

NCPFP 2025 Evaluation Report

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Executive Summary

The purpose of this report is to provide formative data on the eight principal preparation programs funded in the 2020-2026 and 2022-2028 grant cycles of the fully consolidated North Carolina Principal Fellows Program (NCPFP). The Education Policy Initiative at Carolina (EPIC) is the official evaluator of the NCPFP and this is the third written report in EPIC's seven-year NCPFP evaluation. For this report we analyzed interview, focus group, survey, and administrative data. When possible, we compared results for Principal Fellows to those completing traditional principal preparation routes. Our work focuses on the four key tenets of the NCPFP: attracting promising school leader candidates, providing innovative and high-quality preparation experiences, meeting a majority of the demand for school leaders in North Carolina, and producing effective school leaders. From our analyses we identified several important takeaways.

Key Findings

Attracting Promising School Leader Candidates

- Partnerships between school districts and universities in the recruitment and selection of Principal Fellows are a key distinction between NCPFP and traditional MSA programs.
- Very few Principal Fellows report feeling financially burdened by program attendance. In turn, a large majority of Principal Fellows report that program financial support makes pursuing a degree more possible and allows them to focus more time on becoming a school leader.
- Relative to traditional MSA completers, Principal Fellows are more likely to have a graduate degree or NBC and have higher levels of teacher performance (NCEES, EVAAS).

Providing Innovative and High-Quality Preparation Experiences

- At program completion, Principal Fellows report feeling best prepared for Cultural Leadership and Strategic Leadership. Principal Fellow completers identify the full-time internship and interactions with their cohort as the most valuable aspects of their programs.
- Perceptions of program quality vary across NCPFP programs, with several programs (ECU, NCSU, and UNCG) standing out as being more highly rated by their graduates.

Meeting a Majority of the Demand for School Leaders in North Carolina

- Relative to traditional MSA completers, Principal Fellows are much more likely to move into a school leader position.
- Principal Fellows report minimal difficulty in securing a school leader position—most receive offers during or immediately following the internship—and a large majority (86 percent) go on to work as a school leader in their home district.

Producing Effective School Leaders

- The primary responsibilities of Principal Fellows in assistant principal roles generally include tasks such as bussing, discipline, and test administration. Principal Fellows expressed a desire for more involvement in instructional leadership.
- Principal Fellows spoke highly of the support provided by program coaches and mentors, with a desire for the wider use of coaching post-graduation.
- Compared to traditional MSA graduates, Principal Fellows in assistant principal roles earned significantly higher ratings on the Strategic Leadership standard. NCEES results were particularly strong for Principal Fellows from NCSU.

Introduction

For 30 years North Carolina has been committed to innovative, high-quality, and financially accessible principal preparation. In 1993, the state General Assembly established the North Carolina Principal Fellows Program (NCPFP), which provided competitive, merit-based scholarship loans to individuals of exceptional ability who wanted to enter school leadership in North Carolina. In the initial design of the NCPFP, individual candidates were selected to receive a forgivable scholarship loan, then each Principal Fellow chose the eligible institution they wanted to attend, earned a Masters in School Administration (MSA), and repaid the scholarship loan through at least four years of service as an assistant principal or principal in North Carolina. From its inception through programmatic changes in 2021, over 1,200 individuals completed an NCPFP program.

In 2015, the state General Assembly expanded its approach to innovative and financially accessible school leader preparation by creating the Transforming Principal Preparation Program (TP3). Unlike the initial iteration of NCPFP, where funding was directed to individual principal candidates, North Carolina allocated TP3 funds to preparation programs through a competitive grant process. TP3 programs aimed to develop authentic partnerships with K-12 districts, proactive and intentional recruitment and selection strategies, rigorous coursework, and full-time paid internships. In addition, TP3 programs needed to display a commitment and capacity to prepare leaders for high-need, low-performing schools. From its inception through its consolidation with NCPFP in 2021, over 370 individuals completed a TP3 program.

In July 2021, North Carolina consolidated TP3 and NCPFP into a single principal preparation program under the original NCPFP name. The new NCPFP combines aspects of the original NCPFP with aspects of TP3. The consolidated program directs funding to preparation programs through a competitive grant process and prioritizes partnerships between programs and K-12 districts. Principal Fellows take coursework as a cohort, participate in enrichment opportunities offered by their individual programs and the state level NCPFP, complete a paid year-long internship, earn an MSA degree, and satisfy requirements of their forgivable loan by working as a school leader in North Carolina. The core commitments of the consolidated NCPFP are (1) attracting promising school leader candidates; (2) providing innovative and high-quality preparation throughout coursework, practice-based experiences in schools, and coaching; (3) meeting a majority of the demand for school leaders in North Carolina; and (4) producing effective school leaders that positively impact student achievement, student engagement, school working conditions, and teacher retention.

As part of the consolidated NCPFP program, eight institutions have been awarded NCPFP grants across three funding cycles. The first funding cycle, running from 2020 to 2026, includes four institutions: East Carolina University (ECU), North Carolina Central University (NCCU),¹ North Carolina State University (NCSU), and UNC Charlotte (UNCC). The second funding cycle, running from 2022 to 2028, awarded grants to six institutions: Appalachian State University (ASU), ECU, NCSU, UNC Chapel Hill (UNCCH), UNC Greensboro (UNCG), and Western Carolina University (WCU). Finally, the third funding cycle, running from 2026 to 2032, awarded grants to four institutions: ECU, NCCU, NCSU, and UNCC.

¹ The NCPFP program at NCCU is a partnership between NCCU and the Central Carolina Regional Education Service Alliance.

In addition to providing rigorous preparation experiences, the NCPFP is committed to an evaluation process that meets state reporting requirements, identifies effective preparation practices, and informs decision making around program practices and future grant funding. To fulfill these objectives, the North Carolina Principal Fellows Commission selected the Education Policy Initiative at Carolina (EPIC) as the official NCPFP evaluator. EPIC is a research initiative within the Department of Public Policy at UNC Chapel Hill with deep expertise in educator preparation and a long history of conducting applied research and evaluation in partnership with K-12 and higher education agencies in North Carolina.

This is the third written report in EPIC's seven-year evaluation of the NCPFP.² In prior reports we examined (1) recruitment and selection practices for NCPFP programs and their district partners; (2) characteristics of Principal Fellows and the schools in which they previously worked; (3) perceptions of NCPFP coursework and internship experiences; (4) internship school and mentor principal characteristics; and (5) whether Principal Fellows were moving into school leader roles after program completion.

In this report we focus on NCPFP programs and Principal Fellows completing these programs in the 2021-22, 2022-23, 2023-24, and 2024-25 academic years. For reporting, we align our evaluation questions with the core commitments of the NCPFP.

Attracting Promising School Leader Candidates

- (1) How are NCPFP programs and school districts recruiting and selecting candidates?
- (2) To what extent do financial supports provided by NCPFP assist Principal Fellows during preparation?
- (3) What are the characteristics of Principal Fellows candidates?

Providing Innovative and High-Quality Preparation Experiences

- (1) How well-prepared do Principal Fellows feel for school leadership responsibilities?
- (2) Which components of their program do Principal Fellows identify as particularly valuable?
- (3) How do NCPFP programs differ from traditional MSA programs?

Meeting a Majority of the Demand for School Leaders in North Carolina

- (1) What is the process for Principal Fellows to acquire school leader positions?
- (2) What are the employment roles held by Principal Fellows?
- (3) To what extent do Principal Fellows secure employment as a school leader in their home district?
- (4) What are the characteristics of the schools in which Principal Fellows work as a school leader?

Producing Effective School Leaders

- (1) What are the responsibilities of Principal Fellows in assistant principal roles?
- (2) What supports are provided to Principal Fellows for their on-going development?
- (3) How well do principals rate Principal Fellows in assistant principal roles?

² Previous reports can be found here: [NCPFP 2024 Report](#) and [NCPFP 2023 Report](#)

We use qualitative and quantitative methods to analyze a range of interview, focus group, survey, and administrative data. Our diverse data sources and mixed methods analyses are a strength of this evaluation, as they allow us to better understand program practices and assess program impacts. At this stage of the evaluation—the mid-point of a seven-year evaluation timeline—our results are largely intended to be formative and to inform NCPFP program practices. Our findings can also begin to inform consequential decisions regarding program funding and success. In the remainder of this report, we detail our data sample and sources, describe our analytical methods, review our findings, and discuss implications for program practices and future evaluation efforts.

Data and Analysis

Data Sample and Sources

In this evaluation report, we focus on NCPFP completers from the 2021-22, 2022-23, 2023-24, and 2024-25 academic years. Our analyses focus on the consolidated NCPFP and do not include candidates completing TP3 programs or NCPFP programs under its original design.³ Four NCPFP programs had graduates in 2021-22 (ECU, NCCU, NCSU, and UNCC), three programs had graduates in 2022-23 (ECU, NCSU, and UNCC), all eight programs had graduates in 2023-24, and six programs had graduates in 2024-25 (ECU, NCCU, NCSU, UNCCH, UNCC, and WCU). As further detailed below, some of our analyses include graduates from all four cohorts. Given data availability, other analyses include graduates from a smaller number of NCPFP cohorts.

For this NCPFP evaluation report, we relied on data from the following five sources:

- (1) NCPFP program reporting: NCPFP programs submit data to EPIC for each graduating cohort of Principal Fellows. These data include the district from which enrollees entered the program, enrollees' role in the district (e.g. teacher), enrollee email addresses, whether and when the enrollee completed the program, the cost of the enrollees' tuition and fees, the school where the enrollee completed their internship, the name of the mentor principal, and final ratings for the enrollee from their internship experience.
- (2) State level administrative data: The North Carolina Department of Public Instruction (NCDPI) provided data on all K-12 students, school personnel, and schools.⁴ The UNC System Office provided data identifying individuals completing an MSA degree at a UNC System institution.
- (3) Program completer survey: We developed a survey to assess program completers' perceptions of their principal preparation programs. For this evaluation report we analyze survey items on perceptions of financial burden, program quality, and the value of program components.

³ There were TP3 graduates in 2021-22 from High Point University, NCSU, the Sandhills Regional Education Consortium (SREC), UNCG, and WCU. NCSU also had Principal Fellows completers in 2021-22 and we include them in our analyses.

⁴ Administrative data from NCDPI does not consistently include charter schools, especially in school personnel data. As such, our analyses largely focus on traditional (non-charter) public schools in North Carolina. The exception to this is our analyses of employment roles held by Principal Fellows completers. For these analyses we supplement employment data from NCDPI with employment data collected by NCPFP programs.

- (4) NCPFP program director interviews: In fall 2024, we conducted interviews with program directors and other key personnel for each NCPFP program. Personnel participating in the interviews included program directors, coordinators, grant facilitators, coaches, and professors.
- (5) Assistant principal focus groups: In spring 2025, we conducted focus groups with Principal Fellows from the 2024 graduating cohort who were working as assistant principals in North Carolina. We conducted one focus group for every NCPFP program. A total of 22 Principal Fellows participated, with 2-4 participants in each focus group.

Qualitative Data Analysis

Our qualitative analysis consisted of both deductive and inductive coding. We developed an initial set of deductive codes that were guided by our research questions. Later, we developed an inductive coding schema from themes we identified in the data. Each transcript was coded by two members of the evaluation team and reconciled by a third member. We identified major themes in the interview and focus group data both within and across NCPFP programs. In our findings sections below, we report key results with illustrative quotes to elevate the voices of program directors and Principal Fellow graduates serving in assistant principal roles.

Quantitative Data Analysis

We conducted quantitative analyses to assess (1) perceptions of financial supports provided by NCPFP; (2) the characteristics of Principal Fellows and other MSA completers; (3) Principal Fellows' perceptions of their preparation programs; (4) the employment roles held by Principal Fellows after program completion; (5) the characteristics of the schools in which Principal Fellows work after program completion; and (6) data on how principals rate the early-career assistant principals working in their schools.

To address these topics, we use a mix of descriptive reporting and regression analyses. Across both of these analytical approaches, we often present data for Principal Fellows and for those completing other preparation routes—e.g., traditional MSA and licensure only programs. In doing so, our goal is to compare outcomes for Principal Fellows relative to more traditional school leader preparation. When appropriate, we also present data for each NCPFP program.

Please see the appendix for more details on our data sources, quantitative and qualitative analyses, interview and focus group protocols, and survey items.

