internet searches. Who are the organizations out there that are turning out teachers for organizations? Who out there who might be membership bodies for principals or other sorts of administrators? And then making phone calls, sending out emails, making introductions, and getting to know the people behind those organizations. So, it really focused on who the players are in the city and in the state. Some connections had been made by the program. In some cases, [the founding director], said ‘Call so and so, they might have some ideas about organizations you can reach out to. They might be a fertile ground for you to go and make some presentations.’ So, it was a combination. I would say it all lived in [the founding director’s] head, but there was actually nothing on paper, and there was nothing really strategic about how we approach these organizations until I came on board.

UEL has a faculty and staffing structure that allows the program administrator to devote a significant amount of time to the recruitment of prospective candidates. I came to view their role as an important facet of candidate recruitment strategy and execution at UEL. As will be
discussed more in the cross-case analysis, the notion of relationship building is a complex theme for all participants and one that is an important prerequisite to successful and effective recruitment in EELPs. UEL has a strategic written recruitment plan to guide the program in recruitment activities throughout the year. Their recruitment plan places significant importance on the cultivation of relationships as a source of prospective candidate recruitment. It includes individual meetings and targeted outreach to people and organizations. For example, UEL has a document that details ongoing meetings with stakeholders including UIC College of Education Alumni, approved Chicago area teacher certification programs, Illinois Network of Charter Schools, and nonprofit education advocacy and support organizations. Key contacts, titles, dates, and outreach/meeting details are included in the document. The document also includes a timeline of outreach, details of the type and context of the outreach, and notes including wording for specific forwardable emails “I went to UIC, here’s why you should, too!” (UEL Recruitment Plan, 2019). UEL has a database of all recruitment contacts with granular information detailing individuals who registered to attend an information session but were a ‘no show.’ The importance of recruitment at UEL is clear. UEL has an Ed.D. Leadership Advisory Board and the meetings include a discussion of recruitment outreach and strategies.

The program administrator discussed the importance of making time for one on one meetings with prospective candidates, networking with education organizations in Chicago and throughout Illinois, visiting schools to present to principals, and heavily utilizing email communication to stay engaged with program alumni:

I'll reach out to anybody who has ever expressed an interest in the program. I keep a database of prospective students. If they reached out six years ago…and they haven't submitted an application and they haven't told me, ‘Stop emailing me,’ I’ll send a
periodic email [to them checking in and asking] ‘Hey, [I] wanted to see if you're still thinking about becoming a principal. Let me know if you have any questions…here is our upcoming information session.’

Clearly, UEL has a faculty and staffing structure that allows the program administrator to devote a significant amount of time to the recruitment of prospective candidates.

*Celebrating program alumni and students.* The program also places substantial time and effort into maintaining and deepening relationships with program alumni. UEL views word of mouth recruitment as a key opportunity for recruiting talent. Since its inception, the UEL program has continuously improved its print, on-line, and in-person recruitment strategies, largely in partnership with Chicago Public Schools (CPS), to ensure that accurate and inviting information about the program is disseminated to the most promising candidate pools. One of the newest messaging vehicles includes the biweekly newsletter, which UEL began in November 2019. The program administrator said:

It's been tremendously successful and a lot of times our principals or other alumni will reach out and say, ‘I got this award. Can you put me in the newsletter?’ I think it's been a way for people to remain in touch with the program in a way that's not terribly intrusive. It's not me sending a personal email. It's just, ‘Here's a newsletter. Look at what your colleagues are doing. Don't forget there's an information session on June 1, so please send this [flyer] to your teachers.’

Not only does the newsletter provide an avenue for sharing program information such as recruitment events, but it also helps to cultivate relationships with alumni by highlighting their accomplishments, provides interesting and relevant leadership focused articles, and brings attention to events and opportunities of note. From the November 2018 Newsletter:
Thank you to everyone who has shared the good news that highlights the amazing work of our EdD students, alumni, and faculty. In this issue you will read about: Fall 2018 Stone Early Childhood Education Fellows; Career Developments of our Students and Alumni; UIC Center for Urban Education Leadership and P-3 Leadership Development for Underserved Schools; UIC EdD in Urban Education Leadership Information Sessions; Upcoming Events; and Resources for School Leaders.

**Continuous recruitment.** UEL makes a sincere effort to host online information sessions, in-person information sessions at UEL, and in-person information sessions at public schools around Chicago. Unlike other graduate programs in the College of Education at UIC, the Ed.D. program holds bimonthly recruitment/information sessions for prospective candidates, led by academic and clinical faculty. This assortment of information session offerings allows prospective candidates multiple opportunities and mediums to learn more about the program and “take the next step.” The program administrator noted that most people who participate in an online session will still come to an in-person session at a later date.

**Diversity and inclusion efforts.** Many of the urban schools that eventually hire UEL graduates are largely African-American and Hispanic in enrollment. Accordingly, the program administrator said the UEL program attracts substantial candidates from these two population groups, and they have historically comprised the majority of candidates admitted. Targeted recruitment efforts to African American and Hispanic organizations and affinity groups help diversify recruitment efforts. Examples of outreach include presentations to the UIC Office of Multicultural Student Affairs and Alumni Association. UEL partners with CPS and acknowledges that the school district has a large stake in the recruitment and selection of candidates and understand they “have to pound the pavement and beat the bushes and help us to
identify the people who were best to be in the pipeline of their future leaders. So that [partnership] has really grown over time.” CPS has many affinity groups within the district and UEL’s contact at CPS will provide a list of individuals who identify as African American or Hispanic who may be interested in pursuing an Ed.D. When discussing the value of having CPS principals provide recommendations to prospective candidates, the administrator said, “I can't think of a time when we had a principal recommend someone and that person has not shown up at least to an information session.” UEL also joined forces with the Chicago Public Education Fund (CPEF), a self-identified liaison between principal prep programs and CPS. This organization views themselves as a mediator and facilitator to help decide what the principal pipeline should look like. “I would say that it seems more like a joint partnership now” [than when the program administrator began at UEL].

*In-house research staff aiding recruitment and selection practices.* While UEL has formed valuable partnerships outside of the program, they also benefit from the partnerships and knowledge of researchers in their Center for Urban Education Leadership (CUEL) at UIC. As the field of school leader preparation undergoes changes in efforts to improvement preparation (Darling-Hammond, LaPointe, Meyerson, & Orr, 2007; Manna, 2015), UEL has made progress in many facets of their program and rely on research-based decision making in all areas of their program. Ongoing research and work at CUEL occurs regarding the best and most innovative practices for school leader recruitment and selection. Future publications and white papers are likely to include new research on enhanced recruitment and selection practices.

*Theme 2: Research-based decision making drives innovative recruitment and selection processes.* UEL instituted what they call selective candidate selection practices in 2003. Although the process has undergone numerous iterative changes since 2003, UEL has always
required multiple measures of candidate performance evidence, including a professional practices portfolio and in-person simulation, to support their assessment of urban school leadership potential prior to program admission. When asked about the evolution of the selection process, the program administrator remarked that in the early days of the programs, a lot of selection revolved around gut decisions by program faculty and administrators:

[Program faculty and administrators] said, “I think they have what it takes to be a great principal.” We hired a researcher and [the researcher] said, ‘We have to be a little bit more systematic about this. We can't just admit people based on [program faculty and administrator] feelings on a given day.’ [CUEL researchers] really did a tremendous job and did some research on what other principal prep programs were doing and what other doctoral programs were doing, and it was very impressive.

*Evolution of selection improvement efforts.* The overarching question which guided the evolution of UEL selection activities: “What candidate characteristics predict later success as a school leader and how do we select for these characteristics?” The CUEL researchers worked with program faculty and identified a series of domains for candidate selection. Researchers asked questions of faculty and CPS partners such as “What kinds of dispositions are you seeing your students have that are serving them well?” and “What kinds of dispositions do we need to be weeding out?” The program administrator noted that “over time, we have determined that we are looking for evidence in seven different domains of candidate promise, which are illustrated in three groupings: dispositions, professional practice, and ethics.” The three “disposition” domains include: Strengths as a learner in the context of urban schools and diverse populations; Personal commitment to equity and excellence for students; and Presence and attitude as a leader. The three “professional practice” domains are: Deep instructional knowledge for diverse populations;
Collaborative orientation to working with and leading adults; and Educational systems management expertise (Walker et al., 2017). When discussing the selection process, the program administrator explained some of the requirements:

We also ask them to prepare a portfolio for us and we give them some examples of the kinds of artifacts that we're looking for. Years ago, we used to get portfolio binders that were this big (participant indicates a very large binder). And so now we're getting portfolios that are 20 pages. They're a lot more targeted and focused on the kinds of things that we want to see that might demonstrate the kinds of dispositions and the kinds of leadership domains that we want to see. For example, we want to see that they've been able to move student achievement in their classrooms as classroom teachers. We want to see some evidence that they've been able to galvanize a core group of teachers toward a common vision. And we want to see that they've been able to be able to look at achievement from a school wide perspective and not necessarily just from their classroom perspective, so that portfolio is helpful there.

UEL aims to select the best people for the purposes of developing particular forms of leadership in schools. More specifically, they aim to develop leaders who demonstrate successful performance as assessed against Illinois professional leadership standards, positive impact on school performance and student learning in urban contexts, and aptitude for ongoing development as a school or district education leader. To fulfill these goals, UEL attempts to:

…see what they're thinking. But we also want to know habit. What is their leadership presence like? How are they going to present to an IOT or to a grade level team or to a group of parents? How are they coming across as leaders?
Training candidate assessment staff, faculty, and volunteers. Each prospective UEL candidate is reviewed by a panel of three people closely affiliated with the program. The makeup of the three people includes a combination of faculty members, leadership coaches, CUEL research staff members, and UEL program graduates currently working in a leadership position. The UEL selection process includes two phases:

1) review of application materials and a review of in-person performances and interview. Panel members complete a 35-item selection packet organized around six of the seven domains described earlier. Interviewers rate each application element on two or more of the domains using a six-point developmental scale: red flag, undeveloped, emerging, developing, advanced, and exemplary (Walker et al., 2017, p. 8).

2) To ensure equitable selection practices, UEL “developed modules for training interview panel members and calibrating them to the rating system” (Continuous Improvement Brief, p. 8).

When asked about the training process for interviewers/assessors, the UEL program administrator explained that the program collectively decides what dispositions, experiences, traits they are seeking and conducts training with interviewers/assessors two times prior to the selection events. In most cases, it is “a retraining because we don't have any new people involved. This year, but it'll be a refresher training for folks. And we'll probably get that done sometime in early June.” UEL strives to “leverage is the expertise of our coaches. Again, these are folks who have been assistant principals, principals, [and] associate superintendents [in CPS], so they know what they're looking for. We asked them, ‘You tell us what it is that we need to be seeing in these candidates’ when they come in.” During the training, coaches and UEL program
administrators have robust conversations about the kinds of things that they have seen over the years. The conservation is documented and indicators “that people might be good at each of these sorts of things that they're going to be called to do in a leadership position.” UEL program administrators rely on the assessors and “don't necessarily tell them what to look for. They tell us what to look for. And then we try to figure out how to codify it and make sure that there's a way for [the selection team] to document that they're seeing.”

Although UEL shared many artifacts, information about the selection team interview training was not submitted or specifically requested. UEL is the only EELP program that indicated having a multi-day required training for individuals taking part in candidate selection events.

**Candidate assessment.** In assessing applicant characteristics, UEL engages in a holistic review process, described as mission and values driven by a recent report of the Council of Graduate Schools (CGS) (Kent & McCarthy, 2016). According to the report, UEL considers “a broad range of characteristics, including noncognitive and personal attributes.” In doing so, UEL seeks to achieve a diverse student body while also selecting for “characteristics they believe are more likely than traditional measures of test scores or grade point averages to be related to student success in a career” (Walker et al., 2017, p.10).

In summary, UEL demonstrates a continuous recruitment process, characterized by a commitment to cultivating relationships with people, organizations, and agencies. A major mechanism behind this effort lies in the creation of a staff role to lead recruitment efforts at UEL. By devoting significant time to networking, meetings, and recruitment events, the message of UEL is spread robustly. Finally, a devotion to highlighting the successes of program alumni and
students via different media channels extends the reach of the program and widens the pipeline of prospective candidates.

University of Texas at San Antonio Urban School Leaders Collaborative. In contrast to the selective admissions at UEL, USLC “does not gatekeep the admissions process,” but “encompasses an approach that not everyone may be open to or comfortable to engage in.” Informal conversations are the main recruitment and selection process.

Theme 1: Equity driven barrier-less approach to selection. USLC maintains a strong social justice focus by recruiting and nominating students who are “committed to aggressive reform and improvement; committed and competent to work in diverse and increasingly complex cultural contexts; and willing to engage in deep reflection for the purpose of self-discovery and to establish a strong sense of self, who they are, and what they stand for as they prepare to become leaders for social justice” (Garza & Merchant, 2015, p. 33). This mission serves as the rationale for their recruitment philosophy and selection practice. Information conversations are the main recruitment and selection tool. While informal, the community bonds and strength of relationship allow USLC to grow in prominence in the districts it serves with a strong reputation for preparing excellent and socially just school leaders.

Barrier-less recruitment. The program is open to all qualified applicants who work in their two partner districts, San Antonio Independent School District (SAIAD) and Bexar County, a San Antonio metropolitan area which includes several small school districts in the southern part of Bexar County. The initial partnership between USLC and SAISD began due to an informal relationship between program administrators which formed during childhood. The partnership with Bexar County evolved in a similar informal fashion. The USLC program administrator stressed the program’s mission to admit candidates who want to be a part of the
program and seek to “be a social justice leader” (USLC Recruitment Flyer, 2018). Although there was an acknowledgment of the partnering districts on recruitment flyers, there is no noticeable formal collaboration with districts for the recruitment and selection of students. The USLC program administrator discussed conducting all recruitment and selection events, although they accept nominations from district partners and recruit on their campuses. This lack of formal collaboration seen in this study does not mean that a formal collaboration does not exist, it simply means a formal relationship was not noticeable in an interview and document analysis of USLC materials.

Admissions tension with UTSA Graduate School. Although the USLA program is open to all candidates who apply and express a commitment to socially just leadership, the admissions process for USLC is the same as the admissions process for graduate programs at UTSA. This admissions process requires:

- Conferral of a baccalaureate degree from a regionally accredited college or university in the U.S. or proof of equivalent training at a foreign institution; Transcripts and a grade point average of at least 3.0 (on a 4.0 scale) in the last 60 semester credit hours of coursework for the baccalaureate degree, as well as in all graduate-level work taken; A Resume; One letter of recommendation addressing the applicant’s administrative leadership capabilities from the principal of the school at which the applicant currently teaches or most recently taught; or a former cohort member or immediate supervisor; A statement of purpose which outlines: (1) the applicant’s reasons for pursuing the master’s degree and principal certification; (2) a biographical sketch of the applicant’s experiences relevant to the field of education, including the leadership roles the applicant has held in his/her teaching position(s), (3) the applicant’s career plans, and (4) the applicant’s views
on one current educational or future educational reform effort. (USLC Admissions Letter, 2018).

*Informal conversations.* A review of recruitment materials details the program’s focus on “attitudes and mindsets initially, and then on skills” (USLC Recruitment Flyer, 2018). The program administrator discussed how conversations with prospective candidates help identify those who are a good fit for the program. They said, “if you want to learn about budgets, you're going to learn about budgets, but not in the traditional way. You're going to learn it and how you create a budget that's equitable for all students to have an opportunity to be successful.” The program administrator said a profile of a USLC student does not exist; however, they seek out candidates with “social justice orientation” who are able to talk about “race, culture, systems of oppression...we’re going to talk about racism. We’re talking about everything, but the spin we take on it is from an assets approach, rather than the deficits.” The program mission centers on instructional reform, particularly as applied to the education of Latinos and the socioeconomically disadvantaged. Program administrators discuss these topics in their individual conversations and dialogues with students along the recruitment journey, “so when students come into the program, there is no surprise what our program is about.” The program administrator described the extent to which they have developed relationships with prospective candidates, however, they did not specifically reference a systematic way they have conversations or describe the extent to which they track the conversations they have with students. While the program administrator talked about hosting information sessions, they did not reveal an agenda, PowerPoints, or specific information about the content of the session. However, they did discuss a conversation about a candidate’s desire to apply to USLC and develop into a social justice school leader, “By the time we get the applications [and] read the
statement of purpose, we've met that student multiple times.” The program administrator explained that “the take we have regarding the selection process is we don't neglect, we don't deny students” but added that in information sessions allow the program to ask questions that “are very much guiding them to think about their state in the program. We don't ask them, “Why is it that you want to be a principal? We asked them about critical issues facing education today. How would you reform that effort?”

The program administrator noted they recruit socially just leaders by “looking at [prospective applicants] in a critical way” and “engaging them to be very reflective in their own practice.” USLC spends time to make multiple interactions with prospective students so that their commitment to equity can be seen and heard:

[The interactions with prospective students] gauge us to [the equity orientation] students come in with, and it's good, because then we embed that statement of purpose into the program, because they're able to revisit that during their development as social justice leaders.

The program administrator described avenues for recruitment and specifically mentioned their partnerships with SAIAD and Bexar County.

**Theme 2: Informal relationships shape the value and culture of candidate recruitment and selection.** In addition to a focus on equity, USLC also conducts recruitment based on relationships, which is evident in the co-coordinators’ role, recruitment strategies, and advocacy efforts. The informal nature of relationships with partnering districts, prospective candidates, and district contacts define the culture at USLC. While there is no formal recruitment plan or formal strategy for relationship building, there is a focus on personal conversations with prospective students.
Former principals as a recruitment advantage. USLC has two program co-coordinators and they both have full responsibility for the recruitment of candidates. One of the coordinators directs the USAID cohort and the other coordinator directs the South Bexar cohort. Both co-coordinators are former principals and the program administrator viewed this background as an asset to recruitment by saying, “I think when we go out and recruit and we tell students that we've been former principals, former administrators ourselves, and that is a huge advantage that we have.” The program administrator suggested that developing relationships with prospective candidates was easier because they have been principals. The program administrator went on to elaborate on the experience of the program coordinators and suggested their background helps them identify with prospective candidates. For example, “When some students say, ‘Oh you have you been in the seat that I want to eventually be in.’ Or, ‘Oh, you've been in a secondary setting.’ We have [backgrounds as a] teacher, athletic coach, counselor, assistant principal in both elementary and high schools, and middle schools, to superintendent, district level administrators, campus coach, and work at the state agency for education.”

The program administrator emphasized the importance of building individual relationships within their local educational community and working to ensure that people in the community deeply understand the USLC program and how it differs from other SLPPs. Although they have traditional recruitment in the form of information sessions, email blasts, and flyers, the program administrator described a specific aspect of their recruitment:

When we do the information sessions, we always follow up with in personalized email to…all potential applicants who are interested in getting to know more about our program. By the time that we meet them and greet their applications, we've already…built a relationship.
The program administrator did not elaborate on the content of the information session, but shared a recruitment flyer which asked prospective students if they are “Interested in a Master’s Degree and a Principal Certification Program?” The program administrator acknowledged that they will ask anyone if they have considered serving as a school leader and do not seek out specific candidates.

*Making time for informal connections.* The origins of USLC reveal “long-standing personal relationships among individuals whose professional roles interested with one other” (Garza & Merchant, 2015, p. 40). The enduring nature of the USLC can be attributed, in part, to strong personal relationships from individuals at USLC and partner districts, program alumni, and faculty and staff colleagues at UTSA. Program co-coordinators devote time to making personal visits to schools, presenting information sessions to principals, and meeting with individual teachers in their classrooms to share about USLC. The timeline of recruitment is year-round and is combined with other school visits and meetings, even though the specific K-12 visit is perhaps made in order to collect data for other projects. Several times a month throughout the year, the program coordinators are in school buildings recruiting for the program. The participant described part of USLC recruitment effort this way:

> The majority of the recruitment [is accomplished by going to] visit them. We also have an opportunity [when working] with certain [UTSA] grants in our [partner] school districts. Whenever we…do data collection for this particular grant, we also…visit and knock on the classroom doors and invite teachers [who may be] be good candidates. We'll make that personalized visit and just invite them to apply. They remember that simple visit that even though it's not very formal visit.
The program administrator spoke at length about how important relationships were to recruitment and selection at USLC. However, there was not a mention of a tracking mechanism for candidate conversations, a cohesive strategy for recruitment, or a defined way to store, analyze, and save information on student outreach and engagement. The bulk of this information seemed to be stored inside the minds of the program administrators, rather than in a retrievable software application or electronic database.

