

# NCPFP Year 2 Evaluation Report

*Kevin C. Bastian, Jillian La Serna, Sarah Crittenden Fuller, Rosie Miesner,  
Camille Mikkelsen, & Kai Petry*

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## Executive Summary

The purpose of this report is to provide formative data and analysis on the eight principal preparation programs funded in the 2020-2026 and 2022-2028 grant cycles of the newly 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 first written report in EPIC's seven-year NCPFP evaluation.

For this report we analyzed focus group, survey, and administrative data on NCPFP programs and the Principal Fellows enrolled in these programs in the 2021-22 and 2022-23 academic years. Our work focused on candidate background and selection into NCPFP programs, Principal Fellows' experiences during their programs, and the initial employment outcomes for Principal Fellows completers. From our analyses we identified several important takeaways.

### *Key Findings*

- Principal Fellows in the 2022-2024 graduating classes came from a broad distribution of North Carolina school districts. However, there are portions of the state—particularly the Sandhills and Western NC—that do not yet have Principal Fellows in the newly consolidated program.
- First-year Principal Fellows reported that program quality and financial accessibility were strong motivators in their decision to apply. Principal Fellows felt much less financial burden than those in a traditional Master of School Administration (MSA) program.
- Principal Fellows reported considerable variation in program application and selection practices, both across and within individual programs. K-12 districts were very involved in the nomination and selection of some Principal Fellows; for other Principal Fellows, district involvement was less extensive.
- At program entry, Principal Fellows were better credentialed and more instructionally effective than traditional MSA candidates at a UNC System institution. In particular, Principal Fellows had more years of experience in schools, were more likely to be Nationally Board Certified, and had higher evaluation ratings.
- Nearly 40 percent of Principal Fellows identified as a person of color. This is nearly double the percentage of teachers of color in North Carolina public schools.
- Principal Fellows reported that their coursework and enrichment opportunities were valuable, especially in exposing them to new ideas/practices.
- Principal Fellows felt prepared for an internship placement in a high-needs school. Analyses showed that internship schools and mentor principals were generally similar to other schools and principals within the same district that did not host a Principal Fellows intern. These findings may align with survey responses indicating that Principal Fellows rated their mentor principals no differently than other MSA completers.
- Relative to other MSA completers, Principal Fellows completers reported feeling better prepared for school leadership tasks and more confident in their ability to be an effective assistant principal.
- Nearly 90 percent of Principal Fellows in the 2022 graduating cohort secured an assistant principal position in North Carolina public schools for the start of the 2022-23 year.

## 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 administration in North Carolina. In the initial design of the NCPFP, individual candidates were selected to receive a forgivable scholarship loan, then the Principal Fellows 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 residencies. 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. Principal Fellows take coursework as a cohort, participate in enrichment opportunities offered by their individual programs and the state level NCPFP, develop partnerships with K-12 districts, complete a paid year-long internship, earn an MSA degree, and satisfy requirements of their forgivable loan by working as a school administrator in North Carolina. The core commitments of the newly consolidated NCPFP are to (1) attract promising school leader candidates; (2) provide innovative and high-quality preparation through coursework, practice-based experiences in schools, and coaching; (3) meet a majority of the demand for school leaders in North Carolina; and (4) produce effective school leaders that positively impact student achievement, student engagement, school working conditions, and teacher retention.

Eight institutions have been awarded new NCPFP grants across two funding cycles. The first funding cycle, running from 2020 to 2026, includes four institutions: East Carolina University (ECU), North Carolina Central University (NCCU),<sup>1</sup> 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). With funding from both grant cycles, NCSU now has annual graduating cohorts, while ECU has increased the size of their annual cohorts.

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<sup>1</sup> 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 and the UNC System Office 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 first written report in EPIC's seven-year evaluation of the NCPFP. In this report we focus on NCPFP programs and Principal Fellows enrolled in these programs in the 2021-22 and 2022-23 academic years. We group the evaluation questions for this report into three categories:

#### *Candidate Background and Selection into NCPFP Programs*

- (1) Why do individuals pursue an NCPFP MSA?
- (2) How do individuals learn of, apply for, and become selected into a NCPFP program?
- (3) What are the characteristics of Principal Fellows?

#### *NCPFP Experiences*

- (1) How do Principal Fellows perceive first-year experiences as contributing to their leadership development?
- (2) How prepared do Principal Fellows feel for internship placements and what do they hope to gain through practicum experiences?
- (3) What are the characteristics of NCPFP internship schools and mentor principals?
- (4) How do Principal Fellows completers perceive the effectiveness of their preparation programs?

#### *Outcomes for NCPFP Completers*

- (1) What are the initial employment outcomes for Principal Fellows?

We use qualitative and quantitative methods to analyze a range of focus group, survey, and administrative data. Our diverse data sources and mixed method analyses are a strength of this evaluation, as they allow us to better understand program practices and assess program impacts. At this early stage of the evaluation—year two of a seven year evaluation—our results are intended to be formative and to inform NCPFP program practices.

In the remainder of this report, we detail our data sample and sources, describe our analysis methods, review our findings, and discuss implications for program practices and future evaluation efforts.

## **Data and Analysis**

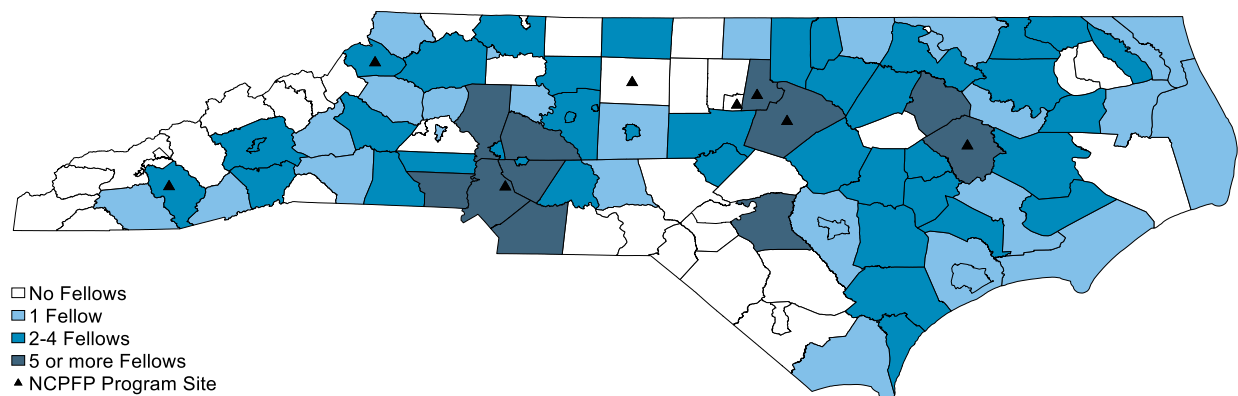
### *Data Sample and Sources*

In this evaluation report, we focus on NCPFP programs in the 2021-22 and 2022-23 academic years. This includes all Principal Fellows in the graduating classes of 2022, 2023, and 2024. Our analyses concentrate on the new, consolidated NCPFP and do not include candidates completing

TP3 programs or NCPFP programs under its original design.<sup>2</sup> When assessing the characteristics and first-year experiences of Principal Fellows, our analyses include all eight institutions with current NCPFP awards. However, our analyses of principal internships, program completer perceptions, and post-program outcomes include only the four programs (ECU, NCCU, NCSU, and UNCC) who received awards during the first funding cycle.

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 238 Principal Fellows in the 2022-2024 graduating classes represent 80 out of the 115 traditional K-12 school districts in the state. Many districts contributed only a small number of Principal Fellows. Eleven districts, generally larger urban districts, contributed five or more Principal Fellows, with Wake, Cumberland, and Durham Public Schools being the top suppliers of Principal Fellows candidates. There are portions of the state—particularly the Sandhills and Western NC—that do not yet have Principal Fellows in the newly consolidated program.

*Figure 1: The Distribution of Principal Fellows by School District (Classes 2022-2024)*



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

- (1) NCPFP program reporting: For each graduating cohort, NCPFP programs submit data on enrollees and program characteristics.
- (2) UNC System Office: The UNC System Office provided data identifying individuals completing an MSA degree at a UNC System institution.
- (3) State level administrative data: The North Carolina Department of Public Instruction (NCDPI) provided data on all K-12 students, school personnel, and schools.

<sup>2</sup> There were TP3 graduates in 2021-22 from High Point University, North Carolina State University (NCSU), the Sandhills Regional Education Consortium (SREC), UNC Greensboro (UNCG), and Western Carolina University (WCU). NCSU also had Principal Fellows completers in 2021-22 and we include them in our analyses. UNCG and WCU had first-year Principal Fellows in 2022-23 and they are part of our analyses.

- (4) Program completer survey: We developed a survey to assess program completers' perceptions of their principal preparation programs. This survey was taken by Principal Fellows in the 2022 and 2023 graduating classes and others finishing an MSA program at a public or private institution in North Carolina.
- (5) NCPFP focus groups: In spring 2023, we conducted focus groups with first-year Principal Fellows from each of the eight NCPFP programs.

### *Qualitative Data and Analysis*

We collected qualitative data through focus groups with first-year Principal Fellows in spring 2023. Each group consisted of two to four Principal Fellows from each of the eight NCPFP programs (see Appendix Table 1). We also conducted several one-on-one interviews with first-year Principal Fellows who were unable to attend a scheduled focus group or declined to be recorded on Zoom. We used data provided by each NCPFP program—including data on Principal Fellows' demographics, K-12 districts, and prior roles in schools—to identify a diverse group of potential participants for recruitment. Overall, we spoke with 24 first-year Principal Fellows from the graduating class of 2024. We identified major themes from focus groups both within and across NCPFP programs. In our findings sections below, we report key results with illustrative quotes to elevate the voices of Principal Fellows.

Please see the appendix for more details on our qualitative analyses, including the questions in our focus group protocol.

### *Quantitative Data and Analyses*

We conducted quantitative analyses to assess (1) the characteristics of principal candidates; (2) the characteristics of internship schools and mentor principals; (3) program completers' perceptions of their preparation programs; and (4) the initial employment outcomes for program completers.

When assessing the characteristics of principal candidates, we compare data on the 238 Principal Fellows in the 2022-2024 graduating cohorts relative to 165 principal candidates completing a traditional MSA degree at a UNC System institution in the 2021-22 academic year. Our analyses focus on the demographics, credentials, and performance of principal candidates prior to their entry into a principal preparation program.<sup>3</sup>

With our internship analyses, we examine the characteristics of the schools chosen to host a Principal Fellows intern and the characteristics of the principals in those schools. The goal of these analyses is to examine the choices made by NCPFP programs and their partner districts in making internship placements. As such, our analyses focus on school and principal-level data from the year before the internship and make comparisons between internship sites and non-internship sites within the **same district**. The sample for these analyses includes 92 Principal Fellows interns—from ECU, NCCU, NCSU, and UNCC—in the 2021-22 and 2022-23 academic years. The

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<sup>3</sup> In these analyses we link principal candidates to data from two years prior to their program completion. This allows us to pull data on Principal Fellows from the year in which they were applying to their programs.



comparison sample for these analyses are the 2,400 schools—and by extension, principals—that did not host a Principal Fellows intern in the respective academic year.

