MINNESOTA PRINCIPALS ACADEMY

A growing body of research underscores the critical role principals play in creating great schools and helping students succeed. Principals set the vision, guide instruction, build the budget, unite the team and lead the drive for results. Their jobs are an extraordinary mix of small details and big ideas, of crisis management and long range planning. "A large number of quantitative studies in North America…show that school leadership influences [student] performance more than any other variable except socio-economic background and the quality of teaching."[1]

Despite the critical and challenging role of the principalship, relatively few principals receive ongoing professional development that enhances their ability to lead schools to high performance. The University of Minnesota sees the ongoing professional development of school leaders as an essential driving force in efforts to improve student learning, close achievement gaps and increase postsecondary completion across the state.

The University of Minnesota's College of Education and Human Development offers a principal executive development program that explicitly connects theory to practice. The thirty-day program is grounded in the National Institute for School Leadership curriculum used in the Minnesota Principals Academy since 2006. The enhanced Principals Academy includes content created and led by University of Minnesota faculty in addition to facilitators who are principals, tailored to unique challenges and opportunities that are present in Minnesota.

In addition to the comprehensive curriculum, participants use the Instructional Leadership Instrument, a tool to self-evaluate their own leadership strengths and opportunities for growth and the Learning Context Assessment to assess the school's current context and identify focuses instructionally and organizationally. The results of these instruments serve as data points as the participant determines the focus of their Action Learning Project. The Action Learning project is an ongoing component of the Principals Academy where participants delve deeply into an instructional issue or area relevant to leading their school to excellence and high achievement.

The Minnesota Principals Academy is designed to be not only a comprehensive executive development program focused on a coherent standards-based instructional system, but also a path to continuous learning.

[1] Barber, M., Whelan, F., Clark, M., 2010. "Capturing the leadership premium: how the world's top school systems are building leadership capacity for the future." McKinsey & Company. p. 5.

Curriculum Overview

Course 1: World Class Schooling: Vision and Goals

- Unit 1: The Educational Challenge
- Unit 2: Principal as Strategic Thinker
- Unit 3: Elements of Standards-Aligned Instructional Systems

Course 2: Focus on Teaching and Learning

- Unit 4: Foundations of Effective Learning
- Unit 5: Leadership in the Instructional Core Part 1: Language Arts and History
- Unit 6: Leadership in the Instructional Core Part 2: Mathematics and Science
- *Addition from U of M*: Leadership for Special Populations
- Unit 7: Coaching for High Quality Teaching and Teacher Development & Evaluation

Course 3: Sustaining Transformation through Capacity and Commitment

- Unit 8: Promoting the Learning Organization
- Unit 9: Teams for Instructional Leadership
- Unit 10: Ethical Leadership for Equity
- Unit 11: Driving and Sustaining Transformation
- Unit 12: Final Case Simulation and Action Learning Project Presentations

Unit Descriptions

Unit 1: The Educational Challenge	This unit explains why fundamental changes in the international economy have resulted in greatly raised educational requirements for all citizens in the advanced economies, and why social development and ethical behavior are no less important than high academic achievement. It helps the participant make a realistic assessment of the challenges that schools must meet if the new standards are to be achieved. A key challenge includes the corrosive effect of pervasive low expectations for many poor and minoritized students. And it is designed to help the participants accept and embrace the goal of getting every student ready for college without remediation by the time that student leaves high school. Includes a self-assessment of leadership. *Main Themes/Concepts*: • The principals will understand the individual principal's role in meeting challenges in the new context of 21st century globalization. • Standards-based education requires and provides a powerful set of strategies. • All students can and must meet high standards.

	• Race plays a significant role in the education of students. Therefore, leaders must be racially conscious leaders in addition to understanding issues of equity surrounding socioeconomic status. • Keys to success are alignment/coherence of all elements of a standards-aligned system, strategic thinking about how all students can achieve high standards, and an unrelenting focus on results.
Unit 2: **The Principal as Strategic Thinker**	The purpose of this unit is to enable the participant to think strategically about the challenges he or she faces and to put together a clear and powerful strategy for addressing those challenges. Much of this unit draws on experience from business and the military, but the participant is also asked throughout to apply what is learned to the world of the school—for example, they examine their own school visions against criteria for effective visions. Participants are introduced to the distinctions among tactical, operational, and strategic thinking. They are also introduced to the elements of planning and decision making required both to construct a viable strategy and to execute it successfully. Case Studies are used in this unit. *Main Themes/Concepts:* • The principal must lead the effort and motivate a school team to create and commit to a vision of where the school wants to be over a period of years; develop a strategy to implement that vision; build action plans to execute the strategy; and apply a process for measuring accomplishments. • An effective conceptual framework for strategic thinking starts with an examination of the context and the vision, and includes consideration of assumptions, interests, objectives, capabilities, threats, and risks. • To evaluate a school vision, the principal should ask whether or not the vision is achievable and doable; is focused on results; leads to accountability; is measurable, simple and clear; is actionable; whether it lends itself to a strategy to accomplish the vision; leads to hard choices, and whether it is worth fighting for. • An understanding of decision making models—rational actor, organizational processes, bureaucratic politics, and dominant personality—helps the principal turn thought into priorities, effective action, and powerful practice.
Unit 3: **Elements of Standards-Aligned Instructional Systems**	The purpose of this unit is to help the participant develop a sophisticated understanding of the components of the elements of standards-aligned instructional systems and the ways those components can be combined to produce very powerful effects on student performance. In this unit participants are introduced to the

