

## A BETTER WAY TO PREPARE PRINCIPALS:

### Impact of a competency-based fellowship on aspiring principals' growth into leadership

#### *Overview of key findings*

#### **The Challenge**

High-poverty, low-achieving school districts – which arguably need the best principals – have difficulty attracting high-quality applicants. Relatively few principal preparation programs offer strong clinical training components; and when clinical training is offered, it rarely provides candidates with the sustained, hands-on conditions they can expect to face as a principal.

#### **A Better Way to Prepare New Principals**

The National Institute for Excellence in Teaching (NIET) – in partnership with the Texas Tech University (TTU) College of Education and 12 high-need school districts in Texas and Louisiana – sought to change principal preparation to produce highly effective administrators to lead high-need schools. The result of the partnership was the *Leadership Instruction for Teachers (LIFT) program*, an innovative, 15-month principal preparation and residency program that impacted 42 schools and 35,000 students. The LIFT program was funded in part through a federal Supporting Effective Educator Development (SEED) grant awarded in 2015.

The LIFT program placed principal candidates as interim assistant principals in high-need schools for a year-long residency – more closely aligning coursework to their job-embedded clinical experience – under the mentorship of an experienced school leader. These strategies produced significant results over the four-year grant period. One principal fellow said, “The opportunity to spend every single school day as an assistant principal was the most valuable piece of the LIFT program. The job-embedded component gave me the opportunity to gain experience in a variety of areas.”

#### Outcomes include:

- Principal fellows improved in all areas of the job as measured using state recommended principal evaluation rubrics, including providing feedback to teachers.
- 95% of principal fellows reported they felt “job-ready” following the LIFT residency.
- 87% took a leadership position within one year of graduation.
- 80% took a leadership position in a high-need school within one year of graduation.



#### **Creating a Leadership Pipeline for High-need Schools**

The innovative LIFT partnership demonstrated how to create coherence and alignment between university principal preparation and the expectations and demands of the job of principal in a high-need school, with a non-profit leadership development organization strengthening the handoff. This partnership developed the skills and knowledge of new principals, connected them to schools and students that needed them most, and set them up to be successful on day one. The LIFT program provides lessons learned for strengthening principal preparation across the country.