To assess completers' perceptions of program quality, we analyze the survey responses of NCPFP completers in the 2021-22 and 2022-23 academic years. In total, 83 unique Principal Fellows from first cycle programs (ECU, NCCU, NCSU, and UNCC) completed the survey. Our comparison group for these analyses is 96 other survey respondents who completed a traditional MSA degree in the 2021-22 or 2022-23 academic years. For this report we focus on completers' perceptions of (1) how well their program prepared them for school leadership tasks aligned with the North Carolina School Executive Standards;<sup>4</sup> (2) the extent to which mentor principals supported their growth, provided high-quality feedback, and were effective school leaders; and (3) their confidence to be an effective assistant principal and an effective principal.

Finally, to assess the initial employment outcomes of NCPFP completers, we focus on the 48 Principal Fellows in the 2022 graduating cohort. Using employment records from the start of the 2022-23 school year, we compare the employment outcomes for these Principal Fellows relative to those of the 165 individuals completing a traditional MSA degree at a UNC System institution in the 2021-22 academic year.

Please see the appendix for more details on our quantitative data and analyses and for the questions from our program completer survey.

## Findings

### *Candidate Background and Selection into NCPFP*

#### *Why do individuals pursue a NCPFP program?*

Focus groups with first-year Principal Fellows revealed that participants' prior education experiences were both varied and extensive. Many Principal Fellows spent multiple years working in different school positions such as teachers, media roles, or counselors. Additionally, many focus group participants named instances in which, at the time of their application to an NCPFP program, they were already performing administrative duties (e.g., grant writing) at their school. This is exemplified by one Principal Fellow sharing, *"I do a lot of AP [assistant principal] things. We don't have an AP position, so I do a lot of it. I don't do evaluations yet, but I just help in any way possible. I help him. I help teachers. I help students. Just whatever I need to do and I do enjoy it. So when this opportunity came up, I was like 'Well, I never thought I'd go back to school.' Then I did it."*

Many Principal Fellows were drawn to the program to enact positive change in schools, noting their inability to make large, systemic changes in their roles as teachers or in other faculty positions. These participants perceived that moving to an administrator role would further their ability to make positive change. One Principal Fellow shared, *"Personally, I just always found myself saying, 'man, I wish that I could change this' ...but as the teacher, a lot of times, your voice*

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<sup>4</sup> The seven NC School Executive Standards are Strategic Leadership, Instructional Leadership, Cultural Leadership, Human Resource Leadership, Managerial Leadership, External Development Leadership, and Micro-political Leadership.

*is heard but it's not necessarily one that can really cause any significant change."* Other Principal Fellows felt that a school administrator position was the next logical step in their career progression.

Principal Fellows cited former teachers, school mentors, and support from experienced staff members as key motivators for them to apply to the program. Some participants were also approached by administrators in their district about the opportunity to be a Principal Fellow. Others noted the quality and financial accessibility of the program as a major draw to apply. As one Principal fellow stated, *"I will say, to be honest, the fact that the program is fully funded, that's a huge bonus. That is real. If I want to take that time to invest in a grad program, I wanted a program that was going to invest in me. So that was also a component of making my decision was the fully paid internship and the quality of the program."*

Data from the program completer survey supports this qualitative finding regarding financial accessibility. When asked if they felt burdened by the financial obligations of attending their principal preparation program, 84 percent of Principal Fellows survey respondents strongly disagreed or disagreed. By comparison, only 34 percent of other MSA completers answered similarly. Additionally, 96 percent of Principal Fellows survey respondents indicated that the financial support from their programs enabled them to focus more of their time and attention on learning how to become a school leader.

#### *How do individuals learn of, apply for, and become selected into a NCPFP program?*

During our focus group conversations, first-year Principal Fellows reported learning about the program and opportunity to apply in three ways: direct nomination from a school or district leader, district or school-wide email, or independently, through peers or personal research. Some participants heard of NCPFP through multiple channels. Importantly, Principal Fellows attending the same institutions reported differing application and selection experiences based on district practices. Overall, the manner by which Principal Fellows learned of the NCPFP opportunity related to their application and selection experiences.

Several Principal Fellows reported being nominated directly to NCPFP by an administrator. In these instances, principals or district leaders approached staff members and encouraged them to pursue the opportunity. Nominated individuals completed a local application in some districts, whereas in other districts they only completed application materials for the university. As described by one first-year Principal Fellow, this approach highlights the tension between promoting equitable access to the NCPFP opportunity and managing the practical staffing needs of school districts. *"One of the things that my superintendent did tell me when he offered me the opportunity was that, because of the role that I had just switched to, it afforded me the opportunity to be in the program because I was not responsible for students on a regular basis. [...] The other two people from our district are in that same position. The role that they currently served afforded them the opportunity to be able to do this because [the superintendent] wasn't going to have to pull anyone from a classroom or pull anyone from direct student service, especially in early August."*

Principal Fellows at six institutions cited learning about the program through district- or school-wide emails. This method of notification ensured that all teachers and staff were aware of the



NCPFP opportunity and the extent of their eligibility. However, this approach may increase demands on the district to create formal application and selection processes. In one instance, a participant described their district as shifting to this method to create a fairer process. *“I think that maybe our district caught a little bit of backlash [from prior recruitment efforts] because there are other people who might have been interested also and didn’t have an opportunity to even tell that they were interested. So, when they did it the second time, that’s when they started an application process. So, they emailed the entire district and let everybody know and did it that way.”*

Several focus group participants found out about NCPFP without district involvement. These Principal Fellows noted hearing about the program via social media, from colleagues, or in other graduate programs. One Principal Fellow reported learning from multiple sources. *“Twitter is actually where I found it first. There was a flyer that was tweeted out. Then I followed the link and read up on the website. The website has information from past Fellows, what the course of action might be for classes and then actually, after that, a lady I used to work with got into the program and she raved about it as well.”* While dissemination via social media and word-of-mouth is important, this may also suggest that other eligible staff remain unaware of the NCPFP opportunity.

Prior to completing a university application, some participants reported passing additional screenings or application processes at the district level. These processes varied in content or intensity. For some Principal Fellows, the district selection process comprised an application, a letter of recommendation, an interview, or some combination thereof. Other Principal Fellows noted additional mock leadership scenarios intended to showcase their skills. For example, as described by one Principal Fellow, *“So you’re thinking, ‘I’m here for an interview,’ and then you walk in and you have this folder with your name on it with all these papers, a schedule, a map of all these different places you have to go at all these different times. You have three simulations with actors and you’re also being recorded and you’re learning everything on the spot. [...] We got a problem from our superintendent and we had to collaborate as a team with people we’d never met in front of a panel about how it was fixed. They called it basket tasks where you had three or four different problems that you had to solve in writing and it was all timed.”*

These different selection processes created varied demands of Principal Fellows, as the range of application materials required different amounts of time to complete. These iterations also required different levels of involvement from district staff charged with overseeing application processes and making candidate selections. The spectrum of Principal Fellows’ experiences in learning about, applying to, and being selected for NCPFP may reflect districts’ available resources for identifying and selecting candidates, as well as their understandings of and orientations toward the NCPFP.

#### What are the characteristics of Principal Fellows?

Table 1 displays descriptive data on the characteristics of Principal Fellows in the 2022-2024 graduating classes and our comparison sample of those earning a traditional MSA degree at a UNC System institution. For these analyses, we use data from two years prior to program completion so that we can assess the characteristics of Principal Fellows at the time they applied to their NCPFP program.

The top panel of Table 1 shows demographic data for Principal Fellows and our comparison sample. Among those enrolled in an NCPFP program, we find that 74 percent of Principal Fellows are female, 39 percent are a person of color, and their average age at program entry is 36 years old. Principal Fellows are significantly more likely to be female and are significantly older at program entry than other UNC System MSA completers. When examining these data at the program level, we find that (1) a significantly higher percentage of Principal Fellows from NCCU and NCSU are female; (2) a significantly higher percentage of Principal Fellows from NCCU, NCSU, and UNCCH are a person of color;<sup>5</sup> and (3) Principal Fellows from ECU, NCCU, UNCCH, UNCC, and WCU are significantly older at program entry.

The middle panel of Table 1 presents descriptive data on educator credentials for Principal Fellows and our comparison sample. At the time of program entry, we find that Principal Fellows have over 10 years of education experience, 13 percent are Nationally Board Certified (NBC), and 37 percent have a graduate degree. Relative to the comparison sample, Principal Fellows have significantly more educator experience and are significantly more likely to be NBC and have a graduate degree. When examining these data at the program level, we find that (1) Principal Fellows from ECU, NCCU, UNCCH, UNCC, and WCU have significantly more educator experience than other UNC System MSA completers; (2) Principal Fellows from ASU and ECU are significantly more likely to be NBC; and (3) Principal Fellows from ECU, NCCU, UNCCH, UNCC, UNCG, and WCU are significantly more likely to have earned a graduate degree prior to program entry.

Finally, the bottom panel of Table 1 presents data on the performance—NCEES ratings and EVAAS estimates—of Principal Fellows and our comparison sample. In the year prior to program entry, we find that Principal Fellows earned average evaluation ratings of 4.08 (where ‘4’ is ‘accomplished’) and had average EVAAS estimates 21 percent of a standard deviation above the statewide mean. These data suggest that Principal Fellows were instructionally effective prior to program entry. Relative to other UNC MSA completers, Principal Fellows earned significantly higher NCEES ratings (by 0.21 points)<sup>6</sup> and had comparable EVAAS estimates. When examining these data at the program level, we find that (1) Principal Fellows at ASU, NCSU, UNCC, and WCU earned significantly higher NCEES ratings and (2) Principal Fellows at UNCCH and WCU had significantly higher EVAAS estimates.

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<sup>5</sup> We find that a significantly lower percentage of Principal Fellows from WCU are a person of color.

<sup>6</sup> To put this difference into perspective, we note that the average difference in NCEES ratings between first and second-year teachers is approximately 0.20-0.25 points.

