# Emerald Insight

## International Journal of Mentoring and Coaching in Education

Mentoring and induction for new assistant principals: the Kansas Educational
Leadership Institute
Jia Liang Donna Augustine-Shaw

## Article information:

## Users who downloaded this article also downloaded:

## For Authors

If you would like to write for this, or any other Emerald publication, then please use our Emerald
for Authors service information about how to choose which publication to write for and submission
guidelines are available for all. Please visit www.emeraldinsight.com/authors for more information.

## About Emerald www.emeraldinsight.com

Emerald is a global publisher linking research and practice to the benefit of society. The company
manages a portfolio of more than 290 journals and over 2,350 books and book series volumes, as
well as providing an extensive range of online products and additional customer resources and
services.

Emerald is both COUNTER 4 and TRANSFER compliant. The organization is a partner of the
Committee on Publication Ethics (COPE) and also works with Portico and the LOCKSS initiative for
digital archive preservation.

# Mentoring and induction for new assistant principals: the Kansas Educational Leadership Institute

Jia Liang and Donna Augustine-Shaw

*Department of Educational Leadership, Kansas State University, Manhattan, Kansas, USA*

## Abstract

**Purpose** – The purpose of this paper is to present findings from an initial year of mentoring and induction provided to new assistant principals (APs) served by the Kansas Educational Leadership Institute (KELI) and to identify program characteristics that support leadership development for first year APs.

**Design/methodology/approach** – The current research utilized surveys and interviews for data collection. The participants included 12 new AP mentees and five mentors currently participating in the KELI program. Two comparable questionnaires are designed to examine perceptions of both groups on the effectiveness of the program in general, mentoring/induction approaches used, and the appropriateness of the intensity of engagement required. The semi-structured interviews provide contextualized understanding of the same aspects examined in the surveys.

**Findings** – The findings reveal that mentees found mentoring/induction experiences with KELI highly valuable. The mentor-mentee matching mechanism together with other structured components in the KELI program such as mentor coaching training and multiple professional learning opportunities was instrumental for promoting a trustful relationship, reciprocal learning, and personalized and growth-based assistance that are key to successful mentoring/induction experiences.

**Research limitations/implications** – The study findings will inform the research-based requirements in KELI's model and further define effective components in serving the unique and varied responsibilities inherent in the AP position.

**Originality/value** – There is a need to identify elements in effective mentoring and induction support for new APs and to encapsulate best practices to further develop skills and dispositions for this important leadership position.

**Keywords** Professional development and mentoring, Educational leadership, Assistant principals, Multi-districts/professional organizations and university partnership

**Paper type** Research paper

## Introduction

The role of leaders in our schools today can be complex and overwhelming as they guide and shape educational outcomes for students and serve in often contentious political environments. With pressing requirements for accountability and increasing acknowledgment of leaders' impact on student learning, leadership positions become increasingly stressful, influential, and time-demanding (Fusarelli and Militello, 2012). For many schools and districts, marked shortages of well-qualified and skilled administrators and attrition during rapid times of change are of paramount concern and demand a targeted approach to developing productive career paths for aspiring leaders (Sciarappa and Mason, 2014). High turnover rates also promulgate the need to tap and develop competencies in the assistant principal position (Barnett *et al.*, 2012). Scores of articles have been written on the relationship between successful leadership and school effectiveness (e.g. Fullan and Hargreaves, 1996; Seashore Louis *et al.*, 2010; Waters and Cameron, 2007). However, much is yet to be understood about the assistant

principalship, the most common entry-level position for an administrative career path (Austin and Brown, 1970; Glanz, 1994a, b).

The limited studies available on the assistant principalship indicate that, though primarily responsible for providing subsidiary support to the principal, teachers, and students, assistant principals (APs hereafter) can perform very different roles depending on the school context and the principal. They can be subject to narrowly defined responsibilities, limited opportunity for development and utilization of potential, and lack of support (Croft and Morton, 1977; Gorton, 1987; Kaplan and Owings, 1999). With continued emphasis on academic achievement, it is eminent that APs move from traditionally perceived managerial roles to job responsibilities focussed on student achievement, school improvement, curriculum programming, and use of data (Barnett *et al.*, 2012). A visionary, career-building approach to support new APs reach their potential is needed (Johnson-Taylor and Martin, 2007).

A new AP is often challenged by first-time perceptions in seeing beyond the walls of the classroom as they encounter new experiences marked with situational dilemmas, resistance, and uncertain expectations. Responsibilities and duties assigned to the AP often involve narrowly defined and unpredictable situations for the inexperienced administrator. The circumstances require the AP to demonstrate particular skills in time management, communication, and problem solving (Barnett *et al.*, 2012). Optimally, new APs should have the opportunity to experience a wide range of responsibilities over time if they are to make a successful transition into the role of principal (Barnett *et al.*, 2012). Easing into new and challenging situations can generate time to develop skills and expand experiences on which the new leader can build. In some situations, however, an AP is often left to specific tasks such as discipline and organizational duties that do not provide them opportunities to refine their overall skills in preparing for the next step as principal. Without the chance to develop important background knowledge and on-the-job skills, refine their beliefs, and reflect on values important to the local school context, a new AP may not encounter situations upon which future leadership skills might best be nurtured – the skills essential to create a culture centered on student learning (Marzano *et al.*, 2005).

According to Leithwood (2005), effective leaders at every level must be ready to respond to the local context of their schools and communities. This is especially important for leaders in rural settings in which strong opinions and distinct improvement challenges exist. Rural leaders must orchestrate a broad range of leadership decisions in a highly visible role. Geographic isolation along with limited resources further exacerbate the complex nature of rural leadership, making recruitment, and retention of skilled leaders even more challenging (Browne-Ferrigno and Maynard, 2005). Creating mentoring structures and socializing networks are particularly beneficial for administrators in rural settings as they reduce isolation and maximize limited school and community resources (Enomoto, 2012; Marzano *et al.*, 2005).

