

## **Delta School Leadership Pipeline (DSLPP) Project**

*A Proposal Submitted to the U. S. Department of Education School Leadership Program*

*By the College of Education and Human Sciences at Delta State University*

### **Introduction**

Delta State University's (DSU) College of Education and Human Sciences (COEHS) proposes the Delta School Leadership Pipeline (DSLPP) Project, building upon its existing Educational Leadership Master's Cohort Program, also hereafter referred to as the Cohort Program, to address the shared goal of increasing student achievement through the preparation of aspiring principals and the professional development of current in-service principals to master core leadership skills. The project will target schools in high-need Local Educational Agencies (LEAs) each year, located in the impoverished region of the Mississippi Delta, a region that consists of primarily rural, isolated small communities sharing characteristics of high rates of poverty, low per capita income, and poor educational outcomes. Eligible districts are listed in the LEA Eligibility Chart and have provided a partnership letter to the COEHS that is included in the attachment section of the proposal.

This project responds to both invitational priorities of the Department's School Leadership Program: Building Leadership Capacity and Supporting Practices and Strategies for Which There is Moderate Evidence of Effectiveness.

The project will improve and extend the Educational Leadership Master's Cohort Program at DSU, which primarily serves school districts in the 18-county Mississippi Delta region. This region extends from the suburbs of Memphis, Tennessee, to the north, through extends through the rural, agricultural heart of the Delta bordered by the Mississippi River to the west, to small communities located a short distance from metropolitan Jackson, Mississippi,

which lie close to the southern edge of the Delta. In addition to supporting aspiring, pre-service principals in the Cohort Program, this project introduces two innovative elements to add breadth and depth to an already nationally-recognized program. The addition of coaching induction support in Year 2 and the development and piloting of school-based instructional leadership teams in Year 3 will assist high-need local educational agencies in the Mississippi Delta in recruiting, training, and retaining high quality, effective principals and assistant principals.

Capitalizing on the existence of its nationally-recognized Master's Cohort model, the COEHS at DSU sees the opportunity to deepen its capacity for service to the region through the establishment of a more tightly coupled network binding the COEHS and its educational partners. Through the creation, assessment, and refinement of innovative approaches to leadership preparation and ongoing development, overall school leadership capacity will be enhanced throughout the Mississippi Delta region and others similarly concerned with school leadership development will be able to learn from our efforts.

Faculty expertise and existing partnerships will be utilized to specifically target these high-need LEAs for building their leadership capacity (*Priority 1*) to increase student achievement. Further, Delta State University's College of Education and Human Sciences is in a unique position to facilitate the alignment of expertise with field-based work, capitalizing upon and strengthening existing partnerships with area public and private schools. In turn, the ability to address the identified needs of the target population and successfully meet the intended outcomes and performance measures of the U. S. Department of Education's School Leadership Program grant initiative is greatly enhanced, as is the ability to improve the educational outcomes of the underserved, underrepresented Mississippi Delta region.

## **A. Project Design**

### **1. Project Goals, Objectives, and Outcomes**

The overarching goal of the Delta School Leadership Pipeline Project is to increase student achievement in high-need schools in the Mississippi Delta region by recruiting, training, and supporting the ongoing learning and development of principals through the provision of financial incentives to aspiring new principals, stipends to resource-poor districts, induction support of new principals through the establishment of coaching relationships, and the provision of professional development opportunities to new school-based teams that focus on leadership development and data-based instructional improvement and to all area school leadership at eligible school districts throughout the Mississippi Delta region. Three goals have been developed for this project, along with measurable objectives and outcomes to address the stated School Leadership Program performance measures:

- 1) Through an exemplary Educational Leadership Master’s Cohort Program, develop high quality school leaders and place them in high-need schools of the Mississippi Delta region.**

Objective 1.1: Admit and support with scholarships five quality candidates per year (2014-2018) into the Leadership Cohort Program, producing a total pool of 25 new school leaders over the span of the grant period.

Objective 1.2: Improve curriculum and other program elements through continuous self-study incorporating reflective feedback from stakeholders.

Objective 1.3: One hundred percent (100%) candidates will complete three intensive 12-week internships at the elementary, middle, and high school levels within partner districts.

Objective 1.4: One hundred percent (100%) of candidates will successfully complete requirements for program/graduation.

Objective 1.5: One hundred percent (100%) of candidates will achieve licensure established by the Mississippi Department of Education.

Objective 1.6: Secure placement for 100% of graduates in principal or assistant principal positions in schools within the Mississippi Delta region within two years of graduation/licensure.

*Outcome: By the end of this project, 25 new leaders will have successfully completed all requirements of the Educational Leadership Master's Cohort Program for graduation, and licensure requirements in the state of Mississippi, and these leaders will have secured placement as a principal or assistant principal in a high-need school district in the Mississippi Delta region.*

**2) Provide induction support to increase likelihood of initial effectiveness and retention of high quality school leaders in high-need schools of the Mississippi Delta region.**

Objective 2.1: Through the introduction of an ongoing support model of induction coaching, candidates will demonstrate improved leadership effectiveness with particular attention to instructional improvement by pre-determined target dates (end of Years 1 and 2 following program completion).

Objective 2.2: Through an ongoing support model, 90% of program graduates will be retained in leadership roles in Mississippi Delta schools 2 years out of graduation/initial placement.

*Outcome: Twenty (20) new principals will have successfully completed two years of coaching and induction support, demonstrating leadership effectiveness and indicating*

*likelihood of retention in leadership positions in high-need school districts in the Mississippi Delta.*

**3) Improve the instructional leadership of current principal and other school leaders to increase student achievement in high-need schools in the Mississippi Delta region**

Objective 3.1: Establish and pilot test school-based instructional leadership teams in two targeted high-need districts, using a process of design-based research.

Objective 3.2: Develop functions of those two teams focused on collaborative data-driven decision making for instructional improvement.

Objective 3.3: Through ongoing support, two teams will employ and implement a continuous improvement inquiry cycle (i.e., data collection, analysis, responsive change) to examine and improve team functions and effectiveness to promote school-wide instructional improvement.

Objective 3.4: Students will show growth on prescribed outcome measures aligned with Common Core Standards.

Objective 3.5: In addition to the objectives associated with developing these school-based instructional leadership teams, we propose to provide annual professional development offerings to current principals and other school leaders focused on leadership development and the continuous improvement process, and to address problems shared by high-need Mississippi Delta school districts.

*Outcome: Current principals and other school leaders will have successfully developed functional school leadership teams engaged in a Continuous Improvement Process to address student achievement in at least two targeted school districts in the Mississippi Delta region.*

*Outcome: Current principals and other school leaders will report how these professional development activities have had a positive change on their school environment or instructional leadership capabilities.*

The overall purpose of the Delta School Leadership Pipeline (DSLPP) Project is to develop school-wide leadership capacity (Priority 1) for instructional improvement in the Mississippi Delta region, and, thus improve overall student outcomes. Related goals within the project address the need to provide better initial preparation programs to produce high quality principals for area schools and throughout the region and to improve induction and in-service support. In-service leaders will receive coaching and professional development through membership in school leadership teams. Teams will be trained in a continuous improvement (CI) model (Priority 2), which will provide a framework for the identification, analysis, and interpretation of pertinent data to drive school-based decisions regarding teaching methods, practices, and possible programs in targeted schools (see e.g., Boudett, City, & Murnane, 2008; Park, Hironaka, Carver, & Nordstrum, 2012; Smylie, 2010). Similarly, project planners will utilize a CI model to study the effects of training and coaching with respect to the capacity of developing teams to improve the overall quality of instruction in schools and, ultimately, student achievement. A cycle of continuous improvement will allow for adaptations in professional development related to leadership development and the use of data to make instructional improvements in schools. This process resembles the process of design-based research now encouraged by the U.S. Department of Education's Institute of Education Sciences in its "Continuous Improvement Research in Education" program (Priority 2). That process involves the identification of promising practices aimed to address a particular education problem, the implementation and study of those practices applying an identifiable inquiry cycle, and the

improvement of those practices consistent with local context but also with the consideration of drawing lessons for the application of those practices by others (Bryk & Gomez, 2008; Bryk, Gomez, & Grunow, 2010).

Program planners find themselves at a pivotal point in terms of future efforts to improve education in the region. Given the longstanding partnership between the Cohort Program and regional public schools, it is clear that support is in place. However, with this foundation in place, a critical next step is to deepen the relationships within and among DAAIS partner institutions. DSU program planners propose to extend and enrich the Educational Leadership Master's Cohort program with induction support, professional training to develop and support leadership teams focused on instructional improvement and the provision of induction and support for new principals and a program of professional development that cohesively addresses the unique issues facing the Delta region's schools.

The goals, objectives, and outcomes are further described through the Implementation Plan on the following pages, which outlines activities, timeline, responsible parties and evaluation methods, aligns all aspects of the project design, and which will guide the full implementation of the Delta School Leadership Pipeline Project.