*Table 1: The Characteristics of Principal Fellows and Other MSA Completers*

	Other MSA	NCPFP	ASU PF	ECU PF	NCCU PF	NCSU PF	UNCCH PF	UNCC PF	UNCG PF	WCU PF
<b>Demographics</b>										
Reported Female	65%	<b>74%<sup>+</sup></b>	67%	77%	<b>79%<sup>+</sup></b>	<b>77%<sup>+</sup></b>	58%	74%	67%	73%
Reported Person of Color	33%	39%	20%	43%	<b>66%**</b>	<b>48%<sup>+</sup></b>	<b>67%*</b>	24%	24%	<b>13%*</b>
Age at Entry	33.0	<b>36.3**</b>	35.6	<b>36.8**</b>	<b>39.5**</b>	32.9	<b>43.9**</b>	<b>36.0*</b>	34.4	<b>39.4**</b>
<b>Credentials</b>										
Teacher Experience	8.3	<b>10.4**</b>	7.9	<b>11.0**</b>	<b>12.5**</b>	8.6	<b>14.3**</b>	<b>10.4*</b>	8.8	<b>11.6*</b>
NBC	7%	<b>13%<sup>+</sup></b>	<b>27%<sup>+</sup></b>	<b>18%<sup>+</sup></b>	10%	8%	8%	13%	5%	13%
Graduate Degree	13%	<b>37%**</b>	20%	<b>34%*</b>	<b>48%**</b>	21%	<b>67%**</b>	<b>43%**</b>	<b>38%*</b>	<b>53%**</b>
<b>Performance Measures</b>										
Avg NCEES	3.87	<b>4.08**</b>	<b>4.14<sup>+</sup></b>	4.03	3.95	<b>4.03<sup>+</sup></b>	3.93	<b>4.23**</b>	3.82	<b>4.43**</b>
Avg Std. EVAAS	0.145	0.214	0.101	0.224	-0.023	0.272	<b>1.48**</b>	0.084	0.133	<b>0.793<sup>+</sup></b>
# Completers	165	238	15	44	29	48	12	54	21	15
# Completers Matched to Prior Data	144	234	14	44	29	48	9	54	21	15

Note: This table displays data on the characteristics of Principal Fellows in the 2022-2024 graduating classes and data on those completing an MSA at a UNC System institution in 2021-22. Data are from two years prior to program completion. +, \*, and \*\* indicate statistically significant differences between Principal Fellows and other MSAs at the 0.10, 0.05, and 0.01 level, respectively.

## ***NCPFP Experiences***

### ***How do Principal Fellows perceive first-year experiences as contributing to their leadership development?***

First-year Principal Fellows identified multiple experiences as key contributors to their leadership development. Coursework and activities outside of the classroom expanded Principal Fellows' understandings of possibilities within school leadership roles and highlighted equity-focused leadership strategies. Participants also spoke to appreciating existing mentorship and looking forward to future coaching within the program.

The coursework discussed by Principal Fellows included a wide range of key school leadership topics: human resources, education policy, the social context of education, the role of the principal, instructional leadership, research methods, educational technology, education law, organizational theory, data-driven decision making, and school safety. Principal Fellows also highlighted the value of the professors working in the program, with one Principal Fellow noting, *"We have been extremely lucky to be a part of this experience, and our professors, I feel like we are really connected to them. They are quick to answer, quick to help."* Another focus group participant discussed a professor who *"did a great job of giving us so many scenarios, so many things that could go wrong in a school and how to handle them as an administrator."*

Activities that occur outside of the classroom also impacted Principal Fellows leadership development. During their first year of the program, Principal Fellows reported participating in a wide variety of activities, including crucial conversations training, district/school site visits, LETRS training, and the Ron Clark Academy. Regarding the impact of school visits, one Principal Fellow commented, *“It’s nice to see things outside of your own district because it opens your eyes to possibilities that you might not have even been aware of. I was not even aware that dual immersion programs were happening in [district], and here I am on top of the mountain with a large Hispanic population and that would be an excellent resource. I came straight back and talked to our principal about it.”* In discussing these activities, Principal Fellows noted that while there may be additional offerings from their university, it is hard to attend some non-mandatory events given commuting distance and other responsibilities or time constraints.

Given program structures, very few Principal Fellows reported experience with coaching in the first year of their programs. However, many Principal Fellows identified their program director/coordinator as an important mentor in the first year. Some programs featured regular, structured meetings between Principal Fellows and the director/coordinator, while other programs scheduled meetings as needed. Principal Fellows described program directors/coordinators as *“confidantes”* who they look to for *“guidance and practical advice.”* As one Principal Fellow shared, *“She checks in with us when we had a few problems. She has definitely stepped up to the plate for us.”*

Finally, Principal Fellows described building their equity-focused leadership capacity through several resources, including coursework, books, assignments, and outside of the classroom activities. While most focus group participants experienced some equity-focused leadership development in their programs, experiences also varied across programs. One Principal Fellow shared, *“Equity for the most part is embedded in everything that we do, literally every class has an equity component to it, even the data class. So I think that’s something that [the program] definitely drives home.”* Conversely, a Principal Fellow in a different program noted, *“Yeah, we reflect on that. But there hasn’t been true instruction in equity within our reading or our coursework. It’s just been embedded into what we’re doing, or in my case, what we’re doing through our [project] but they’re not asking us to discuss it or bring any of that to the table when we are in class.”*

*How prepared do Principal Fellows feel for their internship placements and what do they hope to gain throughout their practicum experiences?*

First-year Principal Fellows participating in focus groups reported feeling prepared to enter a high-needs school for their internship and after program completion. Often, this feeling of preparedness came from prior work experiences rather than NCPFP coursework or enrichments. Reflecting on their past work experience, one first-year Principal Fellow stated, *“All of my teaching years were in a Title I school in the city...I feel like I’ve worked with those kids who other new teachers or new staff might be afraid to unknowingly upset just through interactions. And so I feel comfortable working with the kids. I’m not worried about the needs of staff in high need schools.”* Another Principal Fellow expressed, *“Yea, that’s all I ever worked in, I’ve only ever worked in Title I schools, restart schools. I don’t know any difference. And that’s in my wheelhouse. I love those kids. I build relationships with those kids.”*

Principal Fellows shared many aspects of the internship that they are looking forward to, including active learning in the field, having a safe space to make mistakes, experiencing new grade levels, working with a strong principal mentor, and engaging in coaching opportunities. One Principal Fellow described the importance of experiencing administrative responsibility while being able to make and learn from mistakes. *“I think the thing I’m looking most forward to is the idea of having that safety net. It being a year of internship, and then, knowing that, hey, I’m gonna fail but I want to fail forward.”*

*What are the characteristics of the schools and principals with which Principal Fellows complete their internships?*

Table 2 presents descriptive data on the characteristics of the schools hosting a Principal Fellows intern. These data are from the year prior to the internship so as to better assess the placement choices made by NCPFP programs and their partner districts. The top panel of Table 2 shows that 41 percent of Principal Fellows internships occur in elementary schools and 60 percent are in rural locations. The middle panel of Table 2 indicates that students of color and low-income students make up more than 60 percent of those enrolled in Principal Fellows internship schools, with data on student achievement and attendance showing that internship schools have End-of-Grade and End-of-Course exam proficiency rates of 42 percent and chronic absentee rates of 32 percent. Finally, the bottom panel of Table 2 presents data on teacher retention and working conditions. Teacher retention rates are approximately 79 percent in Principal Fellows internship schools. These internship schools have Teacher Working Conditions (TWC) values (on a 1-5 scale) of 3.57 for school leadership, 3.45 for school equity, and 3.62 for being a good place to work and learn.

*Table 2: Characteristics of Internship Schools and Non-Internship Schools*

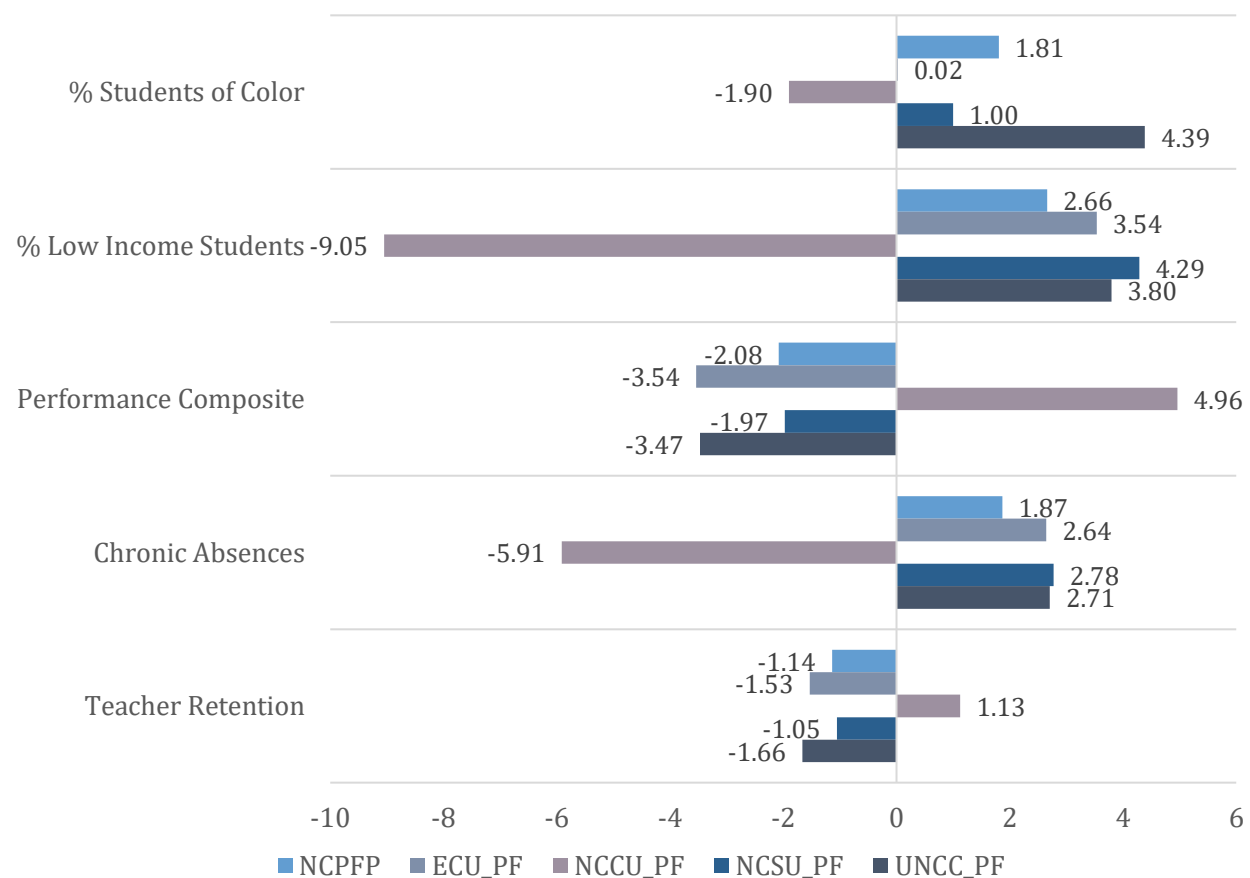
	Non-Internship Site	NCPFP Internship Site	ECU Internship Site	NCCU Internship Site	NCSU Internship Site	UNCC Internship Site
<b><i>School Type and Rurality</i></b>						
Elementary	52%	41%	53%	22%	47%	34%
Middle	19%	34%	3%	56%	38%	38%
High	21%	22%	37%	22%	12%	25%
Urban/Suburban	41%	40%	7%	44%	68%	25%
Rural/Town	59%	60%	93%	56%	32%	75%
<b><i>Student Demographics, Achievement, and Engagement</i></b>						
Students of Color	55%	64%	54%	73%	76%	53%
Low Income Students	57%	62%	67%	56%	71%	51%
Test Proficiency Rate	46%	42%	40%	39%	38%	48%
Chronic Absence Rate	28%	32%	32%	26%	37%	29%
<b><i>Teacher Retention and Working Conditions</i></b>						
Teacher Retention Rate	80.9%	78.6%	79.4%	81.6%	76.8%	79.2%
TWC School Leadership	3.60	3.57	3.63	4.16	3.60	3.35
TWC School Equity	3.49	3.45	3.47	4.04	3.51	3.23
TWC Good Place to Work and Learn	3.68	3.62	3.70	4.34	3.60	3.42

Note: This table displays descriptive data on the characteristics of NCPFP internship schools and non-internship schools. Data are from the year prior to the internship placement.