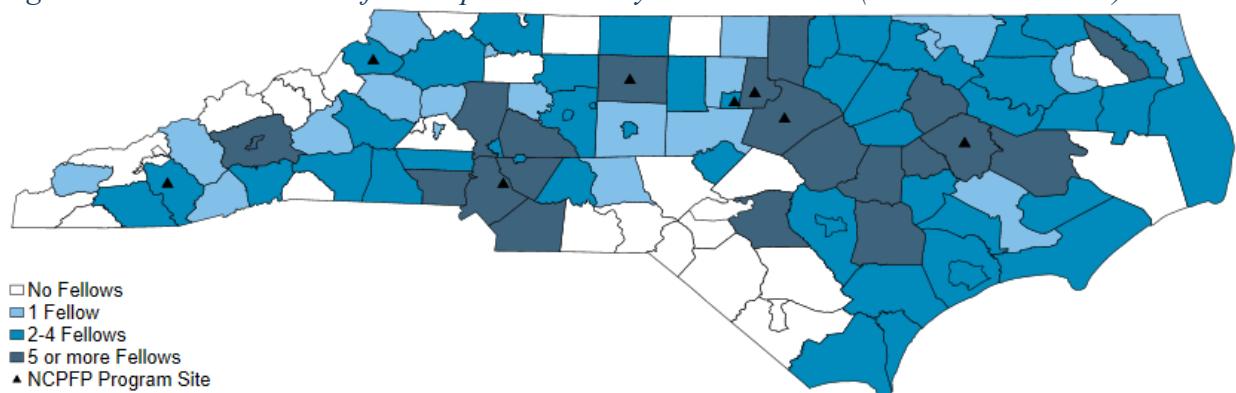
Findings

Attracting Promising School Leader Candidates

The first core commitment of NCPFP is to attract promising school leader candidates. To fulfill this commitment, NCPFP programs have several unique elements—e.g., partnerships with school districts to prioritize candidate recruitment and selection and the provision of a scholarship loan to make high-quality school leader preparation more financially accessible. This section of the report focuses on processes for recruitment and selection between programs and districts, perceptions of financial supports, and the characteristics of those completing NCPFP programs. To examine these topics, we analyze data from interviews with NCPFP program directors, surveys of candidates enrolled in school leader preparation programs, and administrative records from NCDPI.

Figure 1 shows the school districts from which Principal Fellows in our analytical sample originated—i.e., the districts in which they were employed prior to program entry. Overall, the 365 Principal Fellows in the 2022-2025 graduate cohorts represent 91 traditional (non-charter) K-12 school districts in North Carolina.⁵ Many districts contributed a small number of Principal Fellows. Twenty districts, generally larger urban districts, contributed five or more Principal Fellows, with Wake, Cumberland, Durham, and Charlotte-Mecklenburg being the top suppliers of Principal Fellows candidates.⁶

Figure 1: The Distribution of Principal Fellows by School District (Classes 2022-2025)



Note: For Principal Fellows in the 2021-22 through 2024-25 graduating cohorts, this figure displays the districts from which program completers were employed prior to program entry.

How are NCPFP programs and school districts recruiting and selecting candidates?

The selection of Principal Fellows typically follows a multi-step process in which districts and universities play important roles. Recruitment efforts often begin with touchpoints between NCPFP programs and districts. This includes NCPFP programs distributing information packets to superintendents and other district personnel and/or NCPFP programs delivering information sessions to district personnel about the program and the number of spots available for potential candidates. After this initial work, districts recruit and select candidates, in some cases seeking approval from the superintendent and coordinating with prospective mentor principals before advancing nominees to the university. This process was typically followed by a university program-based application and review.

Although each NCPFP program exhibits degrees of variation in their recruitment and selection processes, this district-led approach is common across NCPFP programs and their district partners, with many districts retaining early authority around local selection processes, guided by parameters set forth by respective NCPFP programs. One NCPFP program director detailed this empowerment and trust in the district’s expertise and vision when making these decisions: *“We’re going to trust your [the LEA’s] professional judgment and contextual expertise on who you’re willing to invest in for your succession planning and your next cadre of leaders.”*

⁵ Many of the districts with no Principal Fellows have partnerships with one or more NCPFP programs. However, these districts elected not to recruit for the respective years given their needs.

⁶ While the main WCU campus is in Jackson County (as indicated on the map), the WCU school leadership campus is in Asheville.

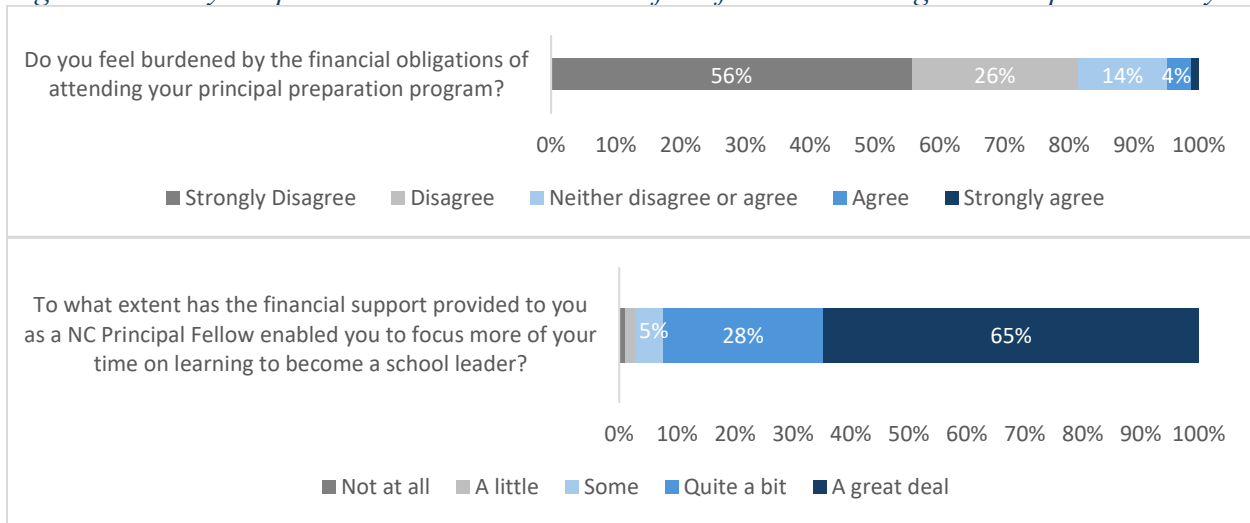
University application materials generally focus on standard MSA eligibility requirements and in some cases, include essay prompts. Most commonly, university selection processes entail an invitation to potential Principal Fellows to participate in in-person interviews. Two NCPFP programs noted that they collaborate with their Regional Education Service Alliance (RESA) to review applications, conduct interviews, score candidates, and make selections. Other programs partner with districts to establish selection criteria and to review applications, with NCPFP programs typically deferring to the district to make final decisions. Many programs noted that they review factors such as GPA, academic record, and candidates' ability to complete performance-based assessments. They also consider motivations for joining Principal Fellows, orientations to school leadership, and coachability. One NCPFP program director described their assessment process as follows: *"We have them [the candidates] engage in different activities so that we can really see what their orientation is to the work [school leadership] and also let them understand how our program is because our program is very applied."*

To what extent do financial supports provided by NCPFP assist Principal Fellows during preparation?

Financial supports provided through payment of tuition represent a substantial component of the NCPFP model and a way to attract individuals to the NCPFP. Figure 2 displays responses of Principal Fellow completers in the 2021-22 through 2024-25 graduating cohorts to two survey items related to the financial burden of principal preparation and the financial support provided by NCPFP. The top panel of Figure 2 focuses on Principal Fellows' perceptions of financial burden during their program. We find that over 80 percent of Principal Fellow respondents disagreed with the statement that they feel financially burdened by attending their preparation program. Only five percent of respondents agreed or strongly agreed that they felt financially burdened.

The bottom panel of Figure 2 presents Principal Fellows' responses regarding the extent to which the financial support provided by NCPFP allowed them to focus more time on learning to be a school leader. Ninety-three percent of Principal Fellow respondents indicated that financial support allowed them to focus more on becoming a school leader. Very few Principal Fellows responded "not at all" or "a little." Taken together, these survey items suggest that school leaders prepared through NCPFP are not burdened by the financial hardships of program attendance.

Figure 2: Survey Responses on the Financial Benefits of NCPFP—Program Completer Survey



Note: This figure presents data on Principal Fellows’ perceptions of financial burden and the financial support of their program. The figure displays the percentage of respondents who selected each possible response category. Data are from the program completer survey. The item on financial burden includes 332 Principal Fellows from the 2022-2025 surveys. The item on financial support includes 187 Principal Fellows from the 2022-2024 surveys.

What are the characteristics of Principal Fellows candidates?

Table 1 displays the characteristics of Principal Fellows in the year prior to their program entry compared to completers from traditional UNC System MSA programs.⁷ The data are for Principal Fellows in the 2021-22 through 2024-25 graduating cohorts and other MSA completers from the 2021-22 through 2023-24 graduating cohorts. We report these data for Principal Fellows, overall, and for each NCPFP program.

The top panel of Table 1 shows the demographic characteristics of Principal Fellows and other MSAs.⁸ On average, more than 70 percent of both Principal Fellows and other MSAs were women and close to 40 percent were people of color. However, individual NCPFP programs differed in the percentage of completers of color. In part, these differences reflect underlying differences in the demographics of populations in different regions of North Carolina. Principal Fellows were over a year older, on average, than other MSA completers and several NCPFP programs had candidates that were 2-4 years older than traditional MSA completers.

The second panel of Table 1 displays the credentials of Principal Fellows compared to other MSA completers. Consistent with the differences in age at entry, Principal Fellows averaged over a year more teaching experience than other MSA completers. At the time of program entry, Principal Fellows were also more likely to have National Board Certification (NBC) and to have a graduate degree. Together, these differences indicate that NCPFP programs and their district partners are recruiting candidates with strong credentials.

⁷ Data for Principal Fellows are from the year prior to program entry. Data for other MSA completers are from two years prior to program completion (e.g. 2021-22 for a graduate in 2023-24).

⁸ Demographic data (gender, race/ethnicity, and birth date) come from NCDPI.

Finally, the third panel of Table 1 presents teacher performance measures for Principal Fellows and other MSA completers. These measures include their overall rating on the North Carolina Educator Evaluation System (NCEES) as well as their ratings for Standard 1 (Demonstrating Leadership) and Standard 4 (Facilitating Student Learning). The table also shows average value-added estimates (standardized) from the Education Value-Added Assessment System (EVAAS). Compared to other MSA completers, Principal Fellows had higher evaluation ratings and value-added estimates as teachers. Several NCPFP programs show particularly high evaluation ratings and/or EVAAS estimates, including ASU, NCSU, UNCCH, UNCC, and WCU.

Table 1: Characteristics of Principal Fellows and Other MSA Completers

	Other									
	MSA	NCPFP	ASU	ECU	NCCU	NCSU	UNCCH	UNCC	UNCG	WCU
Demographics										
% Female	73.1	71.5	66.7	76.3	73.8	71.3	72.7	70.0	66.7	65.5
% Minority	38.3	40.3	20.0⁺	44.7	66.7*	41.8	47.6	34.2	23.8	20.7⁺
Age at entry	34.86	36.09⁺	35.64	36.87⁺	38.95⁺	33.56	37.47	35.71	34.38	38.48⁺
Credentials										
Years of Teaching Experience	9.00	10.34⁺	7.93	11.72*	12.40⁺	8.81	11.47⁺	9.69	8.81	11.21⁺
% NBC	5.7	9.9⁺	26.7⁺	14.5⁺	9.5	5.0	9.1	7.5	4.8	13.8
% Grad Degree	18.2	35.3*	20.0	34.2⁺	45.2⁺	23.7	54.5⁺	37.5⁺	38.1⁺	41.4⁺
Performance Measures										
Avg NCEES	3.89	4.05*	4.14⁺	3.96	3.89	4.06⁺	4.06	4.14⁺	3.82	4.29⁺
Standard 1	3.96	4.17*	4.31⁺	4.08	3.97	4.19⁺	4.12	4.30*	3.89	4.41*
Standard 4	3.84	3.96⁺	4.00	3.90	3.86	3.96⁺	3.94	4.01⁺	3.78	4.26⁺
Avg EVAAS (Std)	0.04	0.25⁺	0.10	0.30	0.02	0.34⁺	1.04⁺	0.12	0.13	0.47⁺
Number of Completers	600	365	15	76	42	80	22	80	21	29

Note: For Principal Fellows in the 2021-22 through 2024-25 graduating cohorts, this table shows characteristics from the year prior to program entry. In addition, this table displays characteristics from two years prior to program completion for traditional MSA completers (from UNC System institutions) in the 2021-22 through 2023-24 graduating cohorts. +, *, and ** indicate statistically significant differences between other MSA (non-PF) and Principal Fellows completers at the 0.10, 0.05, and 0.01 levels, respectively.