	NISL Wheel of a standards-aligned instructional system and focus in on the area of High-Quality Aligned Instructional Systems. Most important, they learn what the role of the principal is in assuring that his or her school has a fully-aligned instructional system that is focused on the standards and is internally coherent and consistent.
	Main Themes/Concepts:
	• A standards-based instructional system includes several critical elements: high quality standards for all students; well-designed curriculum frameworks, syllabi and instructional material based on the frameworks and the standards, formative assessment keyed to progressions, summative assessment based on curriculum, and cleat gateways and safety nets for students.
	• Performance standards and assessments should drive teaching and learning in standards-based schools.
	• Principals must be able to distinguish between content standards and performance standards.
	• Assessments should be used to revise instructional strategies and align them to the standards and curriculum framework.
	• Every child not achieving high standards will need the support of a comprehensive safety net system—mostly beyond the bell.
Unit 4: Foundations of Effective Learning	Unit 4 is the anchor of course two where we turn our attention to the system of the classroom. This unit is a detailed exploration in learning built on three premises: (1) learning is the core business of schools, and is follows that "student learning" is an essential attribute of school leaders. (2) There is a strong evidence-based agreement around how people learn. (3) A coherent view of learning is essential to achieving an aligned instructional system.
	Main Concepts/Themes:
	• Understand the main ideas about learning that reflect the current state of knowledge in the learning sciences and how these ideas relate to enhancing learners' capacity to learn.
	• Explore how mindsets impact the capacity to learn and how to support and develop mindsets.
	• An articulation of the essential connections between language and learning and that language must be addressed in each discipline.
	• Principles must lead staff in building approaches to learning that are consistent with current research and support the development of coherence of curriculum, instruction, and assessment.
Unit 5: Leadership in the Instructional Core	Unit 5 is the first of two units that examines ways in which the research around how people learn, introduced in Unit 4, is applied within the core disciplines of language arts and history. In particular, this unit examines the relationship of language to learning in reading and

Part 1: Language Arts and History	writing in early childhood through high school and their vital importance to knowledge building. Participants explore knowledge building ELA activities through the lens of the educational leader, examine a model of reading comprehension and determine its implication for instruction and explore the relationship among standards, rubrics, and instruction in order to foster student learning and independence. In the area of history, participants will learn that history is an argument (an interpretation) that humans make about the past. *Main Concepts/Themes*: • The principal must become steeped, as an instructional leader, in the essential understandings that knowledge is built through reading, writing and discussion. • Principals need to know that comprehension develops as a result of the interaction between a text base and a reader's mental model and requires a knowledge base of vocabulary, sentence structure, grammar and genre structure along with factual knowledge stored in the reader's memory and experiential learning. • Rubrics should be drawn from standards, develop across the year and used for much more than summative assessment. • Understanding that the arguments made about the past – history – are influenced by a variety of factors: types of sources consulted, the questions asked about those sources, the context of when the argument was made, and the position of the person making the argument.
Unit 6: Leadership in the Instructional Core Part 2: Mathematics and Science	As in Unit 5, Unit 6 continues to build upon the knowledge of how people learn that was introduced in Unit 4, though with the content focus on mathematics and science. In the area of mathematics, significant time is spent understanding mathematical proficiency as described by the five strands identified in *Adding It Up: Helping Children Learn Math* (National Research Council, 2001) and further described in the CCSS: (1) conceptual understanding, (2) procedural fluency, (3) strategic competence, (4) adaptive reasoning, and (5) productive disposition. In the area of science, principals will learn the hallmarks of scientific inquiry – evidence, logic, imagination, prediction, explanation, identification of bias, and empirical, data-driven interpretations. This model of scientific inquiry is how scientists think and learn and is often very different than what is often taught as the "scientific method" in schools. *Main Concepts/Themes:* The principal needs to be able to articulate the characteristics of good standards-based mathematics and science programs and highly-effective math and science classroom teaching.