## The role of mentoring
In the USA, effort has increased to provide aspiring principals with specific strategies to understand culture, larger community values, and a balanced school improvement approach as full levels of responsibility are undertaken (Sciarappa and Mason, 2014). Brondyk and Searby (2013) stated that mentoring varies in educational contexts but is often employed for induction and development of administrators. Mentoring and induction programs for new APs can bridge the gap between what new leaders know when they first enter their position and what they need to know in acquiring important

skills while on the job. Mentoring between the novice and experienced school leader can address deficiencies between leadership preparation, theory, and moving into actual practice (Hallinger and Murphy, 1991). Novice leaders who have an opportunity to learn alongside seasoned experienced leaders can acquire important strategies to establish priorities and focus on what matters most (Daresh, 2004). Mentoring plays a key role in the development and growth of first-time practitioners, forms a trusting partnership where one individual shares his or her knowledge and expertise to inform or support the professional learning of another, and subsequently promotes better practice (Alsbury and Hackmann, 2006; Bloom *et al.*, 2005; Parylo *et al.*, 2012; Reyes, 2003; Rhodes and Fletcher, 2013). For individuals with no familiarity in administrative decision making and leadership, "mentoring is essential in preparing for new positions" (Villani, 2006, p. 16).

New leaders in first-time building administrative roles quickly realize that what they learned in university preparation programs is only a beginning and the daunting reality of practice starts when they step foot in the school door. Successful principals often cite mentors as influential in "helping them learn the important things about being a principal" (Young *et al.*, 2005, p. 1). Learning the ropes takes time. Effective mentors are trustworthy; they are committed to the relationship and invested in assisting the new leader in understanding what it takes to be effective (Young *et al.*, 2005). Zachary (2012) postulated that learning is essential for both the mentor and the mentee; the mentoring relationship evolves and continues being explored within a safe and respectful environment. This learning-centered approach to mentoring, defined by mutual goals, contributes to meaningful application and motivated partnering. The mentoring and induction journey, in this description, values the learning and contributions of both the mentor and mentee through guided and contextual reflection. In concert, effective induction of new leaders into the school community leads the way to a more seamless integration into the school culture while bringing necessary orientation and policy information to the threshold. Mentoring is essential to developing growth opportunities for practitioners to investigate inimitable solutions respective of their individual leadership style (Lipton and Wellman, 2003).

Mentoring and induction support provided to new APs can be particularly challenging and the benefits of this support are critical for those experiencing first-time administrative roles (Villani, 2006). Mentors can provide an important link to bridge the gap between the general responsibilities of an AP and consideration of leadership practices that will provide growth toward understanding the full set of dynamics inherent in future principal responsibilities. Supported by mentors, APs are encouraged to reflect on the trajectory to the principalship, establish professional networks, and venture out with new responsibilities, strengthening the ways in which they adapt and think through situations and challenges (Daresh, 2004; Parylo *et al.*, 2012). Sharing knowledge about effective teaching practices and modeling instructional competence are instrumental for novice administrators to establish expectations for accountability in student learning and a school culture that is learner-centered. Mitgang (2007) established that opportunity for mentoring builds reflective skills in instructional leadership. APs, by learning the craft of building relationships with internal and external stakeholders and developing a competent understanding of effective instructional leadership, are better prepared for future leadership expectations inherent in the principalship and more likely to remain in the profession (Sciarappa and Mason, 2014).

## Kansas Educational Leadership Institute (KELI) program overview

The KELI is a collaborative partnership among multiple governmental agencies and professional organizations including the Kansas State University College of Education, Kansas State Department of Education (KSDE), Kansas Association of School Boards, United School Administrators of Kansas, and Kansas School Superintendents Association. KELI provides mentoring and induction to new district and building leaders as well as other leadership positions in the state of Kansas, USA. KELI as a state model provides support to new principals and APs by assigning skilled, veteran principals recommended by their district superintendent. KELI utilizes a highly personalized approach to match mentors and mentees across the state that takes account of geographic location, building level and size, and the specific strengths and experiences of mentors. This process puts the conditions in place to enable strong mentor/mentee relationships to form.

KELI's mission is to collaborate and share resources to support professional growth of educational leaders needed in Kansas schools for the twenty-first century. KELI's mission is further divided into two strands: the mentoring and induction of new superintendents, principals, and other new leaders including APs; and a professional learning strand for all Kansas leaders. KELI's program design is framed around best practice and research and it is governed by a partner-based steering committee and an advisory council comprised of field-based practitioners. KELI is an approved mentoring and induction program by the KSDE and is authorized to recommend new school and district leaders to move to acquiring their professional Kansas license or earn credits toward license renewal upon the completion of the program requirements.

Because of the highly rural nature of Kansas, KELI's design addresses a critical need in rural settings by establishing strong mentoring relationships and unique networking opportunities that allow new leaders to optimize resources and collaborate in otherwise isolated locations. The rural nature of Kansas results in new school and district leaders working long distances from others who lead in similar settings. Common challenges exist for school leaders in rural Kansas where physical location prevents face-to-face collegial encounters and collaboration. In rural school settings, new leaders also wear multiple hats and respond to a wide range of responsibilities resulting from dual position assignments and far-reaching expectations. KELI addresses this acute need in rural settings through comprehensive program requirements that support new leaders in these remote locations. In 2015-2016, the pilot year of KELI's AP service strand, AP mentees represented a range of school and district variations, including a representative group of new leaders in rural districts with limited access and ability to provide mentoring and induction support that meet state requirements.

### Kansas Department of Education Mentoring and Induction Guidelines

The KSDE established policy in May, 2008, and regulatory guidance in October, 2014 to require participation and completion of a minimum of one year of mentoring for initially licensed building and district leaders. Upon completion of a mentoring program during his/her first year in a new position, the building or district leader may then apply for and move to their full professional license in Kansas. Every school district beginning in 2015-2016 must provide or select an approved year-long program of mentoring and induction for all new leaders with an initial license. Local districts must comply with specific guidelines in order to be listed as an approved mentoring and induction program in the state of Kansas. Program components must include

alignment to state and national leadership standards, a minimum of 40 contact hours and three face-to-face meetings, statewide networking opportunities, options for continued support during the second year of practice, program evaluation, and criteria for selection of and training for mentors (Kansas State Department of Education, 2015).