Figures 2 and 3 display results from regression models comparing the characteristics of Principal Fellows’ internship schools to schools within the **same district** that did not host an intern. These

models are an opportunity to more closely assess the placement choices made by NCPFP programs and their district partners. There are no statistically significant differences between NCPFP internship schools and other district schools regarding the percentage of students of color and low-income students, test proficiency rates, chronic absentee rates, and teacher retention rates. On these measures, internship schools are similar to other schools that NCPFP programs and districts did not select as an internship site. Regarding TWC survey responses, Figure 3 shows that Principal Fellows internship schools have modestly lower levels (by 0.062 points) on a school equity construct. These TWC results vary by NCPFP program, with NCCU's internship schools having significantly higher TWC values and UNCC's internship schools having significantly lower TWC values than other schools in the partner district.

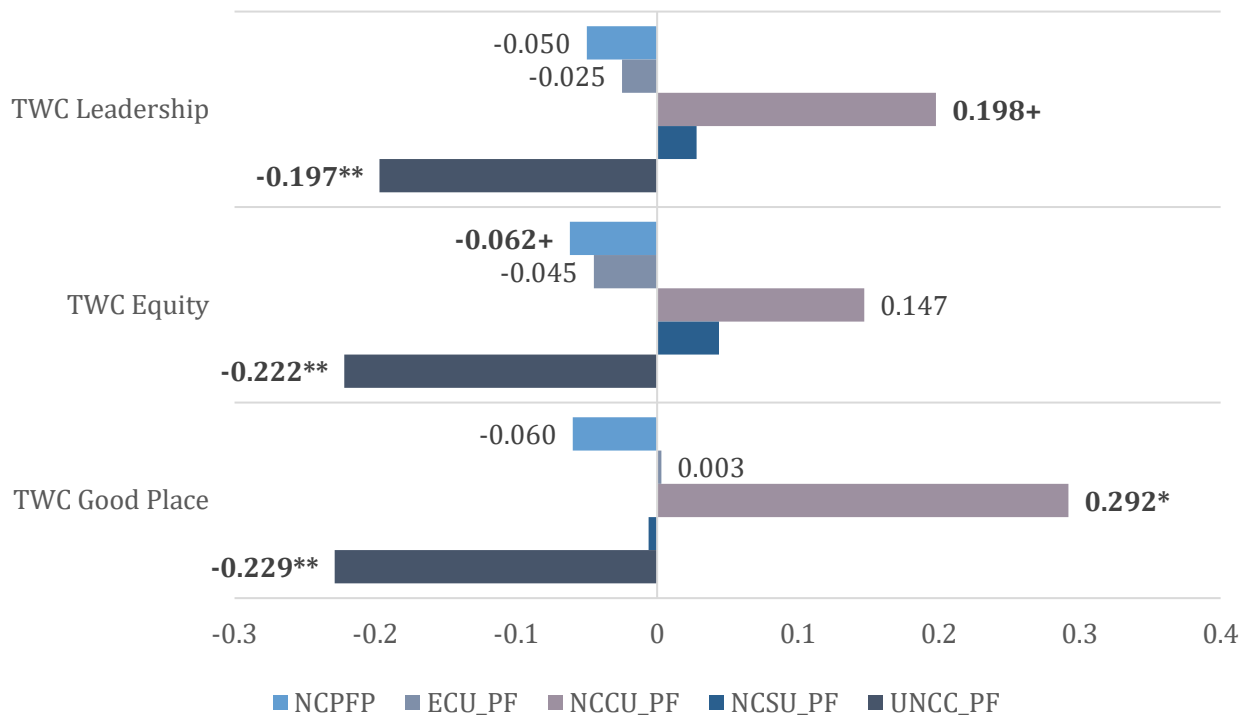
*Figure 2: Comparing Internship Schools to Non-Internship Schools Within the Same District*



Note: This figure presents results from regression analyses comparing the characteristics of NCPFP internship schools to non-internship schools within the **same district**.



*Figure 3: Comparing Working Conditions in Internship Schools to Non-Internship Schools Within the Same District*



Note: This figure presents results from regression analyses comparing the working conditions of NCPFP internship schools to non-internship schools within the **same district**. +, \*, and \*\* indicate statistical significance, relative to non-internship schools, at the 0.10, 0.05, and 0.01 levels, respectively.

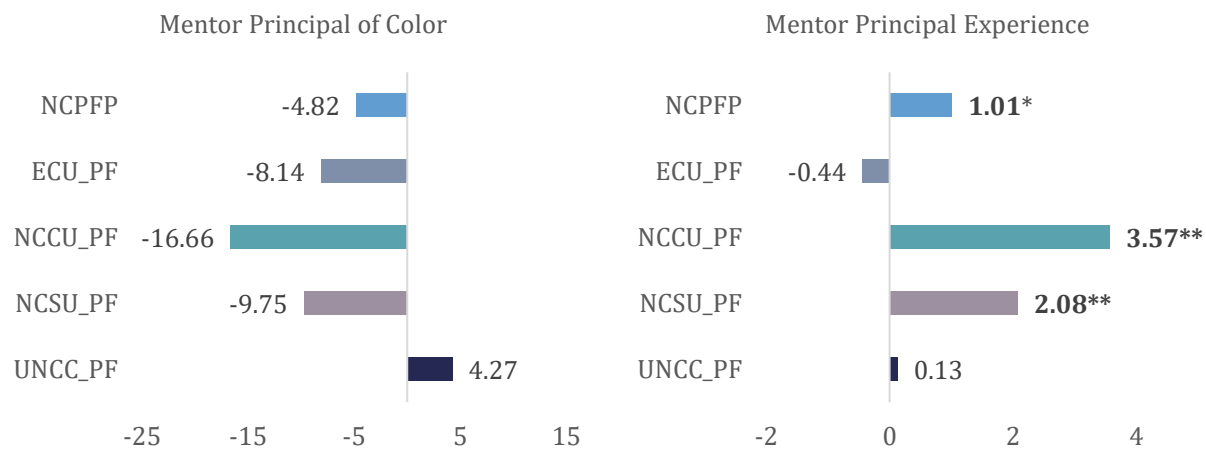
Table 3 presents descriptive data on the characteristics of principals serving as a mentor for a Principal Fellows intern. The top panel shows that 63 percent of Principal Fellows' mentors are female, 34 percent are a person of color, and their average age is nearly 46. Data in the middle panel of Table 3 indicate that mentors for Principal Fellows average seven years of principal experience and nearly four years of principal experience at the internship site. Finally, the bottom panel of Table 3 displays mentor principals' average ratings on the North Carolina School Executive Standards from the year prior to the internship. On average, mentor principals earn ratings just below 4 ('accomplished'), with particularly high ratings for Cultural Leadership and Managerial Leadership.

Table 3: Characteristics of Mentor Principals and Non-Mentor Principals

	Non-Mentor Principal	NCPFP Mentor	ECU Mentor	NCCU Mentor	NCSU Mentor	UNCC Mentor
<b>Principal Demographics</b>						
Female Principal	62%	63%	78%	67%	62%	57%
Principal of Color	29%	34%	25%	44%	48%	24%
Principal Age	46.2	45.8	47.6	49.1	46.5	43.4
<b>Principal Experience</b>						
Principal Years of Experience	6.2	7.0	4.9	8.9	8.0	6.5
Years of Principal Experience at the Internship School	3.7	3.8	4.0	3.7	4.6	3.0
<b>Prior-Year Evaluation Ratings</b>						
Strategic Leadership	3.83	3.92	3.86	3.86	3.87	4.01
Instructional Leadership	3.84	3.89	4.07	3.71	3.7	4.03
Cultural Leadership	3.92	4.05	4	4.14	3.89	4.19
Human Resource Leadership	3.82	3.85	3.93	3.43	3.69	4.04
Managerial Leadership	3.91	4.02	4	3.71	3.98	4.13
External Leadership	3.84	3.84	3.93	3.57	3.67	4
Micro-Political Leadership	3.82	3.96	4.07	3.71	3.69	4.21
Avg NCEES Rating	3.85	3.93	3.98	3.73	3.78	4.09

Note: This table displays descriptive data on the characteristics of NCPFP mentor principals and non-mentor principals.

Figure 4: Comparing Characteristics of Mentor Principals to Non-Mentor Principals Within the Same District

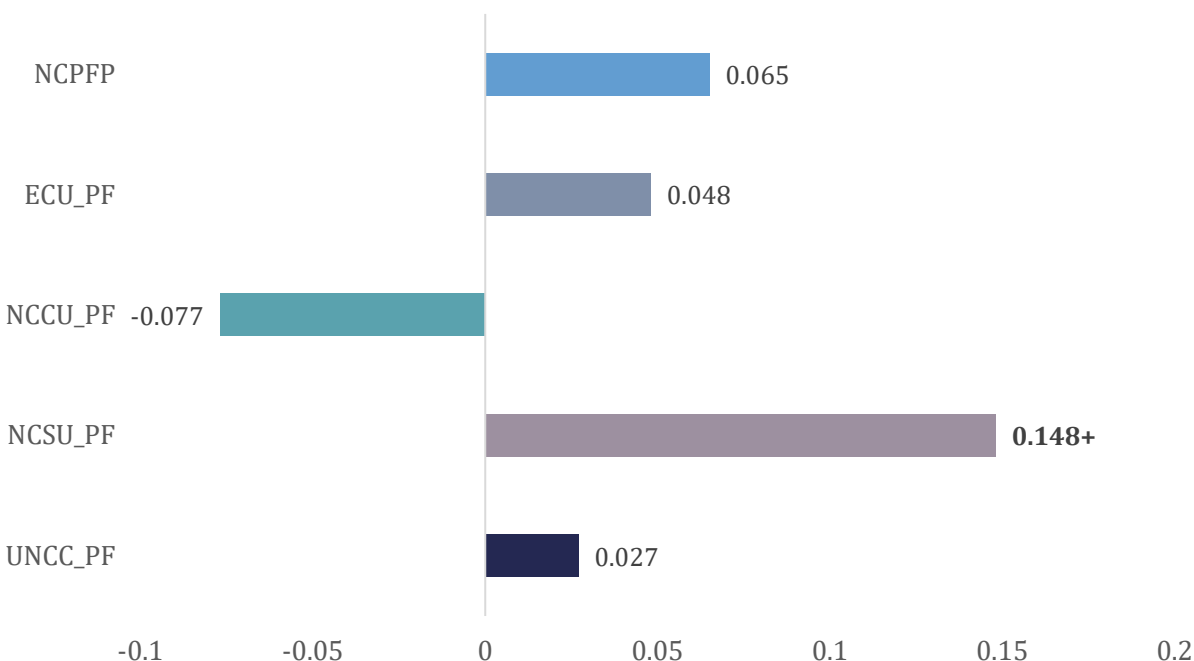


Note: This figure presents results from regression analyses comparing the demographics and experience of mentor principals to non-mentor principals within the **same district**. +, \*, and \*\* indicate statistical significance, relative to non-mentor principals, at the 0.10, 0.05, and 0.01 levels, respectively.

