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Cover Page Footnote

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A Qualitative Follow-up of the Maguire Fellows Program

A. William Place,¹ Kevin Clapano,² and Robert H Palestini²

Abstract: This qualitative follow up study sought the impressions of students after a two year program. The analysis of this data involved grounded theory qualitative methods. The primary means of data collection for the qualitative portion of this study was through digitally-recording and transcribing of participants' voices in response to individual interview prompts. Seven themes emerged from the first interviews which included: Perceptions of leadership; changing perceptions of the Jesuit ideas of *Magis/cura personalis*; changing perceptions of social justice; perceptions of motivation or desire to lead; Catholic identification; theory to practice; and suggested changes to the program. These themes were reinforced and refined in the second interviews, but a few new themes emerged from the additional data. Specifically, the value of the cohort was strongly expanded in the data from the second interviews. Other new themes included special education, the action research project, and some systems issues.

Keywords: Catholic identity, leadership, Jesuit, social justice, Maguire Fellows

The purpose of this study is to find out how students enrolled in the Maguire Fellows preparation program in school leadership were impacted by the program. This program was designed to prepare educational leaders in Catholic school settings. The Maguire Foundation provided substantial funds to assist students with tuition scholarships covering approximately 75% of their tuition expenses to a highly qualified group of leaders and potential leaders of Catholic schools in the Philadelphia area. There were initially 20 students admitted to the program and although it was clearly described as an intense program, two students withdrew within the first few weeks citing time limitations and personal commitments conflicting with the amount of work expected. A third student withdrew from the program in the second year because he left

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Catholic education. This qualitative follow-up sought the impressions of the remaining 17 students after the second year of the two year program. Individual interviews were conducted during the spring 2017 term and a second interview in either the fall 2017 or spring 2018. The focus was on their perceptions of educational leadership and if those perceptions have changed as a result of their participation in the program. The department also collected key assessments from all students as part of the accreditation processes. These key assessments were aggregated as part of the process and the aggregated data examined. Confidentiality was completely maintained and protected.

The analysis of these data involved grounded theory qualitative methods. The primary means of data collection for the qualitative portion of this study was through digitally-recording and transcribing of participants' voices in response to individual interview prompts. Also reported here are the results of the collection of key assessments available to the researchers as part of the departmental ongoing accreditation processes which provided background information concerning the performance of these students. This collaborative research involved two professors in the program and a university administrator involved in the accreditation process. The university received outside funding supporting the Maguire Fellows Program which prepares Catholic high school educators for roles as principals and presidents in the 17 Archdiocesan high schools in Philadelphia and its suburbs (independent Catholic high schools were also included). This leadership succession plan fills a critical void in the Archdiocesan schools at present, as the primary goal of this program is to provide a high quality, affordable and accessible state certification and a master's degree for aspiring Catholic school leaders. The concern of leadership succession has been noted both in the US and other countries (Canavan, 2001). Vigorous recruitment efforts were put forth by the department with the assistance of the Archdiocese and independent school administrators, which resulted in a high quality candidate pool. Most of these individuals were aspiring leaders, but there were also some who while not certified were already principals or presidents of Catholic high schools. It was made clear to each person applying that the selection would be competitive, rigorous, and that being named a Maguire Fellow was a highly prestigious achievement, which carried with it the expectation of remaining in Catholic Schools for a minimum of three years after the completion of the program.

There was a total of 18 Catholic school leaders who were named Maguire Fellows. All 18 were invited to participate in the first interview and the 17 remaining Fellows were invited to participate in the second interview. The voluntary nature of participation was strongly stressed and emphasized. It was also stressed that participating or not participating would have no impact on their status as Maguire Fellows or students at the university. In order to move forward with the study there was expected to be a minimum of eight participants. If less than eight Fellows volunteered, the data probably would have been collected as part of the normal program input, but would not have proceeded to a research presentation or publication. The students were quite

forthcoming in general as they have interacted with the lead author as one of the professors in the first term of the program and as the department chair until June 2017 when he left the university to become a department chair at another university in another state. Interviews for 16 of the 18 participants were analyzed, however only 12 were able to participate in the second interview as the lead author was located in another state at the time of those interviews. The two interviews not analyzed included one from a participant who was changing jobs and would not be working in a Catholic school (therefore would be dropping out of the cohort and finishing the certification in the regular university classes) and the other person did not respond to the offer to participate.