*Word-of-mouth recruiting.* USLC has existed for 17 years and graduated over 160 students. The program administrator indicated that relationships with alumni are key for growing the program and attracting prospective candidates. Initially, the EELP award was given when the partnership was with SAIAD, even though the program has expanded to work with other districts in Bexar County. USLC relies on alumni to nominate educators for the program and learned that program graduates were more responsive to their request for nominations than were average principals. Former cohort members “were also more diligent and selective with their nominations. They felt that it was their responsibility to maintain the reputation of the USLC by nominating students that demonstrated a predisposition for social justice” (Garza & Merchant, 2015, p. 45). USLC administrators have worked to extend the opportunity to attend the program by contacting more schools. This new reach has broadened program relationships and allowed program administrators to present to principals in more schools. These presentations help with recruitment, but they also allow the program administrators to discuss the USLC’s focus on equity and relationships. The recruitment presentation is “the same one we give to the potential applicants so that principals understand this is not a certification program. This is a leadership development program whose focus is on developing equitable opportunities for all students.”
USLC maintains a belief that a candidate who demonstrates a commitment to equity/social justice and seeks to become a leader should be admitted into the program and supported in their leadership journey. A tension of selecting students who may not have the academic credentials UTSA Graduate School Requires is occasionally at odds with the recruitment philosophy of USLC. Unlike other EELPs, USLC only has two faculty working with the program and sharing in recruitment and selection efforts. The founding program co-coordinator has significant institutional and community knowledge which drives relationships with prospective candidates and partner districts. Those informal relationships have yet to be translated into construct plans/tracking mechanisms, leading to a more informal structure to recruitment and selection.

**University of Denver Ritchie Program for School Leaders and Executive Leadership for Successful Schools.** In 2003, the University of Denver (DU) and Denver Public Schools (DPS) partnered together to co-construct Ritchie ELSS. The 1-year certificate program originated from a shared vision and theory of action that transformative leadership is necessary for successful schools. DU and DPS collaborate on all facets of the program, including recruitment and selection. Values permeate every aspect of recruitment and selection, including the approach to engaging with students and the method and mechanisms designed to evaluate candidates. District engagement in the program has expanded to other districts and regions beyond DPS. Assessment of program candidates is shared between DU faculty and district partners, yet the actual selection often involves only one individual from each organization.

**Theme 1: Shared Values that guide the identification of ideal candidates.** Ritchie ELSS emphasized how the recruitment and selection process is deeply informed by their partnership with local school districts. The program administrator recalled the opportunity to co-create a
program with DPS, designed based on shared values. In 2003, DU and DPS co-constructed Ritchie ELSS to prepare principals for the district. The program “emanated from a shared theory of action that transformative and courageous leadership is critical to school success” (Korach et al., 2019, p. 2). Faculty at DU and DPS leaders co-constructed every element of the program, including the recruitment and selection process. The end goal was for Ritchie ELSS graduates to be prepared “to lead schools in the current system” but also brave enough to disrupt the status quo.

Candidate knowledge, skills, and dispositions. Recruiting the type of candidate who seeks to “change things” stems from “identifying the type of leader...that the district wanted.” The participant stated that DU and DPS “created a joint mission, and it was around...[developing] leaders who were courageous to tackle the status quo.” They also seek candidates who are “relentless, courageous, knowledgeable, highly skilled, and committed to building learning communities designed to accelerate the achievement and success of each and every student” in DPS (Korach, 2005, p. 3). This idea was echoed in my interview with the program administrator who often spoke of candidates who “fight against the status quo.”

Use of district channels for recruitment. For recruitment, Ritchie ELSS relies heavily on information being sent through channels in their partnership with DPS. Events such as recruitment information sessions, the distribution of program flyers, and documents containing information about the admissions are filtered through a contact a DPS. The program also has numerous personal conversations with principals in DPS about “identifying talent and aspiring leaders.” Since the program began in 2003, they have amassed a significant presence of program graduates leading schools in DPS. Program alumni assist in recruitment efforts by identifying and referring potential candidates, as well as participating in the selection of students. According
to the program administrator, many prospective candidates apply to the program because of their interactions with school leaders who are program alumni. The strong reputation of the Ritchie ELSS has also helped with recruitment efforts. The program administrator said, “the program is so established and well known within the district and principals see it as a way that also gives them professional development and support because of the engagement of...their faculty in the program.”

*Information sessions.* Information sessions are planned in collaboration with DPS and happen formally about three times a year. Ritchie ELSS receives “a lot of informal and nominations as well.” Shared values emanate from the student experience in recruitment and selection. A program focus on values stems from a leadership framework composed of action science, systems change, and culture and “was designed to provide strategic and conceptual support for aspiring and practicing school leaders as they navigate the complex human and technical domains of school leadership” (Korach, 2019). The program administrator revealed the origins of Ritchie ELSS and the aim to partner with students. “So, we didn't start it and say, ‘This is our program.’ We started it in that we have this great opportunity, and we are all kind of working on making this happen.” The program administrator discussed how Ritchie ELSS views their students as adding to the program:

As we were building [the program], we were continually gathering data and making modification. And we expected [students] to contribute to the development of it. And so, when you start something in that very generative way, it builds credibility.

The program and Ritchie ELSS /DPS team worked to actualize the co-created values through the design of multiple aspects of their program, including the candidate selection process. Selection
at Ritchie ELSS is a formal, multi-step process that involves collaboration among district partners.

**Theme 2: Multi-stop approach to candidate selection with a focus on utilizing scenarios to assess leadership competencies.** As stated previously, DU utilizes a selection process designed “not for students who were already able to tackle the status quo, but who were capable of doing that.” There is a focus on admitting students who are not experts, but who demonstrate an ability to learn and grow. In order to admit these students, the co-created selection process involves an experiential interview process complete with behavior event prompts, scenarios designed to demonstrate leadership competencies, and an opportunity to reflect on responses. This “approach to selection and modeled action of reflection begins their initiation into the program’s value of relationships and partnerships” (Korach, 2019).

From the initial application, prospective students are aware that Ritchie ELSS and the district are collaborating to provide the leadership program and select the candidates in it. Each application is reviewed by a collaborative team from Ritchie ELSS and DPS. Once reviewed, the team rates each candidate on a matrix. Then, the applicants are ranked and ordered and a DU/DPS team identifies candidates to bring to the selection process. When asked about the makeup of the team, the program administrator said the composition of the team has shifted over the years:

This year, for example, it was me and one district person. And then we invite people based off of [the candidate ranking matrix], so it's all numerically based ratings. So we identify from the list if there are people that do not make the count, we don't think that they're ready for an interview. And then all those that are that we are interested in interviewing. Obviously, transcripts are a part of that too.
Instead of a recommendation letter, the program has a nomination form in which “principals have to rate applicants on their on the competencies.” The competencies are based on the district leadership standards and ratings are comprised of “their current work, their resume” and a required “essay about how they will lead to challenge the status quo.”

Candidate ranking. Several references to selecting candidates with a “sense of urgency and dissatisfaction with the status quo” emerged. In answering a question about how the program selects for this desire, the participant explained that “we build a scenario or a case where we're able to watch how students respond, or incoming perspectives.” These scenarios are a mix of “developed questions and protocols” created in collaboration with DPS. Selection criteria aim to identify the following: candidate values, personal behaviors, instructional leadership knowledge, managerial leadership, and external development leadership (Ritchie ELSS Selection Criteria, 2019). The demonstration of traits such as “the ability to collaborate and work on teams” and “the ability to analyze and use data to drive instructional decisions” and “personal ownership and proactive behaviors” are included in the selection criteria (Ritchie ELSS Selection Criteria, 2019). The two-hour selection event “goes through four different scenarios and a writing activity. And then each of those scenarios is scored by a panel of district and faculty. And there are always 2-6 [evaluators] on average...reviewing each of the scenarios.” After the selection matrix forms are scored, the team then ranks candidates and makes admissions decisions.

Candidate feedback. The program administrator was careful to acknowledge that the program genuinely attempts to measure a candidate’s ability to be an effective leader, not simply the candidate’s ability to effectively interview for admission to an educational leadership program. This is a sharp distinction for the program and one that led to shifts in their selection processes and rubrics after collaborative sessions with DPS. Ritchie ELSS asserts that a
candidate’s presentation on a single selection day or individual event can be biased, so candidates should be assessed on more than first impressions, interviewing ability, or how they responded to a scenario. The program administrator explained:

What we found is over time, scenario-based applications are great. However, they privilege people who can perform. And some people may put on a good show, but some people may fail at that, but they have this rich potential. So, we include elements of having them just kind of step back and let us hear their thinking. And that's often the most impactful part of the interview process.

Ritchie ELSS has a collaborative selection process based on shared values including identifying and assessing candidates for multiple academic and dispositional qualities including leadership potential, self-motivation, learning agility, and tenacity. The focus of the interview and the majority of discussion revolved around selection, but key recruitment efforts are delegated to partner districts. Although there is a significant focus on candidate selection and a deep partnership with districts, the selection team typically only involves two people; one person from DU and one from the district. Candidate feedback, role plays, and continuous improvement efforts are a mainstay of candidate selection efforts.

North Carolina State University Northeast Leadership Academy (NELA). The program recruitment methods and selection processes for NELA were created to address the specific needs of 14 districts in the northeast part of NC. Unlike other EELPs, NELA relies almost entirely on grant funding, which influences the areas recruitment occurs in the state and the collaborative partners who aid in the candidate selection processes. Since NELA was designed to develop leaders uniquely for particular high-need school contexts in NC, it has a purposeful focus on deep, authentic engagement with local communities and cultivating strong
relationships among program alumni and district partners. As the major categories of recruitment and selection emerged through analysis, two overarching themes materialized in significant ways.

**Theme 1: District engagement as a fundamental aspect of candidate recruitment.** The program administrator asserted that creating great leaders begins with proactively and intentionally recruiting and selecting the most promising candidates. A core program feature is that NELA “utilizes closed cohorts to build trusting relationships, expand collegial networks, and develop high-performance school leadership teams” (Fusarelli, Fusarelli, & Drake, 2018, p. 7).

**Authentic relationships with partner districts.** In contrast to several other EELPs which were founded with one district partner, NELA established a unique partnership with a public university (NC State University), the state department of public instruction (NCDPI), and local public schools (14 districts) in northeastern NC (Fusarelli, 2014). The partnerships provide an effective method for recruiting candidates for specific district contexts while also expanding networks available to NC State’s programs and individual school districts. NELA and participating districts work together to recruit and select candidates and use a variety of in-person sessions, email outreach, and word of mouth recruitment. When NELA originally began in 2010, it partnered with 14 NC counties. As the program grew and obtained more grant funding, the reach of the program expanded and now partners with 25 of 100 NC counties. This expanded reach contributes to the large presence of NELA graduates in school districts across the state. According to the program administrator, relationships with alumni aid and support the recruitment and selection process.

**Community context in recruitment and selection.** The program administrator discussed the importance of recruiting and selecting candidates “who reflect the population/community
they lead” (Fusarelli, Fusarelli, & Drake, 2018, p. 12). Originally designed to meet the needs of school districts in high-need, rural areas, NELA has expanded to serve high-need schools in rural, urban, and suburban areas. NELA’s particular focus is on recruiting candidates who have demonstrated success while working with historically underserved populations. Another important aspect of NELA is a commitment to recruiting candidates who have a “passion of wanting and believing that all students should receive high-quality education.” This anchoring belief has dictated the funding sources the program seeks. Unlike the four other EELPs, NELA has always been supported entirely through grant funds (as of the 2018-2019 school year).

NELA was designed to develop school leaders specifically for 14 NC districts “that comprise the northeast quadrant of NC” and “suffer from issues related to abject, intergenerational poverty and racial segregation” (Fusarelli, Fusarelli, & Drake, 2018, p. 12). Fusarelli, Fusarelli, and Drake (2018) describe the evolution of funding for NELA:

Funding by the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation supported initial program design and a grant from the NC Department of Public Instruction (NCDPI) helped launch the program. USDOE’s Race to the Top grant supported Cohorts 1, 2, and 3. Funding for Cohorts 4, 5, and 6 came from the USDOE’s School Leadership Program and from the Turnaround Leader Program. Funding for Cohorts 7-11 came from the state of NC, through funding from the Improving Principal Preparation Program established by NC House Bill 902.

Since 2010, NCSU’s program has been supported by over $27 million in grant awards. The relationships with communities served by NELA are geographically, culturally, and economically dissimilar. Forming deep and trusting relationships with the communities served requires time, resources, and a sincere appreciation for their unique features and talents. NELA
program administrators have invested in relationships across their counties and those relationships allow the program to effectively utilize grant resources to support their work.

*Aligning investors with program values.* The program administrator discussed the commitment to seek investors who align with program values, but also commented that a grant funded program may have different recruitment goals or requirements than other EELPs. Grant funding designates NELA as an alternative pathway status in NC, meaning that NELA operates outside of rigid oversight by NCDPI. The alternative status, along with grant funding, “enables NCSU to have unprecedented freedom from state bureaucratic oversight to allow us to work with our district partners to design and deliver a program that, as scholars and practitioners of educational leadership, we believe will best prepare principals for what is likely one of the hardest jobs in America” (Fusarelli, Fusarelli, & Drake, 2018, p. 5). This funding model also shapes the areas, and thus the candidates that NELA will recruit. “So, the grant, in a sense, kind of dictated...where they [the recruitment events] would be,” the program administrator described when asked about recruitment of candidates. The intentionality in recruiting leaders who reflect the communities they lead has resulted in the program “being the second most racially diverse program at NCSU-second only to an international engineering program” (Fusarelli, Fusarelli, & Drake, 2018, p. 12).

**Theme 2: Evolving candidate selection process based on continuous improvement practices.** The program administrator asserted that the process for recruiting and selecting candidates has evolved over time. The program administrator described NELA aligning their admission standards, measures for assessing candidate potential, superintendent endorsement of candidates, and evidence-based evaluation and feedback to select leadership candidates. The selection process aims to help NELA recruit and select candidates who:
Have high expectations and share the belief that all children can achieve at high academic levels; have a sense of urgency and personal accountability for achieving results for students; have a deep commitment to equity and community engagement; possess a deep knowledge of curriculum and instruction and monitors teacher effectiveness; and have strong resiliency skills to persevere when confronted with setbacks (NELA EELP Application, 2013).

NELA has a strong belief that creating great leaders begins with proactively and intentionally recruiting and selecting the most promising candidates. The NELA recruitment process, admission standards, measures for assessing candidate potential, and final selection process are aligned with the mission to recruit and select promising candidates. NELA’s particular focus is on recruiting teachers successful with historically underserved populations and the belief that all children can succeed.

Candidate Assessment Day. NELA program administrators and faculty assess and select finalists to participate in NELA’s experiential Candidate Assessment Day (CAD). To aid the decision of which prospective candidates to invite to CAD, prospective candidates are required to submit the following before the assessment day:

1. Application form (including transcripts)
2. Resume
3. Letters of recommendation
4. Purpose statement/letter of interest
5. Writing sample/educational essay
6. Superintendent’s nomination
As mentioned previously, in order to select candidates with requisite experience and beliefs, the NELA admissions process includes a daylong CAD. Applicants undergo a multi-step selection process which includes experiential events in which a candidate participates in role-plays and responds to a variety of scenarios. These experiences allow various NELA program faculty, mentors and coaches, NC Department of Public Instruction staff members, current NELA Fellows, district partners, and K-12 students to see if candidates demonstrate the needed skills, knowledge, and dispositions required to lead successful schools (Candidate Assessment Day, 2015; Fusarelli & Militello, 2012).

Evolving selection process. When NELA was founded in 2010, candidates were selected by their district superintendent (Fusarelli, Fusarelli, & Drake, 2018, p. 12). While NELA still asks district superintendents to identify and recommend teachers who have leadership potential, strong pedagogical skills, and deep content knowledge, there is now a multi-step candidate selection process which includes a scenario-based role-play in which candidates engage in scenario-based activities. The program administrator explains the importance of the role play in selection:

We want to see that the candidate really cares. This is the part that speaks to the passion of wanting and believing that all students should receive high-quality education. But along with that high-quality education is understanding that students come in with different needs. We want to see that the person understands what diversity is, and what challenges exist for students, for families. And that comes through when we're when the candidate is actually doing a role play.

When detailing the evolving selection process, the program administrator stated that NELA has undergone several revisions to their rubrics, role plays, and selection processes. These
revisions were evident in reviewing the selection materials included in the initial EELP application in 2013 and the selection documents submitted to me in June 2019. Additional CAD activities and a more diverse selection team were evident in 2019 selection materials. Some of these changes stem from additional partnerships with districts and their leadership teams. The program administrator summarized the evolving continuous improvement cycle by stating that NELA “faculty and staff have said ‘we can improve this and make it better, stronger.’” As will be discussed more in the cross-case analysis, the theme of *continuous improvement* became visible throughout the EELP programs. It was apparent there has been a steadfast internal commitment to and ownership of continuous improvement in the NELA selection process.

*Utilization of role-plays to assess candidates.* The role play at CAD is structured to observe how candidates react to various scenarios including a one-on-one role-play with a K-12 student and a teacher observation post-conference with a K-12 teacher. There are additional components to the daylong CAD, such as a timed writing exercise which includes a memo home to parents about an emergency situation at school that day. In describing their CAD, the program administrator said that faculty, staff, and district partners “are in teams that work together to evaluate the candidate, the role play, as well as their interview. And before we leave that day, we...provide individually our assessment.” The NELA evaluation teams typically consist of a mix of an NC State faculty member, NELA project staff member, NELA coach (an executive coach assigned to a NELA student), a district representative, current K-12 teacher, current school leader, and a high school student. This multi-interviewer approach allows numerous stakeholders to meet and interact with the prospective candidates, helping to provide a multidimensional assessment and the best possible candidate selection. The teams utilize scoring rubrics for each activity and a summary is made at the end of the day to provide final recommendations to NELA
Leadership Team. Lastly, the assessment team debriefs with the NELA Leadership Team about the strengths and weaknesses of each candidate. The NELA Leadership Team then completes “a comprehensive review of all materials, consults with district leaders, and makes final admission decisions” (Fusarelli, Fusarelli, & Drake, 2018, p.14).

NELA has a strong belief that creating great leaders begins with proactively and intentionally recruiting and selecting the most promising candidates. Through reading recruitment flyers, information session PowerPoints, reviewing selection rubrics, the NELA recruitment process, admission standards, measures for assessing candidate potential, and final selection process are aligned with this mission. Recruitment is enhanced by the authentic relationships with program alumni, strong partnerships with districts, and grant-seeking activities which support with NELA’s values. The process for selecting candidates is refined with each iteration of the program and “is comprehensive, exhausting, and requires a significant time commitment” (Fusarelli, Fusarelli, & Drake, 2018, p. 24).

University of Washington Leadership for Learning doctorate in education program (L4L). From its inception, L4L has aimed to recruit and select candidates who can address the challenges in public school systems in Washington State with a central focus on leadership for realizing educational equity. Similar to UEL, the L4L program is an Ed.D. program that launched its first cohort in 2002. L4L recruits professionals currently working in or with K-12 school systems who wish to become school system superintendents, other district office leaders, or professionals committed to leading educational organizations in with equity-focused leadership. Social justice and equity practices define the recruitment and selection philosophy and shape their commitment to equity-focused leadership.
Theme 1: Equity-focused leadership philosophy guides recruitment and selection. The program is extremely clear that L4L is explicitly about equity and justice “And by that, we mean ending discrimination. And we mean, rebuilding systems with minority communities in mind” the program administrator remarked. L4L is an Ed.D. program that systematically aims to serve the region and state and by focusing on equity-focused leadership for seasoned public-school K-12 administrators, teacher leaders, and community leaders. The L4L program administrator has a large responsibility for the recruitment and selection of L4L candidates and detailed a robust system of recruitment and selection. There is a heavy focus on the cohort makeup and on recruiting and selecting cohort members “where every member sees themselves already as a leader.” As an Ed.D. program, L4L also focuses on systems-level change and helping shift the demographics of Washington school superintendents and Washington Schools:

Executive leadership… like in most parts of the country…is overwhelmingly white and male. When we think about our contribution to the region, we're looking to help people reimagine what the superintendency could be, and most certainly what it looks like when the superintendent is female, Black, [or] Native American. We are thinking about the demographics of the state when we think about our cohort.

