

IPLA Cohort Survey (Cohorts I & II)

In the winter of 2004 15 Iowa Principal Learning Academy (IPLA) students received their certificate of completion as Cohort #1 graduates. They made history and will always be known as Cohort I graduates. That night was also the first time anyone knew for certain that the graduates would be fully endorsed to serve as school principals in the state of Iowa. They are our pioneers. It was the first class in Iowa that based its curriculum on the six standards. The curriculum was based on practical applications rather than a "sit and get" type of learning. It was modeled after a medical curriculum where a promising doctor actually performs a procedure rather than just reads about it.

The initial program was an outgrowth of a grant application for Innovative Leadership. A few progressive leaders from the "old" AEA 5 decided to apply for the grant and in the year 2000 the grant was awarded. A diverse advisory committee (think tank) took three steps forward and two back for a two-year period of time to plan the program. The first Cohort, under the dynamic leadership of Dennis Bahr, a former counselor/principal/superintendent, began classes in the fall of 2003.

Three years after that first graduation 14 of the original 15 are directly involved in education. (One graduate was place bound and is working in private business). Three are involved in counseling, one remained as a teacher, two are curriculum coordinators, one serves as an AD/teacher, two work for AEAs, four serve in principal's positions and one is executive director of a day care.

All supervisors of the 14 practicing educators were surveyed during the 2006-2007 school year. In some cases more than one supervisor was interviewed. The findings follow.

Of those who knew the Cohort member before and after the class, seven of the eight supervisors agreed that the program made the member a stronger leader. The one who didn't agree stated that the leadership skills might not be evident because of the person's current job description.

Ten of the supervisors interviewed were responsible for hiring the Cohort member (more than one supervisor was interviewed for some Cohort members working in larger systems). Some reasons given for hiring included: background, experience, best teacher I have ever known, best example of human relations, tremendous work ethic, willing to get the job done, great sense of humor, thinks out of the box, experience in curriculum mapping, a leader, and knowledge of school improvement. Many of the above listed characteristics were mentioned more than once. Eight of the ten supervisors who helped hire the Cohort member definitely felt that the IPLA program had enhanced their leadership skills. Two did not know them well enough to give a definitive answer.

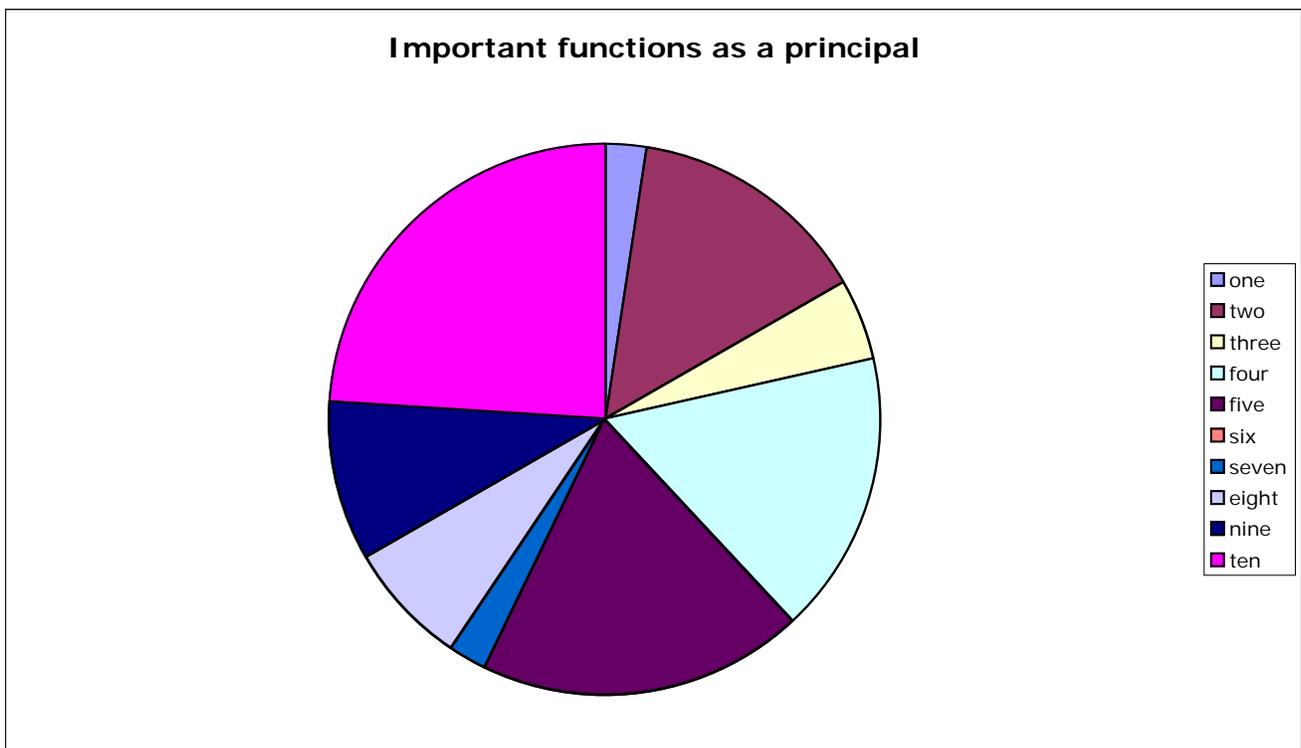
All supervisors were asked to rank ten functions of a principal and to prioritize the top three. If their Cohort member was serving in a position other than a principal, they were asked to prioritize the top three for that position.