**Delta State University – College of Education and Human Sciences  
Delta School Leadership Pipeline (DSLPP) Project  
Implementation Plan Matrix**

**Goal 1: Through an exemplary Educational Leadership Master’s Cohort Program, develop high quality school leaders and place them in high-need schools of the Mississippi Delta region.**

<b>Objective 1.1: Admit and support with scholarships 5 quality candidates per year (2014-2018) into the Educational Leadership Master’s Cohort Program, producing a total pool of 25 new school leaders over the span of the grant period.</b>			
<b>Activities</b>	<b>Timeline</b>	<b>Responsible Parties</b>	<b>Evaluation</b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Advertise through media outlets: bulletin boards, email, webpages, radio</li> <li>• Market program through work with partner districts by exposing districts to quality DSU programming</li> <li>• Recruit program candidates at local, regional, and state conferences by sponsoring booths, making presentations</li> <li>• Admit candidates based on established selection process</li> <li>• Award scholarships to selected candidates</li> </ul>	Year round	Cohort Program Coordinator, Project Director and DSU Office of Graduate Studies	Number of applicants meeting program entrance requirements
	Year round		Number of scholarships awarded to program candidates
	Year round		
	February through April annually May annually		
<b>Objective 1.2: Improve curriculum and program elements through continuous self-study, incorporating reflective feedback from stakeholders.</b>			
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Conduct annual curriculum audit</li> <li>• Conduct annual survey of partner district principals using the ELPPQ<sup>1</sup></li> <li>• Conduct exit surveys of candidates</li> <li>• Hold focus groups with school administrators</li> <li>• Revise program elements as indicated by data analysis</li> </ul>	August to October annually	Cohort Program Coordinator, Project Director	Curriculum Audit
	April annually		Annual Survey
	March annually May/June annually		Exit Survey Focus Groups

<sup>1</sup> Educational Leadership Preparation Programs Questionnaire

<b>Objective 1.3: One hundred percent (100%) of candidates will complete three intensive 12-week internships at the elementary, middle, and high school levels within partner districts.</b>			
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Recruit district/schools to serve as intern sites</li> <li>Identify, select, and train principal mentors</li> <li>Assign program candidates to intern sites</li> <li>Monitor the internship on a weekly basis through Wednesday classroom debriefing and regular site visits (two per site)</li> <li>Improve the internship through review of mentor and candidate feedback, and Clinical Correlations</li> </ul>	<p>June/July annually July annually</p> <p>Weekly and regularly ongoing</p> <p>Ongoing</p>	<p>Cohort Program Coordinator, Project Director</p>	<p>Mentor evaluations Site visit logs Clinical Correlations evaluations</p>
<b>Objective 1.4: One hundred percent (100%) of candidates will successfully complete requirements for program/graduation.</b>			
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Continually monitor candidate progress in courses</li> <li>Provide additional tutoring and learning opportunities as needed for candidates to meet program requirements</li> </ul>	<p>Continuous</p>	<p>Cohort Program Coordinator, Project Director</p>	<p>Graduation records</p>
<b>Objective 1.5: One hundred percent (100%) of candidates will achieve licensure established by the Mississippi Department of Education.</b>			
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Candidates take comprehensive exam</li> <li>Candidates take the SLLA<sup>2</sup></li> <li>Candidates complete packet for licensure application</li> </ul>	<p>May/June annually</p>	<p>Program Coordinator, Project Director, Field Experience Coordinator</p>	<p>Comprehensive Examination Scores Licensure packet checklist</p>
<b>Objective 1.6: Secure placement for 100% of graduates in principal or assistant principal positions in schools within the Mississippi Delta region within two years of graduation/licensure.</b>			
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Contact Delta area school districts to determine future principal openings</li> <li>Contact MS Dept of Education for job openings</li> <li>Work with graduates to attain positions</li> <li>Work with districts to select qualified leaders that meet identified needs</li> </ul>	<p>February annually</p> <p>March annually</p>	<p>Cohort Program Coordinator, Project Director</p>	<p>Document placements Follow-up surveys of candidates</p>

*Outcome: By the end of this project, 25 new leaders will have successfully completed all requirements of the Educational Leadership Master's Cohort Program for graduation, and licensure requirements in the state of Mississippi, and these leaders will have secured placement in a high-need school district in the Mississippi Delta region as a principal or assistant principal.*

<sup>2</sup> School Leadership Licensure Assessment

**Goal 2: Provide induction support to increase the prospects for initial effectiveness and retention of high quality school leaders in high-need schools of the Mississippi Delta region.**

**Objective 2.1: Candidates will demonstrate improved leadership effectiveness with particular attention to instructional improvement by pre-determined target dates (end of Years 1 and 2 following program completion).**

<b>Activities</b>	<b>Timeline</b>	<b>Responsible Parties</b>	<b>Evaluation</b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Develop training manual for use with coaches of program completers employed in principal or assistant principal positions</li> <li>• Recruit and enlist cadre of coaches</li> <li>• Train cadre of coaches</li> <li>• Assign coaches to candidates</li> <li>• Develop individualized plan in conjunction with district/school based on prioritized needs</li> <li>• Assess candidate performance on the basis of ISLLC<sup>3</sup> Standards using a nationally-recognized leadership tool or its equivalent</li> </ul>	Jan-May 2014 Mar-Jul 2014 July 2014 June 2015 Jun –Sep 2015  Ongoing	Consultant  Project Director  Project Director and Program Faculty	Training Manual Coaches’ MOA’s Individualized training plans ISLLC Standards- based assessment instrument
<b>Objective 2.2: Through an ongoing support model, 90% of program graduates will be retained in leadership roles in Mississippi Delta schools 2 years out of graduation/initial placement.</b>			
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Continue monitoring coaching support to principals</li> <li>• Assign beginning principals to school leadership teams (see goal 3)</li> </ul>	July 2016 July 2016	Project Director	Coaching Evaluations Survey of job placements NEA Keys

*Outcome: Twenty (20) new principals will have successfully completed two years of coaching and induction support, demonstrating leadership effectiveness and indicating likelihood of retention in leadership positions in high-need school districts in the Mississippi Delta region.*

<sup>3</sup> Interstate School Leadership Licensure Consortium

**Goal 3: Improve the instructional leadership of current principals and other school leaders to increase student achievement in high-need schools in the Mississippi Delta region.**

<b>Objective 3.1: Establish school-based instructional leadership teams in two targeted high-need districts.</b>			
<b>Activities</b>	<b>Timeline</b>	<b>Responsible Parties</b>	<b>Evaluation</b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Select first round participant districts from pool of partner districts</li> <li>• Identify target schools within those districts</li> <li>• Secure agreements between participant districts/schools and DSU College of Education and Human Sciences</li> <li>• Identify members of school-level teams in conjunction with district superintendent/school principal</li> <li>• Conduct interviews with prospective team members to assess prior experiences, dispositions, and particular needs in terms of leadership capacity and inquiry/assessment experience</li> <li>• Provide charge to team members (development of leadership capacity at various levels with goal of establishing pipeline for continuous improvement focused on increasing the quality of teaching and therefore, student achievement)</li> </ul>	March 2016-May 2016	Program Coordinator and Project Director along with District Superintendent	Number of schools participating Sign-in logs for PD PD Evaluation forms PD Implementation Monitoring forms
	March 2016-May 2016		
	March 2016-July 2016		
	July 2016		
	August 2016 Ongoing annually thereafter		
<b>Objective 3.2: Develop functions of two teams focused on collaborative data-driven decision making for instructional improvement.</b>			
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Develop team leadership capacity and synergy through professional development targeting both individual roles and ultimately the role of the team as it provides leadership for the whole school</li> <li>• Provide professional development to prepare teams throughout the Continuous Improvement (CI) cycle (see Goal 3) focused on isolating and collecting appropriate data, analyzing data to identify areas for improvement, and recommending action steps for achieving improvement</li> </ul>	Academic Year 2016-17 Ongoing annually	Project Director, Program Faculty	Sign-in logs for PD PD evaluation forms Review of team goals and functions
	Aug 2016-June 2016 and ongoing annually		

<b>Objective 3.3: Through ongoing support, teams will employ and implement a continuous improvement inquiry cycle (i.e., data collection, analysis, responsive change) to examine and improve team functions and effectiveness to promote school-wide instructional improvement.</b>			
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Provide continuous support to teams (on team processes, particularly within the continuous improvement process focused on data collection, analysis, interpretation, corrective action) through professional development and coaching by university staff and expert consultants</li> <li>• Teams will effectively implement instructional improvement programs and practices that derive from inquiry/improvement cycles</li> <li>• Teams will use the CI cycle to examine team processes for developing leadership; collecting and analyzing data; making adaptations; and utilizing their findings to improve effectiveness of their work</li> </ul>	Years 4: October 2016- Sept 2017 and Year 5: October 2017- Sept 2018	Project Director, Program Coordinator, and School-based team	Team Satisfaction Survey Team logs
<b>Objective 3.4. Students will show growth on prescribed outcome measures aligned with Common Core Standards.</b>			
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Provide support to teams as they identify appropriate measures of student outcomes and analyze them in terms of need for curriculum adaptations, other necessary corrective actions</li> <li>• Monitor and provide feedback to teams throughout CI cycles as they work to improve instruction and student outcomes school wide</li> </ul>	June 2016 – June 2017 and ongoing annually	Project Director, Program Coordinator, and School-Based Teams	Student performance results on state benchmark tests or other comparable performance measures aligned with Common Core Standards
<b>Objective 3.5: In addition to the objectives associated with developing these school-based instructional leadership teams, we propose to provide annual professional development offerings to current principals and other school leaders focused on leadership development and the continuous improvement process, and to address problems shared by high-need Mississippi Delta school districts.</b>			
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Provide at least two continuous improvement process professional development opportunities annually featuring both local and nationally-recognized educational experts</li> </ul>	Each year of the project period through September 30, 2018	Project Director	Professional Development Evaluation Surveys Implementation Reflections by Principals/Other School Leaders

*Outcome: Current principals and other school leaders will have successfully developed functional school leadership teams at two targeted schools and engaged in a Continuous Improvement Process to address student achievement in at least two targeted school districts in the Mississippi Delta region.*

**2. The proposed project is appropriate to and successfully addresses the needs of the target population or other identified needs.**

The Delta School Leadership Pipeline (DSLPP) Project addresses three identified needs shared by the majority of the educational systems of the Mississippi Delta: (1) Aspiring principals and school districts lack financial resources to take advantage of educational opportunities to develop new school leaders; (2) New principals are often isolated and lack induction support during the first few years of their principalship; and (3) Current principals lack opportunities for affordable professional development to become strong instructional leaders and address the educational challenges of their rural, impoverished districts and their students.