	• Instructional leaders develop strategies for improving math and science outcomes for all students. This includes understanding the important of students' preconceptions and recognizing students' misconceptions and correcting them. • Principals need to establish processes within the school to ensure a conceptual understanding of mathematics is at the center of instruction. • Principals need to understand the two basic process skills in science – observation and inquiry and how these can assist teachers in uncovering preconceptions and misconceptions to identify testable questions.
Additional Day from U of M : Leading Instruction for Special Populations	This unit will focus on specific programmatic approaches relative to instruction for students receiving special education services and Emerging Bilingual Learners. Multi-Tiered Systems of Support (MTSS) are the focus of this unit with an emphasis on using systems for improved outcomes for all students.
Teacher Development and Evaluation	The State of Minnesota's comprehensive TDE system is discussed with a focus on teacher development. Experts from the Minnesota Department of Education assist with the understanding of the legislation, the State's TDE model and the tools and resources available to principals and other evaluators.
Unit 7: Coaching for High Quality Teaching	Completing the end of Course 2 surrounding the classroom practices, Unit 7 focuses on the transference of professional learning. NISL's coaching model is introduced. This model focuses on listening, questioning, observing, giving and receiving feedback, reflecting, inspiring and celebrating. In addition, NISL's Performance Analysis Framework is explored to look at the root cause analysis of a range of factors that can improve – or impede- performance. Finally coaching for teaching efficacy is combined with teaching for equity. *Main Themes/Concepts*: • A highly effective means of implementing instructional improvements is through coaching. • Coaching unlocks a person's potential to maximize performance, and coaching is critical to implementing change systemically. • Instructional coaching is intentional and specific; it begins with a shared understanding of the school's goals for improving student achievement. • The action plan should include specific steps to be followed, resources that will be provided, and follow-up measures.
Unit 8:	This unit helps enable the participant to lead a school-wide effort for professional learning. The idea of professional learning vs professional

Promoting the Learning Organization	development is explored through the comparison of three quality professional learning approaches in British Columbia, Shanghai, and Singapore. Participants engage in the factors that are present in these systems, conduct a gap analysis of their own system and plan next-steps for their own school. In addition, a deep look at a school case study is used as the context for a leadership simulation where the principal is asked to determine the priorities for a school amid competing the many competing priorities of stakeholders. *Main Concepts and Themes* The principal must deeply understand the importance of creating a learning culture in schools directed at improving student learning outcomes • The principal needs to deepen and weave in the relationship between principles of how people learn and the characteristics of effective professional learning organizations. • Deep professional knowledge and the effective use of benchmarking and scientifically-based research should guide and enhance professional learning in schools. • The principal should understand how to align school needs to teacher development, creating a powerful professional learning communities that connect their work directly to classroom practice. • Principals must develop learning leaders and teams within the organization.
Unit 9: Teams for Instructional Leadership	This unit enables the participant to reflect on his or her role as an instructional leader and to learn how to play that role effectively in combination with other members of a leadership team. This unit argues that effectively distributing leadership through the use of team's continuous improvement allows a school to create a culture of "peer to peer" accountability. Participants analyze their own leadership teams' agendas and examine and challenge the rationale, charge, composition and authority of existing teams in their schools. They will examine the need for creating new teams or restructuring existing ones. *Main Themes/Concepts:* • Today, the role of the principal should again be that of "head teacher," responsible for leading school improvement initiatives to implement sound instructional practices. • Principals must have an instructional vision and build an enthusiastic following for the vision; there must be a coherent overall strategy for improving instruction. • Principals must have a deep commitment to distributed leadership and recognize that learning requires modeling from many.

Unit 10:
Ethical Leadership
for Equity
	This unit provides participants the opportunity to examine their roles as ethical leaders in providing equitable learning environments in their schools. This unit provides principals an opportunity to study ethics and consider what being ethical and equitable means. Ethics (the communal rules of conduct) and morals (individual principles, beliefs or habits underpinning behaviors) are explored through the lens of the school leader. Ideas of academic education and character education are explored along with the implications of decision making. Participants assess their school's moral and ethical culture using an analytical tool, complete a cultural/racial autobiography to self-reflect on their own lenses, identify the resources needed for and the barriers to creating and sustaining and equitable and positive school culture for all students.
	  Main Concepts/Themes:
	  • All students can achieve at high levels with the right and equitable support. There is a distinction between equity and equality, and this distinction plays a significant role in the creation of high achievement.
	  • Leaders must determine how resources can be distributed equitably to support high student achievement for all.
	  • A just, fair, and caring school community does not just happen—the three qualities are always in tension and do not easily coexist.
	  • Racial disparities are evident in student outcomes. Leaders must determine how to discuss and address these with teachers, students, parents and community.

Unit 11: **Driving and** **Sustaining** **Transformation**	This unit enables the participant to design, lead, and drive a change process calculated to produce steady improvement in student achievement. The principal should also learn how to identify root problems and causes, gather intelligence, and formulate a plan on the basis of appropriate data, set performance targets, select strategies and develop sound implementation plans. *Main Themes/Concepts:* • The purpose of leadership is not to produce consistency and order; rather, it is to produce movement and create change. • Leadership focuses on strategies, creativity, and taking calculated risks, whereas management focuses on operational excellence and risk mitigation. • Change is difficult and involves accelerators as described by John Kotter that can assist in not only the planning of the change, the change process itself, but also sustaining change and adapting. • To effectively lead systemic change, school leaders must be able to distinguish between and balance the roles of change leader and change manager.

Unit 12: Final Case Simulation and Action Learning Project Presentations	The conclusion of the learning incorporates a simulation that requires participants to use what they have learned throughout the EDP. In addition, Participants will present the results of their Action Learning Projects to the cohort of their peers.