The functions listed were:

- 1) management of organization, operations and resources
- 2) school order, safety, and discipline
- 3) school mission and vision
- 4) instructional leadership and staff development
- 5) improvement of student achievement
- 6) evaluation of program and staff
- 7) school-parent-community collaboration
- 8) assessment and data disaggregation
- 9) comprehensive school improvement planning and implementation
- 10) Creating an environment for student learning

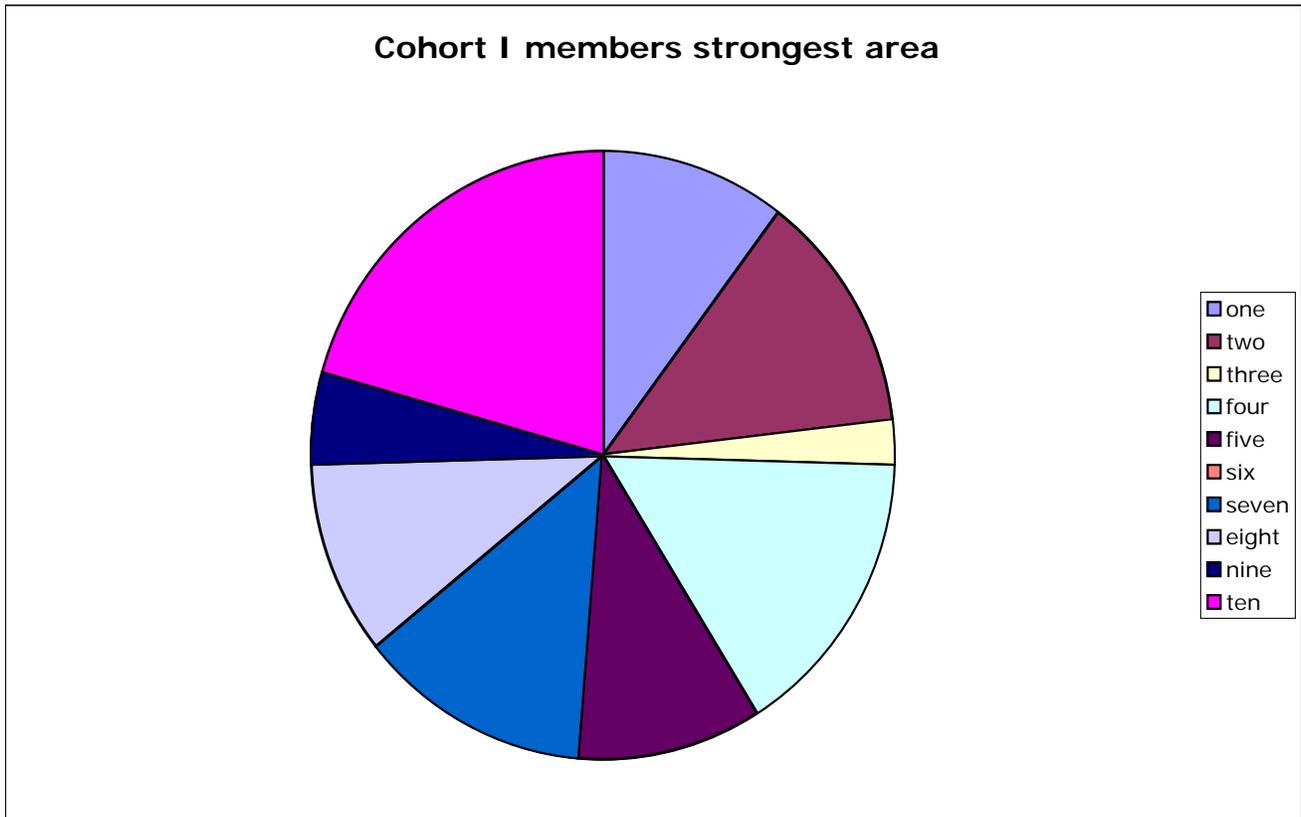
The pie graph lists the number of times that supervisors listed the ten functions in the top three priorities.