KELI has been ahead of these regulatory guidelines, beginning service to new superintendents in 2011 and new principals in 2013. KELI's program, designed by Kansas practitioners, also exceeds these state benchmark requirements. With the passage of state mentoring and induction regulations, KELI began serving all new position leaders in 2015-2016, including assistant superintendents, APs, and three levels of special education leadership positions.

### AP mentoring and induction program in its first year

The program requirements outlined for new APs mirror the current requirements for building principals. An AP selected to participate in KELI's mentoring and induction program must have the support of his/her district superintendent. An annual fee is set for program participation. Successful completion of KELI's new AP (or principal) mentoring and induction program requirements secures the move to a professional school leader license in Kansas for initially licensed mentees upon program completion.

*Mentor selection and training.* Successful principals are recommended by their superintendents to serve as mentors. Mostly, mentors are currently practicing in Kansas schools with a few cases of recently retired principals for selected situations such as geographic proximity and role similarity. Mentors receive in-depth training on coaching practices (Cheliotes and Reilly, 2010). Online learning modules, practice labs, and coaching demonstrations are integrated in training to help mentors develop and enhance skills in listening, questioning, communicating positive intent, and constructing reflective feedback in a confidential and safe environment. The coaching capacity building provides mentors with a foundation to engage mentees in critical thinking about practice, beliefs, and the impact of everyday decision-making processes. Mentors receive an annual stipend for serving as a mentor and regularly participate selectively in panel discussions at state conferences to share their experiences and professional growth in their service as KELI mentors.

*Program structure.* Interactions between mentors and their respective first year APs include meeting face-to-face at the mentee's school site at least five times during the school year. The mentee also has the opportunity to visit the mentor school site during the year. These mentoring visits allow immediate and more individualized support to new leaders. Technology or phone contact is often utilized for additional communication throughout the year by mentees and mentors. Mentors also complete two on-site performance observations such as a staff meeting, in-service, or another activity jointly agreed upon by the mentee and mentor. The mentor provides confidential and timely feedback to the mentee for the purpose of professional growth. State and national leadership standards inform mentoring practices and discussions relevant to real-life situations and local school context (Council of Chief State School Officers, 2008).

Structured activities and exposure to professional resources are also built into the KELI program. One such resource is a monthly checklist developed by mentors in conjunction with the KELI program coordinator. These checklists outline upcoming reports, tasks, and other important duties for the first year APs (and principals) as they devote time to meet necessary requirements in addition to their daily priorities. Timely research articles often accompany these monthly checklists to provide additional information on topics important to school leaders.

To promote professional community building, mentees are required to attend four professional networking sessions throughout the school year when enrolled in the KELI program. The four sessions include two professional organization meetings (i.e. principal association or other professional organization meeting), one cohort session with other regional/state peers, and one of the multiple leadership workshop/deep learning sessions delivered by field experts on a variety of topics related to education and leadership. Mentees are also encouraged to engage in reflection by sharing brief reports of their learning experiences at these events. Mentees write a culminating reflection at the end of their first year to capture highlights of their professional growth during the year as a new leader.

*Program feedback mechanism.* Ongoing program review is a priority for KELI. Embedded in KELI's practice is a process to acquire formal and informal feedback at multiple points throughout the program duration. In February 2016, informal feedback was solicited from new AP mentees and mentors on this inaugural year of the AP service strand. A high level of satisfaction was expressed and general suggestions to improve the program were offered. These suggestions included incorporating monthly checklists specific to the AP position and athletic director responsibilities, allowing technology platforms to attend certain required events, increasing cohort opportunities, and securing an understanding of the time commitment involved in participating and serving in the program with all direct supervisors. In April, all mentors and mentees currently participating in the KELI program were formally surveyed for experience and program feedback, including the AP service strand and other service strands. Shortly after the survey phase, the researchers started the interview phase, first with the AP mentors and mentees who have given consent and then others in additional service strands. The interview arrangements are scheduled into early Fall 2016.

Within this context, this study was intended to complement and build on the existing literature regarding developing and supporting APs. The purpose was twofold: first, to understand the AP mentees' experiences in participating in the KELI; and second, to understand the mentors' experiences in participating in KELI and their perceptions as to the value of the program in serving new leaders. General feedback on program improvement was an additional benefit to survey and interview results gathered from other participant groups in other service strands. Although some research has explored district-university partnership programs for AP preparation (e.g. Barnett *et al.*, 2009; Marshall and Hooley, 2006), investigations on a state-level multi-district, and university/professional organizations partnership attending to both mentors' and mentees' experiences are rare. This study provides a unique perspective on formal and structured mentoring for APs and the program mentors' views and experiences in serving new school leaders.

## Methods

The researchers employed surveys and interviews for data collection on this project. This paper describes the survey data on AP mentees and a portion of the interview data collected in ongoing research of the AP service strand and other service strands in KELI. The broader research is guided by the following research questions:

- What are the perceptions of the new leader mentees regarding their experiences in the mentoring/induction program with KELI, particularly related to mentor-mentee interactions?

- What are the perceptions of the new leader mentees regarding the quality of the KELI program?

- What are the perceptions of the mentors regarding their experiences in mentoring under the KELI program?

- What are the perceptions of the mentors regarding the quality of the KELI program, particularly related to coaching training for mentors?

- What are the similarities and differences in perceptions of the new leader mentees and mentors regarding their experiences with the KELI program and the mentoring interactions?

For the purpose of this paper, the researchers asked the following two research questions:

*RQ1.* How do the participants of the AP service strand perceive their experiences related to the mentoring under the KELI program?

*RQ2.* What are the perceptions of the participants in the AP service strand on the KELI mentoring/induction program?

*Participants*
The participants included 12 new AP mentees and five mentors currently participating in the AP service strand of the KELI program. Table I summarizes the demographic characteristics of the two groups. Mentees represented all levels of US building types (i.e. elementary-3, middle-4, high school-4, junior/senior high-1). Seven mentees were in their first year of an assistant principalship while the remaining five were either in their second or third year whose school districts requested their enrollment in the KELI mentoring/induction program. The districts represented by the 12 AP mentees included rural, urban, and suburban settings. The school size ranged from 333 to 1,300 students. There were more males ($n = 8$) than females ($n = 4$) in the mentee group. The gender distribution in the mentor group was relatively balanced with three females and two males. All the mentors were practicing principals at the secondary level. All of them were at least in their second year as KELI mentors.