The project addresses the financial needs and challenges of both the principal candidates and the school districts. It is a financial challenge for teachers who aspire to be principals to take a leave from the classroom and their teaching positions to enroll in the Educational Leadership Master's Cohort Program (Cohort Program) and commit to the 13-month full time program. The State of Mississippi provides sabbatical pay; however, it is at the rate of a five-year, Bachelor's level teacher, whereas many aspiring leaders are at a higher rate of pay. The districts are required to supplement the sabbatical, making up a difference of oftentimes \$5,000 or more. This is challenging for already resource-poor school districts and creates a barrier for districts to identify and recommend those having leadership potential to the Cohort Program. The DSLPP will provide financial incentives to the districts that will offset the cost of their obligation for the candidate's sabbatical. Furthermore, the project will provide a financial incentive in the form of a scholarship award to the aspiring principals of \$10,000 per candidate entering the Cohort program. \$5,000 will be provided at enrollment in the Cohort Program, and the remainder will be provided upon successful completion 13 months later.

Another identified need of the target population is induction support for new principals. Particularly problematic in this region is the lack of a support structure for new principals due to the rural isolationism of the small Delta school districts. Increasingly complex expectations at the state level, coupled with decreased funding related to economic downturns and decreasing population in the Mississippi Delta region, exacerbates the problems facing both pre- and in-service principals. Myriad reform efforts and continually shifting targets for student growth, along with the rigor of Common Core Standards, often leave principals overwhelmed when trying to make decisions regarding how best to improve teaching in their schools, and, therefore, student outcomes.

In response, this project proposes to develop and implement a principal coaching model, utilizing experienced and successful school principals to serve as coaches to new principals. A coaching manual and training program will be developed and implemented in the first year of the project. A pair of coaches will be recruited and enlisted to provide coaching support for up to five new principals each year, beginning in Year 3. Individualized coaching plans will be developed to address school/district and principal needs. Coaching will occur throughout the first two years of induction of the new principals. Coaching support will be monitored by the DSLP Project Director.

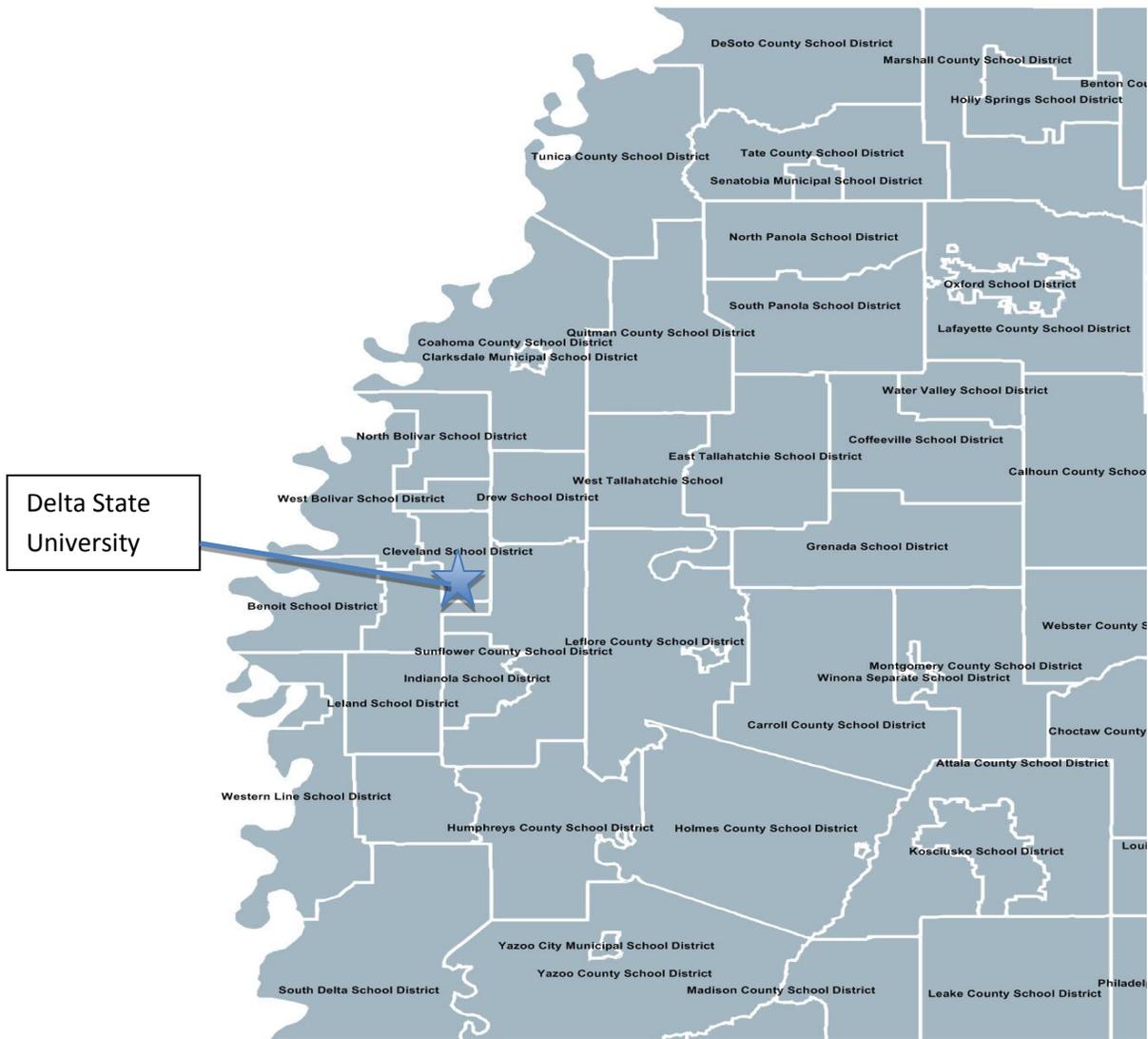
In order to build and sustain capacity in Mississippi Delta school districts to address their needs, a cohesive leadership team needs to be in place (Chrispeels, Brown, & Castillo, 2000; Hackman, 2002, 1989; Leithwood, Sammons, Day, Harris, & Hopkins, 2008; Yukl, 2013). Bringing synergy to the decision-making process in schools will broaden the base of stakeholders providing ongoing support for instructional improvements school wide and positively impact student outcomes. Therefore, two school leadership teams will be identified in

Year 3 of the project to participate in the pilot of the more intense school-based instructional leadership team activities throughout Years 4 and 5 of the project. It is important to recognize that a significant aspect of principal development in the domain of instructional leadership is the ability to establish a culture and climate in the school that fosters an environment focused on ongoing inquiry and instructional improvement for increased student performance. For beginning principals entering schools where a shift in the culture must occur, sustained support over a period of five to ten years, and the establishment of a leadership team within the school focused on data-driven inquiry, is critical to the achievement of the ultimate goal of school wide student improvement and, as well as the retention of strong leadership within the school (Chrispeels, Brown, & Castillo, 2000; Chrispeels & Martin, 2002; Leithwood, Day, Sammons, Harris, & Hopkins, 2008).

Delta State University is uniquely situated, both geographically and through its partnerships, to address these identified needs. Delta State University was created as Delta State Teachers College in 1924 and opened for its first regular session in September 1925, authorized to offer only a Bachelor of Science in Education. It has grown from a small teachers college to a multi-purpose university focusing strongly on high quality classroom instruction. As a regional Carnegie Master's I university, Delta State University "serves as an educational and cultural center for the Mississippi Delta, *Bulletin of Delta State University*, 2012-2013, p. 7." The University offers programs of study leading to baccalaureate, masters, educational specialist, and doctor of education degrees. The University's student body is the most diverse among the eight public Institutions of Higher Learning in Mississippi with 60% identifying as white, 33% as black, and 7% as other races as of (Fall 2012). This is more reflective of the Mississippi Delta region than sister universities serving the state and, particularly, the Mississippi Delta region.

The majority of DSU's more than 4,000 students continue to be natives of Mississippi, with most being the products of and graduating from school districts in the 18-county area that comprises the Mississippi Delta. This holds true for the Educational Leadership Master's Cohort Program in that currently 100% of the program candidates come into the program on teacher sabbaticals from Mississippi Delta school districts.