Cohort I



Instructional leadership (#4) was the top priority five times. Student achievement (#5) and comprehensive school improvement (#9) were listed as the first choice three times. Although creating an environment for student learning (#10) was listed in the top three choices nine times, it was never listed as the top choice.

When asked to use the same chart of functions to rank the Cohort member's strengths, the following chart resulted:



One supervisor added the characteristic of leadership, which wasn't one of the choices (instructional leadership was a choice, but this person thought that leadership was broader).

Three supervisors felt that the Cohort member they were supervising was strongest in (#2) school order, safety, and discipline and three felt their member was strongest in (#8) assessment and data disaggregation. Two felt their Cohort member was strongest in (#4) instructional leadership and staff development, (#7) school-parent-community collaboration, (#9) comprehensive school improvement planning and implementation, and (#10) creating an environment for student learning.

Only one of the 15 responses had a perfect match between the priority functions of a principal and the strongest areas for the Cohort member.

- Two responses were the same with one different
- Two responses were the same, but with different priorities
- One response was the same, the other two were the same, but with different priorities

- One response was the same, one the same with a different priority and one was different
- One response was the same, but of a different priority and two were different
- One had no similar responses

Approximately one year later, Cohort II graduated. With Cohort I leading the way, they were aware that success was possible through the IPLA program. Cohort II supervisors were also interviewed. Sixteen supervisors were surveyed for the 14 graduates.

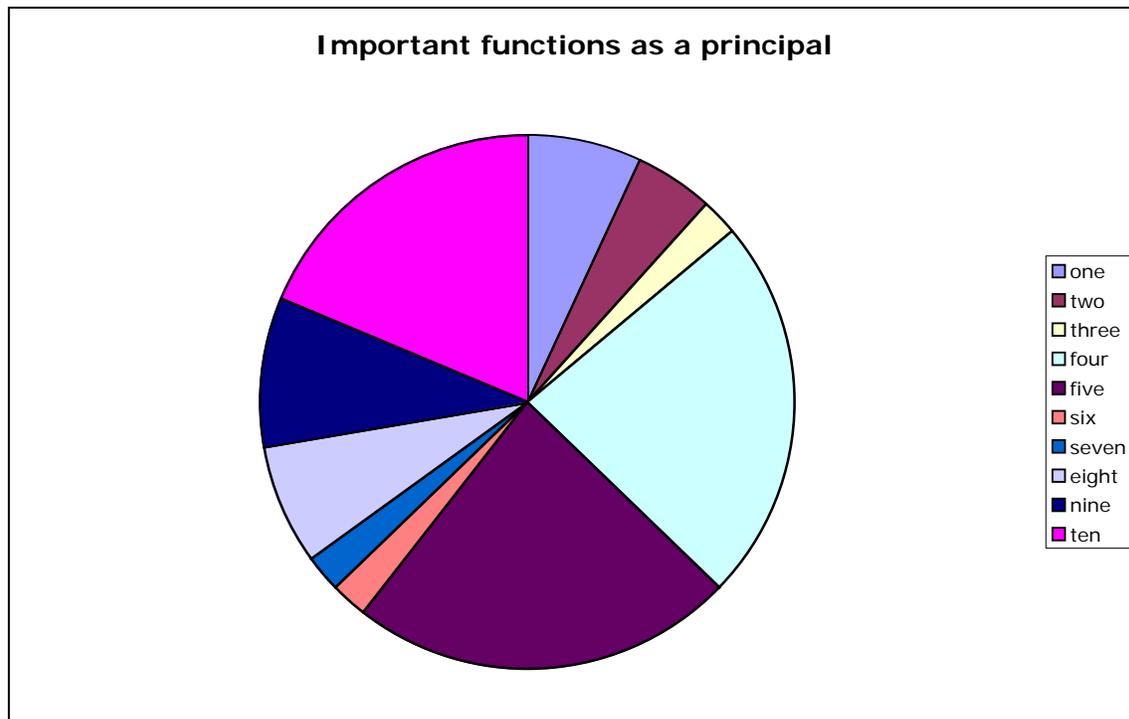
Of the fourteen graduates in Cohort II three are currently serving as principals, one at the elementary, one at the middle school and one at the high school. Six are in the classroom with one serving as a teacher/athletic director, two are counselors, two serve in AEAs and one is a curriculum director. All are involved in education.