Providing Innovative and High-Quality Preparation Experiences

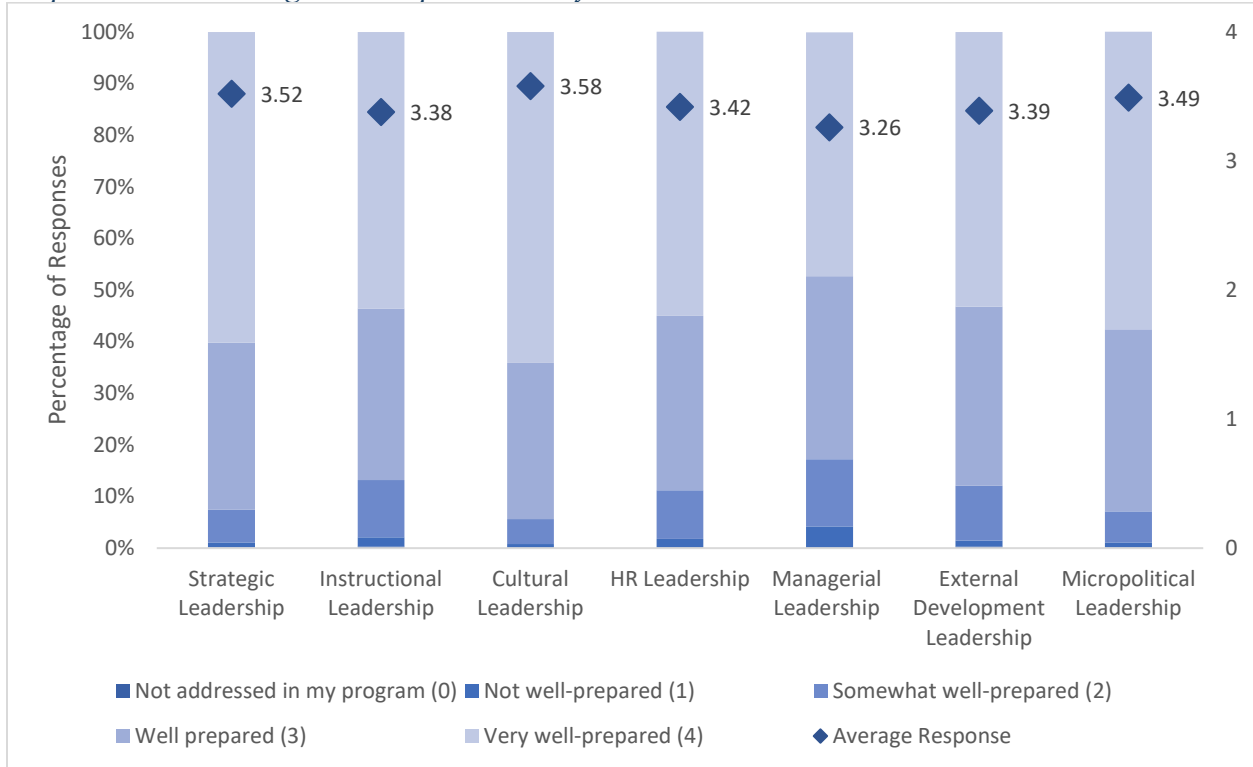
The second core commitment of NCPFP is to provide innovative and high-quality preparation experiences. NCPFP programs have a number of elements—year-long internships, executive coaching, program-specific enrichment activities, enhancements provided by the NCPFP Central Office—that may help Principal Fellows succeed in school leadership roles. In prior evaluation reports, we focused on the experiences of first and second-year Principal Fellows (e.g., recruitment, coursework, internship). This section of the report focuses on readiness for school leader responsibilities, the value of program components, and differences between NCPFP and traditional MSA programs. To consider these areas, we analyze data from surveys, focus groups with assistant principals, and interviews with NCPFP program directors.

How well-prepared do Principal Fellows feel for school leadership responsibilities?

To address this question, we analyze data from the program completer survey. We administered this survey to Principal Fellows in the spring of their graduation year—near the end of the internship—as a way to assess perceptions of program quality and program experiences. For this section of the report, we focus on a series of survey items about how well NCPFP programs have prepared Principal Fellows for key school leadership tasks. These survey items are on a 0-4 scale (‘not a part of my program’ to ‘very well prepared’) and are aligned with North Carolina’s Standards for School Executives. Below, we report data from the 2022 through 2025 program completer surveys for all Principal Fellow respondents (335 in total) and for respondents from each NCPFP program. Please see Appendix Table B1 for responses rates to the program completer survey.

Figure 3 summarizes survey data—average responses, distribution of responses—for each school executive standard. We find that Principal Fellows rate their programs most highly on school leadership tasks aligned with the Cultural Leadership and Strategic Leadership standards. For example, 64 percent of Principal Fellow respondents reported being ‘very well prepared’ for Cultural Leadership, while 60 percent answered similarly regarding Strategic Leadership. Conversely, we find that Principal Fellows feel least well prepared for school leadership tasks aligned with Managerial Leadership—e.g. budgeting and accounting, developing systems for sharing information with staff, designing scheduling processes. Only 47 percent of Principal Fellow respondents reported being ‘very well prepared’ for these Managerial Leadership tasks. For the remaining school executive standards—Instructional Leadership, Human Resources Leadership, External Development Leadership, and Micropolitical Leadership—approximately 55 percent of Principal Fellows respondents reported being ‘very well prepared.’

Figure 3: Principal Fellows’ Perceptions of Preparedness for School Leadership Responsibilities—Program Completer Survey



Note: This figure presents data on Principal Fellows’ perceptions of preparedness for school leadership responsibilities. In particular, this figure displays the average response of Principal Fellows (0-4 scale) and the distribution of responses (e.g. percent ‘very well prepared’). Data are from the 2022-2025 program completer surveys and include responses from 335 Principal Fellows.

Table 2 presents data from the program completer survey—average response values by school executive standard—for each NCPFP program. When interpreting these data, it is important to note that the number of responses varies by program given differences in cohort size and the number of graduating cohorts. In Table 2 we use light green shading for values that are 0.01 to 0.10 points higher than the overall NCPFP average. We use darker green shading for values that are more than 0.10 points higher than the overall NCPFP mean. This allows us to identify highly rated NCPFP programs. We find that three NCPFP programs—ECU, NCSU, and UNCG—stand out as being highly rated by their program graduates across multiple standards. A fourth NCPFP program—WCU—is rated highly on the Strategic Leadership standard. Conversely, there are several NCPFP programs with lower ratings across school executive standards. These survey data are an important indicator of program quality, however, they should not be used, in isolation, to evaluate program performance.

Table 2: Principal Fellows’ Perceptions of Preparedness for School Leadership Responsibilities—Responses by EPP to the Program Completer Survey

	NCPFP Overall	ASU	ECU	NCCU	NCSU	UNCCH	UNCC	UNCG	WCU
Strategic Leadership	3.52	3.29	3.61	3.39	3.58	3.35	3.42	3.67	3.72
Instructional Leadership	3.38	3.01	3.47	3.29	3.49	3.32	3.34	3.39	3.35
Cultural Leadership	3.58	3.25	3.71	3.45	3.67	3.52	3.53	3.54	3.58
HR Leadership	3.42	2.97	3.48	3.26	3.60	3.42	3.28	3.68	3.51
Managerial Leadership	3.26	2.87	3.48	3.12	3.41	2.95	3.13	3.41	3.19
External Development Leadership	3.39	3.13	3.55	3.27	3.53	3.21	3.30	3.44	3.36
Micropolitical Leadership	3.49	3.03	3.58	3.26	3.65	3.48	3.43	3.66	3.54
Response Count	335	15	67	38	71	22	76	19	27

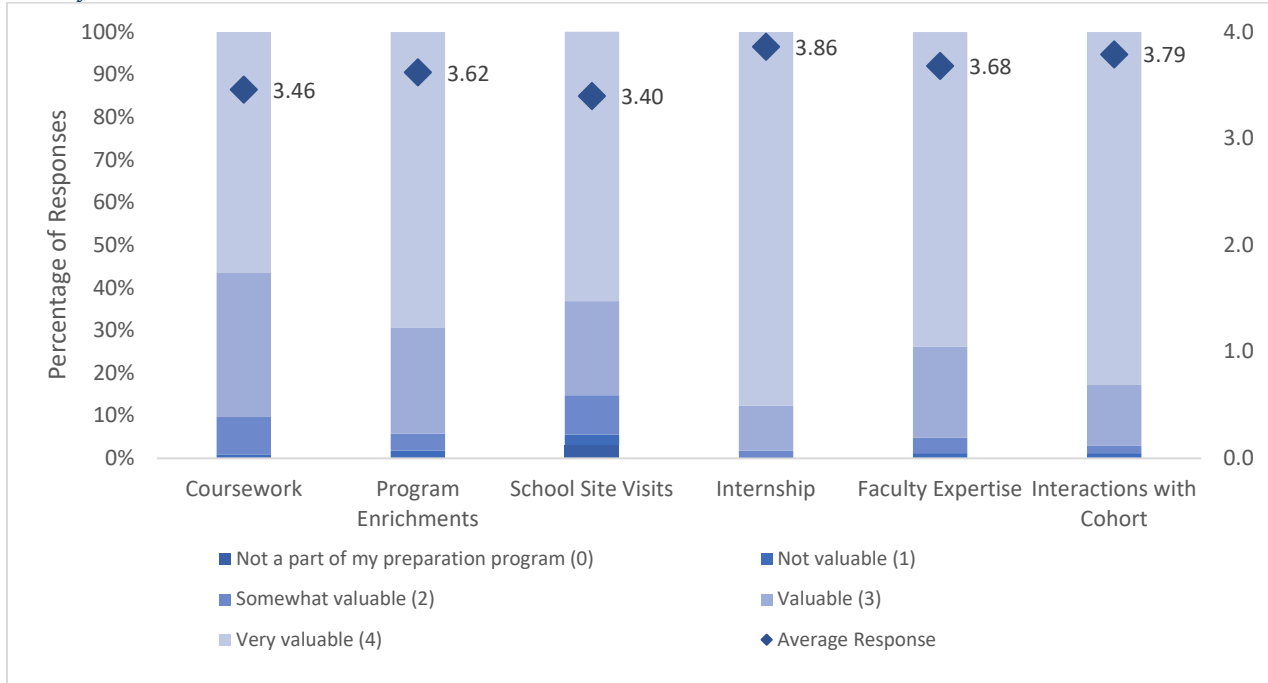
Note: This table presents data on Principal Fellows’ perceptions of preparedness for school leadership responsibilities. In particular, this table displays the average response of Principal Fellows (0-4 scale), overall, and for each NCPFP program. Data are from the 2022-2025 program completer surveys. Light green shading is for values that are 0.01 to 0.10 points higher than the NCPFP average; darker green shading is for values more than 0.10 points higher than the NCPFP average.

Which components of their program do Principal Fellows identify as particularly valuable?

To address this question, we analyze data from the program completer survey. In particular, we examine a set of survey items focused on Principal Fellows’ perceptions of the value of different program components (e.g. coursework, internship). These survey items are on a 0-4 scale (‘not a part of my program’ to ‘very valuable’). We report data from the 2022 through 2025 program completer surveys for all Principal Fellow respondents.

Figure 4 summarizes survey data—average responses, distribution of responses—for six different program components: coursework, program-specific enrichments (e.g. conferences, special seminars), school site visits, the yearlong internship, faculty expertise, and interactions with other Principal Fellows. We find that Principal Fellow respondents identify the principal internship and interactions with their cohort as the most valuable aspects of their program. For example, 88 percent of respondents reported that their principal internship was very valuable, while 83 percent answered similarly regarding interactions with their cohort. Relative to other program components, Principal Fellow respondents were less positive regarding coursework and school site visits. Approximately 56 percent of respondents rated their coursework as very valuable; 63 percent answered similarly regarding the value of school site visits.

Figure 4: Principal Fellows’ Perceptions of Program Component Value—Program Completer Survey



Note: This figure presents data on Principal Fellows’ perceptions of the value of different program components. In particular, this figure displays the average response of Principal Fellows (0-4 scale) and the distribution of responses (e.g. percent ‘very valuable’). Data are from the 2022-2025 program completer survey and include responses from 335 Principal Fellows.

Table 3 presents data on the value of program components for each NCPFP program. We find that Principal Fellows from ECU and UNCG rate their coursework highly, while ECU Principal Fellows are also the most positive about the value of program-specific enrichments. Principal Fellows from ECU and UNCCH are the most positive about the value of school site visits and those from NCSU are particularly positive regarding the yearlong internship. Finally, Principal Fellows from UNCCH and UNCG rate the expertise of faculty highly, while NCSU respondents are the most positive about interactions with their Principal Fellow cohort.

Table 3: Principal Fellows’ Perceptions of Program Component Value—Responses by EPP to the Program Completer Survey

	NCPFP Overall	ASU	ECU	NCCU	NCSU	UNCCH	UNCC	UNCG	WCU
Coursework	3.46	3.07	3.73	3.32	3.50	3.55	3.25	3.68	3.44
Program-Specific Enrichments	3.62	3.21	3.82	3.63	3.67	3.65	3.49	3.72	3.44
School Site Visits	3.40	3.40	3.74	2.34	3.61	3.64	3.29	3.32	3.54
Internship	3.86	3.87	3.79	3.84	3.97	3.82	3.79	3.89	3.93
Faculty Expertise	3.68	3.47	3.77	3.68	3.65	3.82	3.58	3.84	3.67
Interactions with Cohort	3.79	3.40	3.83	3.84	3.91	3.64	3.67	3.89	3.85
Response Count	335	15	67	38	71	22	76	19	27

Note: This table presents data on Principal Fellows’ perceptions of the value of different program components. In particular, this table displays the average response of Principal Fellows (0-4 scale), overall, and for each NCPFP program. Data are from the 2022-2025 program completer surveys. Light green shading is for values that are 0.01 to 0.10 points higher than the NCPFP average; darker green shading is for values more than 0.10 points higher than the NCPFP average.