Delta State University is committed to the Mississippi Delta region and its people as evidenced by its Guiding Principle, A Commitment to Regional and Economic Development, which promotes working collaboratively to advance the Delta region to improve the quality of life and raise the educational level of its citizens. The DSLP Project focuses on the training of school leaders who are recruited from and will serve as leaders in the schools of the Delta region. As depicted below in Illustration 1, Delta State University is geographically situated centrally to the school districts that this project will serve.



**Illustration 1: Northwest Quadrant of the state of Mississippi (Delta region) and its school districts**

The typical Delta public school serves a largely African American student body primarily living in rural communities segregated by race and social class. The following data provide a snapshot of some of the characteristics of the target population and the challenges that the area and its residents face:

- The population fell by over 17% between 2000 and 2009, while the population of Mississippi increased by almost 4% and the U.S. population by over 9%.

- Almost 35% of the majority Black (69.5%) residents live in poverty, as compared to almost 21% in Mississippi and just over 13% for the U.S. (2008 data).
- Just over 55% of persons ages 25 and older are high school graduates, as compared to almost 73% in Mississippi and over 80% in the U.S. (2000 data).
- Of persons ages 25 and older, only 10.6% held a Bachelor's degree or higher, as compared to almost 17% for Mississippi and over 24% for the U.S. (2000 data).

According to the state's 2010 accountability data, 11(41%) of the state's 27 "Failing Schools," the lowest level on the accountability scale, are located in the Mississippi Delta. On the other hand, 9 of 53 (17%) of the "Star Schools," the highest designation, are also located in the Mississippi Delta. But the Star School information is deceptive because seven (7) of those schools are located in DeSoto County, a middle-class suburb of Memphis, Tennessee, located on the very northern border of the Mississippi Delta region; only two (2) are located in high poverty Delta counties, and both of these are magnet schools that draw their student population from across the school district.

The school districts and aspiring principals for this project will be drawn from the public and private schools of this 18-county region, omitting the more affluent DeSoto County, which is clearly not eligible due to not meeting the poverty rate eligibility criteria. This region consists of approximately 30 small, rural school districts, many of them isolated and in counties that lack industry and community resources that contribute to local tax bases.

DSU's College of Education and Human Sciences has developed the relationships and capacity to address the needs of both the target population and target schools. The Educational Leadership Master's Cohort Program consists of program faculty members who have experience as practitioners and administrators in local K-12 school districts. Both Drs. Terry Harbin and

JeVon Marshall, Cohort Coordinators, have experience as successful principals serving Delta area schools and other schools serving large proportions of high-need students. Also of importance is the longstanding relationship of the COEHS with the Delta Area Association for the Improvement of Schools (DAAIS). Housed on the DSU campus on the 3<sup>rd</sup> floor Ewing (Education) Hall immediately next door to the Office of the Dean of the College of Education, DAAIS is a regional consortium of educational institutions in the Mississippi Delta whose primary purpose is to provide services and professional development opportunities for personnel of member schools, as well as curricular and enrichment opportunities for their students. The Dean of the College of Education serves on the Executive Board of Directors for DAAIS and meets bi-monthly with superintendents and school boards. Superintendents cited during an April 2013 DAAIS/DSU COEHS focus meeting their desire for faculty to provide professional development to help their teaching staff align their teaching with Common Core Standards.

The Educational Leadership Master's Cohort Program has a strong record of graduate placement and attainment in the Mississippi Delta. Ninety-two (92) candidates have graduated from the Cohort Program in the past nine years (Cohorts VI— XV). Of this number, 94% remained in Mississippi schools during the 2012-2013 year. Of the graduates remaining in Mississippi, 87% are working in Delta area schools. Of those working in the Delta, 50 are in administrative leadership positions. Additionally, the five graduates employed in Mississippi, but outside of the Delta region, are working in administrative positions; four of them are in districts identified as “critical needs” due to a shortage of highly qualified teachers (Priority 2).

**3. The proposed project is part of a comprehensive effort to improve teaching and learning and support rigorous academic standards for students.**

The Educational Administration and Supervision preparation programs, which include the Educational Leadership Master's Cohort Program, are housed in the Division of Teacher Education, Leadership, and Research within the College of Education and Human Sciences at Delta State University. Degree programs offered include the Bachelor of Education, Master of Education, Educational Specialist, and Doctor of Education in Professional Studies. The Thad Cochran Center for Rural School Leadership and Research focuses on research and service to the degree programs, the College of Education and Human Sciences, and Delta public schools.

The design of the project proposed here is based on a successful model of educational leadership preparation and is a part of Delta State University's College of Education and Human Science's comprehensive effort to improve teaching and learning and support rigorous academic standards for students throughout the Mississippi Delta region. A full description of this leadership preparation model can be found in a recent article published in *Planning and Changing: An Educational Leadership and Policy Journal* (Griffin, Taylor, Varner, & White, 2012). The Educational Leadership Master's Cohort Program was first implemented in 1998 and focused on the preparation of assistant principals and principals with a vision to develop the instructional and leadership skills and behaviors of participants to a functional level that would enable graduates to assume an entry school leadership role and make a significant contribution to the improvement of educational programs and outcomes in local school districts in the Mississippi Delta region. The 13-month program integrated classroom instruction with field-based experiences and was reflected in three interrelated program anchors: Teaching and Learning, Organizational Effectiveness, and School and Community.

The reputation of the Educational Leadership Master’s Cohort Program has increased in stature and significance to the region since its inception in 1998. The excellence of the Educational Leadership Cohort Program has been acknowledged nationally by several organizations, including its identification as one of the top eight in the country by researchers from Stanford University. The *School Leadership Study: Developing Successful Principals*, an in-depth study of principal preparation programs in the United States conducted by the Stanford Educational Leadership Institute and commissioned by The Wallace Foundation in 2007, cited Delta State University’s principal preparation cohort model as “one of the country’s exemplary principal preparation programs” (Darling-Hammond, LaPointe, Myerson, Orr, & Cohen, 2007; LaPointe, Davis, & Cohen, 2007). The study further states,

*“Few that we examined put the pieces together as comprehensively or as consistently well as the Educational Leadership Program at Delta State University. The program benefits from deep support for both local districts and the State of Mississippi, which provide unprecedented financial support through the Mississippi Sabbatical Leave Program. (LaPointe, M., Davis, S., & Cohen, C., 2007) (Priority 2)*

A review of the Educational Leadership Cohort Program was initiated in the 2010-2011 academic year, which stemmed from an internal desire to make a good program better. The program was redesigned based on a model developed by Dr. Joseph Murphy of Peabody College, Vanderbilt University. The redesigned Educational Leadership Cohort Program is the synthesis of concepts constructed from a thirteen-year partnership with the public school districts in the Mississippi Delta and an ongoing review of effective theory and practice in the field of education. This redesign was reviewed by Dr. Joseph Murphy, nationally recognized scholar in the areas of educational leadership and leadership preparation, and he had the following to say:

*“This is the best I have seen. It is inspired, incredibly well grounded in the research, and quite sensitive to the local context. It is beautifully written and cogently presented. The documentation is superb. Your ability to stay focused on developing leaders for the Delta region—and for schools with challenging students is impressive. Your approach on the entire topic—from vision to program anchors to theory of action to curriculum chunks to levers for leadership to specific knowledge and skills—is excellent.”* (Murphy, June 6, 2011)

During the redesign of the program, its theory of action was developed to provide a stronger focus on the research-based leadership levers used to build individual and organizational capacity to support high levels of performance and learning for all students. The overarching theme of the theory of action is the view of the school as a learning organization: an organic, functioning whole in which leadership levers associated with beliefs and values and their related skills, effective teaching and organizational capacity, and the socio-political context of the students’ families and communities are used by leaders for learning to positively impact student learning. The leadership levers found in the theory of action are applied in the program curriculum through their infusion throughout the three program curriculum anchors. They are implemented in the curricular areas that describe what the program candidate should know and be able to do. These three program curricular anchors are based on Standards from Interstate Schools Leaders Licensure Consortium (ISLLC) and the Educational Leadership Constituent Council (ELCC):

**Anchor I: Curriculum, Instruction, and Assessment (CIA)** focuses on supporting high learning and performance outcomes for all P-12 students and centers on the leader for learning’s work with teachers to establish a personalized learning environment with high expectations for

student learning, as well as support for the teacher and administrator growth necessary for effective teaching of students from disadvantaged environments. Accountability is based on a continuous improvement model in which the leader for learning works collaboratively with other educators to collect and analyze student performance data in order to make decisions related to teaching and learning. Attention to the socio-political context in which students live is the key leadership lever used by the leader for learning to advocate the creating and maintaining of an instructional program sensitive to the unique needs of students from disadvantaged environments. High learning expectations are coupled with attention to the individual needs and interests of students.

Goal I of the proposed project establishes a priority for undergirding pre-service principals with the necessary content, skills, and dispositions to create and sustain learning environments which lead to positive educational outcomes. As is described in Anchor I, a critical factor that must be considered when supporting candidates in the transition from theory to practice is the need for engagement in a continuous improvement process. The obvious alignment between Goal I and the critical Anchor I of curriculum instruction and assessment is fundamental to the success of this project. The program builds upon this premise through Goal 3 to eventually engage new principals in school level leadership teams for deeper and more comprehensive continuous improvement.