*Instrumentation*
Two comparable questionnaires were designed, one for mentors and one for mentees. Both Likert-scale and open-ended questions were used in the surveys. The surveys

| | Mentees ($n = 12$) (%) | Mentors ($n = 5$) (%) |
|---|---|---|
| *Gender* | | |
| Female | 34 | 60 |
| Male | 67 | 40 |
| *Ethnicity* | | |
| Anglo-Caucasian | 92 | 100 |
| Hispanic | 18 | – |
| *School level* | | |
| Elementary | 25 | – |
| Middle | 33 | 40 |
| High | 33 | 60 |
| Other | 9 | – |
| Years of serving as KELI mentor | n/a | 2.4 years |

Table I.
Demographics of AP
mentees and mentors

focussed on the perceptions of the mentees and mentors on the general effectiveness of the program, approaches used in mentoring and induction, and the intensity of the engagement, as well as the mentees' learning experiences.

Data collection also included semi-structured interviews. The mentor and mentee interview protocols, though independent, were constructed to provide comparable data related to the following four areas: past experience with mentorship; view on mentorship; practical aspects of mentoring experienced in KELI; and feedback related to the KELI program. Refined interview protocols are to be used for future interviews with new rounds of AP mentees and mentors served by the program.

With slightly different language to differentiate the mentee from the mentor, the interview protocols used for the interviews (of which data were included for analysis for the purpose of this paper) consisted of the following questions:

(1) Could you tell me about your past experiences with mentoring formally or informally?

(2) How would you define mentoring?

(3) What are the roles do you think a mentor provides to a mentee?

(4) What are the strategies or processes that (your mentor/you have) used and (you/ your mentee) found to be helpful?

(5) Walk me through a specific time/incident where (your mentor was/you were) able to help (you/your mentee) effectively.

(6) Were there circumstances that those helpful strategies or processes that you noted above did not work? Could you walk me through a couple of such situations?

(7) What aspects of the KELI program do you find most helpful to you professionally and career wise? Could you please give me an example?

(8) Are there components/things you would like to change or add to the KELI program?

*Procedures*
The surveys were administered online via Qualtrics. The invitation e-mails were sent to the potential participants followed by a second e-mail containing the survey link. The potential participants were informed that their participation was anonymous and voluntary. In the end of the surveys, participants were invited to participate in the interview phase, and by providing their contact information and best time to contact, the participants gave the researchers permission to follow up with them for interview time and location arrangement. The survey part and the invitation for interview part were established independently in the Qualtrics system to ensure the anonymity of the survey respondents. Only the researchers and a graduate student assistant had access to the survey results through a passcode protected log-in. The researchers conducted the two interviews independently. Prior to the interviews, arrangements were made with respondents for convenient times and locations for the interviews. The interview with the AP mentor was conducted over the phone by one of the researchers of the study who is a member of the KELI program staff. The researcher and AP mentor maintained strict adherence to the interview question protocol, verified by a second researcher via audio-recording of the session. The interview with the AP mentee was

conducted face-to-face by another researcher at a location convenient to the mentee. In both cases, informed consent forms were signed. Both interviews were audio-recorded and transcribed; extensive notes were taken by the interviewers and typed up following the session.

*Analyses and data reporting*
The limited number of participants ($n = 17$) did not permit psychometric statistical analysis. Analysis of the survey data entailed an examination of basic statistics and the items' means. Thematic analysis (Guest, 2012) was applied to the qualitative data from the open-ended survey questions and interviews. The two researchers conducted coding independently on the qualitative data first and then reviewed for coding consistency. An examination of the themes found in the two sources of actual narratives was also conducted as a way to connect with and reassess the quantitative findings. Discrepancies were resolved through re-assessment of the codes and consensus building between the two researchers. Categorization of codes and generation of themes followed the similar review-and-agreement process (Denzin and Lincoln, 2010).

*Limitations*
Before turning to the findings, it is important to note the limited sample of 12 APs and five mentors from Kansas participating in the KELI program does not warrant generalization to the greater population of educators in similar roles across the state and in other parts of the country. Nevertheless, the study does shed light on the experiences and perspectives of APs and their mentors in a statewide multi-district-university/professional organizations partnership, and provide a foundation on which to collect additional data from APs and other new leaders as well as program quality in future contexts. The qualitative data, the interview narratives in particular, provide a situated understanding of a diverse group of APs' experiences and perceptions about their initial year in the position.

Because the mentor survey did not differentiate the types of mentees (i.e. new principal or new AP) that the mentor was mentoring, it was impossible to tease out the five AP mentors' survey responses from those of the remaining building-level mentors. The researchers were not able to conduct the mentor-mentee comparison on the quantitative data for the current study. A new routing mechanism has been added into the Qualtrics to allow sorting among different mentor groups for future program participants. The mentee survey included an item asking about the respondents' current position, which allowed the researchers to separate all 12 AP mentees' survey responses from those of the principal mentees. Out of the 12 AP surveys, two were unusable due to incompleteness.

## Findings
The KELI AP service strand in its pilot year was modeled after the principal service strand where the latter has received positive feedback from all participants for two consecutive years. AP mentors were selected for their knowledge and experience of the AP role and previous experience serving as a KELI principal mentor. Also considered was the mentors' ability to acclimate the KELI principal mentoring and induction program requirements to fit the needs of the AP. Informal feedback received from the pilot year AP mentees and mentors indicated the principal program requirements provided a strong foundation for AP mentoring. In the sections below, the survey results consider data related to *RQ1* and *RQ2*.

*Survey results*

In the following, the survey results were reported based on the responses to the survey questions mostly designed on a five-point high-low ranking scale. The mentee survey contained questions primarily on three areas: basic demographics, building-level leadership standards, and program quality. For example, one item in the standard section was: please rate your response to the following statements on Standard 1 – Shared School Vision of Learning, with "1" being "very low," "3" being "average," and "5" being "very high." The statements were: "This standard is important to my job for the first 12 months," "This standard is important to my job for the future," "My self-assessment of current progress/performance on this standard," and "KELI program has helped me develop and set goals related to this standard." The intention was to capture the possible variations in the participants' self-defined priorities among and growth on the leadership standards at the time of completing the program (which is the end of their first year of the position) in relation to their after-first year developmental focus. For the program quality category, the respondents were asked to rate their (dis)agreement to the statements. For example, one of the statements to be rated was "The coaching I receive from my mentor strengthens my problem-solving skills," based on a five-point scale with "1" being "disagree," "3" being "undecided," and "5" being "agree."