Using technology for recruitment. As a statewide program, L4L recruits over a broader geographic range than some other EELPs. They have a mission to serve the region and state and strive to continually evolve in how they serve their community. Emergent ways they have broadened their reach include the way they use their website and efforts to more effectively utilize social media. The L4L Facebook page is active with a mix of posts regarding upcoming L4L recruitment events, alumni and student learning sessions, alumni and student social activities, conferences, and other informational sessions. L4L also has a user-friendly online
nomination form whereby website visitors can nominate an “Aspiring L4L Leader” by providing their contact information. A program administrator from L4L will then invite the inquirer to an upcoming information session. A formalized section on the website allows prospective L4L students to request program information to be added to the L4L mailing list, or to connect with a program administrator. The message to students says, “We thank you for your dedication to serving students through high expectations and a commitment to equity. We look forward to meeting you and helping you engage in the next steps of your leadership journey!”

Statewide recruitment of seasoned leaders. L4L has a broader focus on recruitment than other EELP programs and recruits candidates within and beyond the K-12 public school system, with a central focus on “leadership for realizing educational equity” (Honig & Walsh, 2017, p. 2). The program administrator discussed their focus on equity in recruitment in the following statement:

[Program administrators] are working to extend the places we show up as a program. As an example, there's a small schools conference put on by an organization in Washington State. And we serve largely the urban and suburban Seattle, the Puget Sound region. Our goal is to extend into more rural, remote, and reservation parts of Washington State. So, we're showing up at different conferences. We're interacting with different organizations that can get the word out. And we're doing that formally, so we have handouts where we indicate that we're looking to extend our partnerships into different school districts than we have before. And it wasn't that we weren't interested in those districts before, it was [that] we decided that shifting practice by showing up in different places and getting to know the work of different districts will pay off in the long run in terms of recruiting and selecting.
Program standards guide candidate selection. The program administrator highlighted the L4L standards in almost every interview question answer and made it clear that the standards guide all aspects of the L4L program, including the curriculum and candidate selection. Aligned with Washington state and national educational leadership standards, the L4L Leadership Standards emphasize key leadership elements, such as equity and excellence for each student. They “describe program faculty’s latest thinking about the observable leadership actions that contribute to excellent educational opportunities and outcomes for each and every student, especially students of color, students learning English, students living in low-income families, and others traditionally underserved by public school systems.” (L4L Program Standards, 2019).

We say what we mean by equity [and] we're really clear that we're talking about everyone leads. [This program] is not for seasoned administrators only, we're looking for teacher leaders and community leaders. Info sessions are a good chance for us to start the learning and engagement [with prospective candidates] right away.

The program administrator discussed how L4L faculty help recruit in informal ways, even though the core responsibility for recruitment rests with the program director and program manager:

The faculty team interacts in their usual research-practice partnerships, or their networks, they're also talking to people about L4L. So, it's a program that the core faculty also believes in our principles. And so, they're recruiting in that way.

Information sessions. Information sessions are a large component of recruitment, which also unfolds into selection. Information sessions provide a chance for faculty and program administrators “to recruit based on actual core principles of L4L” which include a race explicit focus. L4L did not submit any documents for review, but there are numerous ways for a
prospective candidate to learn about upcoming information sessions on the L4L website. Additionally, the L4L Facebook page posted recruitment events around Washington State, including the Washington Association of School Administrators (WASA) Small Schools Conference. The WASA Small Schools Conference gathers school and district administrators from small districts throughout Washington State.

*Equity conversations in recruitment.* L4L has deep conversations with prospective candidates early in the recruitment process in an attempt to gauge the ability and willingness of a candidate to hold important equity conversations. Conversations about equity during the recruitment process enable the program team to learn about candidates’ “current thinking” prior to seeing an application:

We do this both in info sessions and in the interview. We talk about race, racism, [the prospective candidate’s] own identity. We're very interested in advancing that work. And we think in a very short three-year program, we need people who are already on that path. The program administrator credited their broader recruitment efforts in their success at having more diverse candidates at their information sessions and open houses:

How we use the diverse voices that are in the room and the way that we've built that out, we are able to get much deeper into conversations much sooner as a result of how we've been approaching that and who we have in the room. I think we've seen some tremendous shifts, just in who is now seeing themselves as future superintendents in this state.

*Equity-focused selection.* Once applicants decide to apply to L4L, they are required to provide basic information about themselves and their experience with educational leadership. Prospective candidates are assessed on their leadership and learning related to equity, inquiry, instructional and systems focused leadership. In addition to Graduate Record Exam (GRE)
scores, transcripts, recommendation letters, and writing samples, applicants are asked to submit a reflection on the L4L Standards in their Goal Statement. The goal statement:

…aims to engage you with important aspects of the L4L program, including the L4L Leadership Standards, and deepen your reflections on the fit between your professional goals and L4L. This narrative, which you will upload as part of the online application, is used to ensure the applicant’s needs and our programs are well-matched. (L4L website, 2019).

In a paragraph, applicants must respond to the following equity-focused questions:

How do you define “educational equity?” We acknowledge that educational equity is a complex idea but sometimes systems leaders must capture complex ideas in a couple of sentences. What is your current definition, in a nutshell? What is one concrete instance of educational inequity that you have encountered and that is important to you? Why is it important to you? What is a specific example of how you led to address that or a related instance of educational inequity? Please describe in detail what leadership moves you made. Why those? With what results? And what are your reflections now on your leadership and impacts? If you have not exercised leadership around that issue, why not?

Stepping back, what feedback might you give yourself about how to take action with regard to that instance of inequity? (L4L Application Steps, 2019).

Assessing candidate equity philosophy. The selection process leading to the creation of and evaluation of question prompts is “aligned to our program standards. And so, we actually get candidates engaging from the time of association with it in the written materials.” The selection determination is not “something mysterious that the students wouldn't understand what we're up to.” The program administrator elaborated on L4L selection decisions:
No matter which faculty members of the team were assessing candidates in the room, they used the same language that was based on the [L4L] standards. So, if there were opportunities to really highlight the [prospective candidate’s] approach to equity and justice that involved how the system was impacted, we note that and we're really clear that people are thinking about systems and about equity, and about themselves. So, it's sort of this triangulation of: If you're leading a meeting, are you saying really clearly or indicating really clearly what you will do as the leader? It’s not that we're just about fierce independence as our definition of leadership. But most certainly, we need to know that candidates are aware of who they are in the scenario. And similarly, [that prospective candidates are] thinking about broader impacts on a system. So, there are lots of ways to define a system. If you're talking about a district, you're doing so in a way that you're clear that there's collaboration necessary, and there's community input that's necessary.

*Diversifying cohorts.* L4L’s broader program outreach efforts and aim to diversity their cohort led to shifts in enrollment of candidates of color. “The percentage of candidates of color has sharply trended upward from 12.5% in Cohort 5 to 33.3% in Cohort 6 and 45.7% in Cohort 7 (2018-2021)” (Honig & Walsh, 2018, p. 8). The program recruitment and selection activities are geared toward understanding a candidate’s current practice and what their capacity is for systems focused leadership beyond where they are and beyond themselves. Focused on equity, L4L’s interview questions go deep with understanding if a candidate “can do more than the talk of equity” and “are they deeply engaging in that [the work of equity]?"

Equity is infused throughout L4L’s recruitment and selection processes. Program administrators and faculty engage prospective students early in equity conversations at all recruitment events, leading to many students self-selecting in and out of the program.
continuous focus on program standards ensures that equity is a specific area of focus for the program’s admissions and selection team. Questions about equity are infused into the L4L application and candidate answers/philosophies on equity are a significant factor in selection.

**Recruiting and Selecting Educational Leaders: Cross-Case Analysis**

In examining the recruitment and selection of all exemplary SLPPs, five themes emerge:

**Cross-Case Analysis EELP Themes**

1. Formal and Informal Relationships as a Multifaceted Contributor to Recruitment and Selection
2. Equity Focused Leadership as the Foundation for Identifying and Selecting Prospective Candidates
3. The Evolution of Candidate Self-Selection as EELPs Developed Over Time
4. Continuous Improvement in Recruitment and Selection
5. Higher Education Politics and Bureaucracy as an Inhibitor to Change, Innovation, and Shared Values in Recruitment and Selection

**Theme 1: Relationships as a Multifaceted Contributor to Recruitment and Selection.**

Relationships with programs and districts, prospective candidates, community members, and alumni help facilitate recruitment and selection. These relationships are developed through a variety of efforts including individual conversations with district partners, social media messaging, and word of mouth recruitment. The conversations and interactions programs have with candidates differ in their level of formality, but all programs sought to engage candidates in a reflection of their personal values and leadership philosophy.

*District partnership relationship.* Each participant discussed the importance of relationships in their recruitment and selection process. While most participants described
specific relationships and district partnerships utilized in their recruitment and selection, they all recognized and regarded the individual nature of these relationships as a strong contributor to their recruitment and selection success. The relationship with Ritchie ELSS and principals in partner districts has been built over 18 years and has grown stronger over time. Ritchie ELSS cites the relationship built through their district partnership and notes that “we talk a lot with principals and talking to principals about identifying talent and aspiring leaders. And so, we recruit through them quite a bit.” They have longstanding and rich connections with district partners and remarked that “all but two of the incoming students are in schools where graduates are serving. So now, you know, it's turned into the program is so established and well known within the district.” Likewise, UEL has partnered with CPS since its inception in 2002 and program candidates are “known for their exceptionally high rate of success on the Chicago Public Schools Principal Eligibility Assessment and they have a 98% placement in Chicago Public Schools” (Center for Urban Education Leadership website, 2019). CPS also seeks out UEL graduates for their 100% high-need schools, and 47 urban elementary schools are now led by UEL principals. NELA is unique in its partnership, in that they partner with several small districts in northeastern NC. Schools that have been named the lowest-performing in NC are disproportionately clustered in 14 rural counties, but NELA graduates “make a three-year, post-degree commitment to work in high-need schools in northeastern NC, thus, creating a critical mass of turnaround specialists for these districts” (NELA website, 2019). UEL described their strong relationships with partner superintendents and found that “[superintendents] who we have relationships with, they know our program and they know what we're looking for. Most of them have been through the program.” The UEL program administrator noted that having an increasing number of alumni working in CPS schools has aided in increasing the program’s
reputation. USLC began when the superintendent of SAISD, Dr. Ruben Olivarez, reached out to
the now co-coordinator at USLC. They had a longstanding relationship because he was the
program administrator’s little league baseball coach. SAISD is the third largest school district in
San Antonio and serves a diverse population of families, the majority of whom are Hispanic and
low income. The USLC program administrator stated that the enduring nature of the USLC can
be attributed, in part, to “strong personal relationships between individuals from both
institutions” (Garza & Merchant, 2015, p. 40). The informal nature of relationships with two
partnering districts, SAISD and Bexar County, prospective candidates, and district contacts
define the culture at USLC. While there is no formal recruitment plan or formal strategy for
relationship building, there is a focus on personal conversations with prospective students.

Use of district channels for recruitment. For recruitment, Ritchie ELSS relies on
information being sent through channels in their partnership with DPS. Events such as
recruitment information sessions, the distribution of program flyers, and documents containing
information about the admissions are filtered through a contact at DPS. The program also has
numerous personal conversations with principals in DPS about “identifying talent and aspiring
leaders.” Since the program began in 2003, they have amassed a significant presence of program
graduates leading schools in DPS. Program alumni assist in recruitment efforts by identifying
and referring potential candidates, as well as participating in the selection of students. According
to the program administrator, many prospective candidates apply to the program because of their
interactions with school leaders who are program alumni. The strong reputation of the Ritchie
ELSS has also helped with recruitment efforts. The program administrator said, “the program is
so established and well known within the district and principals see it as a way that also gives
them professional development and support because of the engagement of...their faculty in the program.”

L4L partners informally with many districts across the state of Washington and is reaching out via phone and email to more rural, remote, and reservation parts of Washington. They “decided that shifting practice by showing up in different places and getting to know the work of different districts will pay off in the long run in terms of recruiting and selecting.” When L4L program administrators meet with district representatives, they “have handouts and indicate that we're looking to extend our partnerships into different school districts than we have before.” In the current L4L program structure, there is a full-time director and a full-time manager who do the majority of recruitment, but “as the faculty team interacts in their usual research-practice partnerships or their networks, they're also talking to people about L4L.” To recruit potential candidates, NELA hosts information sessions that are widely advertised and open to everyone, including individuals from outside their participating districts. They also “work with the district superintendents, central office staff and existing principals to identify and endorse high-quality individuals with strong leadership potential” (NELA EELP Application, p. 5). Likewise, USLC’s district partners are “very much involved with (department) faculty in identifying students for the program. Both the principals in the district and the graduates of the USLC nominate teachers or staff who have demonstrated the potential to become district leaders” (Garza & Merchant, 2015, p. 44). The process begins with the superintendent where “all principals are directed by the superintendent to nominate two to three teachers or staff members they believe have demonstrated leadership potential and a pre-disposition for social justice” (Garza & Merchant, 2015, p. 44).
Connecting personally with candidates. USLC described their effort to connect personally to prospective candidates and cultivate relationships before prospective candidates even apply to the program. The USLC program administrator remarked, “We have the flyers, we do the emails, but like I said, it's more about engaging one on one with the students. And by the time we meet them [at] orientation, we already know who they are, by both face-to-face and through their story that they share in the info session.” Similarly, NELA works to cultivate relationships with candidates before their application and makes contact with prospective candidates via email and phone to encourage them to apply. Relationships with the communities NELA serves run deep, but they take time to develop, maintain and require a commitment by NELA and district partners. Examples of connections include work with local nonprofit organizations during students’ summer internships, partnering with NC State’s 4H Extension Office, presenting to local school boards, and bringing helpful items to schools during visits (such as pens and books). The number of connections is sizable, and program administrators, faculty, cohort directors, and alumni are all involved in maintaining and deepening community relationships. NELA utilizes a Quality Measures Partnership Effectiveness Continuum Tool to “develop a common understanding of the indicators of effective partnerships as described in the research literature. It guides team reflections and prompts discussions on and pathways to strengthen existing partnerships and form productive new ones” (Fusarelli, Fusarelli, & Drake, 2019, p. 16). L4L discussed the importance of all forms of relationship building, even relationships built via social media, but noted that:

We've been finding most value tends to be in the conversations that we’re having, whether that is in person or by phone, or email. But it is more than individualized conversations and getting people to the info session for really continuing that in the mode
that we design our classes. We're very intentional about the ways that we structure our formalized info sessions to be authentic to get them engaged [early in the application process] with deep conversations.

*Relationships with program alumni.* Several programs cited relationships with program alumni as a key source for recruitment and selection efforts. UEL said, “We have a robust alumni network, I email the hell out of our people. So, you know, once they're UIC, you’re in it for life (laughter). So they are. I mean, they're just a tremendous resource for me and for one another.” UEL highlights its alumni and maintains a strong connection through their alumni newsletter. Not only does the newsletter provide an avenue for sharing program information such as recruitment events, but it also helps to cultivate relationships with alumni by highlighting their accomplishments, provides interesting and relevant leadership focused articles, and brings attention to events and opportunities of note. USLC relies on alumni to nominate educators for the program and learned that program graduates were more responsive to their request for nominations than were average principals. Former cohort members “were also more diligent and selective with their nominations. They felt that it was their responsibility to maintain the reputation of the USLC by nominating students that demonstrated a predisposition for social justice” (Garza & Merchant, 2015, p. 45).

NELA indicated the strong effect of having relationships with alumni and also noted that their alumni participate in recruitment events. The program administrator detailed the pride that NELA alumni have in letting “other people know just what kind of experience they would have if they were accepted and chose to attend [NELA].” USLC and Ritchie ELSS also view alumni as an important component of recruitment efforts.
**Word of mouth recruitment.** Several participants indicated the value of word of mouth recruitment. The UEL administrator said the word of mouth recruitment “has really taken off” and they encourage their alumni to tap strong teacher leaders since “many strong teacher leaders will not self-identify. Somebody needs to say [to strong teacher leaders], ‘I think you’d be fantastic for this program or I think you’re ready to take the next step.’” UEL views word of mouth recruitment as a key opportunity for recruiting talent. However, the word of mouth referenced is not a passive byproduct of the recruitment plan, it is an intentionally formulated part of the recruitment and selection plan designed to elicit/evoke demonstrations of action that encourage prospective candidates to consider the program or propel them to attend an information session.

UEL program administrators note that word of mouth recruitment is aided by their alumni newsletter. Not only does the newsletter provide an avenue for sharing program information such as recruitment events, it also helps to cultivate relationships with alumni by highlighting their accomplishments, provides interesting and relevant leadership focused articles, and brings attention to events and opportunities of note. While L4L has a strong alumni network and they “have access to a number of districts across the state.” The program administrator said recruitment efforts are helped by word of mouth recruitment because “people leave us believing in what we do and continue to do.” The administrator described districts learning about their program or meeting program alumni then asking, “Will you come to our district? Will you do something in our region?” Similarly, DU noted the power of word of mouth recruitment when describing the relationships created with selection events. After their first cohort of students, the DU program director “talked a lot with principals and how they can identify talent and aspiring leaders. We recruit through [those conversations] quite a bit.” DU’s conversations also enable
them to meet more district leaders who often serve as a selection team member in their assessment selection event.

The NELA program administrator discussed NELA graduates desiring to present to prospective candidates at recruitment events to “let other people know just what kind of [transformational] experience they would have if they were accepted and chose to attend.” The participant discussed the recruitment of NELA candidates and said “the reputation of NELA draws people to want to be in this program. And to me, that is huge. It's huge because it speaks to people.” They discussed the benefit of the NELA reputation and the importance of the positive relationship with NELA graduates in word of mouth recruitment:

My point is, the pride comes because people want to be a part of this program. They want to have the experiences they heard about. And it's just getting bigger when you think about [a NELA Cohort II Graduate] being the [2019 NC] Principal of the Year, and he's a graduate of NELA. And I guess that's what I'm saying about how the word gets around just by the word of mouth or experiences of other [NELA students and graduates]. So, the pride comes in.

Without close relationships with program alumni, it would be more difficult for NELA to host information sessions with passionate program graduates. The graduates are an integral part of NELA information sessions and are highlighted prominently at information sessions and recruitment events.

As Fusarelli, Fusarelli, and Wirt (2018) noted, “developing effective educational leaders is fundamentally and irrevocably an interpersonal, relational process—one that requires face-to-face contact, deep thought, deliberation, reflection, engagement, and interaction” (p. 23). The effort put toward cultivating, developing, and nourishing relationships made a positive difference
on a larger recruitment and selection scale. These relationships ultimately result in ELPPs interacting with more diverse prospective applicants and increased numbers of promising candidates who had a clearer sense of the skills, experiences, motivations, and requirements EELPs desired. Processes look different for all programs, but the cultivation of enduring relationships is at the forefront of EELP missions as related to recruitment and selection.

**Theme 2: Equity Focused Leadership as the Foundation for Identifying and Selecting Prospective Candidates.** Each participant offered a unique perspective of equity, yet all programs expressed an overarching commitment to recruiting and selecting leaders who possess a mindset of valuing and advocating for socially just outcomes for all students. For many EELPs, the mission of recruiting and selecting candidates who demonstrate equity is at the forefront of recruitment and selection efforts. For others, equity is infused into the mission of the program but plays a more moderate role in recruitment and selection activities.