**Anchor II: Continuous Improvement and Culture of Learning (CICL)** focuses on leadership levers used by the leader for learning to build organizational capacity for achieving and sustaining high levels of student learning and performance. Data-driven decision making supports a continuous improvement model focused on the consistent collection and analysis of student performance and school operations data. The development of a professional learning

community is key, in which both teachers and administrators share norms of collegiality and experimentation to improve their individual and collective practices and positively impact student learning. Distributed leadership is closely linked with that of the professional learning community as leadership functions are distributed and held collectively across all organizational levels of the school.

The proposed project provides for further development of this curricular anchor. In the case of pre-serve principals, they are placed in schools that are actually in the process of developing teams engaged in continuous improvement inquiry for institutional improvement. The curricular anchor has an extended application through an agenda of ongoing professional development for in-service principals and the provision of coaching for beginning principals.

**Anchor III: Leading Operations for Learning (LOL)** promotes effective policies and practices in the management of people, processes, and resources with a primary focus on the learning of students and professionals within a safe, efficient, and effective school environment. An outgrowth of developing leaders across the school includes support for the implementation of formal and embedded, ongoing professional development; the development of effective instructional policies; and the use of data-driven decisions to improve teaching and learning. The leader for learning also proactively fosters collaboration with families and communities to address the challenges of effective instruction, as well as creates partnerships to provide emotionally and physically safe and secure school environments that advance student learning.

Goal 2 of the project proposes sustained support of and further professional development for beginning principals. Without the provision of induction support and ongoing professional development, foundational training will have limited effect. Coupled with Goal 3, which addresses the need for broadening the critical inquiry process to include other school level

leadership stakeholders, the project provides a comprehensive plan in support of Anchor III, Leading Operations for Learning.

The structure of the program continues to be a cohort model, which promotes a supportive learning environment among candidates that is based on the social constructivist theory of learning. All experiences in the program, whether they are academic class or field experiences, are particularly structured and sequenced in a way that allows for introduction, development, application, refinement, practice, and modeling of knowledge, skills, and beliefs about leadership for learning and best practices. The program candidates enter the 13-month program on June 1 of each year and complete the program on June 30 of the following year. As progression through the program occurs, instructional classroom experiences are integrated with field experiences. Program faculty link candidates with trained principal mentors, preferably in high performing schools, where three 12-week field experiences at an elementary, middle, and high school occur. Program candidates return to the university setting on Wednesdays each week for continued instruction and reflective practice activities, allowing for the true integration of the classroom instruction and field experiences and enabling the application, refinement, and practice of knowledge, skills, and beliefs.

**4. The extent to which the design for implementing and evaluating the proposed project will result in information to guide possible replication of project activities or strategies, including information about the effectiveness of the approach or strategies employed by the project**

The College of Education and Human Sciences is engaged in continuous evaluation of its programs and projects that allows faculty and staff to assess the effectiveness of their strategies, in part due to its accreditation by the National Council for Accreditation for Teacher Education.

This is embedded in a university-wide process through its annual strategic planning and assessment process as well as through accreditation requirements guided by its accreditation body, the Southern Association for Colleges and Schools.

There are already assessment tools in place that are used to assess candidate performance in both the classroom instructional and field experiences that are then reviewed to assess program approaches and strategies employed. This is one prong of program assessment and effectiveness that will be integrated into the Delta School Leadership Pipeline Project as well. These include varied types of assessments including program coordinator's evaluations, candidate self-assessments, internship/mentor performance evaluations, situational analysis, portfolios, and comprehensive and state licensure exams. Clinical Correlations assess the candidate's ability to integrate content and professional knowledge and skills with real life experiences and situations at each internship site during the year. Each correlation is related to a recognized educational standard, a current educational issue, and one of the program curriculum anchors. The Exit Portfolio is the culminating assessment for program candidates; and it provides an opportunity to reflect on learning and growth throughout the program and produce a professional document that provides substantial evidence of that learning and growth. It contains five sections including a self-assessment, summary of field experiences, and Clinical Correlations, as well as samples of work and other activities. All of these tools are used to assess the effectiveness of the Cohort Program and make adaptations and continuous improvements.

Through a design-based research approach, project planners propose to develop and implement curriculum, professional development, and support measures that will engage pre-service and in-service school leaders in ongoing leadership development focused on instructional improvement and improved student outcomes. The continuous improvement (CI) inquiry model

will be central to each aspect of this project to ensure that Delta area schools build the depth of leadership necessary to initiate and sustain improved student outcomes for their schools. In addition, the evaluation plan provides a comprehensive assessment blueprint that capitalizes on the rich data under study through the continuous improvement cycle. This architecture, which provides a blueprint for developing the leadership of principals to assume appropriate roles within school teams engaged in the process of continuous improvement of their programs, is available for adaptation and replication by other schools in the Delta region pipeline. Given the strong partnership commitments between DSU and the regional schools, there is the perfect conduit for connecting other schools to the pipeline. In studying the efficacy of its own program and associated leadership development strategies, Delta State University program staff plan to provide guidance to interested partner schools that may choose to implement similar programs for their own improvement. Absent such a pipeline for school improvement in the Delta region, improved educational outcomes will continue to be isolated and fragmented.

## **B. Project Evaluation**

Evaluation is an integral component of the project design. As such, evaluation activities and oversight will be the responsibility of the Delta School Leadership Pipeline Project Director, while much of the data collection will be accomplished by the Cohort Program Coordinator and program faculty as described in the Implementation Matrix included in Section 1, Project Design. A team approach will be incorporated for data analysis, which will include the Division of Teacher Education, Leadership, and Research team. The following evaluation plan includes program goals and their intended outcomes. The objectives are provided with detailed narrative on the qualitative and quantitative data that will be collected. Each objective has a

corresponding objective performance measure. The five School Leadership Program (SLP) Performance Measures are aligned with the corresponding goal.

**1. The methods of evaluation include the use of objective performance measures that are clearly related to the intended outcomes of the project and will produce quantitative and qualitative data to the extent possible**

**Delta School Leadership Pipeline (DSLPL) Project  
Evaluation of Project Goals/Objectives**

**Goal 1: Through an exemplary Educational Leadership Master’s Cohort Program, develop high quality school leaders and place them in high-need schools of the Mississippi Delta region.**

*Outcome: By the end of the project, 25 new leaders will have successfully completed all requirements of the Educational Leadership Master’s Cohort Program for graduation and licensure requirements in the state of Mississippi, and these leaders will have secured placement in a high-need school district in the Mississippi Delta region as a principal or assistant principal.*

**Objective 1.1: Admit and support with scholarships 5 quality candidates per year (2013-2019) into the Educational Leadership Master’s Cohort Program, producing a pool of 25 school leaders over the span of the grant period.**

The Program Coordinator will maintain a database on all program applicants relevant to each of the criteria represented in the Leadership Cohort M.Ed. Admissions Portfolio (including CAAP/GRE minimum writing score; GRE composite score; minimum GPA; writing sample; and letters of recommendation). In addition, candidate interview ratings will be maintained in the database. A point system will be utilized to assess the overall candidate qualifications and will

result in a score that determines whether the applicant is eligible for admittance to the program. The top five applicants based on admissions requirements will be awarded tuition scholarships, which will be tracked via a database maintained by the Project Director. Appropriate Memorandums of Understanding between the College of Education and Human Sciences at Delta State University and the candidates will be on file in the Division of Teacher Education, Leadership, and Research.

The Project Director will track quality indicators to determine if candidates' performance on measures of quality is higher than has been demonstrated by previous cohorts.

***Objective Performance Measure: Number of quality candidates per year admitted to the Cohort program and supported with financial incentives.***

**Objective 1.2: Improve curriculum and program elements through continuous self-study, incorporating reflective feedback from stakeholders.**

Consistent with the design-based research approach, the Program Coordinator and program faculty, in conjunction with the Project Director, will audit the curriculum annually through a systematic review of syllabi in light of national and state standards, best practice and theory in the field, anecdotal observations, and survey and exit data. The Educational Leadership Principal Program Questionnaire (ELPPQ) is designed to allow partner district principals to provide feedback on elements of the program curriculum and is administered annually in April. Results are aggregated and provided to program faculty for review. The Leadership Cohort Exit Survey requires candidates to provide both *qualitative* and *quantitative* data regarding the quality of their experiences within the program. The exit survey is administered to candidates in June and is aggregated and tracked via a database. Trend data is established and curriculum revisions recommended on the basis of this data. In addition, the Project Director will convene annually in

March focus groups comprised of superintendents and principals from partner districts. They will be guided by the program coordinators and program faculty through a focused review of program outcomes and curricula with members advising regarding needed improvements. These recommendations will be recorded by the Program Coordinator, filed by the Project Director, and shared with the Faculty Curriculum Committee for Leadership Studies. Recommended program improvements will be made and shared with school teams for further implementation and study.