Table II provides the means and standard deviations (SDs) related to AP respondents' rankings on the standard items. An SD measures the level of variation among the observed data points for a variable under study. When the sample size is small, caution on interpreting the results is noted, for the results are more vulnerable to outliers (also known as extreme values). In general, all ratings were high with either at or above 4, indicating that they perceived the leadership standards as equally important relative to each other (between the standards) and relative to their first year and future status. These ratings provide insight into *RQ1* relative to mentees' perceptions of their mentoring experiences in the KELI program. However, in general, the advocacy standard had the lowest ratings across all four statements. Such results were not surprising given a leader's capacity to advocate takes a maturity in job-related competencies as well as a sense of establishment or acceptance by the community which new leaders are less likely to possess. New leaders identified handling tasks related to management and vision building as pressing needs in the survey results as both items were rated very high in importance but much lower in their self-assessment ratings. The ratings on KELI's assistance on goal setting for standards, though high (at least four out of five), were on average lower than the ratings of self-assessment and importance. Nevertheless, variations under this category were high, indicated by the SDs mostly at 0.9-1.0. As revealed in Table III, further examination of program quality

| Building leadership standards | Importance to the job | | | | Self-assessment | | KELI assistance on goal setting | |
| | First 12 months | | Future | | | | | |
| | Mean | SD | Mean | SD | Mean | SD | Mean | SD |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| 1. Shared school vision of learning | 4.9 | 0.3 | 4.7 | 0.8 | 4.2 | 0.8 | 4 | 0.9 |
| 2. School learning culture | 4.8 | 0.4 | 4.8 | 0.4 | 4.4 | 0.8 | 4 | 0.9 |
| 3. Management | 4.9 | 0.3 | 4.7 | 0.7 | 4.4 | 0.5 | 4.3 | 0.8 |
| 4. Collaboration | 4.7 | 0.7 | 4.7 | 0.7 | 4.5 | 0.7 | 4.1 | 1.0 |
| 5. Professional ethics | 4.8 | 0.6 | 4.8 | 0.4 | 4.6 | 0.7 | 4.2 | 0.9 |
| 6. Advocacy | 4.5 | 0.8 | 4.6 | 0.8 | 4.3 | 0.8 | 4.1 | 1.0 |

**Note:** $n = 10$

**Table II.**
Leadership standard items, means, and standard deviation by year 1 and future

| Program quality item | Mean | SD |
|---|---|---|
| Overall program helpfulness | 4.5 | 0.7 |
| Mentor's 4 face-to-face visits to the AP's school | 4.6 | 0.7 |
| Site visit to mentor's school | 4.4 | 1.0 |
| Small group cohort meetings with area mentors and mentees | 4.6 | 0.7 |
| Additional distance communication between mentor and AP | 4.4 | 0.8 |
| Mentor's feedback on performance observation | 4.8 | 0.6 |
| Monthly checklist | 4.5 | 0.8 |
| Professional meeting (at least one) | 4.8 | 0.6 |
| Beginning meeting of all mentors and mentees | 4.3 | 1.0 |
| End of school year meeting of all mentors and mentees | 4.1 | 0.9 |
| Utilization of coaching behaviors modeled by mentor | 4.7 | 0.7 |
| Mentor's coaching helps mentee's problem-solving skills | 4.5 | 0.7 |
| Recommendation of KELI for first year leaders | 4.4 | 0.7 |

Table III.
Program quality items, means, and standard deviation

indicators provides a more nuanced understanding of perceptions and experiences of AP mentees in the program for *RQ1*.

Table III presents the means and SDs related to AP respondents' rankings on the program quality items, capturing survey results related to *RQ2*. All items were rated high by the respondents, with at least four (out of five). The three components rated highest by the AP mentees were mentor's feedback on performance observation, attending professional meetings, and utilization of coaching behaviors modeled by his or her mentor. All three also had relatively lower SDs, indicating a higher level of agreement among all respondents. The results were further supported by the qualitative data in the open-ended survey questions and interviews, which will be further discussed in the following paragraphs. Echoing the literature (Daresh, 2004; Parylo *et al.*, 2012), the mentees found program components that were closely tied with their job responsibilities and more targeted based on their individual contexts to be most beneficial.

### Themes
The qualitative data provided the researchers more contextualized understanding of the participants' experiences and perceptions related to mentoring and other program components under KELI. In this section, the themes are presented, corresponding to the research questions that guided this research. All names related to persons, organizations, and locations are pseudonyms.

Themes related to *RQ1*: how do the participants of the AP service strand perceive their experiences related to the mentoring under the KELI program? The first theme, keys to successful mentoring experiences, includes three subthemes: a compatibility rooted in shared values; a trustful relationship between a mentor and a mentee; and reciprocal learning. These three subthemes address *RQ1*. Elaboration of these subthemes are provided as follows.

The literature on mentoring noted the importance of the mentor-mentee compatibility (Lipton and Wellman, 2003; Young *et al.*, 2005). Embedded in the KELI program structure, multiple criteria have been used for mentor-mentee pairing, including positional/role similarities, professional experiences relevancy, geographic proximity, and even key dispositional compatibility. Such a multi-facet consideration benefits from a collective and accumulated knowledge and personal and professional connection that KELI staff have established and maintained over the years with state

district leaders and community constituents. As Marshall, the AP mentee, noted about his KELI mentor, Marcus, "Deep down, there is no difference between him and I in terms of how I am or he is as a person and how I want or he wants to lead." Marshall commented, though he and his mentor differed in some other aspects such as organizational style, they operated from the same fundamental principles. He continued to note that it was important for novice leaders to have someone who was similar and yet different to expand their perspectives. Marshall noted that an effective mentor is a professional and life coach for the mentee:

> The mentor will help the mentee to grow in [his or her] position, learn what is needed through trials and errors, celebrate [his or her] successes, and get [him or her] to really look into deeply why [he or she] was successful here but not there.