*Recruiting equity-focused leaders.* Some participants offered effusive responses to the type of candidates they recruit and select by highlighting their search for equity-focused leaders. L4L said they “recruit based on actual core principles of L4L, so nobody's surprised when they get there, that we take a race explicit and racism exclusive focus on the work rather than being race-neutral, which many programs continue to be and operate that way, just fine. That's not what we do.” Ritchie ELSS stated that the “one thing that has remained constant in the recruitment or the selection process has been a strong focus on cultural responsiveness, identification of bias, race, racial issues of pushing toward recognizing deficit thinking.” USLC spoke of the many SLPPs alternatives housed at UT San Antonio and described USLC’s efforts to engage prospective students who truly want to participate in their program. When asked about recruitment, the USLC program administrator indicated that “we really want to get to know
them. So, the purpose is why they want to focus on this program. Do they just want a principal degree or, if do they, I mean, we have other opportunities, we have the on-campus program, we have the certification program, but if they're really interested in getting to know how to be equitable leaders, then this is a program for them.” Similarly, the NELA program administrator remarked that:

We want to see that the candidate really cares. This is the part that speaks to the passion of wanting and believing that all students should receive a high-quality education. But along with that high-quality education is understanding that students come in with different needs. So, we want to see also that the person understands what diversity is, and what challenges exist for students, for families.

Early conversations around topics of equity were universal in EELPs.

Alumni identifying equity leaders. Several EELPs utilize alumni to help identify equitable leaders. NELA asks “principals, superintendents, program alumni, and coaches to identify and encourage applications from excellent teachers who have strong leadership potential” (Fusarelli, Fusarelli, & Drake, 2019, p. 12). Their particular strategic recruitment focus is on “recruiting educators who have successfully worked with students from historically underserved populations (i.e., teachers of exceptional children/special education and/or teachers of English Language Learners, Reading Support Specialists, etc.)” (Fusarelli, Fusarelli, & Drake, 2019, p. 12). Comparably to L4L, NELA is committed to recruiting and selecting leaders who reflect the population and community they lead. NELA’s commitment to recruitment and selection has resulted in their MSA being the second most racially diverse program at NCSU—second only to an international engineering program (Fusarelli, Fusarelli, & Drake, 2019).

Likewise, UEL focuses on recruiting leaders to reflect the communities they serve. As the urban
schools targeted by the program for new leadership are largely African-American and Hispanic in enrollment, the program seeks to guarantee and deepen its commitment to equity through the implementation of the UIC Diversity Strategic Plan. The UIC College of Education’s Office of Recruitment and Diversity Affairs, the Ed.D. Program Coordinator, the Director of Coaching, the Associate Director of the Center for Urban Education Development (CUEL) all play a role in the design and/or dissemination of recruitment materials and efforts.

*Recruiting and selecting for equity.* While maintaining different methods, visions, and processes, the five EELPs highlighted in this study all believe it is important to be forthright with prospective candidates about the missions of their organizations, and their commitment to equity. To make sure that they recruit and select leaders who bring diverse thinking and are from diverse backgrounds and communities, four out of five programs use rubrics during their selection events (USLC does not hold a selection event) and invite multiple stakeholders into the process in an effort to ensure candidates are identified and assessed in a multidimensional way. According to program administrators, these efforts are having an impact on increased candidate diversity for the programs. Recent findings from UEL on their African-American, Latinx, bilingual, and candidates with special education backgrounds indicate they “are actually leading achievement growth at rates higher than folks from other kinds of backgrounds.” All five EELP program administrators acknowledge a commitment to activities such as outreach to organizations that serve diverse administrators and teachers, seeking out candidates with diverse backgrounds, such as a bilingual endorsement, and targeting recruitment in the areas that represent the populations that program graduates will serve.

*Theme 3: The Evolution of Candidate Self-Selection as EELPs Developed Over Time.*

When asked about selection, participants often referenced their specific processes (formal
graduate school applications, writing samples, scenario-based assessment events, dispositional observations, etc.); however, participants also discussed candidate self-selection or filtering as a contributor to why a prospective applicant might choose to apply or not apply to their program. There appears to be uniformity in the experience of having candidates self-select in or out of EELPs, although the way self-selection materialized differed from program to program.

*Selection process begins during recruitment.* Though the selection process is open to anyone who applies to USLC, the program administrator noted that the process works well because students self-select themselves in or out based on their knowledge of and deep understanding of the USLC mission. This understanding is attributed to the authentic conversations that arise during USLC information sessions, one-on-one meetings with prospective applicants, and the personal conversations aspiring applicants have with program alumni. Very few USLC students leave mid-program, but the program administrator did say that if students “really see during the first semester that this program is really not for them. That it's too emotional, it's too much, it invades too much of their personal space, then they realize [they need to] go through very traditional program where [they] can just go to school” and not be asked to reflect on issues surrounding social justice and their personal leadership stance on these issues. The program administrator further explained, “that's why we don't have a selection criteria other than, you know, this is what this [program] is, and this is why it's strongly advertised what our program is about.” Recruitment flyers contain information enticing prospective students with a desire to grow into a “socially just leader” and invites them to contact the USLC program administrators to learn more about the program.

Similarly, NCSU’s selection process begins at information sessions framed around the program’s core values. NELA information sessions “challenges potential students to ask
themselves whether they believe that they belong with us after a series of value-based statements about the program” (Fusarelli, Fusarelli, & Drake, 2019, p.13). Examples of the value-based statements include:

If you pursue leadership so you can feel like you’re among the elite...a special few...Then you will not find satisfaction here. If humility is your M.O., then you belong with us. If you stop and listen to the stories of the people around you and learn from every person you meet...then you belong with us. (NELA Information Session PowerPoint, 2019).

Additionally, NELA program graduates take part in the information sessions and share their experiences in the program and describe the time commitment required to complete the MSA. The combination of these interactions at the information session, “usually results in many individuals self-selecting out of applying to such an intensive, mission-driven program” (Fusarelli, Fusarelli, & Drake, 2019 p. 13).

When the UEL program administrator was asked about the selection process, it became clear that they also experience a form of self-selection. This self-selection stems from a candidate learning more about the specific aspects of the UEL program during an online information session:

One thing that I found is that most people who do the online session, who are really interested in the program, will still come to an in-person session at the end. I think my online sessions are really a chance for people to hear my voice and to see my face and then people who are interested, they'll, they'll take the next step, but it's also a nice chance for people to say… ‘this is not really the program for me.’ And so, the communication might end with they're switching gears a little bit.
The online information session covers the same information as the in-person information session including the Ph.D. curriculum, year-long clinical residency, and coaching across three full years of leadership practice. Prospective UEL students are encouraged to attend an in-person information session where they have the opportunity to meet program faculty, coaches, current students, and alumni. However, the program administrator acknowledged that some people cannot attend in person, so they also hold online information sessions. Online sessions also help anyone who may be “on the fence” about the program decide if they want to inquire further or if they discovered enough information to realize they are not the right fit for the program.

*Reasons for self-selection.* The notion of “everyone leads” and the program’s commitment to equity-focused leadership come to light when the program administrator acknowledges that not everyone who has a commitment to equity is ready to lead. The L4L program administrator discussed the important conversations that take place before their formal selection events that often lead to self-selection:

There is an important factor of self-selection. So, if you if you've been at an info session, you have to imagine yourself able…you're already invited/required to have these conversations sitting in an info session, to talk about your work, to talk about justice, to talk about equity. So, there are some people, who I am certain, decide after an info session, ‘Maybe this is not the program for me, maybe that's not the work I'm doing right now.’ So, it's either a ‘Not yet, maybe I'll try to the next cohort’, or ‘There are other programs that are I'm also interested in where I get to do different work.’ Because certainly, this isn't the work that everyone wants to do, otherwise we'd be getting different outcomes in our systems.
Likewise, the UEL program administrator acknowledged that early recruitment meetings with interested students and conversations at information sessions allow prospective applicants to “really understand what they're getting into and what the program is going to ask of them” if admitted to UEL. This understanding lends itself to self-selection since prospective candidates “who are interested [will] take the next step” in applying to the program, but some candidates realize “this is not really the program for [them], and they switch gears a little bit”.

While some programs shared more stories of prospective students self-selecting out, Ritchie ELSS described students seeking out their program because it is uniquely different from alternatives:

One of the things that have happened, which is an interesting phenomenon, is that the nature of the program is so different, that recruitment has been made easier in that students come to us because they know it's not going to be a kind of program where you take a course in law, do whatever you need to do, and then you go to another course. They can do that easily online. So, they come to the program knowing the personal impact on them; that they're going to have to create a lot because we expect them to lead and to do during the program. So, it's almost become kind of a natural filter.

USLC identified a similar self-selection phenomenon from its prospective applicants. As interested students learned more about the USLC during meetings and information sessions, the prospect of “getting to know how to be equitable leaders” either led them to pursue the program or focus on other opportunities at UTSA, such as the on-campus MSA program or principal certification program. Other programs at UTSA do not have a focus on social justice and equitable leadership. Likewise, the information prospective students learn at NELA information
sessions, including information about the program mission, often results in individuals “self-selecting out” of applying (Fusarelli, Fusarelli, & Drake, 2019, p. 13).

All EELPs have a form of candidate self-selection, where a prospective applicant is engaged very early in conversations about unique and rewarding areas of the program and potentially challenging aspects of the program. These early conversations enable prospective students to make informed decisions about whether to proceed with applying for a program. This transparency gives candidates the options upfront to withdraw themselves from being considered for the program, or to more confidently proceed with the application with increased motivation and a stronger connection to cultural fit. As the program administrator at Ritchie ELSS stated, “You have to come into this experience open, and really immerse yourself in it. And that's when you get the best, you know, that's when you get the most out of it.”

All EELPs have a goal to recruit and select prospective students who are capable and align with the specific program mission and values. Advertising a program brand is a compelling venue to help candidates self-select and determine if they are the right fit for a program. Helping prospective students self-select by advertising a mission, promoting a culture, selling benefits, and using unique recruitment tools helps EELPs achieve their recruitment and selection goals.

**Theme 4: Continuous Improvement in Recruitment and Selection.** As there has been increased interest in and attention to the creation of exemplary forms of leadership preparation, there has also been focused attention on “continuous improvement as critical to the cultivation of more exemplary forms of leadership” (Cosner, 2019, p. 110). UCEA has expressed a mounting interest in and attention to the creation of exemplary forms of leadership preparation (Young, 2018), so it was not surprising to find examples of continuous improvement in EELP recruitment and selection. This theme materialized as a strong contributor to understanding the knowledge,
skills, and dispositions EELPs seek and the recruitment and selection activities that help them identify and select individuals with the requisite attributes. Many ELPPs had recruitment and selection processes that always consisted of items such as word of mouth recruitment, flyers, a required nomination from current leaders, co-selection process with district leaders, and a team of people conducting the candidate assessment. Yet, all programs discussed how their recruitment and selection have progressed over time as they learned how to recruit and select school leaders more effectively.

**Evolving recruitment plan.** UEL described the change that happened within their recruitment process over time:

Early on we focused very heavily on teacher prep programs and we wanted to find out who their alumni were who had been working in the field long enough that they would be eligible for our state's principal endorsement. We also wanted to work very closely with the directors of those teacher prep programs so that they could point us to people who just were rock stars in their student teaching. We wanted… at first, just get our word out there. Let [prospective applicants] know when we're having information sessions. We cast a really wide net. And for better or for worse, we were getting applications, they were coming in. But what [we discovered] is that we weren't necessarily getting applications from really strong teacher leaders. So, the recruitment plan has evolved over time to really focus more strategically on school leaders who were able to identify just one or two prospective candidates who they thought were strong.

UEL did not remain focused on solely recruiting from teacher preparation programs, even though in their original thinking, recruiting from well-known and reputable teacher preparation programs would allow the program to focus on prospective students eligible for the state’s
principal endorsement. After recruiting from teacher preparation programs for several years, the program administrator acknowledged that their recruitment plan had to evolve as they realized their candidate pool was not as strong as they hoped. A renewed effort on recruiting focused on individual outreach to current school leaders who knew and recommended one or two strong teacher leaders.

Renewed focus on diversity. Some EELPs discussed their belief that it is their duty to create space for students whose own experiences have led to a strong commitment to school leadership and equity. L4L discussed their commitment to continuous improvement regarding the students they recruit:

I like to think and talk about...our commitment to continuous improvement. A really important factor in diversity is really diversifying ideas that belong in a space. So, when we think about having more black, brown, indigenous female...you know, pick a subgroup and a demographic aspect. When we think about diversifying in those ways, it means we're inviting different lived experiences into that space, which means the same old ideas we've had, which are almost always white, western, male-dominated ideas, we're willing to rebuild around these identities. And the cycles of continuous improvement have always been clear that we listen to students, we pay attention to the field, we stay at the edge of the field in leadership and research. We're nimble in that way.

Similar to UEL, the L4L program noticed that their cohort was not as diverse as they would like it to be. As the L4L program progressed, program administrators began to hypothesize that the candidates of color most likely to seek out and join the program were those who had been
personally encouraged to apply by a respected, on-site mentor who made individual connections with L4L faculty and staff throughout the admissions process:

Faculty then actively encouraged alumni to take a ‘promising candidate of color to coffee’ and discuss the program. Faculty also shifted admissions activities to increase personalization, for example, by holding more frequent, smaller information sessions for applicants that maximized their engagement with one another and with faculty (Honig & Walsh, 2018, p. 14).

Likewise, USLC’s program serves a majority Latino population and has committed to recruiting Latino students. The majority of the participants in the program are Latino (53%) or African American (10%) (Garza & Merchant, 2015, p. 45). Furthermore, L4L places growing importance on social media and online information in their recruitment efforts. The program administrator discussed remarked:

We [program administrators] manage a Facebook page that, frankly, we're making better sense of now. [We ask] what other ways to use social media and to get our message out there?

The Facebook page details a variety of recruitment events, alumni social and professional development gatherings, and pertinent leadership articles.

*Data informs changes to practices.* Other EELPs also seek out new and more effective ways to recruit and select candidates. NELA continually collects and monitors data to inform changes in its recruitment and selection process. Recently, the program included “serendipitous encounters or intentional interactions during which the candidate does not know their behavior is being assessed as a teaching tool to demonstrate what the potential students will experience in the program” (Fusarelli, Fusarelli, & Drake, 2018 p. 14). An example included a CAD volunteer
posing in a janitor's uniform. Throughout the day, the janitor cleaned the halls in proximity to candidates. A Serendipitous Encounters rubric details the janitor’s impressions of how candidates interact with him at the CAD:

At the end of the day, before candidate dismissal, the janitor’s true identity was revealed. We explain that the program looks for candidates who show compassion, kindness, and professionalism to everyone they meet and not just the evaluators. The purpose was to show potential students that in the program, as in leadership, everything counts (Fusarelli, Fusarelli, & Drake, 2018, p. 14).

The literature on continuous improvement reveals that particular organizational capacities are required to be successful (Smylie, 2010). Other efforts toward continuous improvement in recruitment and selection emerged in the data when identifying specific EELP organizational capacities. For example, several programs mentioned some organizational resources that support their work of continuous improvement, specifically related to mission, funding, and faculty and staff resources. UEL noted the quest to find university funding for an associate director position who would largely be responsible for the recruitment of new students:

My role is actually now housed exclusively within the program and we sort of incubated my position in the Center [The Center for Urban Education Leadership] with the expectation that it would not permanently be covered by soft money by grant funds, but that the university would pick up my role. And now it is in the department. So now the position is not in jeopardy...we're not on pins and needles wondering whether a funder is going to come through or not. We know, year after year, it's [their position] going to be paid by state claims.
**Hiring EELP faculty who align with the program mission.** L4L described the importance of ensuring that department faculty are aligned to the mission and core values of L4L. The program administrator described faculty alignment to the L4L mission as a necessity for recruitment and selection of L4L candidates:

There is a formalized set of agreements that say, here's who we are in L4L. So being in our area in the college or a member of the college faculty itself doesn't mean you automatically work with L4L, or even want to. But if people are interested, or we are interested in partnerships with [specific] faculty members, we start with those agreements. And they're revisited and revised as new people join the team.

Similarly, USLC described the importance of committed faculty to recruitment and selection efforts:

So USLC didn't get here by just [the founding director]. It was a group of highly motivated individuals who believe in the power of change, who believe that the way we're going to restructure, we're going to change school systems is we change how we prepare people, both from the teacher perspective to leadership perspective. And I think that…recruiting faculty that really believe in that is instrumental to any program.

The hiring of dedicated program faculty and staff who align with the mission of EELPs emerged as a noteworthy aspect of continuous improvement for some EELPs. Committed program faculty and staff allow EELPs an “opportunity for sensemaking and anchoring…in their identity and what [the program] intends to contribute” to recruitment and selection of students, interaction with partner districts, and the specific region and communities neighboring an EELP.

**Valuing applicant quality over quantity.** Despite some participant comments suggesting a push by SLLPs to grow applicant numbers, several participants indicated they believed the focus
of recruitment should be on quality, not quantity. The Ritchie ELSS program administrator
offered a unique description of continuous improvement in their recruitment strategy resulting in
a noticeable difference in the quality of Ritchie ELSS applications:

What we found happen over time is that the number of applications to our program has, it
has decreased. But the quality of the applications has increased. So, we're not getting
applications from folks who've been teaching for four years, who meet the minimum
criteria for the state endorsement but haven't really been able to demonstrate teacher
leadership or any sort of leadership of adults. And that's something [the leadership of
adults] that we focus very heavily on. So, when we reach out to our principals who are in
the field, or when we reach out to superintendents, who we have relationships with, they
know our program and they know what we're looking for. Most of them have been
through the program. So, they're able to really handpick people who they think are going
to be good.

As an established program now in its 17th year, Ritchie ELSS has developed a robust network of
partners, alumni, and stakeholders. Many individuals at DU and DPS have been a part of Ritchie
ELSS selection events for more than a decade, are strong advocates for the program, and assist
the program in finding prospective candidates who demonstrate teacher leadership. The Ritchie
ELSS administrator further explained the evolving nature of their processes. In describing the
evolution to a scenario-based candidate selection process, the program administrator noted:

Originally, the selection process consisted of questions for candidates. Today, it's a
scenario-based process. And then later, as time went on, they morphed into scenarios that
helped us see the kind of mental models that the applicants coming in. Were they
[prospective candidates] looking to just follow directives? Or did they want to question
and challenge? Were they able to see in a scenario or a situation that change needed to happen? Or did they just fall back on just referring to processes and things like that?

As the Ritchie ELSS program refined its candidate selection in the early years of the program, scenario-based processes were developed. The Ritchie ELLS program administrator acknowledged that their processes continue to evolve as new research emerges.

*Time devoted to improvement work.* Implementing changes to selection processes demanded that EELP program administrators revisit and evaluate any changes to determine if they succeeded with the intended results. All EELPs have at least one program administrator working on continuous improvement work in recruitment and selection. As Elmore & McLaughlin describe when discussing school reform (1988), continuous improvement is steady work. Cosner (2019) noted that the work of school leadership preparation “is resource-demanding. It requires cultivating and sustaining the right kinds of capacities in sufficient quantities and qualities” (p. 144).

As program administrators collected more data about their program, as well as learned about advances in leadership research, new questions were raised, and renewed efforts were put toward recruitment and selection. All EELPs described the steady nature of their improvement processes and demonstrated a commitment and sustained attention to the work of continuous improvement in the specific contexts of their program’s recruitment and selection.

*Theme 5: Higher Education Politics and Bureaucracy as an Inhibitor to Change, Innovation, and Shared Values in Recruitment and Selection.* This theme did not represent a specific question in the protocol, but institutional practices related to various aspects of graduate recruitment and selection surfaced as a serious topic for many participants. The theme provides insight into the state of current admissions practices at EELP institutions, including how their
departments and/or graduate schools employ recruitment and selection practices that could be considered helpful or harmful. Several participants reflected on the admissions criteria set within their programs and the faculty and staff dynamics of selecting candidates. Some participants recalled broader university faculty and staff challenges within their university or in higher education generally, such as the challenge of hiring faculty and staff dedicated to recruitment and selection research and practice. All programs indicated, to varying degrees, their work to amend or change university policies which negatively affect their ability to recruit and select leadership candidates as they deem appropriate.