Figures 4 and 5 display results from regression models comparing the characteristics of mentor principals to other principals within the **same district** that did not host a Principal Fellows intern in the respective year. Once again, these models are an opportunity to more closely assess the placement choices made by NCPFP programs and their district partners. The left panel of Figure 4 indicates that mentor principals for Principal Fellows interns are no more or less likely to be a person of color than other principals within the district. Regarding years of experience, the right

panel of Figure 4 shows that mentor principals for Principal Fellows interns average one more year of principal experience than other principals in the district. These experience results are particularly strong for NCCU and NCSU, who place interns with mentor principals with 3.5 and 2 more years of experience, respectively, than other principals in the district. Finally, Figure 5 shows that there are no statistically significant differences between the NCEES ratings of mentor principals for Principal Fellows interns and other principals in the district. At the individual program level, however, we find that NCSU and their district partners place interns with mentor principals who earn significantly higher NCEES ratings (by approximately 0.15 points) than other principals in the internship district.

*Figure 5: Comparing the Prior-Year NCEES Ratings of Mentor Principals to Non-Mentor Principals Within the Same District*

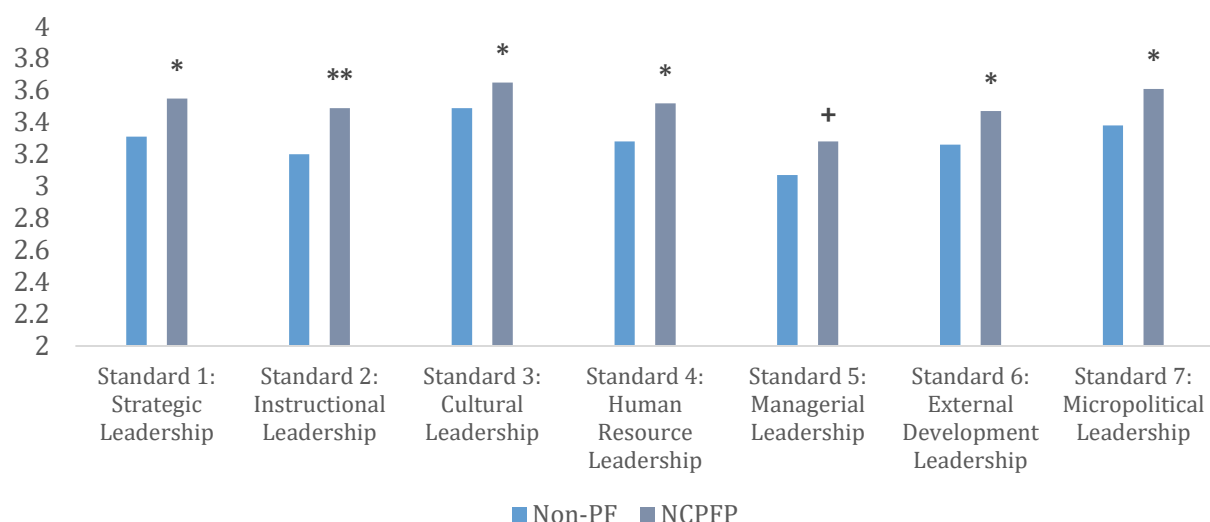


Note: This figure presents results from regression analyses comparing the prior-year NCEES ratings of mentor principals to non-mentor principals within the **same district**. +, \*, and \*\* indicate statistical significance, relative to non-mentor principals, at the 0.10, 0.05, and 0.01 levels, respectively.

#### *How do Principal Fellows completers perceive the effectiveness of their preparation programs?*

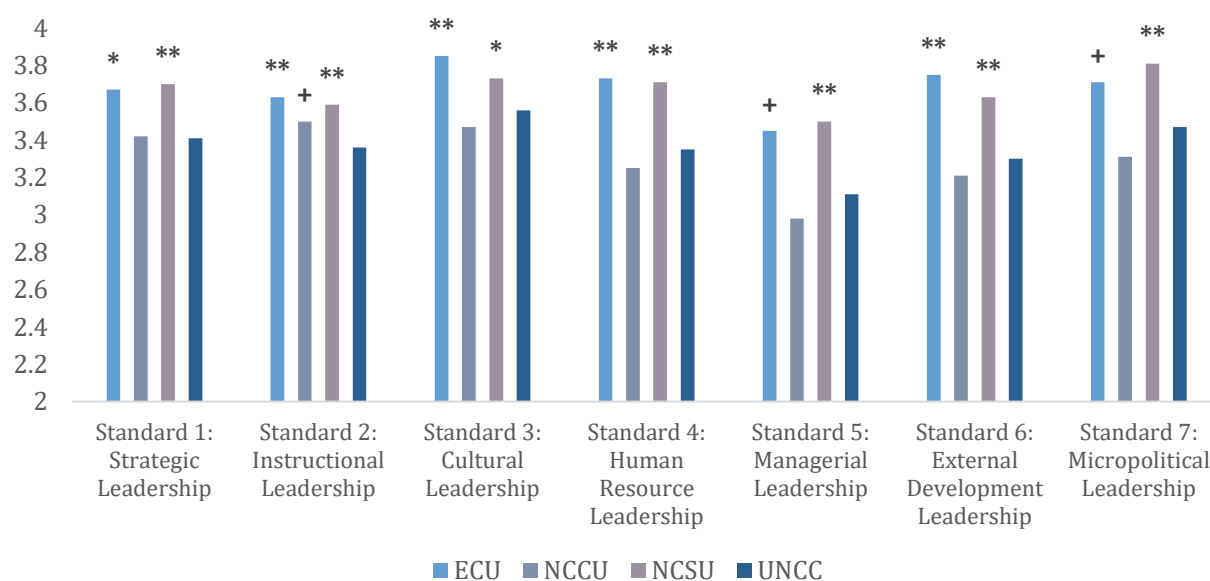
Figure 6 displays data regarding perceptions of how well-prepared principal candidates felt to enact school leadership tasks aligned with North Carolina's school executive standards. This figure presents survey respondents' average response for all Principal Fellows and our comparison group of others earning a traditional MSA degree. Across standards, Principal Fellows report feeling relatively well prepared for Cultural Leadership and Micro-political Leadership responsibilities and relatively less well prepared for Managerial Leadership tasks. When comparing the data for Principal Fellows versus other traditional MSAs, we find that Principal Fellows have significantly higher perceptions of how well they were prepared across all seven school executive standards.

*Figure 6: Completers' Perceptions of Preparation Program Quality*



Note: This figure displays the average response to a set of survey items assessing completers' perceptions of how well their preparation program prepared them to enact leadership tasks aligned with the North Carolina School Executive Standards. The response scale ranged from 0-4, where 0 was 'not addressed in my program', 2 was 'somewhat well prepared' and 4 was 'very well prepared.' +, \*, and \*\* indicate statistical significance between Principal Fellows and other MSA completers at the 0.10, 0.05, and 0.01 levels, respectively.

*Figure 7: Completers' Perceptions of Preparation Program Quality—Program Specific Results*



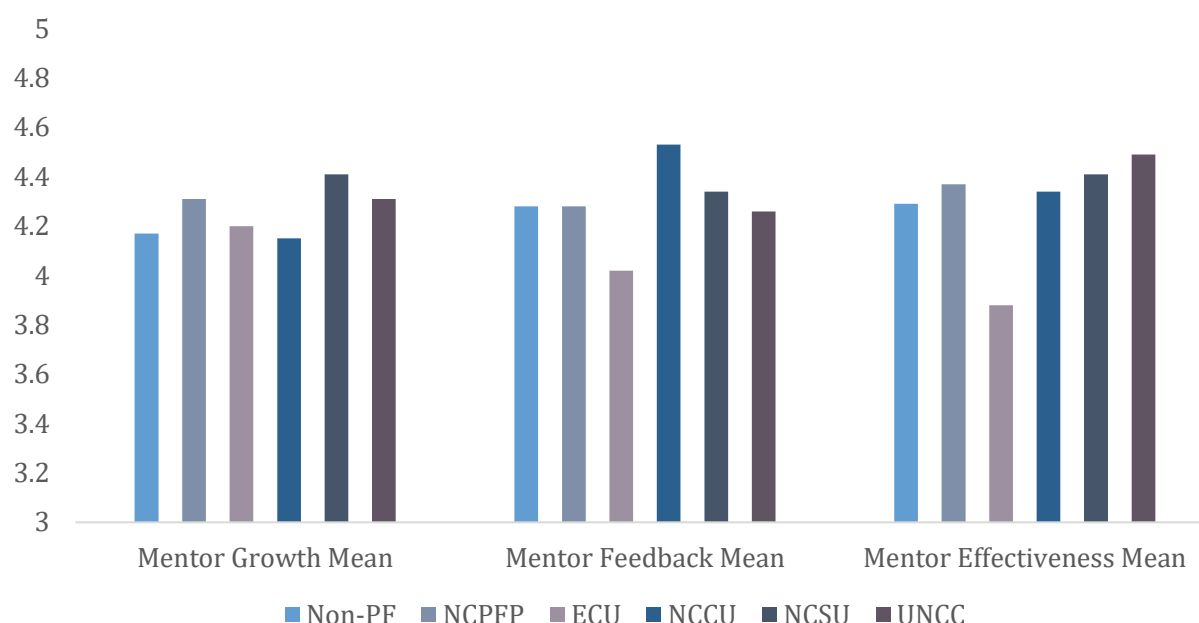
Note: This figure displays the average response to a set of survey items assessing completers' perceptions of how well their preparation program prepared them to enact leadership tasks aligned with the North Carolina School Executive Standards. The response scale ranged from 0-4, where 0 was 'not addressed in my program', 2 was 'somewhat well prepared' and 4 was 'very well prepared.' +, \*, and \*\* indicate statistical significance between Principal Fellows from the respective program and other MSA completers at the 0.10, 0.05, and 0.01 levels, respectively.

In Figure 7, we display perceptions of preparation quality for individual NCPFP programs. Relative to traditional MSA completers, these data show that survey respondents from ECU and NCSU report significantly higher perceptions of preparation quality across all seven school

executive standards. Principal Fellows from NCCU reported significantly higher perceptions of preparation quality for Instructional Leadership. There were no statistically significant differences for Principal Fellows from UNCC.

Figure 8 focuses on principal candidates' perceptions of their mentor principals—i.e., the extent to which the mentor principal supported candidate growth, provided high-quality feedback to the principal candidate, and was effective in their own practices as a school administrator. Overall, we find that Principal Fellows report positive perceptions of their mentor principals. For example, the mean response for Principal Fellows on items regarding the extent to which mentors support their growth and development was 4.31 on a 1-5 scale. However, when comparing the responses of Principal Fellows to other MSA completers, we find no significant differences in their perceptions of mentor principals. Likewise, when comparing each NCPFP program to other MSA completers, we find no significant differences in the perceptions of mentor principals.