Likewise, Doug, the AP mentor, shared that good mentors take the mentee where he or she is and expresses a personal interest in him or her by making connections on a personal and professional level. "Coaching with patience is an important role for a mentor," Doug said, "you need to ask questions to help the mentee reflect on whether a solution is competent and will stand the test of time."

As noted in the literature, a healthy mentoring relationship is a trusting partnership that promotes mutual learning and better practice (Alsbury and Hackmann, 2006; Bloom *et al.*, 2005). Doug noted in the interview that an effective mentor needs to "listen with empathy" and create and maintain a relationship where the mentee feels safe to "move past being guarded." "You need to leave your ego at the door;" he commented, "It is not about you, the mentor; you are there to help these young and new leaders." Marshall had similar responses:

> As a first year person, I really don't have anybody that I can trust, I mean, trust 100%. I have to learn where I can go with these people [colleagues in his school] […]. It is just nice knowing that I can talk to someone who is not in my district about things that I probably would not tell my supervisor right off the bat.

For mentees, quality mentors function like their "sounding boards" and "confidants" who stay "true to themselves" and not pretentious about "real life struggles that [they] continue to face" as veteran administrators. As Marshall noted:

> […] when he [the mentor] is transparent with you and shows you like "here are my negatives," it helps you to put your defenses aside because then it is like that he is not all on the stage; he is trying to show me that it is okay that I have struggles.

Also, the learning in a mentoring relationship can be mutual. Though mentors are typically the ones who have more knowledge and expertise to share with the mentees and inform or support the professional learning of another, the mentors learn soft skills and benefit in the area of self-realization, as other researchers have indicated (Rekha and Ganesh, 2012; Thornton, 2014). Doug said that he was "thankful to serve as a mentor." He noted, "not only mentees but also mentors benefit from exchanging thoughts and engaging meaningful discussions around leadership roles out of similar experiences and challenges." Likewise, Marshall shared that his mentor, Marcus, told him after visiting his school and witnessing how he handled a situation with an upset parent, "I've never seen anyone do that. I am going to take that back with me. I like how you handled the situation." "It is important for a mentor to be open minded," Marshall said, "Marcus is like that […] [someone] continues to get better with [his] craft […]. We are all learning. If you can embrace that, it is not awkward anymore."

Themes related to *RQ2*: what are the perceptions of the participants in the AP service strand on the KELI mentoring/induction program? The second theme, program strengths, includes two subthemes: personalized assistance; and content and activities are growth based. These two subthemes address *RQ2*. In practice, the two subthemes were intertwined as they are manifested in the KELI's structured coaching training for mentors and guided interactions and tasks required between mentors and mentees (as also revealed in the survey results). For example, the component of performance demonstration in the KELI program was found to be particularly beneficial by mentors and mentees. The mentor and mentee agree on a leadership activity in which the mentor will observe and then provide direct, timely, and confidential feedback to the mentee. "As mentors, you are along for the trip," Doug noted, "you work with the new leader to make connections with [his or her] current duties and build an avenue to relevancy and potentials." Marshall also noted that his mentor, Marcus, paid close attention to his needs and goals:

> When we first met and throughout the process, he [Marcus] often started our conversation with questions like "What are your daily challenges?", "What are the things that you are good at?" and "What would you like to be five years from now?"

Networking has been noted as crucial in one's professional growth (Parylo *et al.*, 2012; Sciarappa and Mason, 2014). Participants in this study valued the networking opportunity that KELI has provided to them. Marshall commented:

> It is nice to meet someone outside my district […]. It is nice to go out there and know someone who is not affected by some of the issues […] things that I need to get off of my chest and I can just openly talk. Another nice thing about KELI […]. KELI kind of helps speed things up on that end, whether meeting with other first year administrators or the mentors; it is nice to have that network expanded.

The cohort experience was found to be valuable by both the mentor and mentee participants.

Another component embedded in KELI program requirements included professional resources and monthly checklists sent to mentees that provide useful suggestions to plan for upcoming tasks or required reports. Marshall shared that he was excited to notice that his building principal also utilized the monthly checklists when checking in with him on work planning and progress. Doug commented, "The monthly resources speak to good practices and/or critical events that are 'in the news' affecting all school districts." Doug stressed that "mentees should be encouraged to stay socio-politically informed" and KELI needs to continue "playing a critical role in stimulating conversations around state and national topics." The monthly checklists initiated meaningful discussion between the mentor and mentee on specific responsibilities and duties in the AP role and in broadening the AP's understanding of leadership issues.

The four service strands (the assistant and head positions at both the building and district levels) provided by KELI reflect a trajectory that mentees can envision as they contemplate and seek potential support in upwardly mobile careers. Such benefits were exemplified by Marshall's responses:

> It is nice knowing that KELI is also going to help [me] in the next step, there will be superintendents all around me. Just getting me further and further into the networks of people who are already doing this. As far as the trajectory, you don't get a trajectory if you don't do your current job well. I have support from my KELI mentor […] the checklist from KELI, my principal has the same one, […] the network […] the district is definitely behind all these [supporting me attending KELI related activities].

The interview data on the benefits of structured program components confirm the survey results. As noted above, the items rated the highest by the AP mentees were mentors' feedback on performance observation, attending professional meetings, and utilization of coaching behaviors modeled by his or her mentor – items that were highly individualized and developmental in nature. Recommendation was also made by the participants to formalize the commitment by the district to clarify expectations, time commitments, and outcomes as well as provide a clear description of mentor/mentee interaction defined in program requirements. Allowing mentees to have input into the decision would help in some cases to solidify support and to offset any perception that the mentor or program will be a "burden" rather than a "benefit"; it helps signify to mentees that participation in KELI is an investment in leadership and that the district office will support activities that require time out of the building.

## Implications
Several implications are evident from this initial research on the perceptions of mentees and mentors regarding their participation in the KELI mentoring and induction program for APs. First, continued growth in serving this important segment of new leaders through increased field practitioner awareness will support APs as a vital leadership group serving schools and communities. As newly appointed APs and district superintendents who support their participation become more aware of KELI's service to this segment of school leaders, development of professional skills of APs will benefit individual learning environments as well as the profession at-large.