Ritchie ELSS discussed the tension of recruiting and selecting individuals they believe are likely to be successful as school leaders and the roadblocks that often emerge in the admissions process:

We look at the achievement through transcripts and things like that. But what we found is…the stories around people's challenges within an academic environment often give us a lot of data about their resilience and their drive to see things change. Because it hasn't worked for them personally, [their experience] gives them a very personal investment into really critically examining those who have been so very successful within the education system, sometimes they don't recognize the privileges that they have. I have always pushed on the university against, especially within our area [that] we won't accept anyone that graduates with a bachelor's with a C average. That doesn't make sense, right? The program administrator acknowledged that there is “a tension there because they [candidates] have to also write and be successful in an academic environment.” However, they were adamant that the Ritchie Program “recognize and play with that and work to make sure that we are
accepting people who are going to be successful on the academic side of it, but also that we're not excluding people just because they don't show up like a traditional student.”

Similarly, the USLC program director discussed their frustration with university GPA requirements dictating aspects of who USLC can select. They also noted their strong desire to be an advocate for prospective students, despite the possibility that student advocacy is not rewarded in the tenure process:

…how do I use this platform? How do I use my work? How do I use my coordinatorship and research platform that other people may be fearful of because they acknowledge that higher ed doesn't appreciate [advocating for students] in the tenure process? So that's one of my proudest moments...moving it from a selfish perspective to student-centered perspective… having to fight the bureaucracy, the higher ed bureaucracy, when they tell me that certain students can’t get in because of certain GPAs. And to me, it's...that's something that, ugh! That just fuels my passion to become an even stronger advocate.

Most EELP graduate schools appear to value quantifiable metrics (such as GPA), but individual programs seem more likely to consider more qualitative metrics (such as nomination letters, personal interactions with program faculty, and assessment day performance). Although all programs described their program admissions process, indicating a decentralized admissions structure with primary admissions authority housed within the academic program, it was evident that programs often struggled with university policies in admissions decisions. The USLC administrator noted:

But even my position now as a higher ed individual faculty member, how do I challenge the bureaucracy in higher ed? Some of the policies that [UTSA has] in place only benefit those that traditionally have been benefited by higher ed policy. So, say we want to
increase the number of Latinos who received terminal degrees. How are we going to do that we use the same power structures that have kept them out? I mean, I just don't get it! And so sometimes presenting that to critical scholars in a non-scholarly way, it's (sigh)... it's a challenge.

Adding an optimistic and encouraging sentiment, the program administrator continued:

It’s a challenge. They say, ‘Well, that’s the way the system has always been.’ Yes, but now we have an opportunity to recreate new policies. And so, believe me, it's an uphill battle. But it’s one I embrace.

As described previously, the EELP programs have a variety of funding mechanisms and program components. For instance, L4L is self-funded by its own tuition dollars, and the program enjoys some degree of flexibility to design and conduct recruitment and selection they way it sees fit. Yet, they also operate on a Research I institution and L4L applicants are required to complete a University of Washington graduate school application, which dictates specific admissions criteria. Alternately, NELA is a grant-funded program and maintains a level of programmatic freedom that other preparation programs both within and outside of NC might not currently experience. Although they have alternative status and are grant-funded, NELA candidates still have various requirements from the NCSU Graduate School. As the NELA program administrator explained, the program occasionally has to advocate for the candidate to be admitted to NC State and provide justification “why we should admit the student even though this transcript shows a GPA of less than what is typically required.”

Higher education challenges influenced recruitment and selection in a variety of ways, and UEL indicated recruitment was affected by “growing program size and complexity, limitations in faculty capacity, and underdeveloped administrative support” (Cosner, 2012, p.
The UEL program administrator described the evolution of funding for their role and how responsibility for recruitment must be owned by someone or multiple people in the program or it will not be given the time and effort necessary to recruit and select the most promising candidates:

I was brought on board to manage the day to day operations of the center to do a lot of grant writing and research. And to also interface with students. My role was designed to offer some really critical hands-on support to the students who are in the program. And one of those responsibilities very early on was to recruit and to orient and to provide some support to the students to make sure that they were good to go. To make sure that they really understood what the program expects of them.

When UEL identified the need for program innovation and “greater attention to pipeline development and improved selection process,” limitations in university funding and a lack of time to devote to improvements in recruitment and selection became a hurdle for the program. UEL described the challenge:

Funding is scarce and highly competitive. Program personnel, particularly academic faculty, must distribute their time and energy across a range of roles and responsibilities beyond those associated with the Ed.D. program and its ongoing improvement. The program has developed much of its “fiscal and time” capacities through external resources and unusually high levels of faculty commitment of time toward program improvement work. (Cosner, 2012, p. 143).

Similarly, NELA describes the institution of higher education (IHE) challenges for the program: Innovative programs face challenges, professional jealousy, internal restrictions, personnel issues, and a near continual battle against institutional intransigence in the state
bureaucracy (top-down standards, licensure, and the bureaucratic tendency for every program to look alike), in IHEs (three-credit courses rather than sets of specialized trainings), and in districts (that’s how things are done around here). The work is complicated by a lack of public understanding about how IHEs function, the need for sustained (not grant dependent) financial support, and more empowering (more flexible) and more stable state policies for leader development, which are essential for scaling up and replicating successful programs. (Fusarelli, Fusarelli, and Drake, 2018, p.15).

Quantifiable metrics (such as GPA) are still required from all EELPs institutions of higher education (IHE), but individual programs are more likely to consider qualitative metrics (such as nominations and recommendations, personal interactions with program faculty and staff, and assessment day performance and reflection) in admissions decisions. Data analysis indicates that graduate schools and academic units within EELPs are responsible for different types of admissions policies for program applicants. Due to dual admissions roles and policies, IHEs can impede or enhance the enactment of innovative and robust recruitment and selection practices and procedures. These findings offer insight into the challenges, future needs, directions, and priorities of EELP admissions decisions as related to recruitment and selection.

Chapter Summary

This chapter included a discussion of five individual EELP cases and their recruitment and selection activities. The chapter began with a thematically organized discussion on the distinct recruitment and selection practices and processes of five EELP award-winning programs. The five programs include: The University of Illinois at Chicago Ed.D. in Urban Education Leadership; The University of Texas at San Antonio Urban School Leaders Collaborative; The University of Denver Ritchie Program for School Leaders and Executive Leadership for
Successful Schools, North Carolina State University Northeast Leadership Academy; and The University of Washington Leadership for Learning Doctorate in Education Program.

All programs place value on leadership recruitment and selection but convey differing methods and philosophies regarding their recruitment and selection. Findings suggest that most EELPs express heightened attention on selection activities, as recruitment efforts were discussed less frequently in interviews and fewer recruitment documents were collected. UEL has a structured recruitment and outreach plan and comprehensive selection process including multi-day training of selection evaluators and a research team aiding in the creation of selection rubrics. USLC has an informal method of recruitment and a barrier-less approach to candidate selection, based on their mission to recruit socially just leaders. NELA, DU, and UW utilize district partnerships, word-of-mouth recruitment, and electronic communication to aid in recruitment and have comprehensive selection plans and processes. Participants noted that their specific partnership, geographical location, program mission, budgetary constraints, and faculty/staff model influence their approach to recruitment and selection.

The second section of this chapter described a cross-case analysis of EELP programs and the five themes which emerged. Participants overwhelming state that formal and informal relationships are the key to their recruitment success. Even with geographically dissimilar populations, participants exhibited a great deal of commonality in terms of their focus on equity in recruitment and admissions decisions. A majority of the participants are best characterized as stating their mission and program expectations so clearly that many prospective students are drawn more deeply to their program or decide to pursue other opportunities. Participants also indicated that they desire to disrupt the status quo in educational leadership preparation, leading to an emphasis on utilizing new research on leadership preparation and maintaining a continuous
improvement model in recruitment and selection practices. Often at odds with the university admissions standards and criteria, EELPs expressed some challenges related to their program being situated in a higher education environment. Challenges included the need to advocate for the admission of some students who do not meet university established GPA minimums, conducting recruitment and selection with limited dedicated program faculty and staff, and operating under constraints and set guidelines within a grant-funded program.

The following chapter will include a discussion of the interpretation and implications for policy and practice, a call for future research, and concluding remarks.
CHAPTER 5: DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSIONS

The purpose of this qualitative multiple case study was to describe and understand the recruitment and selection activities of school leadership programs that have been identified as exemplary, a title given to programs receiving the Exemplary Educational Leadership Program (EELP) Award by the University Council for Educational Administration (UCEA). This study explored the recruitment and selection practices of five EELPs. The following research questions framed the study:

1. In what ways do exemplary school leader preparation programs (SLPPs) recruit and select candidates who they believe are likely to be successful as school leaders?
   a. What knowledge, skills, and dispositions do programs seek, and what recruitment and selection activities help them in identifying individuals with the requisite attributes?
   b. What are the systematic recruitment and selection plans of EELPs? Do the programs rely on multiple sources of evidence and show deliberate efforts to attract and admit applicants who demonstrate leadership potential? If so, in what ways?
   c. Does a connection exist between stated program values, mission, vision, and intentionally designed recruitment and selection processes? If so, how are they connected?
   d. What are similarities, commonalities, and differences of EELP awardees’ recruitment and selection processes and activities?

The focus of this study was to investigate how five nationally award-winning SLPPs recruit and select aspiring leadership candidates who are likely to be successful as school leaders.
This research contributes to the collective understanding of recruitment and selection by examining the specific recruitment and selection activities and strategies of exemplary SLPPs. Through interviewing EELP program administrators and examining relevant documents, the findings provide information about the recruitment and selection practices of EELPs. This research study centers on understanding the ways in which the five EELPs recruit and select candidates they believe are likely to be successful as school leaders and highlights implications for education policy-makers, school leaders, and teachers. This chapter provides an overview of the problem, summary of findings from the study, discussion of findings, and connections to recent research. The chapter concludes with recommendations for policy and practice, future research, and final considerations. Table 5.1 shows a comparison of EELP program elements (Cosner, 2012; Fusarelli, Fusarelli, & Drake, 2018; Garza & Merchant, 2015; Honig & Walsh, 2017; Korach et al., 2019; NCSU College of Education, 2020; University of Illinois at Chicago, 2020; Walker, Tozer, Webb, Parkinson & Whalen; 2017).
Table 5.1 EELP Program Comparison Table

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<th>EELP</th>
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<td>University of Washington L4L EdD Program</td>
<td>• Dedicated director</td>
<td>25-35 per cohort year</td>
<td>Approximately 20% of participants are students of color.</td>
<td>$58,993</td>
<td>3 years</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Tenure-line University of Washington faculty (between 3 and 6 core members)</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Full-time program manager</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• 1-2 research/teaching assistants</td>
<td></td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Tenure-line University of Washington faculty (2)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>UT San Antonio USLC MA Program</td>
<td>• Tenure-line University of Texas at San Antonio co-ordinators and faculty (2)</td>
<td>20-30 per cohort year</td>
<td>The majority of the participants in the program are Latino (53%) or African American (10%), educators who serve a majority Latino population.</td>
<td>$56,748</td>
<td>2 years</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Table 5.1 (continued).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>EELP</th>
<th>Program faculty and staff</th>
<th>Students Per Cohort Year</th>
<th>Demographics</th>
<th>Program Cost</th>
<th>Completion Time</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| University of Denver Ritchie ELSS MA/Certificate Program | • Part-time director  
• Tenure-line University of Denver faculty (between 3 and 6 core members)  
• Full-time program manager | 15-18 per cohort year | Unknown | $35,000 - $40,000 | 1 year |
| University of Illinois at Chicago UEL EdD Program | • Part-time director  
• 5 tenure-line academic faculty and 6 FTE clinical faculty (between 10 and 12 core members)  
• Full-time program manager  
• 3 full-time Ph.D. researchers  
• 2 administrative staff | 15-20 per cohort year | Approximately 30% of students are African American, 15% are Latino, 42% are white, and 13% are Asian American and other minority. Nearly 60% of students are female. | $32,249 - $41,463 | 3.5 to 4.5 years |
Table 5.1 (continued).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>EELP</th>
<th>Program faculty and staff</th>
<th>Students Per Cohort Year</th>
<th>Demographics</th>
<th>Program Cost</th>
<th>Completion Time</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| NC State University NELA | • Part-time director  
  • Full-time associate director  
  • Part-time cohort director  
  • Tenure-line and teaching faculty (between 7 and 10 core members)  
  • Full-time program coordinator  
  • 1 to 2 graduate research assistants | 15-20 per cohort year    | 57% White / European American, 43% Black/African-American. 43% Female.        | $41,841       | 2 years         |

The Problem

Research established that principals are second only to teacher quality in terms of influence on student achievement, and the impact of leadership is greatest in schools with the greatest need (Branch, Hanushek & Rivkin, 2013; Darling-Hammond et al., 2007; Leithwood et al., 2004; Marzano, Waters & McNulty, 2005; Murphy et al., 2006). While it has been widely accepted that instructional quality is the single most important school-based factor leading to student achievement, researchers have also found that effective school leadership is crucial to expanding quality instruction and other promising practices school-wide (Darling-Hammond, 200; Bryk et al., 2010). Research on school leadership has long shown the need for effective and qualified school leaders (Hallinger & Heck, 2011; Maulding et al., 2010; Orr & Orphanos, 2011; Young, 2009, 2017) and a growing body of research has demonstrated the need for greater investment in high quality school leadership preparation (Grissom, Kalogrides, & Loab, 2015; Leithwood et al., 2004; Orr & Orphanos, 2011; Waters et al., 2004). An investment by districts, states, federal programs, and national organizations is needed in order to help improve student achievement in our nation’s schools. Yet, there is limited information known about the comprehensive recruitment and selection processes of SLPPs (Anderson & Reynolds, 2015; McCarthy & Forsyth, 2009; Crow, Young, Murphy, & Ogawa, 2009). Although research suggests that rigorous recruitment and selection practices are a vital component of effective SLPPs (Darling-Hammond et al., 2010; Hitt, Tucker, & Young, 2012), data on the recruitment and selection practices of programs remain inadequate (Baker et al., 2007; Browne-Ferrigno & Muth, 2009; Fuller et al., 2017; Murphy et al., 2009). A lack of quality recruitment and selection strategies is often cited in school leadership research as a concern and area for further research (Hess & Kelly, 2005; Levine, 2005; Murphy et al., 2009) and is expressed among university
faculty and state and national policymakers, suggesting the importance of the recruitment and selection process in ensuring high-quality preparation of aspiring school leaders. Despite the fact that a school leader’s significant effect on student learning is also commonly accepted as second to teachers in influence on student outcomes (Hallinger, 2011; Leithwood et al., 2004), research focusing on educational leadership preparation and leader recruitment and selection remains largely neglected (Young, 2009, 2017). This study provides a more comprehensive understanding of recruitment and selection strategies in EELPs and could serve as a resource to other SLLPs that aim to make changes or improvements to their leadership preparation programs.

Connections to Recent Research

As this study was being conducted, two other noteworthy studies launched investigations into school leader preparation programs. The first study, “Leadership Matters: Principal Preparation Quality and Learning Outcomes” (Ni, Rorrer, Pounder, Young & Korach, 2019), is an article about measuring educational leadership preparation program quality attributes and graduates’ leadership learning and assessing the direct and indirect relationships among them, as reported by program graduates. Ni et al. (2019) encouraged future research on leader preparation to include “additional program elements suggested by studies of exemplary leadership programs such as program theme or focus, student recruitment and selection strategies [emphasis added], district partnerships, as well as particular curricular design and instructional strategies” (p. 201). The authors discuss the need for more qualitative research on program features that are essential to high-quality leadership preparation, such as student recruitment and selection strategies. Discovering more about essential steps in the recruitment and selection process of exemplary SLLPs is a vital aspect of ensuring that programs recruit and select individuals with the capacity
to create and transform the conditions for improved teaching and student learning for all students (Ni et al., 2019).

As Gates et al. (2019) note, results of efforts to expand concepts of school leadership preservice activities to “comprehensive approaches to prepare, recruit, select [emphasis added], place, develop, evaluate, and retain principals have shown promise, but such efforts are still in early phases of programmatic development and evaluation.”

This research study supports the view that school leadership matters and draws attention to calls from researchers to discover more about the practices, beliefs, policies, characteristics, and conditions utilized by EELPs in efforts to recruit and select the most promising prospective leadership candidates. Importantly, this study expands the understanding of the pivotal role of recruitment and selection on ELPPs, particularly the specific program features pertaining to their recruitment and selection processes.

Summary of Findings

To summarize the findings, I present a holistic, composite review of the themes discussed in chapter four organized by the research questions that guided the study. This case study focused on practices concerning the recruitment and selection processes of EELP winning programs and interview data were analyzed using within case and cross-case analysis. Findings showed recruitment and selection processes are designed to address the specific needs of the EELP programs and their populations. Each EELP described a variety of recruitment efforts and strategies including developing formal linkages with school districts, recruiting students through collaborations with professional associations or other special groups, and recruitment through informal networks of alumni and other university partners. Some EELPs are more involved with a formal recruitment process than others and have a specific and defined recruitment plan.
including year-round recruitment events, a dedicated staff/faculty member in charge of
recruitment, and even weekly recruitment events. Other EELPs have a more informal recruitment
process including hosting several information sessions per year, distribute flyers to district
partners, and inviting alumni to nominate a prospective student.

A number of selection methods are used by EELPs including a traditional application
requiring a student resume, letters of recommendation, and a formal interview. More recently,
some EELPs have added a daylong selection event with scenario-based activities in an effort to
select candidates with the highest aptitude for leadership and to avoid selecting those whose
personality may be unsuitable for such a career. Different and complimentary recruitment and
selection methods are used by all programs in an effort to provide the best measurement of the
specific targets and goals of the program.

**Discussion of Findings**

This study examined the ways in which exemplary SLPPs recruit and select candidates
who they believe are likely to be successful as school leaders. The findings of this study were
developed through interviews with EELP program administrators and analysis of documents.
This methodology was beneficial because it allowed data to be collected from more than one
point of interest. This section will discuss the main findings of the study which emerged from the
data collection and analysis process. Organization of this section begins with the central research
question and continues with the sub research questions answered in the subsequent subheadings.

Findings showed that the recruitment and selection of candidates into EELP programs is
complex and a unique process for each program. Based on the interviews and interpretation of
data, there is general agreement on the importance of recruitment and selection, but program
differences emerge when analyzing the way these processes are undertaken.
In what ways do exemplary SLPPs recruit and select candidates who they believe are likely to be successful as school leaders? This research question set the stage for this research investigation. The findings suggest that the recruitment and selection processes in EELPs are conscious and demonstrate a commitment towards the enhancement of robust recruitment and selection processes in exemplary leadership preparation. This section is organized around the overarching themes and research sub questions.

Systematic recruitment and selection plans. Prior research indicates that instead of engaging in strategic recruitment processes, SLPPs have historically lacked formal or rigorous recruitment plans (Fuller et al., 2017; McCarthy & Forsyth, 2009; Murphy et al., 2009). Conversely, all EELPs have developed some form of recruitment plan and strategy and utilize selection tools and practices which help identify the prerequisite knowledge, skills, and dispositions they believe are needed to be effective school leaders, even as the formality and rigor varied across EELPs. Additionally, selection activities and events are held at all but one EELP to determine which candidates are selected into programs. USLC does not hold a selection event and admits all candidates who express an interest in the program and commitment to equitable leadership. As described in chapter four, the USLC program is “about social justice. It’s about equity. It’s about fairness. It’s a family” and they believe students are best served when candidates who desire to be in the program are admitted (USLC, 2019). Although economic conditions could influence admission decisions at USLC, this study did not find evidence of economics influencing an admissions or recruitment philosophy. This study revealed, as Jacobson, McCarthy, and Pounder (2015) noted, USLCs “level of institutional commitment to a shared goal, which is then clearly manifested in the programs they construct” (p. 69).