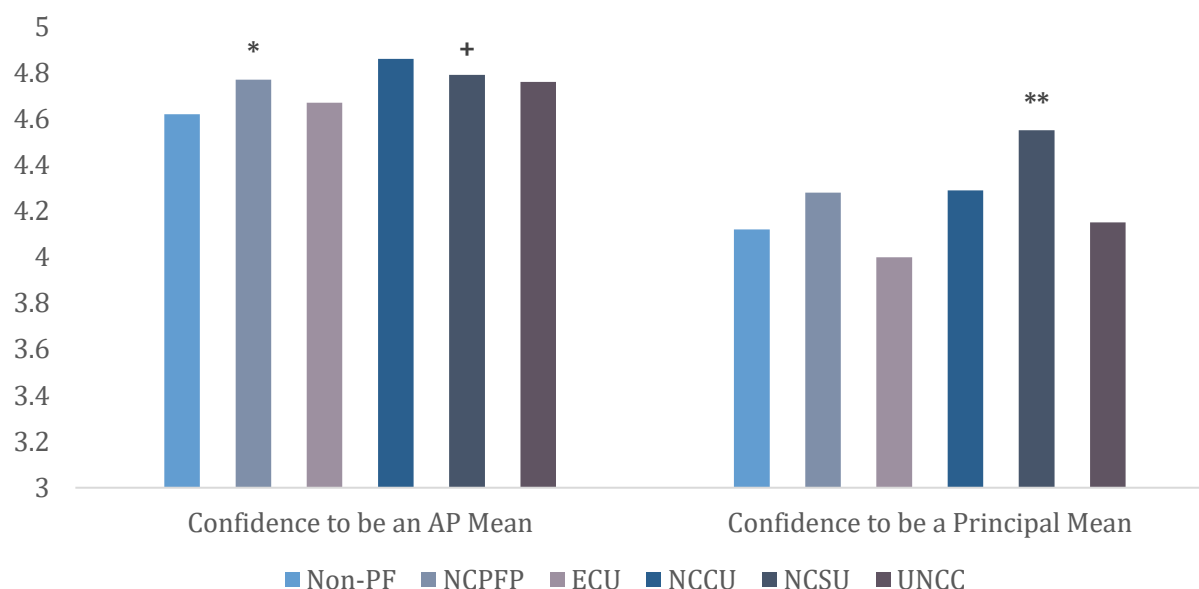
*Figure 8: Completers' Perceptions of Their Mentor Principals*



Note: This figure displays the average response to three sets of survey items focused on mentor principals. The mentor growth items are on the following 1-5 scale (not at all, a little, some, quite a bit, a great deal). The mentor feedback and mentor effectiveness items are on the following 1-5 scale (never, rarely, sometimes, often, always).

Lastly, Figure 9 presents principal candidates' confidence in their ability to be an effective assistant principal and an effective principal. Overall, Principal Fellows feel very confident in their ability to be an effective assistant principal—average survey responses of 4.77 on a 1-5 scale—and relatively less confident to be an effective principal. Compared to other MSA completers, we find that Principal Fellows report feeling significantly more confident to be an effective assistant principal. There is no significant difference between Principal Fellows and other MSAs regarding confidence to be an effective principal. At the individual program level, we find that NCSU Principal Fellows report feeling significantly more confident than other MSAs to be an effective assistant principal and an effective principal.

*Figure 9: Completers' Confidence to be an Effective Assistant Principal and Principal*



Note: This figure displays the average response to survey items asking whether the respondent feels confident in their ability to be an effective assistant principal and an effective principal. The items are on the following 1-5 scale (strongly disagree, disagree, neither, agree, strongly agree). +, \*, and \*\* indicate statistical significance between Principal Fellows and other MSA completers at the 0.10, 0.05, and 0.01 levels, respectively.

## ***Outcomes for NCPFP Completers***

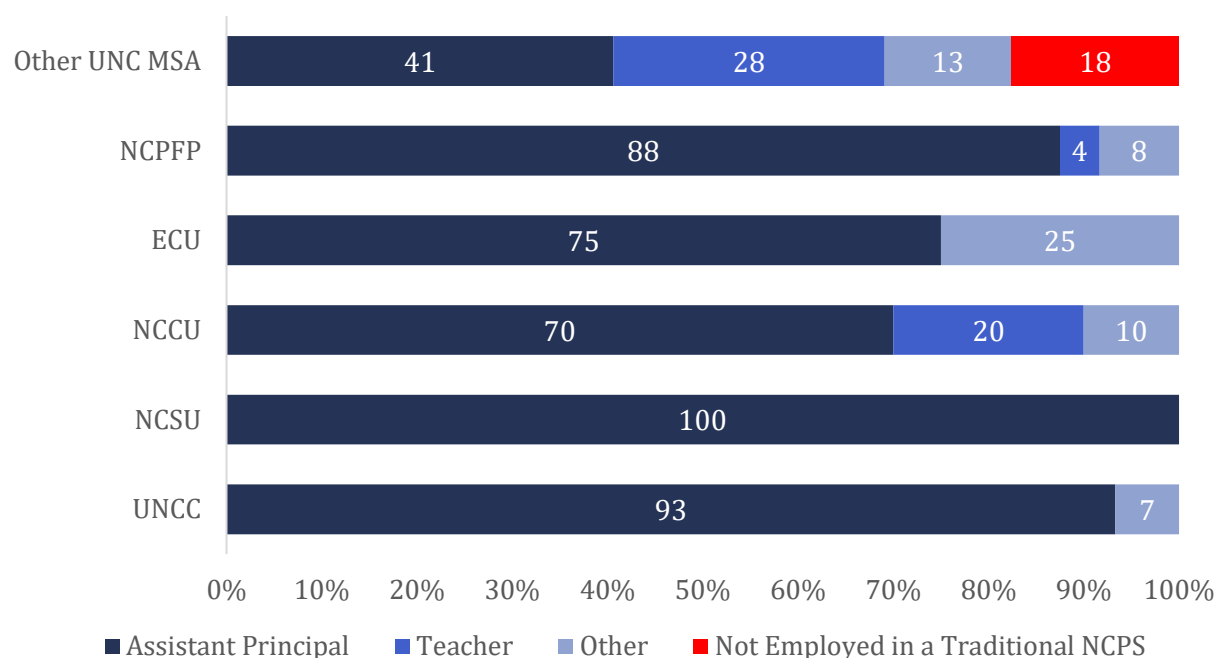
### ***What are the initial employment outcomes for Principal Fellows?***

For MSA completers in the 2021-22 academic year—Principal Fellows and other UNC MSAs—Figure 10 displays data on their employment in September of the 2022-23 school year. Among our comparison sample of 165 MSA completers, we find that approximately 18 percent were not employed in a traditional NCPS, while 41 percent were in an assistant principal role, 28 percent were in a teacher role, and 13 percent were in another certified role (e.g., instructional coach/facilitator, school counselor) in September 2022. The employment results for 2021-22 Principal Fellows completers are very different. All 48 Principal Fellows graduates were employed in a traditional NCPS in September 2022, with 88 percent serving as an assistant principal, 4 percent teaching, and 8 percent in another certified position. We find that the percentage of Principal Fellows graduates in an assistant principal position varies by institution, ranging from 70 percent for NCCU to 100 percent for NCSU. Overall, these data strongly suggest that NCPFP program components, including partnerships with districts and post-completion service requirements, impact the school administrator pipeline in North Carolina.<sup>7</sup>

<sup>7</sup> The NCPFP Central Office and the State Education Assistance Authority track whether Principal Fellows complete their program service requirements through employment in North Carolina public schools. Across the full 2022-23 school year, 96% of Principal Fellows were employed in a qualifying position (e.g., assistant principal, dean of students).



*Figure 10: Completers' Employment Outcomes at the Start of the 2022-23 School Year*



Note: This figure displays employment outcomes at the start of the 2022-23 school year (September) for the Principal Fellows 2022 graduating cohort and other UNC MSA completers from 2021-22.

## Discussion

For this report we analyzed focus group transcripts, survey responses, and program/administrative data for Principal Fellows in the 2022-2024 graduating cohorts. Broadly, we assessed motivations to become a Principal Fellow and selection into NCPFP programs, experiences in and perceptions of NCPFP programs, and initial employment outcomes for program completers. From our analyses we identified several important takeaways.

We found that Principal Fellows in the 2022-2024 graduating classes came from 80 of North Carolina's 115 school districts. While this is a broad distribution of districts in partnership with NCPFP programs, there are portions of the state—particularly the Sandhills and Western NC—that do not yet have Principal Fellows in the newly consolidated program. This may be worth further consideration as NCPFP programs and their district partners recruit for future cohorts.

In talking with first-year Principal Fellows it was clear that program quality and financial accessibility were strong motivators in the decision to apply. Principal Fellows appreciated that the program invested in them and reported feeling much less financial burden than those in a traditional MSA program. This finding may be particularly important if financial accessibility benefits the diversity of the school leader pipeline and allows Principal Fellows to direct more attention towards their development as school leaders.

When asking about the NCPFP application and selection process, we found considerable variation in such practices, both across and within individual programs. For some Principal Fellows, their district was very involved in their nomination and selection into the program; for others, district

involvement was nominal. These differences in application and selection practices may have important implications for the characteristics of individuals brought into programs and their future outcomes as school leaders. As an evaluation team we will be collecting more detailed data on selection practices so that we can better assess connections to candidate outcomes.

Our initial analyses of candidate characteristics showed that Principal Fellows were better credentialed and more instructionally effective than peers in a traditional MSA program at a UNC System institution. At program entry, Principal Fellows had more years of education experience and were more likely to be NBC and hold a graduate degree. Principal Fellows had significantly higher NCEES ratings but had comparable EVAAS estimates to other MSA completers. While there were not statistically significant differences in the percentage of Principal Fellows and other MSAs identifying as a person of color, it is important to note that nearly 40 percent of Principal Fellows identified as such. This is much higher than the percentage of teachers of color in North Carolina public schools.

Regarding their preparation experiences, first-year Principal Fellows reported that their coursework and enrichment opportunities were valuable, especially in exposing them to new and different ideas/practices. Principal Fellows also noted a range of equity-related resources within their programs, with many focus group participants prepared to engage in equitable practices due to prior placements at high needs schools.

During focus groups, first-year Principal Fellows expressed excitement about their upcoming (year two) internships and opportunities for authentic practice in safe spaces. In assessing the characteristics of internship sites and mentor principals (for first cycle NCPFP programs), we found that internship schools were generally similar to other schools within the district that did not host a Principal Fellows intern. With one exception—principal experience—mentor principals for Principal Fellows were similar to other principals in the district that did not host a Principal Fellows intern. These findings may be connected to survey responses indicating that Principal Fellows rated their mentor principals no differently than other MSA completers. Overall, these results might suggest a need for programs to continue evaluating their internship placement practices and supports directed towards mentor principals. The evaluation will continue to assess internship school and mentor principal characteristics for interns from all eight programs in 2023-24.