Second, data derived from larger participation in the KELI AP program will enable researchers to consider meaningful analysis around APs as a group and disaggregated groups such as new APs and mentors in rural settings. Data collection methods to establish statistical analysis and comparison trends between mentors and mentees in this leadership group will become increasingly viable, allowing researchers to share important findings with state, national, and international mentoring and induction programs. Cumulative qualitative data obtained from mentees and mentors in the current and future AP groups will also deepen the understanding of critical components in providing highly individualized and targeted support to new AP school leaders and inform principals and other school leaders about effective methods to support AP development.

A third implication for research regarding mentoring for APs in the KELI program is to provide training and communication of expectations to KELI mentors regarding the use of state and national leadership preparation standards in their mentoring practices. Mentor and practitioner input will shape initial and anticipated direction for incorporating leadership standards into program requirements and provide impetus to inform educational leadership preparation programs and faculty who guide initial development of knowledge, skills, and dispositions. Embedded conversations of how leadership standards interconnect and influence practice in the first year and future years should be explored, as well as additional emphasis on educating new leaders about advocacy in the profession.

A fourth implication for mentoring new APs is evident in continued analysis and evaluation of program effectiveness. Literature defining quality components for mentoring principals abounds while differentiating mentoring interactions to best meet the needs of APs necessitates further dialogue. These components require a continued effort to align experiences and strengths of mentors placed with new APs, differentiation for responsibilities and expectations of the principal, and alignment with career goals of the mentee. Furthermore, an increased emphasis on building capacity

by networking in cohorts, exposure to best practice resources, and a responsive attitude of KELI program planners to embrace the ever-changing landscape of leadership in today's schools by staying attuned to mentor and mentee feedback will be required. As KELI impacts AP development on a state level through quality programming, this knowledge will result in continual improvement in meeting the needs of twenty-first century leadership. Additionally, other state, national, and international programs can learn from the experiences of initial KELI program planners in forming successful statewide partnerships to support the critical role leaders play in our local schools and districts.

The mentor vested in the success of the AP and the new leader who is beginning his or her initial journey with an unmatched desire to make a positive difference for students, combines for a partnership that will have long-lasting impact. KELI, as a mentoring and induction program serving new leaders in Kansas, provides a meaningful setting to make important contributions to the literature and research in defining best practices to support new APs in their quest to achieve positive outcomes in career development and in influencing the educational environment.

## Conclusions
High-quality mentoring and induction for APs is vital. This paper provided an example of one statewide model supporting the development of leadership capacity in the AP position as an indispensable role in serving students, staff, and the school community. In the face of complex and political dynamics, new leaders must form an initial and timely understanding of important values held in their local communities (Leithwood, 2005). In addition, a clear focus on student learning, instructional improvement, and effective communication (Barnett *et al.*, 2012) are expectations of all school leaders. New APs, by learning from experienced leaders who serve as their mentors, gain significant insight into daily practices aligned with these expectations (Daresh, 2004; Mitgang, 2007). This paper shared important perspectives from program participants about embracing a new set of system responsibilities and finding ways to embody, adapt, and respond to situational challenges encountered in the AP role.

Forming critical attributes in leadership skills and dispositions in the AP career path leading to future leadership roles is enhanced by experienced mentors bridging the gap between preparation and practice in the professional growth of APs. This support promotes a more career-focussed path to helping each new AP grasp and understand their potential influence and transition more smoothly into future administrative roles (Barnett *et al.*, 2012; Johnson-Taylor and Martin, 2007).

Current evidence showcases the need for establishing clear expectations for mentors to embed leadership standards in their interactions and program practices. Likewise, building leaders need increased opportunities to understand the critical voice and role they have in advocating for education in their school, community, and in larger venues including state and national discussions. Increased confidence in management responsibilities and a better understanding of the importance of vision in school culture also require attention in mentoring conversations and program resources.

KELI mentees have outlined value in receiving feedback from mentors on individual performance demonstrations, attendance at professional meetings, and modeling of coaching behaviors by mentors. Also acknowledged as an effective approach in the program design is the consistent yet flexible and clear communication of expectations that enables personalized mentoring experiences tailored to the specific role responsibilities of individual APs.

KELI, in its initial year of service to new APs, provides a structured approach to mentoring of new APs in educational settings, including those in highly rural and diverse areas. The KELI model, built on effective program requirements and implementation for principals and superintendents, continues to grow in its impact and understanding of adaptations needed to support each level of school and district leader, widening the perspective of responsibilities and opportunities inherent in nowadays leadership positions.

## References

Alsbury, T.L. and Hackmann, D.G. (2006), "Learning from experience: initial findings of a mentoring/induction program for novice principals and superintendents", *Planning and Changing*, Vol. 37 Nos 3/4, pp. 169-189.

Austin, D.G. and Brown, H. Jr (1970), *Report of the Assistant Principal, Vol. 3: The Study of the Secondary School Principalship*, National Association of Secondary School Principals, Washington, DC.

Barnett, B.G., Copland, M.A. and Shoho, A.R. (2009), "The use of internships in preparing school leaders", in Crow, G., Murphy, J., Ogawa, R. and Young, M. (Eds), *Handbook of Research on the Education of School Leaders*, Routledge, New York, NY, pp. 371-379.

Barnett, B.G., Shoho, A.R. and Oleszewski, A.M. (2012), "The job realities of beginning and experienced assistant principals", *Leadership and Policy in Schools*, Vol. 11 No. 1, pp. 92-128.

Bloom, G., Castagna, C., More, E. and Warren, B. (2005), *Blended Coaching: Skills and Strategies to Support Principal Development*, Corwin Press, Thousand Oaks, CA.

Brondyk, S. and Searby, L. (2013), "Best practices in mentoring: complexities and possibilities", *International Journal of Mentoring and Coaching in Education*, Vol. 2 No. 3, pp. 189-203.

Browne-Ferrigno, T. and Maynard, B. (2005), "Meeting the learning needs of students: a rural high-need school district's systemic leadership development initiative", *The Rural Educator*, Vol. 26 No. 3, pp. 5-18.

Cheliotes, L. and Reilly, M. (2010), *Coaching Conversations*, Corwin Press, Thousand Oaks, CA.