All programs have a recruitment strategy that is manifested through some form of a
recruitment plan with specific outreach targets for people, organizations, and communities. Differences emerge with the scope and scale of recruitment efforts. For example, USLC only has two faculty members involved in the entire program whereas UIC has a robust group of at least 15 faculty, staff, and researchers dedicated to the program. Therefore, the ability to scale recruitment and selection events is vastly different between EELPs (see Table 5.1 above). These differences demonstrate how the process of candidate recruitment can be influenced by factors within and beyond the leadership pipeline. At times these factors can reflect “opposing pressures” such as “the concomitant institutional pressures of expanding access to increase leadership diversity while restricting access to improve rankings based, in part, on exclusivity” (Fuller et al., 2017, p. 78). McCarthy and Forsyth (2009) suggest SLPP recruitment practices may have become more evident but also less targeted, yet the EELPs in this study described instances of broadening their recruitment processes, targeting specific candidates based on their graduates outcome data, seeking research-based strategies, and embracing the opportunity and challenge of improving the quality of their pool of school leadership candidates. As demonstrated by the findings presented in the previous chapter, there is evidence that while institutional pressures may exist in EELPs, their processes are conscious and demonstrate an ongoing commitment to the enhancement of their recruitment and selection processes in spite of those pressures.

Faculty and staff at EELPs share responsibility for various aspects of recruitment, however, some EELPs have specific staffing structures and fund a clearly defined position responsible for recruiting to ensure a robust and sincere effort to identify, recruit, and enroll the most promising candidates. Specifically, UIC hired a staff member specifically to facilitate enhanced recruitment of candidates after they discovered they were not recruiting and admitting
the strongest candidates. Additionally, based on interview data, the EELPs who are able to hire a staff point-person to head up recruitment and admissions efforts seemed to employ more robust efforts toward maintaining an organized database or file of recruitment activities including: lists of prospective candidates, historical meetings with candidates and notes about the meetings, formal timelines of recruitment outreach, and evolving recruitment targets. For instance, the L4L program has a program manager in charge of these processes while UIC’s program has a staff member solely focused on recruitment and onboarding new students. While other programs also have staff members who help organize recruitment efforts, it did not seem that recruitment was the main aspect of their roles. As research by Orr (2010) suggests that recruitment is associated with differences in candidate and program quality, this study provides a basis to argue that the human capital and monetary resources directed toward efforts to engage in effective and targeted approaches to candidate recruitment likely vary between SLPPs.

Clifford (2010) suggests that recruitment can be impeded by SLPPs failing to perform needs assessments and relying on nonstrategic recruitment processes. UIC’s program administrator noted the importance of a data infrastructure in the form of a powerful relational database or file system which allows their program to leverage the data to have a historical record of recruitment practices and to learn about the effectiveness of various recruitment processes.

While one recruitment plan was discussed and submitted for analysis, there was limited information about recruitment plans from most ELLPs in regard to their formal, documented, and detailed plans. Again, because this aspect of recruitment was not noted prominently in this study does not mean that EELPs do not have robust and detailed recruitment strategies, plans, and organized files. It simply means the data was not abundantly evident in this study from
interviews and document analysis.

Recruitment and selection activities to help identify promising school leaders. Hitt et al. (2012) found that a high-quality pool of school leadership candidates reflects the diversity of the communities in which the candidates are being prepared to serve, and all EELPs acknowledge the richness of their communities and incorporate diversity into their recruitment and selection processes. All programs spend substantial time and effort in maintaining and deepening relationships with program alumni, district partners, and community stakeholders. Each program views word of mouth recruitment as a key opportunity for recruiting talent and rely on it as an important asset in their recruitment portfolio. It remains unclear how word of mouth recruitment is organized or tracked broadly by all programs, but each program administrator indicated that relationships with alumni are vital for growing the program and attracting prospective candidates. Additionally, each program designs recruitment and selection strategies to develop leaders uniquely for particular contexts in the geographic locations surrounding their institution. Deangelis & O’Connor (2012) asserted that large social, cultural, and institutional forces influence who is recruited and selected into SLPPs, and EELPs face disparate contextual factors that they grapple with in their pursuit of creating the most robust recruitment and selection efforts. The five EELPs highlighted in this study serve students in urban, rural, and suburban environments and exist in five different states in five disparate regions of the country. Political, social, and geographical conditions influence the decisions of where and how the EELP will recruit and they ways selection will be conducted. NELA, USLC, and Ritchie ELSS offer recruitment events in various locations in partner districts, while UIC offers only serves one district (CPS) and offers information sessions in an online format or on their campus in Chicago. L4L offers online and in-person information sessions throughout the state and their program
manager often travels throughout the year to present to multiple organizations, schools, and at various leadership events.

A similarity of all programs is their determined focus on deep, authentic engagement with specific communities. Creating and employing individual approaches for cultivating strong relationships among program alumni and regional partners appears key and varies in the context of rural, urban, and suburban environments. While all EELP processes have undergone several iterative changes based on experience and analysis, most have always utilized selection processes with multiple kinds of candidate performance evidence to support their assessment of school leadership potential prior to program admission, consistent with Young, Orr, and Tucker’s (2012) suggestion that “multiple, robust sources” (p. 20) be used to select candidates.

Although research designed to measure the efficacy of selection practices could not be found, earlier research has called for selection practices to be intentionally designed to select individuals with the passion and perseverance to lead schools for improved learning outcomes (Young et al., 2009). As detailed in chapter four, what a program selects for depends largely on what a program prepares for and varies depending on program mission and local context. As is the case with many SLPPs (Fuller et al., 2017), how EELP candidates move from recruitment to selection is “dependent on many factors, including what prerequisites are required, who participates in selection decisions, the steps involved, and how candidates are assessed at each stage of the process” (p. 88).

Many EELP faculty and staff began the process of candidate selection with formal and informal relationships which were documented through memorandums of understanding (MOUs) with partner districts. Four out of five EELPs (NELA, Ritchie ELSS, L4L, UEL) undergo a rigorous and multifaceted selection process which includes a day long on-campus
event, including authentic scenario-based activities and an in-person interview. The purpose of
the selection event is to enhance the program’s ability to select candidates who are likely to be
successful in an academic program and as a transformational leader. District partners are utilized
for three of the four selection events, with L4L selecting candidates without the involvement of
district partners.

As described in chapter four, the cultivation of positive relationships is foundational to
recruitment and selection, and internal relationships among EELPs are as important as external
relationships. Similar to previous research on selection processes (Davis et al., 2012; Kochan &
Reames, 2013; Tonsmeire et al., 2012; Turnbull et al., 2015), the locus of control over the
selection processes of EELPs varied across programs. Most EELP candidate selection events are
comprised of at least one member of a partner district and several EELPs include numerous
practitioners and program alumni. USLC and L4L are exceptions, whereby their program
administrators make selection decisions at events which do not include the involvement of
district partners. Factors which facilitated improved candidate selection in EELPs included
faculty members, staff, alumni, researchers, and district partners exhibiting a high receptiveness
to each other’s roles as member of the selection team and the value that each person contributed
to improved processes. Previous research studies support the development of university-district
partnerships and the inclusion of district partners in selection processes (Fuller et al., 2017; Orr
& Pounder, 2011; Young et al., 2012). This theme was universal throughout all EELPs and
highlights an important component of EELP recruitment and selection efforts: genuine
professional respect and collaboration among university-district stakeholders.

Each EELP has been in existence for approximately a decade or more and have amassed
a significant presence of program graduates leading schools in their local areas. EELP alumni
assist in recruitment efforts in numerous ways including identifying and referring potential candidates, participating in the selection of students, and serving as mentors for current students. Most programs acknowledged that many prospective candidates apply to the program because of their interactions with school or organization leaders who are program alumni. With the EELP award, the growing strength of program reputations also assist with recruitment efforts.

**Similarities, commonalities, and differences of EELP recruitment and selection efforts.**

All EELPs described recruitment efforts including developing formal linkages with school districts, recruitment through collaboration with professional associations and/or other special groups, recruitment through involvement with teacher/administrator programs on university and college campuses, recruitment through formal linkages and cooperative programs with historically minority universities and/or minority groups, and other word-of-mouth recruitment strategies used to attract talented populations to SLPPs. Researchers have suggested that “preparation programs maximize their effectiveness when districts and universities work together to recruit the right people into leadership roles” (Hitt et al., 2012, p. 1). EELPs largely recruit through relationships with districts and alumni, a strategy that researchers (Hitt et al., 2012) recommend in order to help to reduce overreliance on self-selection and “promote the development of a candidate pool that reflects the diversity of school communities” (Fuller et al., 2017, p. 86).

While each EELP described a robust approach to recruitment and selection, those approaches were all different. As mentioned previously, USLC extends admission to all applicants from partner districts who express a desire to be a part of the program and commitment to social justice. The L4L program recruits candidates from the entire state, a much wider scope than other programs, and targets a broader group of professionals, including those
who hold roles outside of K-12 school leadership. They recruit prospective candidates who seek leadership positions in institutions of higher education (IHEs), community organizations, and state and local government agencies. As will be discussed later in this chapter, a key commonality of EELPs emerged as the knowledge, skills, and dispositions programs seek in prospective candidates.

As noted by Doyle and Locke (2014), recruitment practices in SLPPs are “are often informal or passive (or both), and therefore likely overlook some high-potential candidates” (p. 7). Participants in this study reported on recruitment strategies being used to develop formal linkages with school districts, student recruitment through collaboration with professional associations and/or other special groups, student recruitment through involvement with teacher/administrator programs on university and college campuses, student recruitment through formal linkages and cooperative programs with historically minority universities and/or minority groups, and other specific student recruitment strategies used to attract minorities and women and other talented populations to preparation programs in educational administration. While many factors contribute to the diversity of candidates selected by SLPPs, selection processes may influence candidate diversity (Karanxha et al., 2014), and all EELPs demonstrated a commitment to diversity in recruitment and selection. Programs have been challenged to design selection processes that intentionally increase the diversity of entering candidates, especially with respect to candidates of color (Young et al., 2012). Researchers found that 80 percent of principals nationally identify as white (Goldring, Gray, & Bitterman, 2013) and all EELPs demonstrated a commitment to increasing the diversity within their school leadership cohorts (see Table 5).
The use of district channels for recruitment emerged as a trend with all programs. While partnerships with districts has been found to be critical for successful SLLPs (Young, 2009, 2017), it was unclear the depth of involvement by districts in recruitment or the effectiveness of their recruitment efforts. For example, all programs rely, to varying degrees, on information being sent through channels in their partnership with school districts or professional organizations. Marketing recruitment information sessions, distributing program flyers, and tapping prospective candidates remains a large part of EELP recruitment in conjunction with district partners. Although not necessarily a negative aspect of recruitment, it does seem well-established that EELPs delegate a portion of their recruitment to districts or other entities and have limited evidence of the degree of success of efforts, level of effort put forth in targeted recruitment strategies, and diversity of candidates approached. It is largely unclear how EELPs ensure or track that their missions for robust efforts to recruit the most promising candidates are met with due regard for equity throughout the recruitment process, including those stages which involve district partners. The recruitment process has the potential to influence diversity efforts and the scope of prospective candidates with leadership potential who eventually apply to SLPPs, an important consideration since researchers (Hitt et al., 2012; Sutcher, Podolsky, & Espinoza, 2017) have found benefits to university-district relationships “when districts and universities work together to recruit the right people into leadership roles” (Hitt et al., 2012, p. 1). While the effectiveness of the recruitment strategies district partners employ remain untested, their involvement “suggests that districts are interested in playing a role in candidate recruitment to ensure the production of a higher quality pool of candidates prepared to meet the context-specific needs of rural and urban districts” (Fuller et al., 2017, p. 79). Again, although strategies for ensuring equity and due regard for robust candidate recruitment were not noted prominently
from descriptions of how all EELP district partners conduct recruitment in their districts, this
does not mean that districts partnering with EELPs do not engage in equitable or targeted
strategies for candidate recruitment, it simply means the data was not abundantly evident in
interviews and data analysis in this study. Since recent legislative and foundation initiatives
require university-district partnerships (Anderson & Reynolds, 2015), this specific area of SLPP
partnerships may be interesting and growing area for future research.

NELA exists as the only entirely grant funded program, even though other EELPs have
sought and received some grant funding for program enhancements. This study found that
external sources of funds have supported three of the EELPs in some capacity (Ritchie ELSS,
NELA, and UEL). As Cosner (2019) notes, these funds are useful for many reasons, largely for
the “provision of faculty time for the kinds of intensive collaboration efforts that are elemental to
continuous improvement” (p. 108). In all EELPs, external funds have supported access to visit
model programs, including travel funding to model programs or experts for program faculty.
External funds have also been used to develop data collection systems and tools and to capture
and analyze data to inform program improvement (Cosner, 2019). Orr and Barber (2009) urged
the field of school leader preparation to cultivate internal commitments to program redesign and
improvement, rather than rely on external accountability pressures to trigger adjustments. All
EELPs demonstrated strong learning orientations, were comprised of program leaders and
faculty who took individual ownership of the organization’s quality and impact and showed a
commitment to engage in continuous and sustained improvement work in pursuit of exemplary
preparation, as evidenced by changes and modifications to their recruitment and selection
processes. Modifications to four of five EELPs included standards-based rubrics, interview
protocols, and performance tasks, all efforts which researchers have found to provide “more systematic ways to assess candidate skills” (Turnbull et al., 2015, p. 41).

Multiple sources of evidence help identify the knowledge, skills, and dispositions programs seek. Virtually all EELPs cited the use of multiple sources of evidence for candidate selection. The leading sources of evidence for determining EELP admission included official college transcripts, a letter of application, a requirement of teaching experience, and personal interview. Additional requirements consist of a day long selection event at four out of five programs. In an effort to determine which applicants are the most promising leadership candidates, prospective students participate in a variety of assessment activities including written exercises, presentations, conversations with students and teachers, a data project, video recorded feedback sessions, personal interviews, and planned “serendipitous interactions” between candidates and on-site staff such as janitors. Candidate selection and evaluation teams typically consist of a mix of EELP faculty members, staff, researchers, mentors/coaches, district representatives, and other school, district, or community leaders. This multi-interviewer approach allows numerous stakeholders to meet and interact with the prospective candidates, helping to provide a multidimensional assessment and the best possible candidate selection. Differences emerged in the number of individuals involved in candidate selection which ranged from two to three (L4L, Ritchie ELSS) to more than ten (NELA, UEL). Most EELP evaluation and selection teams utilize scoring rubrics for selection activities and provide a summary of each candidate. Differences emerge again with the final decision on candidate admittance. Some EELPs consult with district leaders to make final admission decisions and some EELPs unilaterally make the decisions. The level of involvement of district/organization partnerships in recruitment and selection varied between EELPs; however, the overarching theme expressed
from program administrators was the positive outcome of improved communication and dialogue between the EELP and districts/partner organizations. Negative outcomes were not readily identified, but some comments centered on frustration with the amount of time required to make changes and the often-shifting landscape of leaders and district contacts in the K–12 sector.

EELP administrators described requiring documentation of prior experience leading adults, asking for evidence of improved learning outcomes, and designing interviews to surface prior experiences and beliefs about learning. Researchers (Doyle & Locke, 2014) suggest that behavior-based interview questions are more predictive of what a candidate will do in the future than responses to hypothetical scenarios or reflection on personal strengths, and all EELPs reported a commitment to behavior-based interviews. It is unclear the degree to which EELPs have determined what works, why, and under what conditions, but there is agreement that recruitment research is still in its early stages and knowledge on topic continues to evolve (Young, 2017). As Fuller et al. (2017) note, “Answering what works will require researchers to connect recruitment practices with important outcomes: the characteristics, experiences, attitudes, and dispositions of individuals entering a program relative to those recruited; program completion; placement as a school leader; and job performance. Moreover, researchers would need to compare recruitment processes over time at the same institutions and study a large number of institutions simultaneously in order to garner a sufficient sample size of individuals” (p. 108).

Candidate knowledge, skills, and dispositions. All EELPs have a goal to recruit and select prospective students who are capable and align with their specific program mission and values. The missions of all EELPs center on equity-focused leadership and those missions compel many candidates to apply to an EELP. Likewise, EELP missions often motivate prospective candidates
to pursue admission in other non-EELPs, leading to a form of candidate self-selection into EELP programs. Helping prospective students self-select in or out by advertising a mission, promoting a culture, selling benefits, and describing the unique aspects of the program help EELPs to recruit candidates with the knowledge, skills, and dispositions they seek. Jacobson, McCarthy, and Pounder (2015) encourage SLPPs to “articulate an explicit mission that lays the groundwork for and then permeates all aspects of the program. . . . These commitments include expending considerable energy on candidate recruitment and selection to identify aspiring leaders committed to the program mission” (p. 73). Muth, Browne-Ferrigno, Bellamy, Fulmer, and Silver (2013) assert that accepting candidates into an SLPP who do not demonstrate a commitment to school leadership bleeds away resources that could be invested in developing other leaders. All EELPs assess candidate commitment to serving as a school leader and explicitly state their focused missions when engaging with prospective candidates.

As the literature review described, many researchers cite leadership potential as a measure worth including in recruitment and selection activities (Davis & Darling-Hammond, 2012), and “an increasing number of programs are using more rigorous and research-based strategies” in their selection activities (Murphy et al., 2009, p. 3). EELPs value the unique blend of their cohort makeup and on recruiting and selecting cohort members where candidates already see themselves as a leader with the commitment and potential to transform high-need schools. Described in greater detail in chapter four, the following details some of the core leader attributes and dispositions EELPs desire:

- **L4L**: Candidates who see themselves as leaders and are deeply engaged in equity work;
- **NELA**: Happy, heart-driven leaders who believe that all children can succeed;
- **Ritchie ELSS**: Candidates who challenge the status quo and want to change things;
UEL: A personal commitment to equity and excellence for diverse student populations;
USLC: Candidates with social justice orientations interested in instructional reform.

All EELPs have worked to learn more about the importance of dispositions. A particularly noteworthy change that occurred in several programs was the shift from scoring performance on application elements to using application elements to score leader qualities. For example, UEL evaluation teams used to score a candidate’s presentation on a scale of low to high. In a new method, they score “the substantive qualities of an applicant as a leader and educator, for example, ‘Demonstrates a deep knowledge of the instructional practice needed to achieve high academic success’” (Walker et al., 2017, p. 6). Likewise, most EELPs have modified their selection activities to consider that an application and interview for admission is a form of performance. Therefore, most EELPs have incorporated mechanisms which account for scoring evidence of leadership characteristics generated during an assessment event, rather than on the performance itself. As UEL program administrator described, “the former is a more difficult task because evaluators must focus on the strength of evidence separately from the skill of the performance.” All programs desire candidates with deep instructional knowledge for working with diverse populations, a personal commitment to equity and excellence for all students, an orientation to working collaboratively with adults, and presence as a leader.

An additional disposition most EELPs noted is the importance of coachability. As described in chapter four, many programs incorporate a feedback session into their selection activities and candidates who do not respond well to coaching to address the issue raised will not be ranked highly by the program. Research asserts that candidates who are not coachable may lack sufficient self-regulatory strength to manage and learn from the significant challenges they will experience in the leader development process (Day, Harrison, & Halpin, 2009).
Limitations

Limitations to the sampling procedure exist. Although significant changes have occurred across the leadership preparation landscape, as researchers have increased their knowledge base around the content and structure of effective leadership preparation programs, variation still exists among programs. UCEA has “advanced knowledge and development concerning the preparation and practice of educational leaders since it was established in 1954” (Young, 2015, p. 1). One of its activities focuses on working with member institutions to develop a means for widespread dissemination of current research on the features, content, and experiences associated with effective leadership preparation (Darling-Hammond et al., 2007). The EELP award serves as a resource for universities interested in making changes or improvements to their leadership preparation programs. As the five programs in my study were the only recipients of the EELP award that were identified as exemplary at the time of this research, my assumption was that their recruitment and selection activities and materials were also exemplary, especially since recruitment and selection are a component of the award criteria.

Selecting programs in only five states limits the opportunity to explore recruitment and selection practices in other programs around the country and inhibits the generalizability of findings. However, the purpose of this study is not to generalize findings but to explore the recruitment and selection processes of these five exemplary programs. Also, the choice to interview program directors, rather than program faculty, may have inhibited a fuller understanding of recruitment and selection, as multiple individuals may have been in charge of the recruitment and selection process for an individual program. I mediated this limitation by collecting program recruitment and selection documents, reviewing journal articles written by program directors, and analyzing public documents on program websites. The choice to study
only EELP award-winning programs does not give voice to the more than 700 principal preparation programs in the U.S. The selected universities do not capture the full picture of the diverse programs in the U.S., which may have varying candidate populations, economic conditions, geography, or university contexts. However, the purpose of this study was not to make generalizations about the entire population of preparation programs but to focus only on those that have been identified as exemplary and to analyze their recruitment and selection processes.