*Objective Performance Measure: Program staff will have engaged in a continuous improvement process to improve curriculum and program elements.*

**Objective 1.3. One hundred percent (100%) of candidates will complete three 12-week internships at the following levels: elementary, middle, and high school within partner districts.**

The Program Coordinator tracks candidates' completion of graduation requirements, which include three 12-week internships, in June of each year. A database is updated annually and will be reported to the Project Director (See Objective 1.4).

*Objective Performance Measure: Percentage of candidates that complete three 12-week internships as a part of the Cohort Program.*

**Objective 1.4. One hundred percent (100%) of candidates will successfully complete requirements for program completion/graduation.**

The Program Coordinator tracks candidates' completion of graduation requirements (successful completion of all coursework and internships; minimum GPA requirements; and successful completion of Comprehensive Examinations) in June of each year. A database is updated annually and the status of candidates will be reported to the Project Director.

*Objective Performance Measure: Percentage of candidates who complete requirements and graduate.*

**Objective 1.5. One hundred percent (100%) of candidates will achieve licensure according to guidelines.**

Candidates will apply for and take the School Leaders Licensure Assessment (SLLA) annually in June. The Program Coordinator, working with the Field Experiences Director for the COEHS, will monitor candidate performance and report same to the Project Director by July 1 of each year. Candidates who are unsuccessful will receive remediation support in July and retake the SLLA in August.

*Objective Performance Measure: Percentage of candidates that achieve licensure*

**Objective 1.6. Secure placement for 100% of graduates in principal or assistant principal positions in schools within the Mississippi Delta region within 2 years of graduation/licensure.**

The Project Director and Program Coordinator will maintain a database of principal/assistant principal position openings in the Delta region and assist with securing interviews for candidates. Follow-up surveys will be sent to candidates to determine job placement. In addition to pinpointing individual placement needs, trend data will be analyzed for future placements.

*Objective Performance Measure: Percentage of graduates placed in principal or assistant principal positions in schools*

**Goal 1 SLP Performance Measures:**

- *Percentage of program graduates who are certified to become a principal or assistant principal*

- *Percentage of graduates who are certified and hired as a principal or assistant principal in a high-need LEA*

**GOAL 2: Provide induction support to increase the prospects for initial effectiveness and retention of high quality school leaders in high-need schools of the Mississippi Delta region.**

*Outcome: Twenty (20) new principals will have successfully completed two years of coaching and induction support, demonstrating leadership effectiveness and indicating likelihood of retention in leadership positions in high-need school districts in the Mississippi Delta region.*

**Objective 2.1. Candidates will demonstrate improved leadership effectiveness with particular attention to instructional improvement by pre-determined target dates (end of Years 1 and 2 following program completion).**

A training manual for use in developing the skills of coaches assigned to new principals will be developed during the initial year of the program. Thereafter, it will be revised annually in June based on feedback from coaches and Beginning Principal Surveys.

The Project Director will maintain a file of active Memorandums of Understanding detailing responsibilities of coaches. The Project Director will recruit and hire two coaches based on a pre-determined job description, with advertising in March-April and hiring completed in May of the initial year. Replacement hiring, if necessary, will follow this same schedule. The Project Director will work in conjunction with the Program Coordinator to assign Coaches in light of variables such as demographics, special needs, etc. The performance of Coaches will be evaluated through semi-annual (November, April) surveys of both coaches and beginning principals and through ongoing observations of coaching by the Project Director/Program

Coordinator. Observations will be captured through logs maintained by the Program Director, which will be used to conduct an annual evaluation of coaches in May of each year.

The NEA KEYS Survey (or comparable measure) will be administered annually in April to teachers across the whole school to assess dimensions of principal leadership and its impact on instruction. The Project Director will work with school personnel to administer the survey, tabulate data, and provide this information to Coaches. Program staff will use the information to reflect on appropriate supports and professional development needed by beginning principals. Coaches will utilize the data to work with beginning principals on an individualized plan for continuous improvement.

Coaches will submit to the Project Director Individualized Training Plans developed in conjunction with assigned beginning principals. Semi-annual (November/April) updates will be provided to the Project Director, who will review and provide oversight for implementation of the plans. The design-based research approach is critical to this process. By studying the data gathered through the implementation of models, curricula, and practices related to the coaching of beginning principals, project planners foresee that a stronger model will emerge for induction of beginning principals through coaching, based upon “lessons learned.” This model can in turn be replicated in other Delta area schools working to address similar induction issues.

*Objective Performance Measure: Number of principals that successfully complete coaching and induction support*

**Objective 2.2. Through an ongoing support model, 90% of program graduates will be retained in leadership roles in Mississippi Delta schools 2 years out of graduation/initial placement.**

The Project Director will annually survey (in October) program graduates to collect placement data and enter in a database, providing ongoing tracking of the number of graduates placed, where they are placed, and how long they are retained in their positions. This information will be used to assess whether current retention practices are effective and to consider the need for additional strategies targeting retention.

*Objective Performance Measure: Percentage of program graduates who are retained in leadership roles in Mississippi Delta schools for at least 2 years from graduation/initial placement*

**Goal 2 SLP Performance Measure:**

- *Percentage of program graduates certified through the program who are hired as a principal or assistant principal in a high-need LEA and who remain in that position for at least 2 years*

**Goal 3: Improve the Instructional Leadership of current principals and other school leaders to increase student achievement in high-need schools in the Mississippi Delta region.**

*Outcome: As an important aspect of improved instructional leadership, current principals and other school leaders will have successfully developed functional school leadership teams at 2 targeted schools and engaged in a Continuous Improvement Process to address issues of classroom instruction and student achievement in at least 2 targeted school districts in the Mississippi Delta region.*

**Objective 3.1. Establish school-based instructional leadership teams in 2 targeted high-need districts.**

The Program Director will establish a database for tracking recruitment and selection of districts, schools, and teams. In order to be eligible for the pilot, a school district must have a DSU Educational Leadership Master's Cohort Program graduate serving as a beginning principal. Eligible districts will submit a letter of application to the Project Director in May of 2016 prior to initiation of the pilot. The letter will provide information that will determine level of interest and need. The Project Director and Program Coordinator, in conjunction with program faculty, will select two districts from among the applicants to serve as the pilot for developing school leadership teams. Following the selection of districts (and in May), superintendents, with input from the Project Director and Program Coordinator, will identify a low-performing school within the district in which to develop a leadership team. The schools selected must have graduates of the DSU Educational Leadership Master's Cohort Program serving as principals. Each team will be comprised of the building principal; assistant principal; and 2-3 other school professionals as identified by the Principal and the Superintendent of the District. The Project Director will monitor the selection process at each level and maintain a database with narrative comments reflecting the rationale for selections at each level.

*Objective Performance Measure: School-based instructional leadership teams established in 2 high-need districts*

**Objective 3.2. Develop functions of 2 teams focused on collaborative data-driven decision making for instructional improvement.**

The Project Director will provide ongoing monitoring of sign-in logs for professional development sessions held within each district to ensure participation by all team members.

The Project Director and team members will evaluate the effectiveness of professional development sessions in terms of functions related to data identification, collection, and analysis,

as well as data-driven decision making. Evaluations will focus on both individual team functions and group functions. The Project Director will collect data after each professional development session and adjust activities as indicated by analysis of the data.

The Team Diagnostic Survey (Wageman, Hackman, & Lehman), or a comparable instrument, will be administered semi-annually (November, May) to team members to assess how individuals and the team as a whole are functioning, as well as to draw further inferences about the effectiveness of the professional development and other support provided to develop team functioning. The instruments will be administered by the Project Director, who will also tabulate and prepare data for study with the team members in order to improve dimensions of team functioning. Results will be maintained in a database by the Project Director in order to monitor and track team development.

*Objective Performance Measure: Two (2) school-based teams are engaged in collaborative data-drive decision making for instructional improvement*

**Objective 3.3. Through ongoing support, teams will employ and implement a continuous improvement inquiry cycle (i.e., data collection, analysis, responsive change) to examine and improve team functions and effectiveness to promote school-wide instructional improvement.**

Based on the NEA KEYS Continuous Improvement (CI) model, the Project Director/Program Coordinator/Program Faculty will develop an instrument to determine whether teams engaged different elements of the cycle and how well they put those elements into practice. The Project Director will administer components of the instrument at critical transitions throughout the year (yet to be determined), compiling and sharing data with team members for inquiry and planning. The composite results will be tabulated and reviewed holistically by the

team in May in order that they be able to more effectively plan for the next cycle. Results will be maintained in a database by the Project Director in order to monitor and track team development.

*Objective Performance Measure: Continuous improvement inquiry process utilized to promote school-wide instructional improvement*

**Objective 3.4. Students will show growth on prescribed outcome measures aligned with Common Core Standards.**

The Project Director will work with the targeted school teams to analyze results of annual state standardized tests (or other instruments that measure student learning consistent with Common Core Standards) in July 2017/2018. The Project Director will maintain a file of recommendations resulting from the analysis, as will the Team Leader, for reference in planning for the subsequent school year's instructional programs and practices.

*Objective Performance Measure: Number of schools that showed growth using results of annual standardized tests for school*

**Objective 3.5. In addition to the objectives associated with developing these school-based instructional leadership teams, we propose to provide annual professional development offerings to current principals and other school leaders focused on leadership development and the continuous improvement process, and to address problems shared by high-need Mississippi Delta school districts.**

The Project Director will administer surveys at the conclusion of each professional development session. The sessions will be scheduled at intervals throughout each year of the project. The Project Director will tabulate evaluation data, maintaining a database for review by program staff in determining future professional development topics and schedules. In addition, principal participants will maintain reflection logs providing examples of the impact of

professional development, which will be reviewed and summarized by the Project Director to further evaluate the effectiveness of professional development.