Only four of those interviewed had been involved with the hiring of the Cohort II member. Reasons for hiring were hardworking, work ethic, leadership ability and works well with people. One had been hired before he went through the program, but had a better big picture outlook after completion of the program.

When asked if they were a stronger leader after the program seven supervisors indicated affirmatively, two said the Cohort member had more confidence, one said the Cohort member was a stronger person, another said it solidified the Cohort member's leadership and one said it was hard to measure because the person was so sharp in the first place.

The supervisors were then asked to rank the most important functions of a principal using the same list used above.

Cohort II

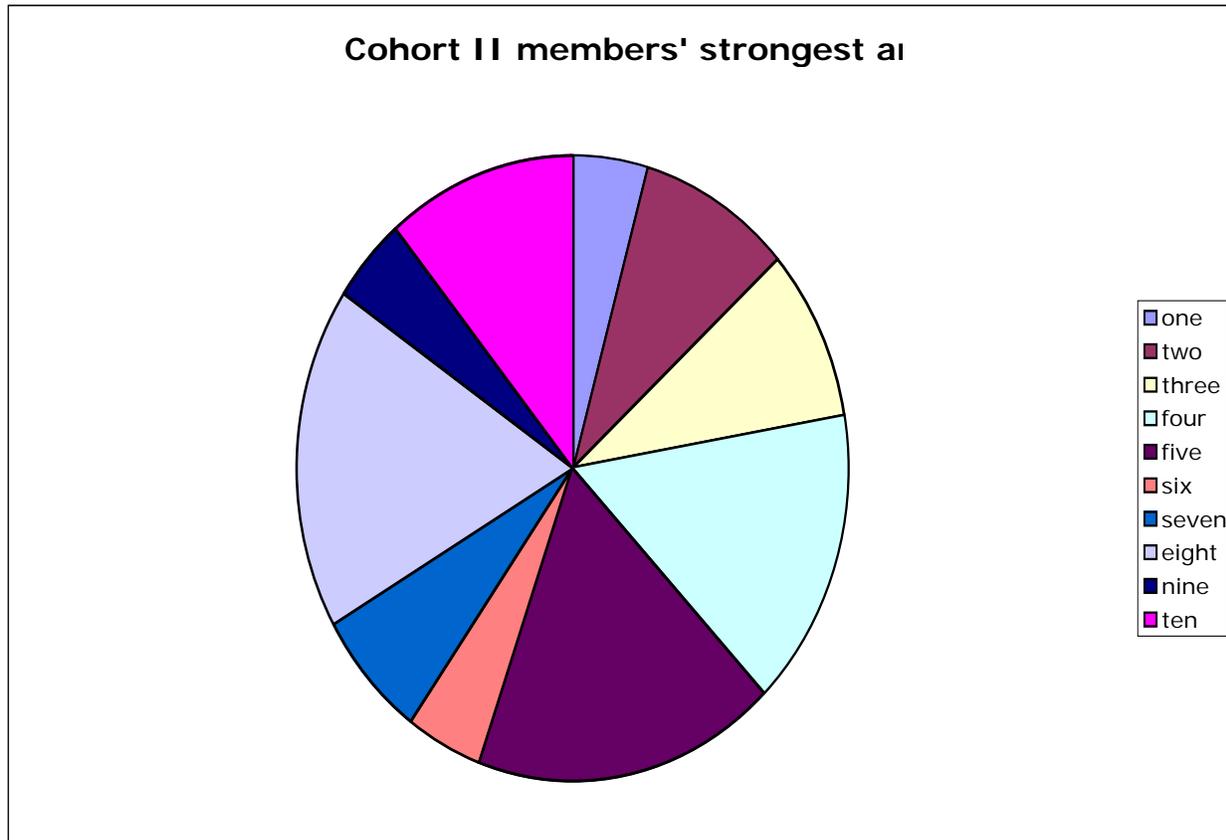


The functions listed were:

- 1) management of organization, operations and resources
- 2) school order, safety, and discipline
- 3) school mission and vision
- 4) instructional leadership and staff development
- 5) improvement of student achievement
- 6) evaluation of program and staff
- 7) school-parent-community collaboration
- 8) assessment and data disaggregation
- 9) comprehensive school improvement planning and implementation
- 10) creating an environment for student learning

Seven supervisors ranked instructional leadership and staff development (#4) as the top priority of a principal's function. Four listed improvement of student achievement (#5) as the top priority. Eight listed creating an environment for student learning (#10) in their top three, but no one listed it as the number one priority.