During the research period, I conducted interviews with program directors from each EELP program via Zoom Video. The geographic locations involved and cost of travel made in-person interviews and observations at each research site prohibitive. However, Deakin and Wakefield (2014) argue that innovative communication technologies, such as Zoom Video software, provide an effective opportunity to talk to otherwise inaccessible participants. Additionally, online interviews may allow for more reflective responses and can be a useful forum for asking sensitive questions (Madge & O’Connor, 2004).

Additional limitations include a small sample size and the need to interview the program director at NCSU. I utilized the same interview protocol with all program directors, even though I was more knowledgeable about the recruitment and selection processes at NCSU. Prior to each interview, I asked the NCSU program director to reflect and answer my questions as if I was not affiliated with the university and knew nothing about the preparation program.

Of the five EELP award-winning programs, two are Ed.D. programs and three are MSA programs. However, all programs seek to admit individuals committed to leading school and other organizations in ways that support high-quality teaching and learning. UCEA is interested in strengthening leadership preparation at all institutions, and while some of the EELP programs
are different, there were stories to be uncovered and components that can be replicated across university and program contexts and cultures (Jacobson et al., 2015). Each of the programs reflects excellence in educational leadership preparation. During the course of this research project, University of Washington’s Danforth Educational Leadership Program (DELP) was awarded the 2019 EELP award from UCEA (awarded in September 2019). The Danforth Educational Leadership Program is a one-year SLPP that offers students the option to concurrently obtain a master’s degree in Education, Leadership, and Policy. The program has successfully developed over 740 principals over its 31-year history (UCEA, 2019). In future research, it would be worthwhile to study the recruitment and selection practices of DELP and compare the findings to this study.

Data from this study were obtained by means of self-report from EELP program directors, which may be impacted by recall and bias. Ideally, I would have been able to include first-hand observations of EELP recruitment and selection in this study but was unable due to funding limitations, timing issues, and travel restrictions. Another limitation is that the findings are presented on the insights of only the participants of this study and the documents they chose to share, and therefore represents a partial perspective of EELP recruitment and selection processes when taking into consideration all the other faculty and staff of the EELPs who did not participate in the study.

As described previously, my own experience with an EELP (NELA) may have affected how the participants described their program’s recruitment and selection process or may have influenced their willingness to share documents. The NELA program director may have revealed less information than other EELP program directors as they may have viewed me as an insider with an understanding of NELA’s processes. IRB ethical concerns did not allow me to interview
the founding NELA program director as they serve as my dissertation advisor and chair. Additionally, I was only able to interview the current director of two EELP programs, and a program coordinator in another EELP, rather than the founding EELP directions. Of the five EELPs in this study, I was only able to interview one founding EELP program director. As some EELP participants were newer to their roles, it is likely they did not have the same institutional or historical knowledge as their predecessors (the founding directors), and therefore, may have been unable to provide the fullest and deepest program insights. These limitations were mitigated as I also conducted a document analysis and was able to analyze program documents, white papers, and research articles authored by founding EELP directors.

Finally, this research study was not conducted with the intention of making statements or generalizations about program quality or effectiveness. In other words, this study did not seek to determine whether the recruitment and selection processes actually translate into excellent school leaders. Although researchers (Fuller et al., 2017) decry the lack of robust empirical research (including case studies) connecting leadership practice to outcomes, this case study illuminated some of the most promising practices, approaches, and innovations of recruitment and selection in EELPs, thus enabling a set of recommendations for future research and policy. While EELP programs demonstrate “that educational leadership preparation programs can and do make a difference in the practice of program graduates” (Young, 2015, p. 8), this study provides descriptions of the recruitment and selection processes of EELP programs, highlights key features, and explores elements that make them powerful and contextually relevant. Much is yet to be learned about effective approaches to leadership preparation, including the recruitment and selection of aspiring school leaders. While these factors represent limitations, this is among the
first studies of its kind to address the recruitment and selection processes of EELPs and presents and highlights important information for IHEs, practitioners, and policymakers.

**Excellent School Leadership Policy Needs Research**

As described in the literature review, school leadership researchers suggest that exemplary programs recruit and select students who have an advanced degree, have prior teaching experience, the documentation of prior leadership experience, and a demonstrated commitment to school leadership or “prior successful work with adults in educational settings” (Muth, 2009, p. 215). Some evidence exists that rigorous recruitment and selection processes of SLPPs are an integral component of effective SLPPs (Darling-Hammond et al., 2007) and an increasing number of programs and faculty are adhering to calls from researchers and “are using more rigorous and research-based strategies” (Murphy et al., 2009, p. 3). Although the effectiveness of these programs or the recruitment strategies they employ remain largely untested, research continues to evolve around the previously mentioned program features as well as their effects on graduates’ knowledge, leadership practices, and career outcomes (Young, 2015). Even programs like the EELPs in this study have not yet demonstrated “researched-based evidence that their recruitment processes discriminate between those candidates likely to become effective leaders and those who are not” (Fuller et al., 2017, p. 109). We have not significantly studied many aspects of school leadership, including but not limited to research-based practices and program outcome measures based on student achievement, the role of gut instinct in admissions decisions, or the tension of traditional higher education admissions metrics valued prominently in graduate programs in IHEs.

While robust recruitment and selection processes are evident in EELPs, “there is no consistent, high-quality body of research that has established an association between selection
processes and outcomes” for SLPPs (Fuller et al., 2017, p. 109). This is a criticism that warrants sincere thoughtfulness and action from practitioners and policymakers. Despite the calls for more empirical research on outcomes, research over the past decade “confirmed earlier assertions that empirical research remains limited in this area” (Fuller et al., 2017, p. 79).

There is a surprisingly limited base of rigorous scientific evidence concerning the effects of many commonly discussed and recommended policies regarding school leader preparation, including recruitment and selection. To be clear, this limited evidence does not mean that current policies and practices are ineffective; they might well be very effective. Instead, my study reflects shortcomings in the contributions that current scholarly study offers to policy and practice conversations in the area of school leader recruitment and selection. It also reflects, in part, the research and policies school leader preparation programs and researchers decide to investigate, and the broader policies and practices that have been implemented in varying degrees throughout the U.S., and therefore, which policies and practices continue to receive attention based on prior research that has significant limitations.

We Must Go Beyond Current Practice

The EELPs in this study received the status of exemplary based on an evaluation of portfolios that were judged on two key criteria, “the extent to which the program (a) reflected the current research on the features, content, and experiences associated with effective leadership preparation (Darling-Hammond et al., 2007; Young et al., 2009) and (b) has demonstrated evidence of program effectiveness” (Young, 2015, p.6). As mentioned above, the criteria reveal what is currently studied in SLPPs and represents both the promise and challenge of current research. In my implications and recommendations, I highlight where school leader evidence is accumulating and where it is limited, and I aim to build consensus around a shared set of realities
that have been established through this research study. In so doing, I also intend to highlight areas where increased and enhanced information could make important contributions to establishing richer and more effective school leadership policies and practices.

**Implications**

My study highlights the need for broader, systematic data collection on SLPP recruitment and selection, so programs have the opportunity to use data to improve their programs. It also acknowledges a concern about the present focus on the areas of research and policy emphasis in SLPPs today and the limitations of continued research in similar directions. Although it may be tempting for scholars and policymakers to assume that the current thought processes in exemplary SLPPs are inherently superior, “the record of relations between systematicity of thought and judgement accuracy reveals a far more nuanced reality” (Ma-Kellams & Lerner, 2016, p. 6). Researchers have revealed studies showing that people often overvalue things because they put so much work into creating them (Norton & Ariely, 2012; Norton, Mochon, & Ariely, 2012). Have we overvalued certain research in school leader preparation at the expense of other research? Are we able to separate the effort put into prior research and policy approaches from new and different methods that may lead to better student outcomes? Is there a bias in SLPPs?

While it is evident we do not have all the answers, we can learn from the EELPs highlighted in this study, replicate components that fit with the contexts and cultures of their institutions and partner districts while also renewing focus and energy toward constructive, informed examination of new and deeper forms of research. Current efforts to craft and enact policy and practice related to school leadership preparation are hindered by a lack of reliable
information based on research about the effects of such policies. To help address this problem, I make several recommendations for further research and policy.

**Recommendations for Further Research**

The challenges we face in improving our understanding of how to prepare effective school leaders may require researchers to think differently. Through this qualitative multiple-case study, I provide the foundation for further significant research. First, researchers should consider a quantitative study that collects and analyzes data from districts in order to provide insight into where their best leaders are trained, the educational backgrounds of those leaders (e.g. undergraduate degree, traditional teacher preparation programs versus alternative certification programs, etc.), and the amount of time those leaders serve in district leadership positions. Additionally, a longitudinal quantitative study could assess the program outcomes of SLPPs with barrier-less selection processes versus rigorous selection processes. This information not only provides districts with information valuable for enabling them to more effectively place principals in schools, but importantly, leader tracking systems (LTS) can also provide critical information for EELPs. An LTS would aid in research to study the connection between the selected leadership candidate and their performance on the job after graduating from their preparation program.

Future research may include studies that examine other metrics for recruitment and selection that have yet to be explored. Researchers (Darling-Hammond et al., 2007; Browne-Ferrigno & Muth, 2009) assert that effective school leadership preparation programs are characterized by rigorous recruitment and selective admissions, yet it is unclear what procedures and efforts lead to the most successful leaders and positive school outcomes (Cheney et al., 2010; Fuller et al., 2017; George W. Bush Institute, 2016). Future studies could examine the role
and influence of program directors' gut instincts in admissions decisions, the outcomes of graduates from programs with open versus selective admissions processes, and the outcomes of graduates from programs utilizing current research-based recruitment and selection criteria.

Additionally, future researchers may consider the findings of this study. The findings can be used to design a larger-scale, quantitative study that explores the perceptions of EELP program administrators and EELP graduates on their program’s recruitment and selection processes. It would be interesting to ask program administrators and graduates to assess a program’s recruitment and selection practices in terms of its productivity, strengths, and weaknesses. The interviews and data analysis of this study highlighted additional dimensions and perspectives to study, analyze, and understand; some of which are: the way in which an EELP improved their selection process by training the interviewers/evaluation team in a multi-day training prior to the selection event, the effectiveness of on-line information sessions versus in person sessions, the way word-of-mouth recruitment is utilized in different contexts, the level of and type of involvement of EELP district partners in recruitment and selection, and the decision to use a specific number of evaluators in final selection decisions (e.g. a smaller group of two to three versus a larger group of seven to eight) and the makeup of that group (e.g. higher education faculty/staff, district partners, alumni, etc.). However, the design of this research study did not allow for a more in-depth analysis of the decision to undertake these and other distinctive EELP recruitment and selection practices.

It would be beneficial to conduct research on recruitment independent from selection. While recruitment and selection are both components of an effective leadership pipeline, the critical constructs involved in candidate recruitment are not well studied. By focusing on recruitment independently, new research questions will be generated. A preponderance of studies
focus on selection, understandably because of the established importance of rigorous selection (Darling-Hammond et al., 2007; Orr, 2010; Young, 2017), while journal articles written by EELP faculty provide more robust, specific, and descriptive examples of selection practices than of recruitment practices (Cosner, 2019; Cosner, Tozer, & Smylie, 2012; Cosner, Tozer, Zavitkovsky, & Whalen, 2015; Fusarelli, Fusarelli, & Drake, 2018; Garza & Merchant, 2016; Honig & Walsh, 2019; Korach, Seidel, & del Carmen Salazar, 2012; Korach, Anderson, Hesbol, Tabron, Candelarie, Kipp, & Miller-Brown, 2019). Despite the inclusion of recruitment throughout research examining the essential components of effective SLLPs, there is little actual recruitment research in this area (Browne-Ferrigno & Muth, 2009; Young, 2017). McCarthy and Forsyth (2009) assert they could not find “comprehensive, systematic research examining the recruitment and admission of school leaders to preparation programs” (p. 89). Eight years after McCarthy and Forsyth’s study, “recruitment on SLPP candidates remains sparse” (Fuller et al., 2017, p. 84).

There are examples of states and SLPPs working to enhance the recruitment and selectivity of their candidate pools, and many state education agencies and policymakers are supporting these efforts (Anderson & Reynolds, 2015). Promising recruitment initiatives by states include efforts to market teaching as a career that prospective college students and adults wishing to transition careers should consider. For example, state-wide recruitment campaigns are underway in North Carolina, New Jersey, and Pennsylvania in an effort to help with teacher recruitment and diversity initiatives (Hinchcliffe, 2019; Mezzacappa, 2019; O’Dea, 2019). Given the absence of studies and notable lack of research in the area of leader recruitment (Fuller et al., 2017), the importance of this stage in the production of school leaders warrants increased attention from researchers.
Additionally, this study highlights the need for more research on the educator pipeline. Similar to the goal of isolating research on recruitment, study on the initial stages of the educator pipeline is necessary as states and preparation programs seek to improve the selectivity and diversity of their educator candidate pools. A report by the U.S. Department of Education (ED) stated that 82 percent of the teaching force is white, yet recent studies have shown the promising benefits of a teaching force that more closely resembles the diversity of the U.S. student population (U.S. Department of Education, 2016). Research from Egalite and Kisada (2017) suggests that “there are positive benefits for students who experience a demographically similar teacher” and “that the underrepresentation of minority and male teachers may contribute to these gaps” (p. 1). One recent study found that low-income black male students were 39 percent less likely to drop out by high school if they were assigned to a black teacher in 3rd, 4th, or 5th grade (Gershenson, Hart, Lindsay, & Papageorge, 2017). This line of research and corresponding conclusions strengthens the need for research and policies aimed at diversifying the teacher, and eventual, leader pipeline. It would be interesting to study the outcomes on educator preparation programs with more intensive recruitment practices and policies and their production of diverse teacher candidates. In May 2019, NC State University assistant professor Dr. Tim Drake presented research to the N.C. State Board of Education and asserted that, “The principal pipeline is only as healthy as the teacher pipeline, and many of the same obstacles for teacher recruitment apply for principal recruitment (e.g., salary, amount of work, perceived status of the profession),” (NC State, 2019).

Increasing the number of excellent teachers in classrooms in the U.S. is key to increasing the number of excellent leadership candidates, and in turn, increasing the number of excellent school leaders who will improve students’ future outcomes. Lessons can be learned, and research
should examine what programs are doing that could be shared to recruit and select talented and diverse individuals into the teaching and leadership professions at higher rates.

**Considerations for Policy**

What role should research play in the design of school leader policies? A substantial amount of literature discusses the relation of research and policy making in the field of school leadership (Young, 2017). Drawing on research to make policy decisions includes risks and has limitations (Eberhart, Han, and Seybel, 2017; Taggart, 2010). A major limitation is that research evidence is fallible, preliminary and, often, contradictory (Hammersley, 2013). One limitation listed previously is the focus of current research in school leadership preparation recruitment and selection. As discussed, a consistent, high-quality body of research has not established an association between selection processes and outcomes for SLPPs (Fuller et al., 2017). Yet, presently, school leadership programs are evaluated on the extent to which the programs reflect the current research on the features associated with effective leadership preparation (Darling-Hammond et al., 2007; Young et al., 2009). School leadership research needs to raise new questions, explore new methods, and spread those advances into policy and practice discourses, while simultaneously continuing to work to identify causal mechanisms and find concrete solutions to existing challenges within current research. In the following recommendations, I discuss several key factors that can make policy actions more effective at enacting thoughtful SLPP policy.

As mentioned in chapter two, in the 2015 Wallace Foundation report, Paul Manna advocated for the need to strike a better balance in the prioritization of school leadership and teaching in the highest research and policy agenda items. A new focus on the impact of school leadership prompted many organizations, state and federal agencies, and higher education
institutions to deepen their knowledge about the role of school leaders in raising the overall achievement of all students. National organizations offered new resources, design and evaluation principles, and training considerations, which support actions that could be taken to ensure that school leaders are as effective as possible (Learning Policy Institute, 2018; RAND, 2017, 2019; The Hunt Institute, 2019; The Wallace Foundation, 2016; University Council for Educational Administration and New Leaders, 2016). However, there is still the problem of inattention and lack of support for principals in the federal funding from the U.S. Department of Education (ED) and the Institute of Education Sciences (IES) (Haller, Hunt, Pacha & Fazekas, 2016).

Alignment of research questions and policy priorities for school leadership research.

Policymakers often combine strategies targeting teachers and principals (Haller & Hunt, 2015). While both groups are considered educators, only the principal is a multiplier of effective teaching and learning and has a school-wide reach (Haller & Hunt, 2016; Manna, 2015). Support for teachers is critical but neglecting school leadership ignores a larger impact and higher return on investment. Over the past quarter century, research on the role of school leaders has grown significantly (Fusarelli, Fusarelli, Seaton, & VanGorder, 2019). Yet, only a small percentage of research on school leadership preparation has been empirical in nature (Ni, Hollingworth, Rorrer, & Pounder, 2016; Young, 2017 p. 1). Orr and Barber write that “the quality and continuous improvement of educational leadership preparation programs are highly dependent upon the field’s engagement in and use of evaluation and related research” (p. 457).

As stated previously, school leadership preparation is in its relatively early stages of development and researchers are beginning to assess how principal preparation programs relative to school improvement and student learning outcomes (Fuller et al., 2011; Ni et al., 2016; Orphanos & Orr, 2013; Orr & Orphanos, 2011). UCEA as well as other special interest groups
have worked diligently to design assessment frameworks and encourage the development of appropriate instruments in program assessment (Ni et al., 2016; Orr & Pounder, 2006; Pounder, 2012). Unfortunately, faculty interest and commitment to learning more about best practices and the effects of preparation on leadership practices remain the primary drivers for advancing program evaluation research (Orr & Barber, 2009). For example, ED has “typically allocated program funds aimed at supporting principals under a broader topic area of Teacher and Leader Effectiveness (e.g. Title II, Supporting Effective Educators Development (SEED), etc.)” (Haller et al., 2016, p. 2). Grouping school leaders and teachers together, or grouping school leaders with other focus areas, “does not just occur with program funding, but is also the standard practice for allocating research funds as well” (Haller et al., 2016, p. 2). Likewise, although ED has financially supported 41 SLPPs in their efforts to recruit, train, and mentor effective school leaders through the School Leadership Preparation (SLP) grant program over the past decade, the SLP was not funded as part of the 2018 Congressional budget (UCEA, 2019).

*Policymakers should increase funding for school leadership research and evaluation.*

Unique challenges to conducting school leadership research exist (e.g. principals affect student achievement indirectly, small sample sizes of principals from programs make analysis difficult, and it takes time for a principal to affect outcomes at a school) and have been documented in literature (Béteille, Kalogrides, & Loeb, 2011; Gates et al., 2014; George W. Bush Institute, 2016). Universities face increasing budget cuts and faculty are stretched with internal and external pressures to achieve tenure, elevating concerns regarding the current higher education policy environment and limited financial and human resources allocated to leadership preparation initiatives (Mitchell, Palacios, & Leachman, 2014). The stakes for neglecting research in this area could not be higher: not a single school has ever been found to accomplish
school turnaround without the intervention of a strong school leader (Leithwood et al., 2004). A key policy instrument to shape exemplary school leadership preparation is legislation around funding. For example, policymakers are able to enhance funding for school leader preparation research or provide targeted funding to large-scale longitudinal studies. Additionally, evaluations help inform policymakers whether necessary adjustments to programs need to be made. Next to longitudinal studies exploring the interrelations between different aspects of school leader preparation in a broader sense, longitudinal SLPP evaluations are examples of how specific policy interests can explicitly direct research questions.