*Objective Performance Measure: Number of professional development opportunities*

**Goal 3 SLP Performance Measures:**

- *Percentage of principals and assistant principals who complete the SLP-funded professional development program and whose schools demonstrate positive change, no change, or negative change based on pre- and post- school site measures, of which one measure must include, if available, student growth*
- *Percentage of program graduates who are rated ‘effective’ or ‘highly effective’ as reassured by a U. S. Department of Education program approved principal evaluation system (Mississippi does not currently have a system in place)*

**2. Methods of evaluation provide for examining the effectiveness of project implementation strategies**

The goals and their intended outcomes have clearly defined performance measures established throughout the evaluation plan that are designed to determine the extent to which appropriate processes for accomplishing those outcomes are in place and whether they are attained. The methods of evaluation employed throughout the project are consistent with design-based research processes. At each phase of project development and implementation, whether curriculum development, professional development training, induction/teaming processes or other aspects of the project, the continuous improvement (CI) model will be utilized to ensure that all aspects of the program improve throughout implementation and with each successive cycle of delivery. The CI model will be employed by program planners for the Educational Leadership Master’s Cohort Program in reviewing curriculum and program components based

on the following: data from stakeholders and the experiences of candidates throughout internships; data from beginning principal induction experiences; and data derived from school-based leadership development teams focused on improving instruction to positively impact student outcomes. Similarly, beginning principals and their coaches, as well as school-level leadership teams, will use the CI model to improve their leadership skills for the primary purpose of improving the quality of instruction school wide, and, therefore, student outcomes. The Project Director will be integrally involved in all processes and will maintain data from all evaluative experiences for dissemination to the Cohort Program Coordinator and project partners so that data is exchanged in a circular flow, with each aspect of the program informing the other.

**3. Methods of evaluation will provide performance feedback and permit periodic assessment of progress toward achieving intended outcomes**

The Project Director will provide a critical link in the exchange of information necessary to the Continuous Improvement (CI) process to inform progress toward achieving intended project outcomes. The Project Director will conference weekly with the Cohort Program Coordinator, Coaches, and Team Leaders for the purpose of ongoing assessment/inquiry/data study and analysis relevant to project goals. Twice a month the Project Director will hold a conference with the Chair of the Division of Teacher Education, Leadership, and Research, during which relevant data will be reviewed in light of progress towards goals and objectives. The Division Chair will meet monthly with the Dean of the College of Education and Human Sciences to share progress toward program outcomes.

The Project Director will submit monthly progress reports to the Chair of the Division of Teacher Education, Leadership, and Research relating progress on program activities/objectives. The Project Director will also submit quarterly reports to the Chair and Dean summarizing

accomplishments for the period under review per each goal/activity and including evaluative data as indicated in the evaluation timeline. A summative annual evaluation report will provide an in-depth report of performance on each evaluation measure associated with the attainment of project goals. The design-based research model will guide the use of all data for study and analysis to make data-driven decisions that will improve the program throughout successive cycles.

### **C. Significance**

#### **1. The proposed project will contribute to increased knowledge or understanding of educational problems, issues, or effective strategies.**

In the Mississippi Delta region served by Delta State University, according to 2010 accountability data, 41% of the state's schools received the lowest level (Failing) on the accountability rating scale. Of further note is the common refrain among state educational leaders and stakeholders imploring those in leadership roles within the impoverished Mississippi Delta to accept responsibility for seeking solutions to intractable problems. Therefore, it is imperative that existing partnerships between Delta State University's College of Education and Human Sciences and Delta area schools be expanded and deepened to provide a continuous pipeline for building leadership capacity at the school level. These school level leaders should in turn grow capacity for leadership within their schools focused on comprehensive instructional improvement. Further, the scope of this supportive network must broaden over time to extend to all schools in the Mississippi Delta as they strive to produce improved student outcomes.

Through a design-based research approach, employing the continuous improvement (CI) inquiry model at every level, project planners and stakeholders will examine programs, activities,

and strategies implemented across the project to determine their effectiveness, and use the lessons they learn in the process to continuously improve programming. These lessons will contribute to helping others in the Delta region who are concerned with school leadership development.

The goals of the DSLP are designed to strategically engage stakeholders in the continual improvement of the COEHS' nationally acclaimed Educational Leadership Master's Cohort Program curriculum. With program curricular anchors that rely heavily upon the application of theory to practice through full-time school-based internships for pre-service principals, a coherent structure exists for the preparation of new principals for entry into the pipeline, as well as for gaining insight from the field for overall improvement in the delivery of the program. The coherence of the curriculum anchors within the Cohort Program is enhanced by the integration of coursework and internships, providing a conduit for the consideration of lessons learned from the field. Similarly, via induction coaching for beginning principals, professional development for in-service principals, and, eventually, the development of leadership capacity for instructional improvement in area schools, those within the pipeline are able to build a common framework of understanding related to how to address the particular problems faced by many of the schools within the Delta region. This common framework guides the inquiry process at every level, so that there is synergy and consensus around what works in area schools, there are examples of practice that can be shared locally, and there is increased capacity to address issues around how students in these schools learn best.

**2. The proposed project will result in system change or improvement.**

Through the preparation of pre-service principals for schools within the Mississippi Delta region, and ongoing support and professional development of in-service principals, Delta State

University's College of Education and Human Sciences is in a unique position to effect a cultural shift in Delta area schools. This shift is necessary if a pipeline is to evolve through which pre-service principals transition to the principalship with ongoing support, continuing to develop and foster deep connections with other school leaders throughout the region. As this pipeline evolves, the process of continual improvement (CI) inquiry becomes the technology for improving first the leadership skills of principals, assistant principals, and other school leaders and then for ensuring quality instruction that results in improved student outcomes.

Participants in the Educational Leadership Master's Cohort Program are trained comprehensively in relevant aspects of leadership, including establishing a culture that supports quality instruction and student learning, leading to high achievement school wide. It is expected that these candidates will become principals in the region, where they will be called upon to lead change and school improvement initiatives. To ensure their success as they segue into this role, ongoing support in the form of coaching and targeted professional development is necessary. By working through partner school districts to distill the critical features of professional development that are most needed to advance school leaders, and therefore school improvement for the region, the project will increase the ability of school leaders to learn from and support one another.

As the project advances in Year 4 to piloting the development of teams of leaders within schools, the capacity for deep and sustainable leadership increases. The engagement of a team of learners at the school level, focused on the study of relevant data to improve instruction and student outcomes, should result in improved outcomes school wide. Simultaneously, the exponential effect of sharing this model with other schools in the area comes into play. Through replication, the culture shift resonates throughout the region. All the while, Cohort Program

faculty and COEHS leaders study with their partner districts how lessons from the field should shape the curriculum of the Cohort Program, continuing to keep the pipeline flowing.

**3. The results/outcomes likely to be attained, especially improvements in teaching and student achievement, will have importance and magnitude.**

In order to break the current trend in which schools in the Mississippi Delta region are generally perceived and publicized as low-performing, it is critical that they be able to engage in practices that position them to realize improved student outcomes. Then, and only then, will they be able to move in a concerted manner towards becoming a system of schools viewed as effective and safe to practice. Improvements in teaching precede improvements in student achievement. Similarly, a cycle exists for preparing a leadership pipeline that continually produces quality leaders capable of effecting change within schools. The project recognizes these relationships and establishes a progression of improving curriculum and instruction for pre-service principals, developing and implementing new coaching induction support, and developing school-based leadership teams for leadership development. However, once again, these precede the improvements in actual leadership that result in more effective teaching and overall improvement in achievement. With measures in place along the way to monitor each of these activities – and the continuous study of how effective these efforts are, with continual improvement as the goal – a pipeline exists whereby the importance and magnitude of the results/outcomes likely to be attained cannot be denied. Without support for such a cohesive and coherent system, schools within the region will continue to struggle in isolation, failing to reach the potential that is within their grasp through the scope of this project.

## **D. Management Plan**

**1. The management plan is adequate to achieve the objectives of the proposed project on time and within budget, and includes clearly defined responsibilities, timelines, and milestones for accomplishing project tasks.**

Dr. Leslie Griffin, Dean of the College of Education and Human Sciences, will have overall administrative authority and responsibility for this project, as she does all programs and projects under the auspices of the College. Dr. Griffin reports directly to the University's Provost/Vice President of Academic Affairs and also is a member of the university's Academic Council. The Delta School Leadership Pipeline project will be a part of the COEHS's Division of Teacher Education, Leadership, and Research, chaired by Dr. Joe Garrison. Dr. Griffin and Dr. Garrison will recruit and select a Project Director within the first two months from award notification at an annual rate of \$60,000 (fringe \$19,800), to oversee the day-to-day activities of the five year project. The project director will be responsible for ensuring all project objectives are met, all activities are implemented and documented, and funds are expended in accordance with the approved project budget. The Implementation Plan Matrix in the Project Design section (Section 1.A) aligns each project activity with a timeframe and responsible party.