When asked to use the same chart of functions to rank the Cohort member's strengths, the following chart resulted:



Five supervisors ranked instructional leadership and staff development (#4) as the strongest areas for the Cohort II graduates. Four listed assessment and data disaggregation (#8) as the strongest area with three listing improvement of student achievement (#5) and creating an environment for student learning (#10) as the strongest characteristic. Several added items to the ten listed. One stated that the top quality of their Cohort II person was that he/she was not excitable, was analytical and not emotional. Another said that management of kids was their Cohort member's strongest area. Another added the word "teachers" to school-parent-community collaboration (#7). Three were so creative with the list that the results did not fit into the graph.

No matches were perfect between the important perceived functions of a principal and Cohort II's strongest area.

- Three matched the first priority perfectly
- Three responses were the same, but two had different priorities
- Three responses were the same, but all had different priorities

- Two supervisors had two responses the same, with one the same priority and one different
- Four supervisors had two responses the same, but different priorities
- One supervisor had one response the same, but different priority
- Two supervisors had one response the same, but different priority
- Two supervisors had no responses the same between the function of a principal and the strongest areas for their Cohort member

Three were creative and either added extra functions, stated that all were important and would not prioritize, or had incomplete data.

Most of the supervisors had no suggestions for improvement. Those noted include:

- students need social type hours together
- make sure that professional development includes working with students with IEPs
- work with principals out in the field
- make sure Cohort members can tell if teachers are following IEPs
- makes sure Cohort members know about special education staffing
- Cohort members should have knowledge of 504
- make sure Cohort members know what is confidential information, and that they keep it confidential
- make sure that Cohort members have people skills and communication skills
- don't know enough about the program to comment on improvements
- have a variety of instructors, the more people involved in instructing, the better
- more experience shadowing and having a mentor, increase shadowing and closer relationship with mentor
- student management systems should be emphasized, also scheduling
- maybe more communication to superintendents
- would be good for hours to transfer to a superintendency, colleges would be foolish not to accept the principal hours

Comments from the supervisors included:

- I've been impressed with the people coming through the program. I would look to the program again.
- Focusing on the new standards was a great idea.
- The program is functioning quite well.
- The program seems pretty practical. Theory into practice is good.
- I wish universities would take this approach. Hand-on is more valuable than textbook knowledge.

- Our Cohort member was very well prepared, very knowledgeable in so many areas.
- A strength is its practical nature. It is not theoretical. Really hits at the core of what we do. Enables us to be a better instructional leader.
- Most impressed with the program. It gave Cohort member the confidence to get the job done. I was envious of some of the experiences she/he had.
- It is important to have background in data and making decisions.
- I like the systems approach. Cohort member has vast knowledge in many areas, special education and general education.
- Program works well. Cohort member thought it was a good program.
- I like it a lot. I like that it is hands-on and not taught by professors (taught by practitioners).
- Scheduling is one of the most important things you don't learn in college.
- Disciplinary situations – especially bigger items. Principals need to understand this.
- Be smart enough to know when to call an attorney.
- The IPLA program can probably identify successful skills better than traditional schools.
- Good format. Give me practical.
- Both Cohort members are really strong proponents of the program.
- Whatever it is you're doing, keep doing it.
- Cohort member came well prepared.
- Program has been wonderful for her/him. At least she/he is wonderful.
- Hands-on very good.
- Like the weekend approach.
- Hands-on is obviously more practical than theory
- Glad it worked. We encouraged him/her to attend. It worked for him/her.

Overall the follow-up surveys of Cohorts I & II produced very positive comments with few negative ones. Some things to remember when interpreting these results are that the students entering this program already had master's degrees in some area of education. They came in with positive references and four years of teaching experience. They may have had an interview with the Program Director and Advisory Board Interview Team. The result of the candidate application and review process is that most candidates were outstanding individuals before they entered the program. For comments from the Cohort members themselves, see Section II in Program Details for "Graduate comments."

In gathering this information 19 school superintendents were interviewed, two school administrators other than superintendents, and 8 AEA Chief Administrators or AEA supervisors working more directly with the Cohort member. Several of those interviewed worked with more than one Cohort member.

The program is based on research and uses methods that have been proven to be effective. Given the results of this survey, it is anticipated that future surveys will be even more positive as the Cohort members gain more experience in their chosen fields.