In addition to these survey data, we draw on qualitative data to gain deeper insights into what Principal Fellows regarded as particularly valuable about their program. During focus groups with assistant principals, Principal Fellows consistently emphasized the impact of the internship, noting its value in providing full immersion into school leadership across the school year. One participant described the depth of the experience, noting *“We lived it, breathed it for an entire year. We went to summer conferences with our admin. We experienced what it’s like to start a year, to wrap up a year.”* These year-long opportunities were further enhanced by the safety net of having school administration there to consult with and provide feedback as Principal Fellows responded to challenges.

In reflecting on the internship as a significant aspect of the program, many Principal Fellows connected it to their readiness for school leadership, noting that the hands-on experience of leading throughout the school year supported a smoother transition into their next professional role. One Principal Fellow shared: *“I felt totally prepared and I honestly say a lot, I don’t know how people who go from the classroom grad program and jump into it and don’t have a true internship, I don’t imagine juggling that. It was hard enough this year. Things are hard. I felt prepared. But it [internship] gave us that next level of experience.”* Having the protected practice time afforded by the internship allowed this participant to feel very prepared for school leadership. Another Principal Fellow participant described the benefits of the year-long internship relative to other hour-based requirements: *“I thought the internship year was very valuable to be able to experience a school year from start to finish instead of some other folks that their particular programs do a number of months, hours here and there, to be able to satisfy their graduation requirements.”* These insights affirm that the year-long internship was instrumental to leaders’ preparation, a theme consistently communicated by Principal Fellows.

Alongside the internship, many focus group participants named the NCPFP cohort model as a key strength. Principal Fellows described learning from their cohort-mates and developing strong relationships that enriched their experience and helped them engage with diverse perspectives. One participant shared: “...collectively, I learned just as much, if not more, from our cohort of colleagues. Those perspectives that may be different than mine, or maybe something similar to mine in a different scenario, but being globally aware, being culturally sensitive...” In this instance, the cohort served as an additional instructional resource, exposing the participant to a wider range of perspectives and scenarios to carry forward into school leadership.

Another participant provided further insight into the importance of their cohort, highlighting the consistency it afforded. They shared: “You know that they’re going back and going through the same things that you’re going through. Same professors, same order of classes. That was great because even in the times that it got rough, our group chat just complaining about stuff, just trudging along in the thick of it.” For this participant, having peer support that reflected their own experiences was essential to their progress in the program. This same focus group participant noted an additional advantage of the cohort model in the sustained engagement with peers after graduation: “Every now and then our combined group chat still goes off with questions about bigger topic items that you know when you put it in that group chat someone’s going to have the answer. Honestly, at this point, that is way more valuable than anything else because I don’t think that’s ever going to go away.”

Beyond the internship and cohort model, Principal Fellows named coursework and textbooks that have proven valuable to their experience as school leaders. Books, seminars, and course materials on topics such as school law and data use were named as resources that Principal Fellows have returned to for reference. One participant shared: “Our program did a phenomenal job of preparing us in terms of school law and risk management and not that we got the nitty gritty on every single thing, but we had the framework to make decisions with, so I was more prepared than I thought I would be for the law aspect of administration.” Another participant shared: “One of our books was our data book. And I tell you that thing is a mini-Bible for assistant principals and principals about how to read data, how to unpack the data, how to analyze the data, how to take the data and pieces of the data and have a response to that data.” These resources were impactful to school leaders’ work. Moreover, in the case of readings, models, and frameworks, Principal Fellows’ ability to revisit these materials helped to sustain competencies developed through their programs.

Principal Fellows also detailed the ways in which their program helped them to feel prepared for school leadership. Some participants shared notable preparation on relational aspects of school administration, particularly in working with teams, navigating micropolitical demands, and building relationships with school staff and students. This preparation consequently equipped these Principal Fellows to manage difficult conversations and engage staff in ways that helped them to feel valued and heard. Of these developed skills, one participant shared: “Sometimes, I tend to get caught up in the ‘we have to do things this way, and this is the way that I feel like it should be done.’ [...] but I feel like I need to show my staff that I value their opinion and that what they have to say is important to me and that they feel appreciated because a lot of times teaching is hard and we take it for granted.” This account highlights a desire to integrate the perspectives of staff in service of establishing a communicative and collaborative culture.

Taken together, these insights affirm the various aspects of NCPFP programs that Principal Fellows found most influential in supporting their transition into leadership roles. Notably, many participants compared their skill sets upon completing the program to those of peers graduating from traditional MSA programs and reported feeling confident that they were “*ahead of the game*” by function of their participation in the NCPFP.

How do NCPFP programs differ from traditional MSA programs?

During interviews with NCPFP program directors and other program personnel, we asked how NCPFP programs differed from traditional MSA programs. According to NCPFP program leaders, a main distinction between NCPFP and traditional MSA programs is that all Principal Fellows complete a year-long paid internship.⁹ Additionally, some traditional MSA candidates enroll in part-time coursework and fulfill their internship hours while working in another role (e.g. classroom teacher). Principal Fellows’ coursework and internships are full-time experiences. NCPFP programs also offer financial support and access to services that traditional MSA programs do not. This includes tuition, fees, instructional materials, continued health insurance, and the local salary supplement during the internship. Traditional MSA programs are largely paid out-of-pocket by program participants. Principal Fellows also receive additional support through coaching and mentorship, as well as access to professional development such as symposiums and conferences.

One NCPFP program leader shared some of the differences between their NCPFP and traditional MSA programs: “*The application process is a little different for the Fellows versus the non-Fellows. The Fellows are required to do that full time internship, so their seminar is structured differently, which allows them access to different enrichment opportunities than the non-Fellows would have.*” This account highlights differences in application processes, internship experiences, seminar experiences, and access to professional development opportunities between Principal Fellows and traditional MSA students. Another NCPFP program leader expanded upon the differences in experiences between Principal Fellows and traditional MSA students in their program: “*For our other [traditional] students, that’s a huge difference. It’s not fully funded...The internship experience is invaluable for Principal Fellows because they get to focus just on that...it’s really hard for other students sometimes to get their [internship] hours while they’re working.*” This participant’s reflection implies that Principal Fellows may face fewer challenges completing the necessary requirements for program completion due to the nature of the full-time internship structures and the financial support provided under NCPFP.

Meeting a Majority of Demand for School Leaders in North Carolina

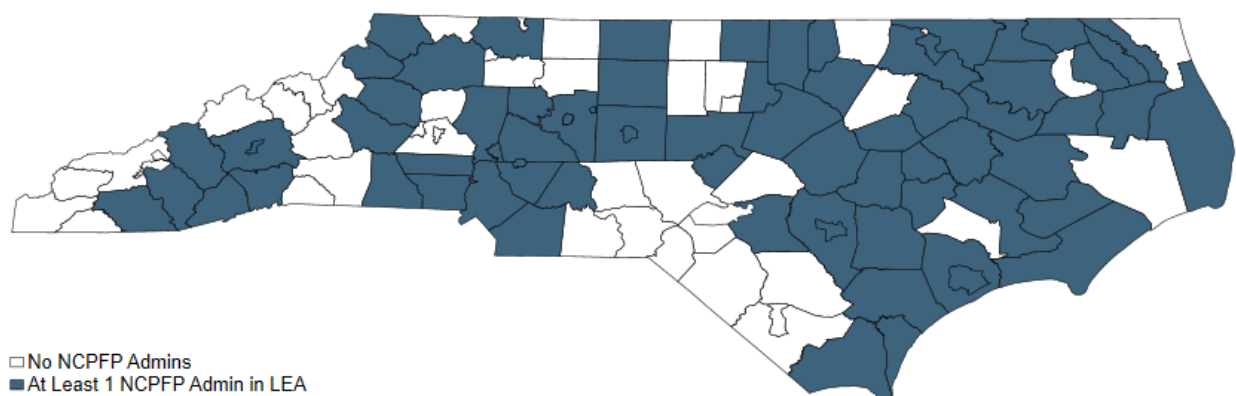
The third core commitment of NCPFP is to meet a majority of the demand for school leaders in North Carolina. NCPFP defines demand as the number of school principals exiting NCPS in a respective year. NCPFP aims to meet 55 percent of the demand for school leaders by 2029 and 70 percent by 2032. By meeting this demand, while also maintaining program quality, NCPFP aims to meaningfully reshape the state’s school leader workforce. NCPFP measures this commitment by the number of Principal Fellows prepared on an annual basis. It is also important to assess how many of those Principal Fellows secure school leadership positions in North Carolina. As such, this section of the report examines the processes for acquiring a school leader position, the

⁹ Principal Fellows receive funding for their internship through North Carolina’s [Principal Internship Stipend | NC DPI](#). Some Principal Fellow interns are hired into school leader roles before the school year is complete and finish their internship requirements in a school leader position (rather than an intern position).

employment roles held by Principal Fellows in the immediate years after program completion, and the characteristics of the schools in which Principal Fellows are working. To consider these topics, we analyze data from focus groups with assistant principals and administrative data from NCDPI.

As an introduction to this section, Figure 5 shows where Principal Fellow graduates are working as a school leader. In particular, Figure 5 maps the districts in which a Principal Fellow—from the 2022, 2023, or 2024 graduating cohorts—was working as a principal or assistant principal at the start of the 2024-25 school year. In total, 80 of North Carolina’s 115 traditional public school districts employed a Principal Fellow in a school leader role. While Principal Fellows are spread across the state, there are regions—notably the Sandhills and far western North Carolina—where there was not a Principal Fellow working as a school leader.

Figure 5: Location of Employment as a School Leader for Principal Fellow Graduates



Note: This figure presents data on the school districts in which Principal Fellow graduates (from the 2022, 2023, and 2024 cohorts) are working as a school leader (principal or assistant principal) at the start of the 2024-25 year.

What is the process for Principal Fellows to acquire school leader positions?

In focus groups with Principal Fellows in assistant principal roles, we asked participants how they secured their position. Some participants engaged in formal application processes, whereas others were placed into assistant principal roles by their district without applying. Principal Fellows who did not apply to a position reported a range of scenarios, including replacing departing assistant principals, securing employment at their internship site, and being matched with an opening by their district. As one Principal Fellow shared, *“I didn’t necessarily have to interview for the assistant principalship. But when I met with my superintendent to tell him about my goals, it was like a miniature interview.”* In this instance and others, participants reported active district involvement in matching Principal Fellows with open assistant principal positions.

Principal Fellows reported minimal difficulty finding a job, with most receiving offers during or closely following their internship period. One participant attributed this ease to their district’s commitment to supporting their employment as a Principal Fellow. They explained, *“I can’t help to believe that the district knew they were in a prearranged agreement, so it was easier for me to get a job because there was a commitment on their part as well.”* Consequently, Principal Fellows perceived the program as providing some measure of job security. Only two focus group participants (out of 22) took positions outside of their internship district, with one reporting limited positions in their placement district and another moving to a new district for unrelated reasons.

What are the employment roles held by Principal Fellows?

To examine employment outcomes, we focus on NCPFP completers from the 2021-22, 2022-23, and 2023-24 academic years. Using NCDPI employment records from the start of the 2024-25 school year, we compare the roles held (e.g. assistant principal, teacher) by these Principal Fellows relative to the roles held by those who completed a traditional MSA degree at a UNC System institution in the same graduating cohorts.¹⁰ In total, the sample for these analyses includes 232 Principal Fellow completers and 600 completers of a traditional MSA degree.

Figure 6 displays data on the employment roles held by Principal Fellows and traditional MSA completers from the 2021-22 graduating cohort.¹¹ Three years after program completion, we find that 77 percent of Principal Fellows are assistant principals and 15 percent are school principals (over 90 percent are in a school leader role). The percentage of Principal Fellows in a school leader position varied across institutions, from a low of 87 percent for UNCC to a high of 100 percent for NCSU. By comparison, approximately 50 percent of the traditional MSA completers were working as a school leader.