Finally, we found that Principal Fellows completers reported feeling better prepared for school leadership tasks than other MSA completers. Likewise, Principal Fellows expressed more confidence in their ability to be an effective assistant principal. These perceptions are important, especially since a **much higher** percentage of Principal Fellows, relative to other MSAs, immediately transitioned into assistant principal roles. Our initial employment results show that NCPFP programs make immediate contributions to the school leader pipeline in North Carolina. On-going evaluation analyses will track the employment and performance of Principal Fellows.

## Appendix A: Data Sources and Analyses

### *Data Sources*

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 demographics of enrollees, 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, the local salary supplement for the enrollee (during the internship year), and final ratings for the enrollee from their internship experience.
- (2) UNC System Office: The UNC System Office provided data identifying individuals completing an MSA degree at a UNC System institution and the year of program completion.
- (3) 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 value-added estimates). School level data include school type, rurality, aggregated student demographics, academic achievement measures, and North Carolina Teacher Working Conditions (TWC) survey responses.
- (4) Program completer survey: We developed a survey to assess program completers' perceptions of their principal preparation programs. Principal Fellows from the 2022 and 2023 graduating cohorts took this survey near the end of their internship experience. Additionally, we worked with the NCPFP Central Office to open this completer survey to others finishing MSA programs at public and private institutions in North Carolina. The survey includes completers' perceptions of (a) how well they were prepared by their program; (b) the value of programmatic components; (c) time use during their internship; (d) the extent to which mentor principals support completers growth, provide high-quality feedback, and are effective school leaders; and (e) confidence to be an effective school administrator.
- (5) NCPFP focus groups: In spring 2023, we conducted focus groups with first-year Principal Fellows (2024 graduating cohort) from each of the eight NCPFP programs.

### *Qualitative Data and Analysis*

We collected qualitative data through focus groups in spring 2023. Our focus groups included first-year Principal Fellows from the class of 2024 and consisted of two to four Principal Fellows from each of the eight NCPFP programs. We also conducted several one-on-one interviews with first-year Principal Fellows who were unable to attend a scheduled focus group or declined to be recorded on Zoom. Prior to the focus groups, we used data provided by each NCPFP program—including data on Principal Fellows demographics, K-12 districts, and prior roles in schools—to

identify a diverse group of potential participants for recruitment. Appendix Table 1 provides an overview of representation from each NCPFP program. Overall, we spoke with 24 first-year Principal Fellows.

Each focus group was semi-structured and lasted approximately one hour. One evaluation team member led the focus group and another team member took responsive notes for data analysis. The focus group sessions were recorded on Zoom and later transcribed and de-identified by a member of the evaluation team. All participants received gift cards for their participation in the focus groups.

We uploaded focus group transcripts into Dedoose, an online qualitative data analysis platform. Our 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 separately by two evaluation team members, followed by a third team member who reconciled coding disagreements. This process promoted inter-coder reliability. We identified major themes from focus groups both within and across NCPFP programs.

*Appendix Table 1: Focus Group Sample Information*

NCPFP Program	Number of Focus Group Participants
ASU	3
ECU	4
NCCU	4
NCSU	4
UNCC	2
UNCCH	2
UNCG	3
WCU	2

## *Quantitative Data and Analysis*

### Candidate Characteristics

To assess the characteristics of Principal Fellows, we focus on those enrolled in a NCPFP program in the 2022-2024 graduating cohorts. Overall, our sample includes 238 unique Principal Fellows across these three graduating cohorts. Our comparison group for these analyses consists of principal candidates completing a traditional MSA degree (non-Principal Fellows, non-TP3) at a UNC System institution in the 2021-22 academic year.<sup>8</sup> Overall, our comparison sample includes 165 unique MSA completers.

In these analyses, the data for Principal Fellows and other MSA completers come from two years prior to program completion. That is, we are pulling data on the demographics, credentials, and performance<sup>9</sup> of Principal Fellows from the year in which they were applying to and being selected

<sup>8</sup> 2021-22 is the most recent year of available data for MSA completers from the UNC System.

<sup>9</sup> Given the COVID-19 pandemic, there are no teacher evaluation ratings (NCEES) or EVAAS estimates in 2019-20. As such, we pull these teacher performance data from the 2018-19 academic year.

for their programs.<sup>10</sup> Our analyses focus on a range of demographic, credential, and teacher performance measures. The demographic measures include reported gender, reported race/ethnicity, and age at entry into the principal preparation program. Our credential measures include years of experience,<sup>11</sup> whether the individual is Nationally Board Certified (NBC), and whether the individual has a graduate degree. Finally, our performance measures include average NCEES ratings and average EVAAS estimates (standardized).<sup>12</sup>

To analyze these data on principal candidate characteristics, we report descriptive statistics for all Principal Fellows, for our comparison sample, and for each NCPFP program. We extend these descriptive analyses with a series of significance tests to determine whether there are statistically significant differences in the demographics, credentials, and performance measures of Principal Fellows versus other UNC System MSAs.

### Internship Characteristics

With these analyses, we are interested in the characteristics of the schools chosen to host a Principal Fellows intern and the characteristics of the principals in those schools. The goal of these analyses is to examine the choices made by NCPFP programs and their partner districts in making internship placements. As such, our analyses focus on school and principal-level data from the year before the internship—i.e., data from the year in which programs and districts were making their placement decisions.

The sample for these analyses includes 92 Principal Fellows interns from the 2021-22 and 2022-23 academic years.<sup>13</sup> These interns are from ECU, NCCU, NCSU, and UNCC—i.e., programs in the first funding cycle. The comparison group for these analyses are all the schools—and by extension, principals—that did not host a Principal Fellows intern in the respective academic year. This includes 2,436 unique schools in 2021-22 and 2,472 unique schools in 2022-23.

Our analyses focus on a range of school and principal measures. The school-level data include school type (e.g. elementary, middle), rurality, student demographics (percent students of color and percent low-income students), the chronic absenteeism rate, the proficiency rate on state achievement tests, the teacher retention rate,<sup>14</sup> and three measures from the North Carolina Teacher Working Conditions (TWC) survey. These TWC measures are perceptions of school leadership, school equity, and whether the school is a good place to work and learn. The principal-level data include demographics (e.g. gender, race/ethnicity, and age), principal experience, years as a principal at the respective school, and prior-year ratings (for each standard and averaged across standards) from the North Carolina School Executive Standards.

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<sup>10</sup> Principal Fellows complete their programs in two years. Program length for traditional MSAs varies. As such, data for traditional MSA completers may not be prior to program entry.

<sup>11</sup> For this we use the teacher experience variable included in NCDPI certified salary files.

<sup>12</sup> Principal candidates will only have NCEES and EVAAS estimates if they served as classroom teachers two years prior to program completion.

<sup>13</sup> Some Principal Fellows had more than one internship placement. As such, our data includes 92 unique Principal Fellows and 102 Principal Fellows-by-schools.

<sup>14</sup> We use NCDPI certified salary files to measure teacher retention at a respective school. In particular, we use object and purpose codes to identify teachers at a school in a given year and then calculate retention as the percentage returning to teach at the school in the following year.

To analyze these data on internship schools and mentor principals, we report descriptive statistics for all Principal Fellows interns, for schools and principals that did not host a Principal Fellows intern in the respective year, and for each NCPFP program. Beyond these descriptives, we estimated a series of regression models to compare the characteristics of internship schools and mentor principals to the characteristics of schools and principals within the **same district** that did not host a Principal Fellows intern. This **within-district** comparison allows us to better understand the placement choices made by NCPFP programs and their partner districts. We report regression results across all NCPFP programs and separate regression results for each NCPFP program.

### Program Completer Survey

We assess the survey responses of Principal Fellows completers in the 2021-22 and 2022-23 academic years. In total, 83 unique Principal Fellows from first cycle programs (ECU, NCCU, NCSU, and UNCC) completed the survey. This represents a survey response rate of 89.2% for Principal Fellows.

Our comparison group for these analyses is other principal candidates—from public or private universities in North Carolina—completing a traditional MSA degree in the 2021-22 or 2022-23 academic years. In total, up to 96 non-Principal Fellows answered at least some survey items; 89 non-Principal Fellows answered all the survey items. This represents a comparison sample response rate of approximately 36 percent in 2021-22 and 32 percent in 2022-23. Given these lower response rates for non-Principal Fellows, we urge some caution in the interpretation of survey findings.

For this report we focus on the following:

- (1) Completers' perceptions of how well their program prepared them for school leadership tasks aligned with the North Carolina School Executive Standards. These items are on a 0-4 scale, where 0 is 'not addressed in my program', 2 is 'somewhat well prepared' and 4 is 'very well prepared'.
- (2) Completers' perceptions of the extent to which mentor principals supported their growth, provided high-quality feedback, and were effective school leaders. Items on mentors supporting growth are on a 1-5 scale (not at all, a little, some, quite a bit, a great deal). Items on mentor feedback and mentor effectiveness are on a 1-5 (never, rarely, sometimes, often, and always).
- (3) Completers' perceptions of their confidence to be an effective assistant principal and an effective principal. These items are on a 1-5 scale (strongly disagree, disagree, neither, agree, strongly agree).

For analyses, we report the average survey responses. We report these data for all Principal Fellows respondents, for our comparison sample, and for each NCPFP program with completer survey data. We test for statistically significant differences in the average responses of Principal Fellows versus our comparison sample.



### Initial Employment

To assess the initial employment outcomes of NCPFP program completers, we focus on Principal Fellows graduates from the 2021-22 academic year. This includes 48 unique graduates from ECU, NCCU, NCSU, and UNCC. As with our analyses of candidate characteristics, our comparison group for these analyses consists of those completing a traditional MSA degree (165 in total) at a UNC System institution in the 2021-22 academic year.

Using employment records from NCDPI for the September 2022 pay period, we identify whether these principal preparation program completers are employed in a traditional (non-charter) North Carolina public school at the start of the 2022-23 academic year,<sup>15</sup> and if so, the primary role in which they are employed.<sup>16</sup> These roles can include school principal, assistant principal, teacher, and other certified personnel.<sup>17</sup>

For analyses, we report descriptive statistics for whether graduates are employed and the primary role in which they are employed. We report these data across all NCPFP programs, for our comparison sample, and for each NCPFP program. There are two limitations to this employment reporting: (1) Our data only include September 2022 employment records. Future analyses will include employment records across the 2022-23 school year. (2) Object and purpose codes (to identify employment roles held) in the certified salary files do not identify all the roles (e.g. Dean of Students) that satisfy the service requirements for the NCPFP forgivable loan. Given these limitations, data we provide in this report may not fully match what is reported by the North Carolina State Education Assistance Authority.

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<sup>15</sup> These certified salary files only include employment in traditional (non-charter) public schools in North Carolina.

<sup>16</sup> We identify an individual's primary role based on their full-time equivalency status.

<sup>17</sup> Other certified personnel can include roles such as instructional coaches, instructional facilitators, and student support personnel.

## **Appendix B: Focus Group Protocol**

### **Section 1: Background**

#### *Classroom*

Tell me about your background as an educator.

- What subjects/ grade levels did/ do you teach?
- How long did you teach?
- Have you held other roles in schools?

Why did you pursue a career in education?

Has anyone been influential to your work as a teacher?