The Project Director will work with Educational Leadership Cohort Program (Cohort) Coordinators, Dr. Terry Harbin and Dr. JeVon Marshall, to address Goal 1 objectives. This team will work with school superintendents to recruit Cohort candidates from identified eligible local educational agencies, both public and private, and work with them to be prepared to enroll in the program June 1, 2014. In the Spring of 2014, potential candidates will complete the rigorous two-phase application and selection process. These applicants must have a strong desire and possess the skills/dispositions necessary to serve as a school leader of learning, provide effective

leadership in high-need Mississippi Delta schools, and be successful in the curriculum and internships components of the program (Moorman, et al, 2011). They must have the recommendation of their local school district superintendent, provide evidence of having taken the Graduate Record Exam (GRE), completed an acceptable writing sample, possess a 2.75 undergraduate GPA in a teaching or related field, and submit a structured resume and three letters of professional reference (followed by telephone contact). Once satisfactorily completed, the candidate progresses to Phase II, which consists of a structured interview process by the review team, including a series of questions to assess their knowledge and background related to foundational principles and effective curriculum, instruction, and assessment. The five selected candidates will receive a financial incentive in the form of a scholarship totaling \$10,000, half of which will be provided in June 2014, with the remaining \$5,000 provided upon completion of classroom and internship requirements and successful graduation from the program. Likewise, districts will receive a \$5,000 stipend to assist them in offsetting the difference between the state's sabbatical contribution and the required sabbatical pay. Financial incentives are critical to successful recruitment of quality applicants due to the limited financial resources of both potential candidates and the districts identifying and referring them for the program. The Cohort will begin instructional courses on June 1, 2014, with the curriculum activities being led by Drs. Harbin and Marshall. This recruitment, selection, and enrollment process will be repeated each year through the life of the project.

The objectives for Goal 2 relate to the two-year induction phase which begins upon graduation, licensure, and placement in a principal or assistant principal position. The project staff will utilize educational consultants to develop a training manual for induction coaching activities. Two coaches will be recruited, identified, and selected from among interested

educational leaders with demonstrated success in school leadership roles. The Project Director, with assistance from the Dean of the College, will be responsible for identifying and selecting coaches as well as training the coaches to deliver exceptional and individualized coaching support. The Cohort Program Coordinator will also provide input in developing the individualized coaching plan. Each new principal's performance will be assessed on the basis of ISLLC<sup>4</sup> Standards using a nationally-recognized leadership tool.

As the new principals move into their second year of induction support, which would be Year 4 of the project, instructional leadership teams will be created with two targeted school districts to address Goal 3 objectives and pilot the innovative approach of establishing school-based instructional leadership teams. These teams will focus on a collaborative data-driven decision making process, employing and implementing a continuous improvement (CI) process to promote school-wide instructional improvement. Eligible districts will submit a letter of application to the Project Director in May of 2016 prior to initiation of the pilot. The letter will provide information that will determine level of interest and need. The Project Director and Program Coordinator, in conjunction with program faculty, will select two districts from among the applicants to serve as the pilots for developing school leadership teams. Following the selection of districts (and in May), superintendents, with input from the Project Director and Program Coordinator, will identify a low-performing school within the district for the establishment of a leadership team. The schools selected must have a graduate of the DSU Educational Leadership Master's Cohort Program serving as principal. Each team will be comprised of the building principal; assistant principal; and 2-3 other school professionals as identified by the Principal and the Superintendent of the District. The DSLP Project Director

---

<sup>4</sup>Interstate School Leadership Licensure Consortium

will guide this process and will also provide individual team professional development at the school site.

Additionally, at least two professional development opportunities per year will be provided to all school administrators serving in Mississippi Delta schools. Professional development will prepare team members to use the CI process, improve instructional leadership, and address other issues that are pertinent and applicable to school leaders in the Mississippi Delta. Over the five year period, a total of \$50,000 will be committed to professional development to both pilot instructional leadership teams and to develop in-service principals and other school administrators.

The chart below shows the number of participants in each goal activity necessary to meet stated goals and objectives:

**Number of Participants per Project Year necessary to meet Objectives**

<b>Project Year</b>	<b>Cohort Program</b>	<b>Induction Support</b>	<b>Leadership Teams</b>
Year 1: Oct 13-Sep 14*	5	0	0
Year 2: Oct 14-Sep 15	5	0	0
Year 3: Oct 15-Sep 16	5	5	0
Year 4: Oct 16-Sep 17	5	10 (5 new)	2
Year 5: Oct 17-Sep 18	5	10 (5 new)	2 (continued)
<b>Total</b>	<b>25</b>	<b>15</b>	<b>2</b>

\*First cohort will not be enrolled until June 1, 2014 due to program structure

**2. The procedures are adequate to ensure feedback and continuous improvement in the operation of the proposed project.**

Consistent with the evaluation of the Delta School Leadership Pipeline project, the Project Director will provide a critical link in the exchange of information necessary to ensure

the smooth and effective operations of the project. The Project Director will conference weekly with the Cohort Program Coordinator and program faculty for the purpose of ongoing assessment/inquiry/data study and analysis relevant to project goals and objectives. Twice a month the Project Director will hold a conference with the Chair of the Division of Teacher Education, Leadership, and Research, during which relevant activities and evaluation data will be reviewed in light of progress towards goals and objectives. The Division Chair will meet monthly with the Dean of the College of Education and Human Sciences to share progress toward program outcomes.

The Project Director will submit monthly progress reports to the Chair of the Division of Teacher Education, Leadership, and Research relating progress on program activities/objectives. The Project Director will also submit quarterly reports to the Chair and Dean summarizing accomplishments for the period under review per each goal/activity and including evaluative data as indicated in the evaluation timeline. A summative annual evaluation report will provide an in-depth report of performance on each evaluation measure associated with the attainment of project goals. The design-based research model will guide the use of all data for study and analysis to make data-driven decisions that will improve the program throughout successive cycles.

### **References**

Boudette, K. P., City, E. A., & Murnane, R. J. (2008). *Datawise: A step-by-step guide to using assessment*

*results to improve teaching and learning*. Cambridge: Harvard Education Press.

Bryk, A. S., & Gomez, L. (2008). Ruminations on reinventing an R&D capacity for educational improvement. In F. M. Hess (Ed.), *The future of educational entrepreneurship: Possibilities of school reform* (pp. 181-206). Cambridge, MA: Harvard Education Press.

Bryk, A. S., Gomez, L. M., & Grunow, A. (2010). *Getting ideas into action: Building networked improvement communities in education*. Stanford, CA: Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching.

*Bulletin of Delta State University*. (2012-2013). Cleveland, MS: Delta State University, p. 7.

Chrispeels, J. H., Brown, J. H., & Castillo, S. (2000). School leadership teams: Factors that influence their development and effectiveness. *Advances in Research and Theories of School Management and Educational Policy*, 4, 39-73.

Chrispeels, J. H., Castillo, S., & Brown, J. (2000). School leadership teams: A process model of team development. *School Effectiveness and Improvement*, 11(a), 20-56.

Chrispeels, J. H., & Martin, K. J. (2002). Four school leadership teams define their roles within organizational and political structures to improve student learning. *School Effectiveness and School Improvement*, 13(3), 327-365.

Cohen, S., & Bailey, D. (1997). What makes teams work: Group effectiveness research from the shop floor to the executive suite. *Journal of Management*, 23(3), 239-290.

Darling-Hammond, L., LaPointe, M., Meyerson, D., Orr, M.T., & Cohen, C. (2007). *Preparing school leaders for a changing world: Lessons from Exemplary Leadership Development Programs*. Stanford, CA: Stanford University, Stanford Educational Leadership Institute.

Griffin, L., Taylor, T., Varner, L., & White, C. (2012). Staying the course: A model leadership preparation program that goes the distance. *Planning and Changing: An Educational Leadership and Policy Journal*, 43(1/2), 57-71.

Hackman, J. R. (1989). *Groups that work (and those that don't): Creating conditions for effective teamwork*. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.

LaPointe, M., Davis, S., & Cohen, C. (2007). *School Leadership Study: Developing Successful Principals (Case study series: Principal preparation at Delta State University – A bold strategy to improve Practice)*. Stanford, CA: Stanford Educational Leadership Institute.

Leithwood, K., Day, C., Sammons, P., Harris, A., & Hopkins, D. (2008). Seven strong claims about successful school leadership. *School Leadership and Management*, 28(1), 27-42.

Murphy, D. J. (June 6, 2011). *Delta State University Redesign Evaluation Report*.

Park, S., Hironaka, S., Carver, P., & Nordstrum, L. (2012). *Continuous improvement in education*. Stanford, CA: Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching.

Smylie, M. A. (2010). *Continuous school improvement*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Corwin.

Wageman, R., Nunes, D. A., Burruss, J.A., & Hackman, J.R. (2007). *Senior leadership teams: What it takes to make them great*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard Business School Press.

Wageman, R., Hackman, J.R., & Lehman, E. V. (n.d.). *Team Diagnostic Survey: Development of an instrument*. Hanover, NH: Dartmouth University.

Yukl, G. (2013). *Leadership in organizations* (8<sup>th</sup> ed.). Upper Saddle River, NJ: Prentice Hall.