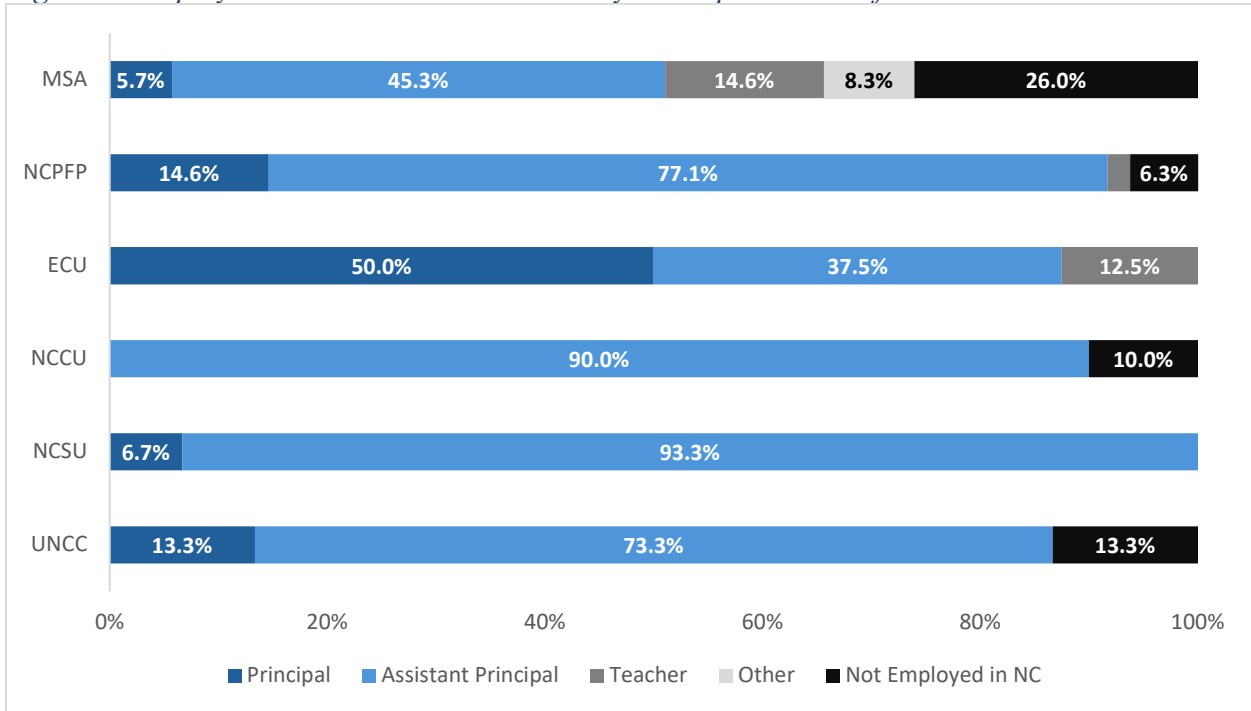
Figure 7 displays data on the employment roles of Principal Fellows and traditional MSA completers from the 2022-23 graduating cohort.¹² Two years after program completion, we find that 83 percent of Principal Fellows are assistant principals and 6 percent are school principals (89 percent are in a school leader role). The percentage of Principal Fellows in a school leader position was largely consistent across the three NCPFP programs (ECU, NCSU, UNCC) with graduates in 2023. By comparison, only 51 percent of the traditional MSA completers were working as a school administrator.

¹⁰ Employment files from NCDPI only include data for traditional (non-charter) public schools. As such, we do not normally know if NCPFP completers are working in a school leader role in a charter school or other, non-public school setting. In addition, our employment records for the 2024-25 school year only include the September pay period. To address these concerns, we supplement the NCDPI employment records with data reported to the State Education Assistance Authority regarding the employment of Principal Fellows in 2024-25.

¹¹ There were four NCPFP programs with graduates in 2021-22: ECU, NCCU, NCSU, and UNCC.

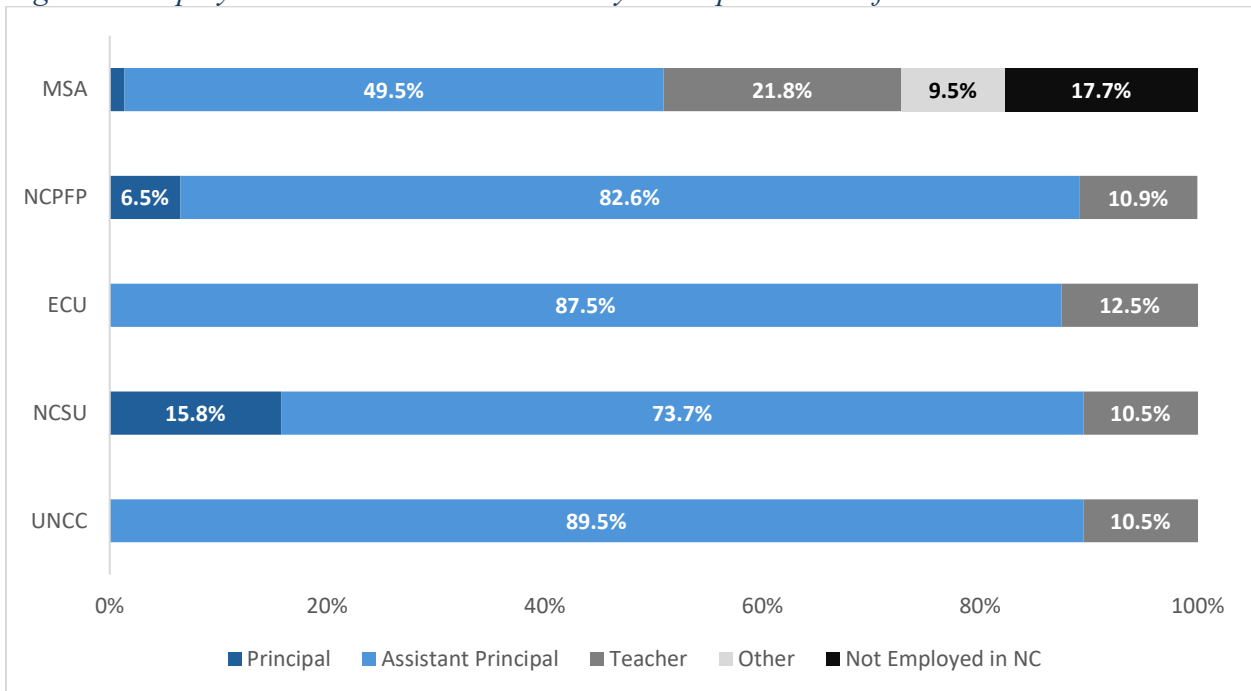
¹² There were three NCPFP programs with graduates in 2022-23: ECU, NCSU, and UNCC.

Figure 6: Employment Roles Held in 2024-25 by Principal Fellows from the 2022 Cohort



Note: This figure displays the primary employment role held at the start of the 2024-25 school year by Principal Fellows and traditional MSA completers from the 2022 graduating cohort. There are 48 Principal Fellows in the 2021-22 cohort: ECU=8; NCCU=10; NCSU=15; and UNCC=15.

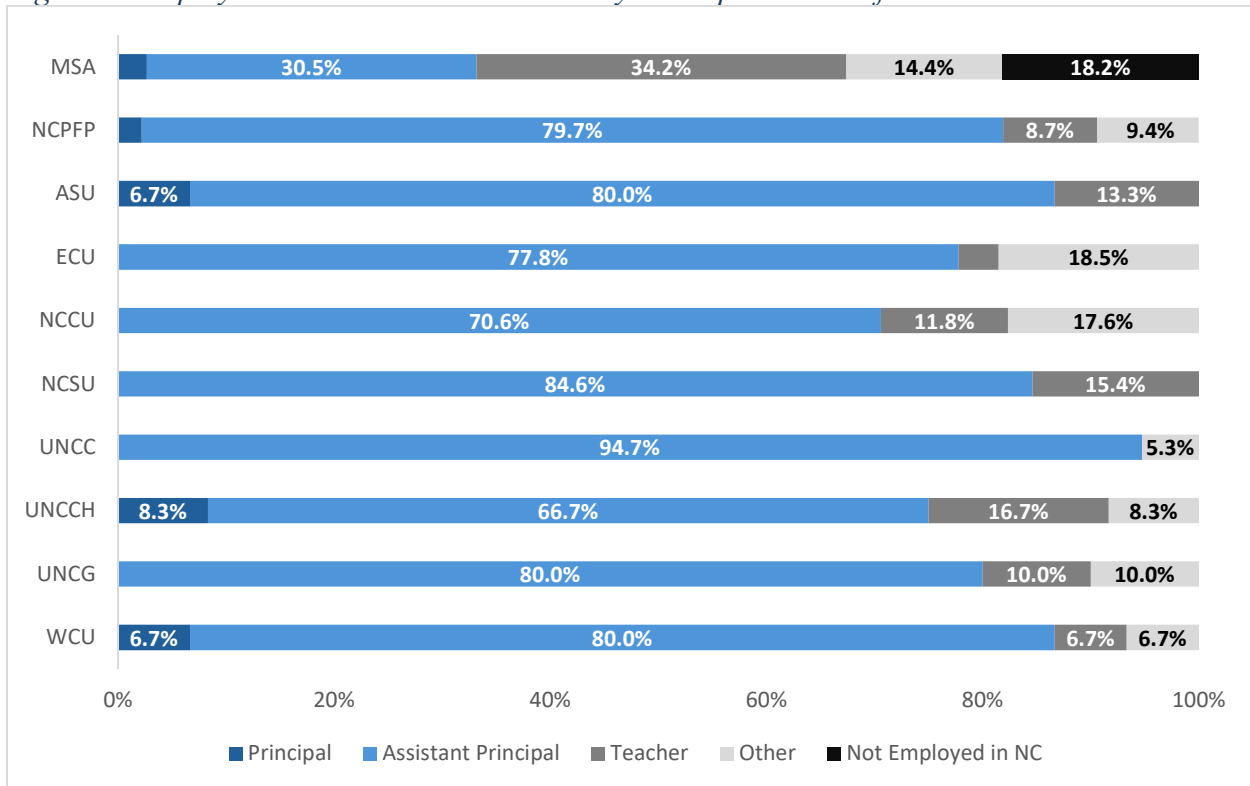
Figure 7: Employment Roles Held in 2024-25 by Principal Fellows from the 2023 Cohort



Note: This figure displays the primary employment role held at the start of the 2024-25 school year by Principal Fellows and traditional MSA completers from the 2023 graduating cohort. There are 46 Principal Fellows in the 2022-23 cohort: ECU=8; NCSU=19; and UNCC=19.

Lastly, Figure 8 displays data on the employment roles held by Principal Fellows and traditional MSA completers from the 2023-24 graduating cohort. This is the first cohort in which all eight NCPFP programs had graduates. In the year after program completion, we find that 80 percent of Principal Fellows are assistant principals and 2 percent are principals (82 percent are in a school leader role). Approximately 9 percent of Principal Fellows from the 2024 cohort were working as teachers and in other certified roles, respectively, in the 2024-25 school year. When examining these employment data at the program level, we find that the percentage of Principal Fellows in a school leader role ranged from 71 percent for NCCU to 95 percent for UNCC. By comparison, only 34 percent of the traditional MSA completers were working as a school leader.

Figure 8: Employment Roles Held in 2024-25 by Principal Fellows from the 2024 Cohort



Note: This figure displays the primary employment role held at the start of the 2024-25 school year by Principal Fellows and traditional MSA completers from the 2024 graduating cohort. There are 138 Principal Fellows in the 2023-24 cohort: ASU=15; ECU=27; NCCU=17; NCSU=13; UNCC=19; UNCCCH=12; UNCG=20; WCU=15.

Taken together, these data reveal several important takeaways. First, relative to traditional MSA completers, a much higher percentage of Principal Fellow graduates are in school leader positions. These data strongly suggest that NCPFP program components, including partnerships with districts and post-completion service requirements, impact the school leader pipeline in North Carolina. Second, these data show that a large majority of Principal Fellows are working as assistant principals for multiple school years. Lastly, Principal Fellows are gradually moving into principal positions. For example, data from the 2024 cohort show that only two percent of Principal Fellows were principals one year after program completion. However, data from the 2022 cohort show that nearly 15 percent had moved into a principal role three years after program completion. Relative to traditional MSA graduates, Figures 6 and 7 also show that a higher percentage of Principal Fellow completers had moved into a principal role by 2024-25.

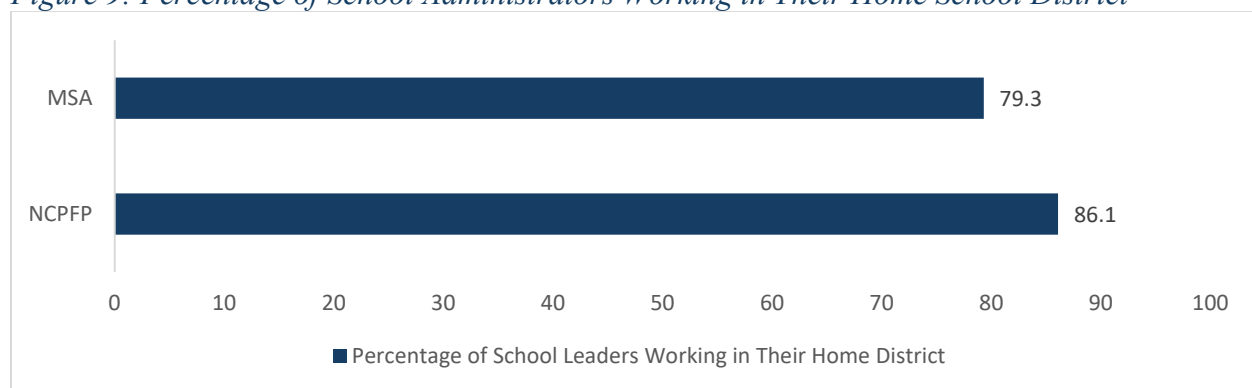
To what extent do Principal Fellows secure employment as a school leader in their home district?