- *If necessary, clarify:* By influential, we mean informative to your approach to teaching and your work with students and families.
- Probe for mentorship in teacher certification program, school-based colleagues, personal connections.

#### *Non-classroom*

What are some things that made you want to pursue an administrative position?

- Probe for altruistic motives (innovative, curriculum development, improving learning, moral obligation).
- Probe for personal motives (salary, job status, career opportunity, personal fulfillment).

Has anyone in your work life or personal life been influential regarding this decision?

- Did you talk through your decision to pursue administration with anyone?

What do you think is required to be an effective school leader?

#### *Candidacy*

How did you first hear about the program?

- Did all staff in your position get this information?
  - *If no*, do you have a sense of why certain staff members did or did not learn about the program?
  - Probe for if they were recruited, by who, info from EPP.

Why did you choose to apply?

Tell me what the application process was like for you.

### **Section 2: Present program**

#### *Coursework*

Can you share a little bit about the courses you've taken?

- Probe for subject matter

How are your courses organized?

- Probe for format, activities, schedules, professors/instructors

At this point, which elements of your coursework do you find most important in developing your capacity for school leadership? (**Ask again in year 2**)

- Probe for particular courses, activities

Have any of your courses focused on equity topics?

- Probe: what elements (race, culturally responsive teaching, gender; teachers, families, students)?
- Probe: which courses?
- Probe: what topics (HR, student achievement, critical conversations)?
- Probe: what materials or strategies were used in the course that supported this learning? (book, syllabus/unit topic, class discussions)?

Are any training or opportunities outside of the classroom provided through the program?

#### *Enrichment activities*

Tell us about any activities you've participated in outside of your coursework as part of your program. These might include visits to DPI, conferences, or other non-coursework activities.

How were you chosen to participate in these activities?

- Probe for whether all students were included/notified of opportunity; just principal fellows or all grad students (all EPPs)

Outside of your coursework, what activities have you found to be most important in developing your capacity for school leadership?

Do you feel there are elements of learning missing thus far in your courses?

### **Section 3: Future program**

#### *Internship*

What are your hopes for your internship experience?

#### *High Needs School Readiness*

Do you feel prepared for a placement in high needs schools?

- Why do you feel this way?
  - Probe for previous experience, coursework, additional preparation

Is there anything else we should know about your experiences in the program thus far?

## **Appendix C: Completer Survey Items**

### **PART 1: REASONS FOR ENTERING THE PROGRAM**

**To what extent did the following influence your desire to become a school leader?**

*Response options: Not at all, a little, some, quite a bit, a great deal*

- Desire for greater influence on the direction of schools
- Opportunity for career advancement
- Encouragement/recommendation from district-level leadership (e.g. superintendent, associate superintendent, HR leadership)
- Encouragement/recommendation from a school principal or assistant principal
- Encouragement from teachers/colleagues
- Other (write in)

**To what extent did the following influence your decision to enter your current school leader preparation program?**

*Response options: Not at all, a little, some, quite a bit, a great deal*

- Encouragement/recommendation from district-level leadership (e.g. superintendent, associate superintendent, HR leadership)
- Encouragement/recommendation from a school principal or assistant principal
- Encouragement from teachers/colleagues
- Availability of financial support
- Ability to balance program responsibilities with other work and personal responsibilities
- Location of the program
- Other (write in)

**I feel burdened by the financial obligations of attending my principal preparation program.**

*Response options: Strongly disagree, disagree, neither disagree or agree, agree, strongly agree*

**During my principal preparation program I was provided with the following opportunities to minimize my financial burden. Select all that apply.**

*Response options: Grants/scholarships (need or merit-based financial assistance); Tuition remission (tuition paid for by program); Stipend or paid internship (salary paid during internship); Assistantships (a part-time, paid academic appointment); Work study (on-campus paid work); Other (write in); My preparation program or school district has not provided opportunities to minimize my financial burden; I am not aware of opportunities to minimize my financial burden*

**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? (Item only seen by Principal Fellow candidates)**

*Response options: Not at all, a little, some, quite a bit, a great deal*

## **PART 2: PERCEPTIONS OF PRINCIPAL PREPARATION PROGRAM QUALITY**

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

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

### ***Standard 1: Strategic Leadership***

- Collaborate with stakeholders to create a vision for the school that captures attention and imagination
- Facilitate the setting of high, concrete goals and the expectations that all students meet them
- Create processes to distribute leadership throughout the school

### ***Standard 2: Instructional Leadership***

- 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

### ***Standard 3: Cultural Leadership***

- 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

### ***Standard 4: Human Resource Leadership***

- 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

### ***Standard 5: Managerial Leadership***

- 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

***Standard 6: External Development Leadership***

- 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

***Standard 7: Micropolitical Leadership***

- 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

***Equity-Driven Leadership***

- Address marginalization related to student identities (e.g. race, class, culture, language, gender, sexual orientation, and disability)
- Ensure that every student has equitable access to the resources necessary for academic and socio-emotional success
- Promote the values of equity, social justice, community, and diversity

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

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

- Program coursework
- Program enrichments/specialized trainings (e.g. crucial conversations, facilitated leadership, digital storytelling, convey modules)
- School site visits
- Internships in K-12 schools
- Expertise of course instructors
- Interactions with fellow principal candidates
- Enhancements offered by the statewide NC Principal Fellows Program (*Item only seen by Principal Fellow candidates*)

**My principal preparation program...**

*Response options: Strongly disagree, disagree, neither, agree, strongly agree*

- Cultivated a supportive environment for all candidates
- Taught evidence-based leadership practices
- Provided opportunities to practice important skills
- Provided actionable feedback on my performance
- Provided opportunities to collaborate with peers on problems of practice



### **PART 3: PERCEPTIONS OF THE PRINCIPAL INTERNSHIP**

**Below, we list five categories of school leader responsibilities—instructional management, internal relations, organization management, administration, and external relations—and examples of specific tasks for each responsibility. Please indicate the percentage of time that you have spent during your principal internship on each of these FIVE school leader responsibilities. Please note that responses should sum to 100 percent.**

#### **Instructional Management**

- Developing/reviewing the school's vision and mission
- Coordinate with teachers to ensure school-wide coherence of instructional programs
- Informally coaching teachers
- Formally evaluating teachers
- Planning and/or implementing PD for teachers
- Overseeing supplementary instruction programs
- Coordinating the use of student assessment data

#### **Internal Relations**

- Developing relationships with students
- Communicating with parents and caregivers
- Supervising school activities
- Counseling students or parents
- Developing relationships with staff
- Mediating conflicts between staff members

#### **Organization Management**

- Dealing with concerns from staff
- Managing budgets and resources
- Hiring teachers
- Maintaining school facilities
- Managing non-instructional staff

#### **Administration**

- Developing and managing school schedules
- Managing student discipline
- Fulfilling compliance requirements (e.g. IEPs) and paperwork
- Managing standardized test administrations
- Supervising students (e.g. lunch duty, hallway monitoring)
- Managing student services (e.g. guidance, nursing, social workers)
- Managing student attendance

#### **External Relations**

- Working with local community members/organizations
- Fundraising
- Maintaining relationships with district, regional, and state administrators

**To what extent did your principal mentor(s) support your growth/development in the following areas...**

*Response options: Not at all, a little, some, quite a bit, a great deal*

- Instructional management
- Internal relations
- Organization management
- Administration
- External relations

**During my time as a principal intern, my mentor principal(s) provided me feedback...**

*Response options: Never, rarely, sometimes, often, always*

- That was informed by observations of my performance
- That was timely enough to support my development
- That was actionable
- That I used to improve my school leadership skills

**During my time as a principal intern, my mentor principal(s)...**

*Response options: Never, rarely, sometimes, often, always*

- Demonstrated highly effective school leadership practices
- Effectively addressed issues related to diversity and equity
- Provided me with autonomy to complete leadership tasks and responsibilities as I saw fit
- Involved me in key aspects of running the school
- Built strong relationships with me and other school leaders (e.g. APs, teacher leaders)
- Worked closely with my university supervisor to coordinate my internship experiences
- Encouraged me to become a school principal

**During your time as a principal intern, did you receive one-on-one support from one or more individuals connected to your university (e.g. field supervisor, leadership coach, cohort coordinator, mentor/advisor, etc.)?**

*Response options: Yes, no*

**How often did you receive one-on-one support during your principal internship?**

*Response options: Never, once a semester, once a month, several times a month, weekly, multiple times a week, other*

**When you received one-on-one support during your principal internship, how often were you...**

*Response options: Never, rarely, sometimes, often, always*

- Given opportunities to determine the goals/issues for your meetings?
- Asked questions that supported your reflection and growth?
- Primarily listened to rather than talked to?
- Supported in problem solving?
- Given direct suggestions or advice?
- Followed up with regarding discussions from previous meetings?

**How effective was your one-on-one support in...**

*Response options: Not effective, somewhat effective, mostly effective, very effective*

- Helping you understand coursework and/or program requirements?
- Helping you troubleshoot or problem solve during your principal internship?
- Supporting your development as a school leader?

#### **PART 4: READINESS AND FUTURE PLANS**

**I feel confident in my ability to...**

*Response options: Strongly disagree, disagree, neither disagree or agree, agree, strongly agree*

- Be an effective assistant principal
- Be an effective school principal

**Please indicate your desired employment position for next school year.**

- Employed as a classroom teacher
- Employed as an instructional coach/facilitator
- Employed as a student support personnel (e.g. counselor, social worker, psychologist)
- Employed as an assistant principal
- Employed as a principal
- Employed in another school-based position
- Employed in a district-level position
- Not employed in education
- Not employed

**When do you want to become a school principal?**

- In 1 to 2 years
- In 3 to 5 years
- In 6 to 10 years
- In more than 10 years
- Do not want to be a school principal

## **PART 5: BACKGROUND AND ENTERING PRINCIPAL PREPARATION**

**Prior to entering your principal preparation program how many years of experience did you have working in K-12 schools?**

*Response: Drop down and let them select the number of years of experience*

**What was the last role you held in a K-12 school prior to entering your principal preparation program?**

*Response options: Classroom teacher, instructional coach/facilitator, student support personnel (e.g. counselor, social worker, psychologist), employed in another school-based position*

**Please select all of the mentoring/leadership roles you held prior to entering your principal preparation program.**

*Response options: No mentoring/leadership roles, Department chair, Grade-level chair, Curriculum specialist, Literacy/math coach, Mentor for beginning teachers, Supervised student teachers, School improvement team chair, School improvement team member, School committee/advisory board, School district committee/advisory board, Other*

**Please select your gender.**

*Response options: Female, Male, Other, Prefer not to specify*

**Please select your race/ethnicity. Select all that apply.**

*Response options: White, Black, Hispanic/Latinx, Asian, American Indian, Pacific Islander, Other, Prefer not to specify.*

Contact information:

Kevin C. Bastian  
Research Associate Professor  
[kbastian@email.unc.edu](mailto:kbastian@email.unc.edu)

Education Policy Initiative at Carolina (EPIC)  
[epic.unc.edu](http://epic.unc.edu)  
[twitter.com/EPIC\\_UNC](https://twitter.com/EPIC_UNC)

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