

Keene State College
Educational Leadership Program
Section V: Use of Assessment Results

The Educational Leadership Program at Keene State College is built upon the pedagogical pillar of “backwards planning.” We continually keep abreast of the changing social and educational dynamics that impact educators in general and educational leaders specific to our program. We have two distinct delivery models with the goal to have each attain the same specific goals at their terminating point. There are several basic tenets that we build our program upon.

The assessments we have built into our program are aimed at capturing the transformational growth it often takes to become an inspirational school leader. We believe strongly that a vast majority of this growth be accomplished in the schoolhouse setting. We know that merely experiencing something is not learning; true learning comes from reflecting upon the experience and enlightened reflection occurs through practice and through having the tools such as research, technology, ELCC best practice inventories and Standards, educational readings, cohort groupings among a long list of programmatic requirements.

The “spine” of our program is the Portfolio that each participant, no matter their chosen program track, must successfully complete. This comprehensive collection encompasses a collection of artifacts, reflections, school-based projects, Action Research Projects, Council for Exceptional Children and ELCC Learning Plans, Vision Papers and other related evidence of learning and mastery of competencies all focused through the ELCC Standards.

Students are given assignments and rubrics for each course that encompass all of the ELCC standards. Through reflection, discussions and direct instruction students must catalog the assignments through the lens of the ELCC Standards. Where there is a deficiency noted the instructors work with the student to rectify the gap through focused readings, assignments and field work. Each student comes to our program via the same admissions and interview process but each is also very different in their philosophies, level of knowledge and dispositions. Our student focused assessments allow the instructors to continually assess student progress in partnership with the student who is continually self-assessing and documenting their own growth.

The portal into our ongoing and constant assessments largely lies within the use of guided reflections that are shared between the instructor and student. We spend a great deal of time discussing the nature of reflection and through practice drive our students in the direction of using the ELCC Standards as their frame of reference. The dynamics of a school that involve complex cultures and human interactions demand to be seen through our adopted ELCC lens. Every student must account for their beliefs and actions as an educator and as a person who will do the right thing for children despite the cost and who will strive tirelessly to improve student achievement through the use of qualitative as well as quantitative data through the skills they have achieved in the areas outlined in the ELCC Standards.

Again, just experiencing something is not enough and this reality drives us to have our students commit to constant improvement through self-reflection and the introspection that brings with it. The rich and deep writings of our students give us regular and ongoing insights into where they are when they enter our program and where they end up when they leave our program whether at the Masters or Post-Masters level. The fact that our students should experience running facets of a school before walking into the real job for the first time is a pallet of growth that does not exist in a course-based program alone.

Our ongoing self-studies and programmatic collaboration is a tool the instructors utilize to assure that our graduates are ready, and more importantly able, to effectively lead a school on their very first day. We place a high priority on the use of technology in leadership roles and are moving toward a universal e-portfolio system this year. We have also started a pilot of long-distance auxiliary mentoring via “IChat” technology. This models for our students a mindset that technology is an important facet of leadership in this day of explosive technological growth. The assessment of this is quite straightforward – the technology must work and must be used in a way that enhances student learning and staff support and not just because the technology exists.

The assessment of our school-based projects is multifaceted and ongoing throughout the time of the project. A major component of our Principals Residency Network track is a year-long school-wide project aimed at creating a research-based intervention for something deemed as problematic in the schoolhouse setting. Our students in the course-based track accomplish something quite similar during their 300 required hours of Internship class. We do not assess the student based on the ultimate success of a project as there are often extenuating political and human relationship issues that extend beyond the time frame of the School-wide Project, but we do assess the depth of research, planning, collaborative efforts, community building, communication, building of ethical relationships and the moral courage it takes to persevere in the face of often entrenched opposition.

Our students almost universally come to see that one can act with total integrity and with a deep and rich plan and still not end up exactly where the wished to be. Our program does an excellent job and we use the assessments in an ongoing process of continual professional goal setting and improvement efforts. The insights gained by the instructors through their work with the students, the student’s learning artifacts and through the deep school partnerships allow us to know day-by-day whether our programmatic goals are being met where it counts most, in the schoolhouse.

The School Based Projects truly encompass each of the ELCC Standards if they are done to the level we expect them to be. Each student must complete their projects to the level described in the related assignments and their accompanying rubrics. If a given project assignment or project is not completed satisfactorily the student must rectify the issues before they may move on. A case in point is our one-year residency program. Students and their mentors are informed upfront that the Keene State College Educational Leadership track reserves the right to extend the duration of their program until such time they can clearly demonstrate competencies in each of the ELCC Standards and other programmatic requirements.

Last year the Educational Leadership Program was accredited by the New Hampshire Department of Education for the next six years. During the accreditation process we were found to have met every state standard with the exception of the use of technology. We took this deficit seriously and have incorporated a much wider application of technology in our program. A few of these were outlined above and more are being planned as of this report.

We also utilize student course evaluations not only for setting professional improvement goals but also for programmatic assessment. A great deal of specific instruction is given in personal responsibility and in professional advocacy skills, therefore our students must show they are adept at letting us know if the program is not meeting their needs and is not getting them to the point where they can state their attainment of the ELCC Standards. The students have told us what we can do to improve our program and we will continue to listen to their observations as we find them to be a valid issue and not one merely of clarity or misjudgment.

Finally, perhaps the most critical instrument assessment means we employ is the “Learning Plan.” This is a grid created around the ELCC Standards wherein each student must assess their existing proficiencies and must set learning goals based upon a discrepancy model. The Learning Plan is carried from course-to-course in a Learning Plan Portfolio in our course-based work and is presented quarterly by the Principals Residency Network students. This instrument gives the instructors deep insights into existing strengths and areas that need improvement thus allowing us to further personalize our instruction and programmatic goals.

The final assessment is how our graduates do in the field. We are proud to point to how many of our graduates are successfully employed locally and throughout New Hampshire, Vermont and Northern Massachusetts and across the broader region. Because we continually assess and adjust our graduates are excelling in the field.