Beyond assessing whether Principal Fellows are serving in school leader positions, it is also important to examine where Principal Fellows are hired. Districts are intentionally selecting promising school personnel to enter the program. As such, they are motivated to keep Principal Fellows in the district after graduation. However, if a school leader position is not immediately available in the home district, Principal Fellows may feel a need, given the service requirements of the scholarship loan, to seek employment elsewhere. The availability of school leader positions may be especially pressing in small, rural districts in which few (if any) school leader positions open on an annual basis.

To explore where Principal Fellows secure employment, we focused on the sample of Principal Fellows who become school leaders—assistant principals, principals—in the year after program completion. Among these Principal Fellows, we report the percentage working as a school leader in their home district—i.e., the district in which they were employed immediately prior to entering the program and/or the district in which they completed their internship. We report these data for Principal Fellows overall—from the 2022, 2023, and 2024 graduating cohorts—and for graduates of traditional MSA programs who become school leaders in the year after program completion.

Among Principal Fellows in school leader positions, Figure 9 shows that approximately 86 percent are working in their home district. These data highlight that, post-graduation, a large majority of Principal Fellows secure employment in the districts in which they previously worked. This finding is broadly consistent with data from focus groups, where Principal Fellows in assistant principal positions reported that their districts made it relatively easy to transition into a school leader position. By comparison, 79 percent of traditional MSA graduates were working as school leaders in their home district in the year after program completion. A much lower percentage of traditional MSA graduates work in school leader positions (see Figures 6-8) and among those school leaders fewer stay in their home districts.

Figure 9: Percentage of School Administrators Working in Their Home School District



Note: For Principal Fellow and traditional MSA graduates who become school leaders in the year after program completion, this figure displays the percentage working in their home district (i.e. the district in which they worked prior to program entry and/or the district in which they completed their principal internship). Data are for graduates from the 2021-22, 2022-23, and 2023-24 academic years. There were 209 Principal Fellows (from the 2022-2024 cohorts) working as a school leader in the year after program completion

What are the characteristics of the schools in which Principal Fellows work as a school leader?

As a final extension of these employment analyses, we assess the characteristics of the schools in which Principal Fellows work as a school leader. For these analyses, we limit our sample to Principal Fellows—from the 2021-22, 2022-23, and 2023-24 graduating cohorts—who transition into a school leader position in the year following program completion. Likewise, we include a comparison sample of traditional MSA completers—from UNC System institutions—who become a school leader in the year after program completion. To these employment records we link school characteristics data from the prior year—e.g., if a Principal Fellow becomes a school leader in 2024-25, we examine characteristics of the hiring school from 2023-24. This allows us to examine characteristics of the schools that Principal Fellows and traditional MSA completers are hired into (rather than potential impacts of the Principal Fellows themselves).

Table 4 presents these school characteristics data for traditional MSA completers, Principal Fellows (overall), and for each NCPFP program. We focus on a limited set of school characteristics, including low-performing status, performance composite, rurality, and the percentage of low-income students and students of color. When examining these data by program, it is important to remember that many Principal Fellows secure employment as a school leader in close proximity to their EPP and characteristics of K-12 schools differ markedly in different regions of the state. Among Principal Fellows who become a school leader immediately following program completion, we find that approximately 40 percent are working in a low-performing school. This is nearly five percentage points higher than the value for traditional MSA completers. Consistent with the rural focus of several NCPFP programs, we find that Principal Fellow graduates are more likely (66 to 54 percent) to be working in a rural school. Principal Fellow graduates and traditional MSA graduates secure school leader jobs in schools with similar performance composites and student demographics. Examining these data by NCPFP program, we find that Principal Fellow graduates from (1) ECU and NCCU are the most likely to secure initial employment as a school leader in a low-performing school; (2) ECU and UNCG graduates are especially likely to work in rural environments; and (3) ECU and UNCCH graduates work in schools with higher percentages of low-income students.

Table 4: Characteristics of the Schools in Which Principal Fellows Work as a School Leader

	Other MSA	NCPFP Overall	ASU	ECU	NCCU	NCSU	UNCCH	UNCC	UNCG	WCU
% Low Performing School	34.8	39.6	23.1	58.8	57.1	25.0	33.3	42.3	35.3	25.0
Performance Composite	49.8	48.9	53.9	44.4	41.6	49.2	50.2	49.9	54.9	52.5
% Rural School	54.0	65.5	78.6	94.3	52.4	40.0	33.3	71.2	100.0	38.5
% Low- Income Students	57.1	61.6	61.0	72.3	63.1	58.2	69.2	55.6	61.7	60.6
% Students of Color	57.6	58.8	35.8	60.5	74.4	69.4	72.3	56.4	43.8	37.5
Count	257	209	14	35	22	45	53	9	18	13

Note: For Principal Fellow and traditional MSA graduates who become school leaders in the year after program completion, this table displays characteristics of the schools in which they work. Data are for graduates from the 2021-22, 2022-23, and 2023-24 academic years. School-level data are from the year prior to employment—i.e. characteristics of the schools that graduates are hired into.

Producing Effective School Leaders

The final core commitment of NCPFP is to produce effective school leaders that positively impact student, educator, and school outcomes. This commitment is the culmination of instituting rigorous selection processes and providing high-quality preparation experiences. In this section of the report, we examine the work of school leaders by detailing the responsibilities of Principal Fellows in assistant principal roles, describing the supports provided to Principal Fellow completers for their on-going development, and assessing how school principals rate the performance of early-career assistant principals. To consider these topics we analyze data from focus groups with assistant principals and NCDPI administrative data.

What are the responsibilities of Principal Fellows in assistant principal roles?

During focus groups with Principal Fellow graduates in their first year of an assistant principal position, we asked about their primary responsibilities, where they were making valuable contributions to their schools, and where they perceived opportunities for increased involvement. Overall, Principal Fellows reported that they were most often responsible for tasks such as bussing, student discipline, and testing. One Principal Fellow shared that much of their day was spent on discipline and caregiver engagement, noting “...typically all day I’m dealing with discipline and counseling and calling parents.” To a lesser extent, assistant principals were involved in 504/LEP meetings, departmental PLCs, curriculum and instruction, and teacher evaluations. One Principal Fellow expressed that while transportation reflected the bulk of their responsibilities, their time was also spent on IEP meetings, PLCs, and testing: “Buses take up a large chunk of the time...once transportation is handled, then I will spend a lot of time in IEP meetings. We’ll do walkthroughs. I participate in [PLCs]...and then, now we’re trying to finish out the school year so I’m testing coordinator.”

Some assistant principals worked individually with distinct leadership assignments, while others shared roles and responsibilities with other assistant principals and the principal. Many Principal Fellows reported that they had fewer opportunities for meaningful instructional leadership and school budgeting. In turn, Principal Fellows frequently expressed a desire to be more involved with instructional leadership and budgeting. For example, one Principal Fellow shared a desire to be more involved in instructional leadership opportunities but noted that *“if one of us [assistant principals] is in a PLC, somebody else has to put the fires out.”* Alternatively, another Principal Fellow expressed that assistant principals alternated some of these responsibilities with their principal, *“We take turns taking the lead on our PLCs. I’m doing the one this week.”*

Principal Fellows described a variety of areas where they have made valuable contributions at their schools. Several reported positive impacts on relationship building, teacher feedback, and student discipline. One Principal Fellow shared that maintaining consistent support for teachers has established the trust required for teachers to feel confident providing feedback to school leadership: *“...They [teachers] know I’ll listen to them and take whatever they say and use it. So that’s made a big difference in our school with teacher morale.”* Another Principal Fellow shared that their ability to maintain consistent support for students has been their most valuable contribution: *“seeing students be able to set goals where teachers counted them out and see the progress that they’ve made.”* Despite assistant principal responses reflecting a desire for increased instructional leadership opportunities, Principal Fellows reported that some of their most valuable contributions involved the development of strong instructional relationships with teachers and cultural improvements at the school.

Participant responses also identified the flexibility required for the assistant principal role. One Principal Fellow stated, *“I show up to school with a plan every day and most days, I’m able to fulfill most of that plan, but more often than not, I’m totally derailed by the universe.”* Similarly, a Principal Fellow shared the various roles assistant principals occupy as needed, *“Sometimes [I start] the day off by driving a bus...so if you’re looking at silver linings, I get to see the kids.”* These experiences reflect the nimbleness required of assistant principals, with many transitioning from their day-to-day responsibilities to more immediate school and student needs.

What supports are provided to Principal Fellows for their ongoing development?

In focus groups, assistant principals described receiving supports from their EPPs and school districts. Principal Fellows from several universities identified executive coaching—from their EPP—as crucial to their ongoing development. These coaching sessions offered Principal Fellows an opportunity to troubleshoot real-world problems, reflect on their practice, and otherwise receive individualized professional guidance from a paired coach. This support took different forms across EPPs, with assistant principals describing varied meeting frequencies (bi-monthly, monthly, ad hoc) and meeting arrangements (in-person or virtual). Further, some assistant principals reported receiving executive coaching or mentorship in program years, whereas others only received it post-graduation.

While formats varied, assistant principals consistently spoke highly of the support provided by their coaches/mentors. Highlighting the experience of their executive coach, one Principal Fellow explained, *“She was a former principal in the district for over 30 years. She worked for [the county]. So she was someone who knew the ins and outs of not just the district but she was also in*

our area, which I thought was really helpful, because our district is split into different regions.” In addition to supporting the Principal Fellow in their daily work [during the internship], this executive coach shared institutional knowledge based on their personal experience in the district and advocated for the Principal Fellow at their placement.

Assistant principals described disparate experiences in terms of support provided by their districts. Nearly all Principal Fellows reported attending monthly or quarterly district-wide assistant principal meetings, though the content of these meetings was not always applicable to their work (e.g., high school transfer information for elementary assistant principals). Some districts provided robust supports, with a Principal Fellow reflecting, *“When I sat down for my interview with the assistant superintendent and superintendent before being offered the position, that was one of the questions. ‘Do you see yourself as a principal and what supports can we put in place to get you to that next level?’”* This Principal Fellow then detailed professional development, coaching, and mentoring as further resources provided by their county. By contrast, some school districts did not have the capacity to provide extensive professional supports to assistant principals. One Principal Fellow commented, *“You’ve got people in the district office doing multiple jobs, so there’s really not a lot of support at all.”* These accounts indicate how district context informs the experiences of Principal Fellows.

When asked about additional supports, several assistant principals wanted access to executive coaching after graduation (as experienced by their peers attending other NCPFP programs). As one Principal Fellow described, *“It was great last year [internship year] when I could have a mentor from the university level that was not involved with the district, didn’t know the politics of the district, didn’t know all the things but they could be that listening ear in a confidential situation and give advice. And if we’re talking from the Principal Fellows program at [EPP], it would be great to see that mentorship, that coaching capacity continue within your first year [as an assistant principal].”* Another Principal Fellow echoed this sentiment, sharing a need for *“Someone to be a little bit of an exemplar. They can help me to plan or show me how something gets started and then I can run with it.”* Principal Fellows who cited modest existing supports in their district wanted more expansive, assistant principal-specific supports to help them develop.

How well do principals rate Principal Fellows in assistant principal roles?

To examine the performance of assistant principals, we compare the NCEES ratings of Principal Fellows in assistant principal roles relative to the NCEES ratings of traditional MSA graduates from UNC System institutions. The sample for these analyses includes Principal Fellow and traditional MSA graduates from the 2021-22, 2022-23, and 2023-24 academic years. We assess their NCEES ratings as early-career assistant principals (less than 3 years of experience in the role) in the 2022-23, 2023-24, and 2024-25 academic years. In total, our sample includes 156 unique Principal Fellows (228 ratings-by-year) and 253 unique traditional MSA graduates (447 ratings-by-year).

For these analyses the outcome variables are each of the seven North Carolina School Executive Standards: Strategic Leadership, Instructional Leadership, Cultural Leadership, Human Resources Leadership, Managerial Leadership, External Development Leadership, and Micropolitical Leadership. Principals rate assistant principals on these standards at the end of the year on a 1-5 scale: not demonstrated (1), developing (2), proficient (3), accomplished (4), and distinguished (5).

We estimate regression models that control for assistant principal demographics, assistant principal experience, and school characteristics. Our models also include a school district fixed effect, meaning we compare the ratings of Principal Fellows versus traditional MSAs working in the same districts. Finally, in one set of models we compare Principal Fellows (overall) versus traditional MSA graduates. In additional models we compare Principal Fellows from each NCPFP program versus traditional MSA graduates. We do not report results for Principal Fellows from UNCCH given their small sample size (< 5 assistant principals in analyses).

Relative to traditional MSA graduates, Table 5 shows that Principal Fellows in assistant principal roles earn significantly higher NCEES ratings on the Strategic Leadership standard. For the remaining standards, the results for Principal Fellows are positive but statistically insignificant. Of note, we find that Principal Fellows earn the highest rating for Cultural Leadership. This is the same standard for which Principal Fellow graduates reported feeling best prepared (see Figure 3). When examining results by NCPFP program, we find that NCSU stands out. In particular, NCSU Principal Fellows earn significantly higher ratings on the Strategic Leadership, Instructional Leadership, Cultural Leadership, and External Development Leadership standards. Principal Fellows from ASU earn significantly higher ratings on two standards, while those from ECU and UNCG earn higher significantly ratings on one standard, respectively.