Council of Chief State School Officers (2008), *Educational Leadership Policy Standards*, ISLLC, Washington, DC.

Croft, J.C. and Morton, J.R. (1977), "The assistant principal: in quandary or comfort?", paper presented at the annual meeting of the American Educational Research Association, ERIC Document Production Service No. ED136392, New York, NY, April.

Daresh, J.C. (2004), "Mentoring school leaders: professional promise or predictable problems?", *Educational Administrative Quarterly*, Vol. 40 No. 4, pp. 495-517.

Denzin, N.K. and Lincoln, Y.S. (2010), "Introduction: the discipline and practice of qualitative research", in Denzin, N.K. and Lincoln, Y.S. (Eds), *The Sage Handbook of Qualitative Research*, 4th ed., Sage, Thousand Oaks, CA, pp. 1-20.

Enomoto, E.K. (2012), "Professional development for rural school assistant principals", *Planning and Changing*, Vol. 43 Nos 3/4, pp. 260-279.

Fullan, M. and Hargreaves, A. (1996), *What's Worth Fighting for in Your School?*, Teachers College Press, New York, NY.

Fusarelli, B.C. and Militello, M. (2012), "Racing to the top with leaders in rural, high poverty schools", *Planning and Changing*, Vol. 43 Nos 1/2, pp. 46-56.

Glanz, J. (1994a), "Dilemmas of assistant principals in their supervisory role: reflections of an assistant principal", *Journal of School Leadership*, Vol. 4 No. 5, pp. 577-590.

Glanz, J. (1994b), "Where did the assistant principalship begin? Where is it headed?", *NASSP Bulletin*, Vol. 78 No. 564, pp. 35-40.

Gorton, R. (1987), "Improving the assistant principalship: the principal's contribution", *NASSP Bulletin*, Vol. 71 No. 501, pp. 1-5.

Guest, G. (2012), *Applied Thematic Analysis*, Sage, Thousand Oaks, CA.

Hallinger, P. and Murphy, J. (1991), "Developing leaders for tomorrow's schools", *Phi Delta Kappan*, Vol. 72 No. 7, pp. 514-520.

Johnson-Taylor, C. and Martin, M.B. (2007), "Preparing assistant principals for the principalship", *Principal Leadership*, Vol. 7 No. 8, pp. 22-25.

Kansas State Department of Education (2015), *District Mentor and Induction Program Guidelines*, Kansas State Department of Education, Topeka, KS.

Kaplan, L.S. and Owings, W.A. (1999), "Assistant principals: the case for shared instructional leadership", *NASSP Bulletin*, Vol. 83 No. 610, pp. 80-94.

Leithwood, K. (2005), *Educational Leadership: A Review of the Research*, The Laboratory for Student Success, Philadelphia, PA.

Lipton, L. and Wellman, B. (2003), *Mentoring Matters: A Practical Guide to Learning-Focused Relationships*, MiraVia, LLC, Charlotte, VT.

Marshall, C. and Hooley, R.M. (2006), *The Assistant Principal: Leadership Choices and Challenge*, 2nd ed., Corwin Press, Thousand Oaks, CA.

Marzano, R.J., Waters, T. and McNulty, B. (2005), *School Leadership that Works: From Research to Results*, Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development, Alexandria, VA.

Mitgang, L. (2007), *Getting Principal Mentoring Right: Lessons from the Field*, Perspective, Wallace Foundation, Eugene, OR.

Parylo, O., Zepeda, S.J. and Bengston, E. (2012), "The different faces of principal mentorship", *International Journal of Mentoring and Coaching in Education*, Vol. 2 No. 1, pp. 120-135.

Rekha, K.N. and Ganesh, M.P. (2012), "Do mentors learn by mentoring others?", *International Journal of Mentoring and Coaching in Education*, Vol. 1 No. 3, pp. 205-217.

Reyes, A. (2003), "The relationship of mentoring to job placement in school administration", *NASSP Bulletin*, Vol. 87 No. 635, pp. 45-64.

Rhodes, C. and Fletcher, S. (2013), "Coaching and mentoring for self-efficacious leadership in schools", *International Journal of Mentoring and Coaching in Education*, Vol. 2 No. 1, pp. 47-63.

Sciarappa, K. and Mason, C. (2014), "National principal mentoring: does it achieve its purpose?", *International Journal of Mentoring and Coaching in Education*, Vol. 3 No. 1, pp. 51-71.

Seashore Louis, K., Leithwood, K., Wahlstrom, K. and Anderson, S. (2010), *Learning from Leadership: Investigating the Links to Improved Student Learning*, University of Minnesota Center for Applied Research and Educational Improvement, Minneapolis, MN.

Thornton, K. (2014), "Mentors as educational leaders and change agents", *International Journal of Mentoring and Coaching in Education*, Vol. 3 No. 1, pp. 18-31.

Villani, S. (2006), *Mentoring and Induction Programs that Support New Principals*, Corwin Press, Thousand Oaks, CA.

Waters, T. and Cameron, G. (2007), *The Balanced Leadership Framework: Connecting Vision with Action*, McRel, Denver, CO.

Young, P.G., Sheets, J.M. and Knight, D.D. (2005), *Mentoring Principals: Frameworks, Agendas, Tips, and Case Stories for Mentors and Mentees*, Corwin Press, Thousand Oaks, CA.

Zachary, L.J. (2012), *The Mentor's Guide: Facilitating Effective Learning Relationships*, Jossey-Bass, San Francisco, CA.

**About the authors**
Jia Liang is an Assistant Professor in the Department of Educational Leadership at Kansas State University (USA). Her research interests focus on school leadership, teacher professional development in STEM, equity for women and racial minorities, and leaders' dispositions and practices in community engagement. She holds a PhD from the University of Georgia in Educational Administration and Policy. Jia Liang is the corresponding author and can be contacted at: gliang15@ksu.edu

Donna Augustine-Shaw is an Assistant Professor in the Department of Educational Leadership at Kansas State University (USA). She also serves as the Associate Director for the Kansas Educational Leadership Institute. Her research interests include the superintendency and mentoring and induction for new leaders, building and district-level leadership preparation, school/district partnerships, school improvement, and change. She holds an EdD from Wichita State University in Educational Administration.