**Funding should be allocated for enhancing effective SLPPs.** It is time for policymakers to prioritize school leadership research and fund and support promising initiatives and questions which have potential to dramatically improve the U.S. education system. State funding could and should be used to incentivize research and promising practices in SLPPs. For example, states could fund the development and implementation of state leader tracking systems which would help districts and SLPPs collect data on where their best leaders are trained, the educational backgrounds of those leaders (e.g. undergraduate degree, traditional teacher preparation programs versus alternative certification programs, etc.), and the amount of time those leaders serve in district leadership positions. As mentioned in recommendations for future research, this information not only provides districts with information valuable for enabling them to more effectively place principals in schools, but importantly, leader tracking systems (LTS) can also provide critical information for EELPs. One possibility to consider is already underway in districts involved in the Wallace Principal Pipeline (Wallace, 2016; NC State, 2019). For example, the districts involved in the Wallace Principal Pipeline (Anderson, Turnbull & Arcaira, 2017) included the following in their LTSs:
Candidate demographic information, where candidates received their principal preparation, how candidates fared on state certification exams, where and in what positions candidates worked both prior to and following their preparation program completion, data on the schools in which candidates worked (e.g., school level and size, student demographics and school performance), and what kinds of professional development candidates participated in (p. 1).

The ability to maintain, organize, and analyze substantial data on school leaders’ records of success in relation to their experiences in preparation, selection, and other areas of support, will allow districts, policymakers, and researchers “to gain clues to the kinds of preparation experiences, selection criteria, and supports that are associated with greater success on the job” (Anderson, Turnbull, & Arcaira, 2017, p. ii).

*States must utilize sound methodology and exercise modification as needed.* As policymakers begin to prioritize school leadership research and fund and support promising initiatives which have potential to dramatically improve the U.S. education system, state funding for programs must be tied to sound methodology and research questions. State funding could and should be used to incentivize SLPPs for focusing on the most effective measures. For example, in 2015 NC created the Transforming Principal Preparation program (TP3), an effort to redefine principal preparation across the state. Structured as a competitive grant program, “TP3 significantly increases North Carolina’s investment in school leadership, while raising the bar on who can serve as a principal and enabling preparation programs to dramatically improve their practices” (BEST NC, 2019). NELA is a recipient of the TP3 funding and has a record of success including “90% of schools with a NELA graduate serving as principal met or exceeded growth for the 2018 – 2019 school year vs. only 75% of principals across all schools in the state
reaching the same level of performance” (NELA, 2020). However, even though TP3 uses research questions and state funding to address current school leadership policy needs, knowledge gaps exist that “are not always evident from the start but emerge in the process” of researching and evaluating programs and “requires careful checking for validity and reliability” (Eberhart, Han, and Seybel, 2017, p. 8). Therefore, room for flexibility, modification, and innovative explorations are essential as gaps in knowledge come to light. States should base funding and support for SLPPs on outcomes measures of school leader graduate performance in leadership roles rather than on outdated metrics (Young, 2017) including number of applications received, number of applications denied, and number of graduates employed in leadership roles.

Make program-district collaboration a qualification for program accreditation.

Researchers (Seashore, Leithwood, Wahlstrom, & Anderson, 2010) suggest that state policymakers rarely incorporate the views of districts in the legislative and agenda-setting process. Given the central role that many districts play in the preparation of school leaders, states should acknowledge the increasingly important role of districts as collaborators in the policy process. Findings from this research suggest that all EELPs prioritize collaboration with districts, even as the specifics of those partnerships varies from program to program. As 43 states require school leader candidates to complete a state approved SLPP for licensure, how SLPPs recruit and select candidates is influential in shaping who can eventually serve as a school leader (Anderson & Reynolds, 2015). While the available literature on SLPP recruitment and selection remains sparse, the existing literature strongly points toward the need to engage in more rigorous recruitment efforts and continue empirical research connecting selection and practice to outcomes (Turnbull et al., 2015; UCEA May 2016).
The initial recruitment and selection of candidates represent the beginning of the school leadership pipeline (Hill, Tucker, & Young, 2012) and states should consider policies targeting these areas. The effectiveness of school leadership preparation is partially dictated by state policies for program approval and candidate licensure (Anderson & Reynolds, 2015). One way states could use policy to encourage more robust efforts in recruitment and selection is to make program-district collaboration a qualification for program accreditation. The Wallace Foundation has championed improved SLPP-district partnerships through their foundation initiatives (Turnbull, Riley, & MacFarlane, 2015) and increasingly, successful SLPPs are engaging in well-developed SLPP-district partnerships, with robust collaboration among a host of program features, including candidate recruitment and selection (UCEA, 2016). There is an emerging consensus among researchers that strong university-district partnerships are essential to high-quality preparation (Davis, 2016) as the inclusion of collaboration between universities and school districts “fosters the design of high-quality curriculum, resulting in greater candidate learning and program effectiveness” (p. 8). Among the markers of quality collaboration include district personnel playing a role in the recruitment and selection of aspiring school leadership candidates (Young, 2010). States should do more to support the preparation of school leaders by providing funding for districts and universities partnership efforts.

**Establish high quality legislation around improving SLPP.** Establishing high quality legislation would require states to develop knowledge of effective leadership preparation, institute high leverage policies that support such preparation, and support the evaluation and continuous improvement of preparation programs, such as requiring a thoughtful approach to recruitment and selection. Even as selection is considered one of the most important areas for state policies school leadership preparation, only Tennessee has a well-developed set of policies
for SLPP selection, “including a plan for recruitment as well as a performance-based assessment. Five additional states also require a performance-based assessment but do not have specific, detailed plans in place for recruitment of new students” (Fuller et al., 2017). States should consider the available research on the importance of recruitment and selection for the principal pipeline, commit to advancing new research in this area, and establish high quality principal preparation legislation in their own states. Legislation should be modified, as needed, as new insights emerge from outcome data gained through more research on the effectiveness of SLPP graduates.

*States should use federal funding for principal preparation.* Additionally, states could choose to allocate federal funding toward exemplary preparation programs, such as through Title II of the ESSA or Title II of the Higher Education Act (HEA), both of which can be used for principal preparation. Based on a review of 52 ESSA plans (50 states, Washington, DC, and Puerto Rico), UCEA found that 21 of 52 plans (40%) specifically mention using Title II-A funds to improve principal preparation programs (Doiron & Reedy, 2018). It is unclear why all 52 states/areas did not choose to use Title II-A funds to improve their SLPPs. Additional funding, whether it comes from districts, states, federal grants, or external philanthropic organizations, may be key to ensuring that excellent school leader candidates are recruited and selected and have meaningful program experiences.

**Considerations for Practice**

There are numerous studies finding SLPP recruitment and selection efforts to be key components of highly effective SLPPs. While past studies have contributed to the body of knowledge in understanding the selection process to greater depths, there is no single formula for recruitment and selection that can be universally applied. Yet this study, as well as previous
research, enhances my deeply held belief that the recruitment and selection of school leadership candidates matter. As pronouncements encouraging more “rigorous” recruitment and selection policies are abundant in literature (Young, 2009, 2017), I agree with Fuller et al. (2017) that “a more appropriate research-based word to describe the recruitment and selection processes that should be adopted by SLPPs is thoughtful” [emphasis added] (p. 110). Understanding the practices promoting success in EELPs can provide valuable lessons for current and future SLPP efforts.

**Willingness to adjust practice as new scholarship emerges.** Additional scholarship is needed to advance the growing field of study in recruitment and selection in SLPPs (Fuller et al., 2017). As described earlier, much of the research on SLPP has been based on a limited set of methodological approaches, including descriptive, survey, and cross-sectional studies (Crow, Young, Murphy, & Ogawa, 2009) while research on the recruitment and selection of preparation program participants was too limited to specify what procedures or policies, if any, were actually driving recruitment and selection (Young, 2018). While “early research efforts spurred and supported significant research activity on educational leadership preparation and development and have provided important resources for scholars, policymakers, and leadership preparation faculty” (Young, 2018, p. 14) it is clear that many questions remain, and more work is needed to understand more about the school leadership practices to use, their purposes, and outcomes as related to student success. The following recommendations for SLPPs committed to thoughtful recruitment and selection of high-quality school leader candidates are based on our current understanding of exemplary practice and on an acknowledgement that questions remain, and additional scholarship is needed.
**Build capacity for program excellence.** The initial recruitment and selection of candidates represents the beginning of the principal pipeline, and most SLPPs can certainly improve their practices around data collection and analysis in this arena. Researchers have long called for states and programs to collect both more data and more accurate data about school leaders (Young & Fuller, 2013). If programs collect and provide data in a central database, it “could provide a wealth of information regarding the characteristics of candidates, how they were recruited, where they were placed, and eventually the outcomes of their preparation” (Crow & Young, 2017, p. 317). It is important for programs to collect helpful and authentic data on their program and to share that information so the field can develop and use data from multiple SLPPs to engage in research on the effects of various approaches. For example, the EELPs in this study varied in their approaches and philosophies of recruitment and selection. The ability to utilize their program information and compare the outcomes of their graduates would provide important insights for the field. This collection and dissemination of information requires a commitment and humbleness from program directors.

**Utilize data systems to make evidence-based decisions.** Programs should adopt an approach to recruitment selection aligned with their goals, mission, purpose, and local context. Recruitment efforts should be targeted and include a systematic process to identify and actively encourage the application of potential candidates who would make for a more robust school leadership pipeline, including candidates with backgrounds as highly successful educators and teachers of color. Passive processes such as flyers, websites, and information sessions are necessary, but insufficient. The entire program faculty and staff should be a part of candidate recruitment and the recruitment activities should be year-round. Recruitment information should be collected and analyzed over time to determine helpful insights and lessons learned. The
recruitment and selection process is a dynamic, complex and important part of SLPPs and those in charge of recruiting and selecting applicants “ought to have sufficient data whereupon to base their choices” (Rozario, Venkatraman & Abbas, 2019, p. 1).

**Strong district-university partnerships are vital.** Relationships will look different for each program, but partnerships and collaborations with districts are a vital component to effective recruitment and selection (Davis, 2016). Each SLPP should have a faculty or staff member to lead efforts on 1) recruitment and 2) selection to ensure that data tracking, continuous improvement mechanisms, and thoughtful approaches and enhancements are undertaken. Selection teams should be well prepared well in advance of a selection event, as their preparation is fundamental in ensuring that the execution and outcome meets the desire and expectation of the SLPP.

**Conclusion**

These findings provide a more comprehensive understanding of recruitment and selection strategies in EELPs and could serve as a resource to other SLLPs that are geared toward making changes or enhancements to their leadership preparation programs. Additionally, program leaders and educational policymakers could benefit from the insights gained from the recruitment and selection efforts and developments taking place within EELPs. This study highlights the need for discussion in the field of school leader preparation about the importance of more deeply understanding and engaging in robust recruitment and selection processes.

The findings could also provide a guidance framework for recruitment and selection policies for IHEs. EELP practices and experiences do not provide a one-size-fits-all approach for all SLPPs, and we are still learning about the best and most effective mechanisms for leader recruitment and selection, but research has shown that leadership programs must engage in
continuous improvement throughout the duration of their existence if they hope to improve outcomes for all students (Cosner, 2015; Smylie, 2010). The capacity of exemplary school leadership to improve student outcomes is extraordinary. The findings of this study, along with numerous examples of improved processes and mission-driven practices discussed in this research, suggest that programs can change, grow, and deliberately enact thoughtful policies and practices surrounding recruitment and selection. My hope is that this research inspires and encourages others to advocate for policies that will ensure that each child can share in the benefits of an excellent school led by a well-prepared and highly-qualified school leader.
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Appendix A: Email Inviting Study Participation

Date

Dear Dr. (Name of program director),

I am writing to request your assistance with research I am conducting for my doctoral dissertation at North Carolina State University. As part of the requirements for the completion of my degree, I am conducting research on the topic of aspiring school leader recruitment and selection in exemplary school leader preparation programs. Since I am only focusing on programs in the exemplary category, I have identified your program for possible participation in my research.

Pending university approval, the study will commence in January 2019, with the majority of the research taking place during the first semester of the 2019 academic year. I am very interested in speaking with you to learn more about your program and your aspiring school leader recruitment and selection process. The study, as designed, should only require one 60-minute video interview via Skype or Google Hangouts. Additionally, I am interested in reviewing your recruitment and selection materials as well as your UCEA Exemplary Educational Leadership Preparation Award application. The purpose of this portion of the study is to garner information regarding how exemplary leader preparation programs recruit and select aspiring school leader candidates and what information they deem most important in this process. I am interested in what lessons can be learned from a review and comparison of EELP awardees’ recruitment and selection processes and activities.

If you would like to participate in this valuable study, I can contact you by phone to share more details and to answer questions about my research project. If you grant me permission to include your program in the study, we can arrange an interview at your convenience.

Thank you for your time and consideration.

Kind regards,

Angela VanGorder
Appendix B: Informed Consent

North Carolina State University INFORMED CONSENT FORM for RESEARCH

Title of Study: Recruiting and Selecting Effective Educational Leaders: A Case Study of Exemplary Educational Leadership Programs

Principal Investigator: Angela VanGorder
Faculty Sponsor: Bonnie Fusarelli

PLEASE READ ALL OF THIS INFORMATION CAREFULLY PRIOR TO COMPLETING THE CONSENT FORM

What are some general things you should know about research studies?
You are being asked to take part in a research study. Your participation in this study is voluntary. You have the right to be a part of this study, to choose not to participate or to stop participating at any time without penalty. The purpose of research studies is to gain a better understanding of a certain topic or issue. You are not guaranteed any personal benefits from being in a study. Research studies also may pose risks to those that participate. In this consent form you will find specific details about the research in which you are being asked to participate. If you do not understand something in this form it is your right to ask the researcher for clarification or more information. A copy of this consent form will be provided to you. If at any time you have questions about your participation, do not hesitate to contact the researcher(s) named above.

What is the purpose of this study?
The purpose of this proposed study is to understand how exemplary school leader preparation programs conduct a rigorous recruitment and selection process for aspiring K-12 school leaders. A qualitative study of this type allows for an in-depth and descriptive examination of how five nationally award-winning programs recruit and select aspiring leadership candidates who are likely to be successful as school leaders. A second objective of this study is to explore the knowledge, skills, and dispositions these programs seek in candidates and how their recruitment and selection activities identify individuals with the requisite attributes. This research has the potential to both inform institutional leaders and policymakers as the study will contribute to our understanding of recruitment and selection activities by exemplary school leader preparation programs.

What will happen if you take part in the study?
If you agree to participate in this study, you will be asked to participate in a one-on-one Google Hangout or Skype interview with the researcher that will last approximately 60 minutes and will take place at a mutually agreed upon time and date. Once the interview is transcribed, you will be invited to review the interview transcript, if you wish, in order to ensure that your answers were accurately reflected.

Risks
We do not anticipate any foreseeable risks or discomforts as a result of participating in this study.

Benefits
The findings for this study could provide a more comprehensive understanding of recruitment and selection strategies in school leader preparation programs. The findings could serve as a resource to other programs who are interested in making changes or improvements to their leadership preparation programs. The field of K-12 and higher education could benefit from the contribution this study could make to the literature on the recruitment and selection efforts taking place in a graduate program context. Additionally, program leaders and educational policymakers could benefit from the insight gained on the recruitment and selection developments taking place at a exemplary school leader preparation programs. Findings could also provide a framework to guide recruitment and selection policies at the state level.

Confidentiality
The information in the study records will be kept confidential to the full extent allowed by law. However, this study is not anonymous and individual data gathered from programs will be named in the final study. Data will be stored securely in a password protected file on my computer which will be locked in a secure location when not in use.

Compensation
You will not receive any type of compensation for participating in this study.

What if you have questions about this study? If you have questions at any time about the study or the procedures, you may contact the researcher, Angela VanGorder, at abvangor@ncsu.edu, or 864-934-2368.

What if you have questions about your rights as a research participant? If you feel you have not been treated according to the descriptions in this form, or your rights as a participant in research have been violated during the course of this project, you may contact Deb Paxton, Regulatory Compliance Administrator, Box 7514, North Carolina State University Campus, USA (919/515-4514).

Consent To Participate “I have read and understand the above information. I have received a copy of this form. I agree to participate in this study with the understanding that I may choose
Appendix C: Program Director Interview Protocol

**Background:** Tell me a little bit about your role as program director how long you have been in it?

**Possible Interview Questions:**

1. Tell me about your recruitment processes? What have you learned about recruitment?
2. How does your program communicate recruitment information?
3. How do you identify potential candidates?
4. How difficult is it to recruit?
5. What is your biggest challenge in recruiting?
6. What is your best success in recruiting?
7. How did you develop your recruitment? How has it evolved over time?
8. Why is your recruitment process exemplary?
9. Tell me about your selection process; what have you learned about selection?
10. What are the processes for assessing and selecting talent?
11. What do you look for during selection? (As a probe, I will follow-up to learn more about candidate characteristics, knowledge, skills, and dispositions).
12. How difficult is it to select candidates?
13. What is your biggest challenge in selection?
14. What is your best success in selection?
15. How did you develop your recruitment? How has it evolved over time?
16. Why is your selection process exemplary?
17. Please describe an ideal candidate.
18. How did you develop your recruitment strategy and materials? How have they developed over time?

19. Has your work changed over time in relation to your program’s recruitment endeavors? Your selection endeavors? If so, in what ways?

20. What are the greatest obstacles or challenges facing your program as it works towards its goals to recruit and select successful aspiring school leaders?

21. Why do you think other programs do not use a similar process?

22. Do you have any advice for other programs who want to improve their recruitment and selection?

23. Is there anything else you think I should know? Is there anything else you would like to tell me about?
Appendix D: UCEA Executive Director Interview Protocol

**Background:** Tell me a little bit about your role as UCEA executive director and how long you have been in it?

**Possible Interview Questions:**

1. Tell me about the history of the EELP Award?

2. Why did UCEA feel it was necessary to distinguish some programs as exemplary?

3. How was the criteria for the award developed? The criteria for recruitment and selection?

4. How was the EELP selection committee determined? Has it changed over time? If so, in what ways?

5. Why was there no EELP awardee in 2015, 2017, and 2018?

6. How has UCEA disseminated information about the exemplary components of these programs?

7. Do you have any advice for other programs who want to improve their recruitment and selection?

8. Is there anything else you think I should know? Is there anything else you would like to tell me about?
Appendix E: Pilot Interview Participant

1) Dr. Diana Pounder, University of Central Arkansas, Retired

Dr. Pounder is a retired College of Education Dean at the University of Central Arkansas (2009-2015) and former Professor and Chair of the Department of Educational Leadership and Policy at the University of Utah-Salt Lake City (1989-2009). She earned her PhD in Educational Administration from the University of Wisconsin-Madison (1984). She has worked as a university professor and researcher for over 30 years, after working in public schools for 10 years as a high school math teacher, a secondary guidance counselor, and a middle school principal.

Dr. Pounder has been active and assumed leadership roles in national professional organizations, including past *Educational Administration Quarterly* Editor, President of the University Council for Educational Administration (UCEA), Secretary of Division A of the American Educational Research Association (AERA), and Co-Chair of the Joint UCEA, AERA-Division A, TEA-Sig Task Force on Leadership Preparation Effectiveness. She has also been awarded two of UCEA’s most prominent awards --- UCEA Distinguished Service Award and the UCEA Master Professor Award. She participates actively in a variety of state and national education and policy initiatives, the most recent of which have focused largely on improving and assessing teacher and leader preparation. Her scholarship includes largely empirical research on school leader preparation effectiveness, professor and principal shortages, and other interests related to attracting, retaining, and developing professional educators.
Appendix F: Document Analysis Protocol

Documents to be Analyzed:

- Exemplary Educational Leadership Preparation award applications
- Program websites and social media accounts
- Recruiting Process Documentation
  - Recruiting materials
  - Description of recruiting practices
  - Flyers
  - Timeline for the recruitment process
- Selection Process Documentation
  - Documentation outlining the selection process from start to finish
  - Timeline for the selection process
  - List of individuals involved in the selection process by position
- Selection Tools
  - Applications
  - Interview protocol for candidates for all rounds of the selection process Activities related to the selection process, for example:
    - Scenarios to which candidates must respond or role play
    - Data candidates are asked to submit or analyze at assessment or selection events
    - Group interview questions
- Rubrics for evaluating candidates, including:
  - Rubric for evaluating candidates’ initial applications, including any minimum criteria
  - Rubric for evaluating interview responses
  - Rubric for evaluating any of the activities listed above