Table 5: NCEES Ratings of Early-Career Assistant Principals

	Other MSA	NCPFP Overall	ASU	ECU	NCCU	NCSU	UNCCH	UNCC	UNCG	WCU
Strategic Leadership	3.45	3.58*	3.82	3.80*	3.33	3.76*	---	3.58	3.57	3.20
Instructional Leadership	3.51	3.60	3.83	3.76	3.35	3.80**	---	3.57	3.37	3.46
Cultural Leadership	3.63	3.71	3.78	3.87	3.59	3.92**	---	3.59	3.54	3.56
Human Resources Leadership	3.50	3.58	3.98*	3.66	3.35	3.62	---	3.62	3.82+	3.47
Managerial Leadership	3.54	3.55	3.78	3.60	3.36	3.67	---	3.52	3.37	3.43
External Development Leadership	3.42	3.53	3.85+	3.62	3.39	3.64+	---	3.50	3.46	3.46
Micropolitical Leadership	3.38	3.47	3.64	3.61	3.55	3.54	---	3.43	3.28	3.38
Unique Count	253	156	11	27	16	30	4	44	13	11
Ratings by Year	447	228	11	39	24	49	4	77	13	11

Note: This table display results from regression analyses comparing the NCEES ratings of two groups of assistant principals: Principal Fellows and traditional MSAs. Regression models control for assistant principal demographics and experience and school characteristics and include a school district fixed effect. Post-estimation, we generate predicted probabilities and report those in this table. +, *, and ** indicate statistically significant differences between Principal Fellows (overall or from a particular NCPFP program) and other MSA at the 0.10, 0.05, and 0.01 levels, respectively.

Discussion

For this report we analyzed interview and focus group transcripts, survey responses, and program/administrative data for Principal Fellows in the 2021-22 through 2024-25 graduating cohorts. Our analyses aligned with the four core commitments of the NCPFP: (1) attracting promising school leader candidates; (2) providing innovative and high-quality preparation experiences; (3) meeting a majority of the demand for school leaders in North Carolina; and (4) producing effective school leaders that positively impact student, educator, and school outcomes. From our analyses, we identified several important takeaways.

We found that school districts are often active participants—e.g., identifying candidates for the program, leading initial interview/screening processes—in the recruitment and selection of Principal Fellows. This district involvement is a key way in which the NCPFP differs from traditional MSA programs. NCPFP’s financial support results in Principal Fellows feeling less burdened and better able to focus on becoming a school leader. Collectively, these program elements—district participation in recruitment and selection, financial supports—may impact the caliber of individuals entering NCPFP. Relative to traditional MSA completers, we found that Principal Fellows are better credentialed—i.e. more likely to be NBC and have a graduate degree at program entry—and have higher NCEES ratings and EVAAS estimates.

To examine preparation quality, we analyzed survey and focus group data that capture Principal Fellows’ perceptions of their programs. At program completion, Principal Fellows reported feeling best prepared for Cultural Leadership and Strategic Leadership. When reflecting on program components, Principal Fellows highlighted their internship and interactions with other Principal Fellows (cohort model) as being the most valuable aspects of their program. Within these perception data there is meaningful variation across programs—i.e., Principal Fellows from some programs were more positive about their preparation experiences than peers from other programs. In particular, the NCPFP programs at ECU, NCSU, and UNCG stand out as being highly rated by their graduates. These perception data are important when considering program quality and improvement. However, these data should not be used in isolation to judge program effectiveness.

In order to satisfy their forgivable loan requirements and meet the demand for school leaders, Principal Fellows must move into school leader roles. Relative to traditional MSA completers, we found that Principal Fellows are much more likely to hold a school leader position. For example, over 80 percent of Principal Fellows in the 2024 graduating cohort were a school leader in 2024-25, compared to just 33 percent of traditional MSA completers from the same cohort. This is consistent with findings from our previous evaluation reports. During focus groups, Principal Fellows reported minimal difficulty in securing a school leader position and a large majority secured a school leader position in their home school district (i.e. the district from which they entered the program and/or completed their internship). This finding highlights another unique aspect of the NCPFP: districts’ ongoing investment in the employment of Principal Fellows. Lastly, it is important to note that Principal Fellows, like other school leaders, often spend multiple years in assistant principal roles before moving into principal positions. However, early evidence indicates that Principal Fellows may move into principal positions more quickly than traditional MSA graduates. For instance, three years after program completion, 15 percent of the Principal Fellows in the 2022 cohort (7 of 48) were principals in 2024-25. By comparison, only 6 percent of traditional MSA completers in 2022 were principals in 2024-25.

A large majority of Principal Fellow graduates are currently working as assistant principals. As such, we analyzed data to more fully understand their job responsibilities, supports dedicated to their development, and ratings of their performance as assistant principals. We found that Principal Fellows in assistant principal positions often focus on bussing, student discipline, and testing coordination. Principal Fellows had relatively fewer opportunities for instructional leadership and expressed an interest for more opportunities in this area. Principal Fellows spoke highly of the coaching/mentoring provided by their programs, with a desire for the wider use of post-graduation coaching. It was rare for school districts to provide impactful professional supports to Principal Fellows in assistant principal roles.

Finally, our analyses showed that Principal Fellows in assistant principal roles earn significantly higher ratings on the Strategic Leadership standard than assistant principals who completed a traditional MSA program. Results for Principal Fellows on the other school executive standards were positive but not statistically significant. Assistant principals from NCSU stood out the most in these analyses, with significantly higher evaluation ratings on four leadership standards. Principal Fellows from ASU, ECU, and UNCG also earned higher evaluation ratings as assistant principals. Moving forward, our evaluation will continue to focus on the performance of Principal Fellow graduates by leveraging survey data, examining multiple outcomes, and considering how variation in program experiences is related to differences in outcomes for Principal Fellows.

Appendix A: Data Sources and Analyses

Data Sources

For this NCPFP evaluation report we relied on data from the following sources:

- (1) NCPFP program reporting: NCPFP programs submit data to EPIC for each graduating cohort of Principal Fellows. These data include the district from which enrollees entered the program, enrollees' role in the district (e.g. teacher), enrollee email addresses, whether and when the enrollee completed the program, the cost of the enrollees' tuition and fees, the school where the enrollee completed their internship, the name of the mentor principal, and final ratings for the enrollee from their internship experience.
- (2) State level administrative data: NCDPI provided data on all K-12 students, school personnel, and schools. Student level data include enrollment and demographics, attendance, and test scores. K-12 school personnel data include demographics, employment, credentials, and performance measures (e.g. NCEES evaluation ratings and EVAAS estimates). School level data include school type, rurality, aggregated student demographics, academic achievement measures, and North Carolina Teacher Working Conditions survey responses. The UNC System Office also provided data identifying individuals completing an MSA degree at a UNC System institution, the location of the principal internship, and the year of program completion.
- (3) Program completer survey: We developed a survey to assess program completers' perceptions of their principal preparation programs. Principal Fellows take this survey near the end of their internship experience. Survey responses rates are high for NCPFP programs (see Appendix B for response rates). For this evaluation report, we analyze survey items on perceptions of financial burden, program quality, and the value of program components.
- (4) NCPFP program director interviews: In fall 2024, we conducted interviews with program directors and other key personnel for each NCPFP program. Additional personnel participating in the focus groups ranged from coordinators, grant facilitators, coaches, and professors. Each focus group followed a semi-structured protocol and lasted approximately 90-minutes. An evaluation team member led each focus group and took notes. Focus group sessions were recorded on Zoom and later transcribed and de-identified by a member of the evaluation team. There was no incentive for participation.
- (5) Assistant principal focus groups: In spring 2025, we conducted focus groups with Principal Fellows from the 2024 graduating cohort who were working as assistant principals in North Carolina. We conducted one focus group for every EPP with a graduating cohort. A total of 22 fellows participated, with 2-4 fellows in each focus group. Each focus group followed a semi-structured protocol and lasted approximately 60-minutes. An evaluation team member led each focus group and took notes. Focus group sessions were recorded on Zoom and later transcribed and de-identified by a member of the evaluation team. Participants received a \$100 gift card incentive.

Qualitative Data Analysis

Our qualitative analysis consisted of both deductive and inductive coding. We developed an initial set of deductive codes that were guided by our research questions. Later, we developed an inductive coding schema from emergent themes in the data. Each focus group transcript was coded by two members of the evaluation team and reconciled by a third member. We identified major themes in the focus group data both within and across NCPFP programs. In our findings sections below, we report key results with illustrative quotes to elevate the voices of program directors and Principal Fellow graduates serving in an AP role.

Quantitative Data and Analysis

To what extent do financial supports provided by NCPFP assist Principal Fellows during preparation?

For these analyses, we use data from the program completer survey to assess Principal Fellow perceptions of financial burden. In particular, we focus on two survey items for these analyses: (1) Do you feel burdened by the financial obligations of attending your principal preparation program (strongly disagree, disagree, neither, agree, and strongly agree) and (2) To what extent has the financial support provided to you as a NC Principal Fellow enabled you to focus more of your time on learning to become a school leader (not at all, a little, some, quite a bit, a great deal). Data for the first financial item are available for 332 Principal Fellows across the 2021-22 through 2024-25 graduating cohorts. Data for the second financial item are available for 187 Principal Fellows across the 2021-22 through 2023-24 graduating cohorts. For analyses, we report descriptive data for the NCPFP program overall. We do not report these data for individual NCPFP programs.

What are the characteristics of Principal Fellows candidates?

With these analyses, we aim to assess the characteristics of Principal Fellows at program entry relative to the characteristics of those completing traditional MSA programs. We focus on the 365 Principal Fellows in the 2021-22 through 2024-25 graduating cohorts and 600 individuals completing a traditional MSA at the UNC System institution in the 2021-22 through 2023-24 academic years. To these program completers—Principal Fellows and traditional MSA—we link administrative data from NCDPI. For Principal Fellows we link data from the year prior to program entry—e.g., data from the 2021-22 school year for someone entering NCPFP in 2022-23. For our comparison sample we link data from two years prior to program completion.

Our analyses focus on the demographics (gender, race/ethnicity, age at program entry), credentials (years of teacher experience, NBC, graduate degree), and prior performance (NCEES ratings, EVAAS estimates) of Principal Fellows and traditional MSA completers. We report these data for traditional MSA completers, Principal Fellows (overall), and for each NCPFP program. To test for significant differences between (1) traditional MSA completers versus Principal Fellows overall and (2) traditional MSA completers versus each NCPFP program, we estimate regression models where the outcome is the respective teacher characteristic and the focal variable is a dichotomous indicator for NCPFP or each NCPFP program. When interpreting the results of these analyses, it is important to recognize that differences between traditional MSA completers and Principal Fellows can reflect differences in recruitment and selection practices and differences in the underlying characteristics of educators in different regions of North Carolina.

How well-prepared do Principal Fellows feel for school leadership responsibilities?

For these analyses, we are interested in how Principal Fellows perceive the quality of their preparation programs. Such analyses are an important way to provide formative feedback to programs and to assess program strengths and areas for improvement. To address this question, we analyze data from the program completer survey. We administer this survey to Principal Fellows in the spring of their graduation year. The sample for these analyses includes Principal Fellows from the 2021-22, 2022-23, 2023-24, and 2024-25 graduating cohorts who responded to the survey (335 in total).

To address this question, we focus on 25 survey items about how well NCPFP programs have prepared Principal Fellows for key school leadership tasks. These survey items are on a 0-4 scale ('not a part of my program' to 'very well prepared') and are aligned with the North Carolina Standards for School Executives. In particular, three survey items are aligned with the Strategic Leadership standard, four items are aligned with the Instructional Leadership standard, four items are aligned with the Cultural Leadership standard, four items are aligned with the Human Resources Leadership standard, five items are aligned with the Managerial Leadership standard, three items are aligned with the External Development Leadership standard, and two items are aligned with the Micropolitical Leadership standard. For each Principal Fellow respondent, we calculate their average response, by standard, and the percentage of their responses in each response category (i.e. the percentage of times they answered 'very well prepared' to items aligned with Cultural Leadership).

For each school executive standard (Strategic Leadership through Micropolitical Leadership), we report the average response and the distribution of responses across all Principal Fellows. We also report the average responses for each NCPFP program. Broadly, these data allow us to identify the school leadership areas in which Principal Fellows (overall and from individual programs) are particularly strong and the areas in which more attention may be needed.

Which components of their program do Principal Fellows identify as particularly valuable?

For these analyses, we explore how Principal Fellows perceive the value of different program components, including coursework, program enrichments, school site visits, internships in K-12 schools, the expertise of course instructors, and interactions with fellow principal candidates. These analyses are a way to provide formative feedback to programs and to identify particularly valuable programmatic elements. To address this question, we analyze the following item from the program completer survey: How valuable were the following aspects of your principal preparation program? Response options were on a 0-4 scale ('not a part of my preparation program' to 'very valuable'). The sample for these analyses includes Principal Fellows from the 2021-22, 2022-23, 2023-24, and 2024-25 graduating cohorts who responded to the survey (335 in total).

