

July 2020

Letter from Guest Editor

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Recommended Citation

Bingham, Steven (2020) "Letter from Guest Editor," *Journal of Organizational & Educational Leadership*: Vol. 5 : Iss. 2 , Article 2.
Available at: <https://digitalcommons.gardner-webb.edu/joel/vol5/iss2/2>

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Letter from Steven Bingham, Guest Editor for Themed Edition
Improving North Carolina's Response to Principal Preparation and Practice

As in many states, educational leaders in North Carolina are reimagining their standards for educator preparation and practice. Nearly two years ago, the NC General Assembly and State Board of Education appointed eighteen education stakeholders to the Professional Educator Preparation and Standards Commission, including principals, superintendents, HR directors, teachers, and university faculty.

Still in progress, the Commission's work seeks to align the 12-year-old North Carolina Standards for School Executives with the nationally developed Professional Standards for Educational Leaders, in part, to redress inequities in schools and schooling. Recent media coverage of acts of institutional racism, assertions of implicit bias, and growing economic inequality suggest the oversight and its implications for practice, policy, and research is too big for educational scholar practitioners to ignore.

Accordingly, members of North Carolina Professors of Educational Leadership, representing NC's 17 universities offering graduate programs in principal preparation, recently approved a Call for Proposals for a Themed Edition of *Journal of Organizational and Educational Leadership* dedicated to "Improving North Carolina's Response to Principal Preparation and Practice." The edition, introduced in this letter from JOEL's founding and guest editor, is our modest but high-quality first effort.

We feature three articles from NC educational scholars, representing High Point University, University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, and University of North Carolina at Wilmington. The first article, written by HPU faculty Tawanah Allen, Dustin Johnson, and Anthony Jackson and UNCCH faculty Derrick Jordan, introduces the Trauma and Learning Policy Initiative's Flexible Framework. The authors make an evidence-based case for incorporating the Framework into principal preparation and development to address the NCSSE oversight.

The second article features UNCCH faculty scholars, Martinette Horner and Derrick Jordan. Building on the work of practitioner scholars like Barbara Howard at Appalachian State University, Horner and Jordan argue that principal preparation needs to "come down from the Ivory Tower" through university-school partnerships. Underscoring the excellent work already begun in select NC principal-preparation programs, the authors marshal research suggesting that authentic, field-based principal preparation is particularly important for aspiring leaders of schools with concentrations of at-risk minority students.

The third article is a study co-authored by UNCW faculty, William Sterrett, and his University of Denver colleague, Jayson Richardson. Sterrett and Richardson underscore the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic where digital learning and leadership has become the new norm. As principals continue to be instructional leaders and staff developers, they must now ask themselves how *to* use technology to engage in such activities. Sterrett and Richardson organize their findings into three themes of how effective principals lead in this work.

In a fourth article, we feature the work of Abbie Mahaffey, Zora Wolfe, and Katia Ciampa, of Widener University in Pennsylvania. We return here to the standards theme of this issue, specifically those developed by the International Literacy Association. Ideally, ILA standards are employed by specialized literacy professionals in schools. In the authors' mixed-method study of elementary principals, it was found that principals lacked familiarity with and use of the ILA standards when determining specialized literacy professional's roles and responsibilities.

Implications for principal preparation and practice evidenced by the articles in this Themed Edition are clear: if schooling outcomes are to improve for all students, school leaders need to be attuned to the inequities in the present system of education, including the disproportionate impacts of childhood trauma, comparative benefits of university-school partnership principal-preparation programs, and the need for principal engagement with standards guiding teaching and learning in all disciplines. At minimum, we hope we have ignited your interest in exploring what is going on in your state. On a larger note, we hope educational policymakers, program planners, and scholars will join our conversation.

Steven Bingham, July 2020