For each programmatic component, we report the average response and the distribution of responses (e.g. the percent responding 'somewhat valuable') across all Principal Fellows. We also report the average response for each NCPFP program. Broadly, these data allow us to identify the program components that are most valuable and programs that may excel at particular program components.

What are the employment roles held by Principal Fellows?

Given the requirement that NCPFP completers serve in school leadership roles (to meet the obligations of their forgivable loan), we assess the employment roles held by Principal Fellows and traditional MSA completers. In particular, we use employment records from the start of the 2024-25 school year (September pay records) and compare the roles held by the 232 Principal Fellows in the 2021-22, 2022-23, and 2023-24 graduating cohorts relative to those of the 600 individuals completing a traditional MSA degree at a UNC System institution in the same years. These employment records from NCDPI have several limitations: (1) they only include employment records for those working in traditional (non-charter) public schools and (2) they only capture roles held at the start of the 2024-25 school year. To address these concerns, we supplement the NCDPI employment records with data reported to the State Education Assistance Authority regarding the employment of Principal Fellows in 2024-25. This allows us to identify the roles held by Principal Fellows in charter school settings and to determine Principal Fellows role across the full school year.

Using these employment records, we identify whether the primary role for these Principal Fellow and traditional MSA completers is working as a teacher, an assistant principal, a principal, in another certified role, or not employed in a traditional North Carolina public school. For each graduating cohort (e.g. 2021-22), we report descriptive statistics for MSA completers, Principal Fellows (overall), and each NCPFP program. These data allow us to compare employment roles for Principal Fellows versus traditional MSAs, to assess whether graduates of certain NCPFP programs are more likely to hold a school leader position, and to track the time between program completion and moving into a school principal position.

To what extent do Principal Fellows secure employment as a school leader in their home district?

For these analyses we are interested in where Principal Fellows are hired as school leaders. School districts are intentionally selecting promising school personnel to enter the NCPFP program and want to keep Principal Fellows in the district after program completion. However, if a school leader position is not immediately available in the district, Principal Fellows may seek employment elsewhere, especially with the service requirements of the scholarship loan. Knowing where Principal Fellows secure employment is an important data point for programs and their partner districts as they plan for recruitment/selection, internship placements, and hiring. It is also important to note that the availability of school leader positions may be especially pressing in small, rural districts in which few school leader positions open on an annual basis.

To explore where Principal Fellows secure employment, we focus on the sample of Principal Fellows from the 2021-22, 2022-23, and 2023-24 graduating cohorts who become school leaders—assistant principals or principals—in the year after program completion. We determine whether these graduates become school leaders with employment records from NCDPI, supplemented with employment data reported to the State Education Assistance Authority. In total, we identify 209 Principal Fellows working as a school leader in the year after program completion. Among these Principal Fellows, we report the percentage working in their home district—i.e., the district in which they were employed immediately prior to entering the program and/or the district in which they completed their internship. We report these data for Principal Fellows overall and

for graduates of traditional MSA programs (from UNC System institutions) who become school leaders in the year after program completion.

What are the characteristics of the schools in which Principal Fellows work as a school leader?

With these analyses we assess the characteristics of the schools in which Principal Fellows work as a school leader. Broadly, these analyses are an opportunity to examine whether Principal Fellows are serving North Carolina’s high-needs schools. For this work, we limit our sample to Principal Fellows from the 2021-22, 2022-23, and 2023-24 graduating cohorts who transition into a school leader position in the year after program completion. Using employment records from NCDPI and the State Education Assistance Authority, we identify 209 Principal Fellows who become school leaders immediately following program completion. Likewise, with data from NCDPI, we identify 257 traditional MSA completers—from the same graduating cohorts—who move into a school leader position in the year after graduation. To these employment records we link school characteristics from the year prior to hire. We use these prior-year data because school leaders can influence some of the characteristics we are interested in, especially school performance data. Overall, this approach allows us to examine characteristics of the schools that Principal Fellows and traditional MSA completers are hired into.

For analyses, we focus on a limited set of school characteristics, including low-performing status, performance composite, rurality, and the percentage of low-income students and students of color. We report these data for traditional MSA completers, Principal Fellows (overall), and for each NCPFP program. When examining these data for individual NCPFP programs, it is important to remember that many Principal Fellows secure employment in close proximity to their EPP and that characteristics of K-12 schools differ across different regions of the state. As such, there are limitations to comparing data across NCPFP programs.

How well do principals rate Principal Fellows in assistant principal roles?

To examine the performance of assistant principals, we compare the NCEES ratings of Principal Fellows in assistant principal roles relative to the NCEES ratings of traditional MSA graduates from UNC System institutions. The sample for these analyses includes Principal Fellow and traditional MSA graduates from the 2021-22, 2022-23, and 2023-24 academic years. We assess their NCEES ratings as early-career assistant principals (less than 3 years of experience in the role) in the 2022-23, 2023-24, and 2024-25 academic years. In total, our sample includes 156 unique Principal Fellows (228 ratings-by-year) and 253 unique traditional MSA graduates (447 ratings-by-year).

For these analyses the outcome variables are each of the seven North Carolina School Executive Standards: Strategic Leadership, Instructional Leadership, Cultural Leadership, Human Resources Leadership, Managerial Leadership, External Development Leadership, and Micropolitical Leadership. Principals rate assistant principals on these standards at the end of the year on a 1-5 scale: not demonstrated (1), developing (2), proficient (3), accomplished (4), and distinguished (5). We estimate regression models that control for assistant principal demographics (gender, race/ethnicity, and age), assistant principal experience, and school characteristics (percent low income students, percent students of color, rurality, school level, and economic tier of the county). Our models also include a school district fixed effect, meaning we compare the ratings of Principal Fellows versus traditional MSAs working in the same districts. In one set of regression analyses,

we compare Principal Fellows (overall) versus traditional MSA graduates. In additional models we compare Principal Fellows from each NCPFP program versus traditional MSA graduates. We do not report results for Principal Fellows from UNCCH given their small sample size (< 5 assistant principals in analyses).

Appendix B: Program Completer Survey—Items Analyzed for the Evaluation Report and Response Rates

Financial Burden Items

Do you feel burdened by the financial obligations of attending your principal preparation program?

Responses: Strongly disagree, disagree, neither disagree or agree, agree, strongly agree

To what extent has the financial support provided to you as a NC Principal Fellow enabled you to focus more of your time on learning to become a school leader?

Responses: Not at all, a little, some, quite a bit, a great deal

Program Quality Items

Please rate your preparation from 0 to 4, where 0=not addressed in my program, 1=not well prepared, 2=somewhat well prepared, 3=well prepared, and 4=very well prepared

How well has your principal preparation program prepared you to...

- Collaborate with stakeholders to create a vision for the school that captures attention and imagination
- Facilitating the setting of high, concrete goals and the expectations that all students meet them
- Create processes to distribute leadership throughout the school
- Implement coherent systems of curriculum, instruction, and assessment across grade levels and subject areas
- Use assessment data to monitor student progress and improve instruction
- Promote the effective use of technology in the service of teaching and learning
- Provide formal and informal feedback to teachers concerning the effectiveness of their classroom instruction
- Create a collaborative work environment that promotes cohesion and cooperation among staff
- Create a school environment that meets the academic, social, emotional, and physical needs of students
- Promote a sense of well-being among staff, students, and parents/families
- Build a sense of efficacy and empowerment among school personnel
- Create and monitor processes for hiring, inducting, and mentoring new teachers and other staff to the school
- Provide for results-oriented professional development that is aligned with the curricular, instructional, and assessment needs of school personnel
- Evaluate teachers and other school personnel in a fair and equitable manner
- Utilize the results of evaluations to improve the performance of teachers and other school personnel
- Manage fiscal and physical resources through effective budgeting and accounting practices
- Develop systems for the fair and equitable management of school-based conflicts among faculty, families, or community stakeholders
- Design systems for the timely and responsible sharing of information with school and district staff
- Develop scheduling processes that benefit the instruction of teachers and learning of students
- Develop and enforce clear expectations, structures, rules, and procedures for students and staff

- Establish processes that empower parents/caregivers and other community stakeholders to significantly contribute to the school
- Design protocols and processes that ensure compliance with state and district mandates
- Build relationships with community members and groups that support specific goals of the school
- Create processes to ensure that school personnel are involved in decision-making and developing school policies
- Demonstrate an awareness of the personal needs of school personnel and the relationships among school personnel

Value of Program Components

Please rate the value of these preparation components from 0-4, where 0=not a part of my preparation program, 1=not valuable, 2=somewhat valuable, 3=valuable, and 4=very valuable

How valuable were the following aspects of your principal preparation program?

- Program coursework
- Program enrichments/specialized trainings
- School site visits
- Internships in K-12 schools
- Expertise of course instructors
- Interactions with fellow principal candidates

Appendix Table B1: Response Rates to the Program Completer Survey

	NCPFP Overall	ASU	ECU	NCCU	NCSU	UNCCH	UNCC	UNCG	WCU
Response Rate	91.8%	100.0%	88.2%	90.5%	88.8%	100.0%	95.0%	90.5%	93.1%
Response Counts	335/365	15/15	67/76	38/42	71/80	22/22	76/80	19/21	27/29

Note: This table presents data on response rates (for NCPFP overall and each NCPFP program) to the program completer survey.

Appendix C: NCPFP Program Director Interview Protocol

Introductory Questions

Please describe your role at your EPP.

Please briefly summarize your EPP's principal preparation program (e.g. courses, student experiences)

Programmatic Elements

How does the NCPFP program differ from the traditional MSA program?

Did your EPP make changes to the required coursework for the principal preparation program in light of NCPFP requirements?

-Probe: If so, what?

-Probe: Did you make any other changes to your program upon receipt of the NCPFP grant?

-Probe: Have you made any changes to your NCPFP program since the first cohort?

Does your program offer coaching? If it does, what does that coaching look like?

Does your program have any supports for Principal Fellows after graduation? What do these look like?

Recruitment/Selection

How are candidates selected? (probe for process/district collaboration)

How, if at all, has advanced teaching roles, impacted recruitment and selection?

What are you looking for in a candidate?

How do you promote awareness and interest in the program?

District Relationship

How are internship sites selected?

-Probe: District/candidate/school/mentor factors

-Probe: Does this selection process vary by district? Why or why not?

How do you collaborate with districts?

-Probe: Does your EPP have a system for ensuring that the internship experience addresses specific standards? What does that look like?

-Probe: Areas of specific collaboration

What supports are in place for mentor principals?

Commission

How does the NCPFP leadership and/or commission communicate with EPPs and how do EPPs communicate with each other?

How do EPPs manage grant funds?

-Probe: Challenges in managing grant funds?

-Probe: What is working well?

-Probe: Collaboration with districts in grant administration?

-Probe: Other funding sources?

Is there anything you would like to do with grant funds that you can't do?

Is there something you would change for the next grant cycle?

A goal of NCPFP is preparing more school leaders. What resources/changes would your school need to support this goal?

Closing

What advice would you give to another EPP involved in NCPFP?

Is there anything else we should know about your work with NCPFP that we haven't talked about?

Appendix D: Assistant Principal Focus Group Protocol

Introductory Questions

If we have not spoken with you previously, how did you get involved with NCPFP?

How were you selected and recruited into the program?

Where are you currently working and how difficult was it to secure your position after completing NCPFP?

-Probe: If you struggled to secure a role as an assistant principal, what barriers did you face?

-Probe: Location, county preference, competition, policies

Experience as an Assistant Principal

How would you describe your school to another administrator?

-Probe: Would you identify your school as high-needs?

Can you describe a typical day in your role as an assistant principal?

-Probe: How has your role evolved since the beginning of the year?

Are there any areas that are under your supervision/leadership?

What other areas, if any, receive a lot of your focus?

What do you believe has been your biggest contribution to your school so far?

Are there aspects of administration in which you would like to be more involved?

-Probe: In what areas would you like more decision-making power?

Considering your responsibilities, what aspects of your work do you feel particularly prepared for?

What areas, if any, do you feel less prepared for?

-Probe: Is there something you think should have been a larger focus during NCPFP coursework or the internship?

How often do you find yourself drawing on what you learned in your NCPFP coursework? Your internship?

-Probe: Can you provide an example of a time when you did this?

Do you have a current executive coach assigned through the university this year? If so, what does that coaching look like?

-Probe: Have you found coaching in your assistant principal role valuable?

-Probe: Are there any other ways that you're connected with NCPFP alumni resources or faculty?

What other supports do you receive as a new assistant principal?

-Probe: From your school/district?

-Probe: From professional organizations?

Are there any gaps in support or professional learning that would help you grow as a school leader?

What would an ideal support system for new assistant principals include?

What is your relationship with your current principal like?

How do your leadership styles compare to one another?

What feedback have you received from your principal or others at your school about your leadership?

Future Plans/Closing

Where do you see yourself in five years, professionally?

-Probe: Role, district, school level

-Probe: Have you considered becoming principal? What would help you in progressing into that role?

What elements of NCPFP have been most valuable to you in your professional career?

Is there anything else that we should know about your experiences as a Principal Fellow or administrator?

-Probe: Recruitment, classes, internship, supplemental activities, coaching, finances, etc.



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