Participation was strictly voluntary, based on the availability and willingness of participants to participate in the individual interviews. Individual interviews were audio-recorded and transcribed. All of the results were kept confidential and stored in a secure, locked file cabinet or computer file by the investigator. The interviewer did not ask questions which identified the participant or school in which they work. If the respondent replied identifying their school, a pseudonym for the school was used in the transcription. Thus, only the investigator, co-investigators and the graduate assistant transcribing the interviews had access to the actual recording of the interviews. All transcripts, audio etc. have a code using pseudonyms rather than identifiers. Key assessments were analyzed the same as with other cohorts or regular students as part of the accreditation processes, and no identifiable data from the key assessments were used in this research, thus providing full confidentiality for this data as well.

The subjects selected for this study were Maguire Fellows, who agreed to participate in individual interviews. First, we emailed them to discuss their participation and explain the consent process. Then before the individual interviews, we reviewed informed consent again and provided time for clarification. The actual individual interviews lasted approximately 30 minutes, often less. Participants were also informed about the follow-up interview towards the end of their program and that some of the key assessments would be examined, but not as individuals. That is, the key assessments were analyzed as a group and individuals were not identified in that portion of the process. A limitation of the study is that we were not able to separate out participants key assessments from the cohort (i.e. these included the two not interviewed). Key assessments are always confidential (and anonymous in the data shared beyond course professors and those involved in the departmental accreditation process).

Qualitative Analysis: Findings

The researchers listened to recordings of the interviews multiple times and the transcripts were read and reread to enable identification of emergent themes. Seven themes emerged from the first interviews, which included:

1. Perceptions of leadership;

2. Changing perceptions of the Jesuit ideas of Magis/cura personalis;
3. Changing perceptions of social justice;
4. Perceptions of motivation or desire to lead;
5. Catholic identification;
6. Theory to practice; and
7. Suggested changes to the program.

These themes were reinforced and refined in the second interviews, but a few new themes emerged from the additional data. Specifically, the value of the cohort was strongly expanded in the data from the second interviews. Other new themes included special education, the action research project and some systems issues.

Changing Perceptions of Leadership

With one exception, the participants agreed that their views on leadership have been changed by the program. Although one participant indicated that it was being “surrounded by fellow Catholic educators has certainly led me to take to examine things that are perhaps unique to Catholic educational leadership.” One common response indicated that their views broadened or as one participant stated, “My understanding of the ways of thinking of an administrator has certainly deepened.” Another stated, “and that’s another thing the Fellows program has made me more of a reflective practitioner.” Several indicated dramatic or tremendous change occurred. While one participant lamented she had changed her perspective on leadership, “but do not always see it happening in practice.” Another person in discussing leadership explained that,

the Maguire Fellows program has taught me how to be very purposeful. How to deal with data. It’s not really something I’ve, I mean I knew about it. I was a guidance counselor. I dealt with the student side of it. With their test scores and things. But doing your own research, doing action research. I didn’t know anything about that before I started the program.

This use of data to improve student achievement is in keeping with national trends. Interestingly, a recent national report about the perceptions of elementary principals indicated that “a greater percentage of 2018 respondents noted a need for professional development around improving student achievement than in 2008 (Fuller et al., 2018, p. 6).

Several participants noted that the program was giving them some idea of the challenges of leadership. One participant stated, “I really didn’t know what kind of you know the amount of tasks that educational leaders do in a school. So that has kind of been eye opening and at the same time

kind of inspirational.” Yet another put it this way, “I didn’t realize how much of an ominous task it is to be an educational leader...very eye-opening.”

The use of data was still seen as a growth area expanded through the program, but more in the second interview than the first, collaboration and democratic leadership emerged. One participant in discussing the role of principals and other leaders commented that “leading doesn’t always need to be leading the top. Right. And I think that was one of the themes that sort of was driven home through the program.” This view of leadership was very much congruent with the Educational Leadership Constituent Council (ELCC) standards (2011). Another participant noted,

I guess prior to the program I definitely would not have had a desire or a first-hand knowledge or drive to gather detailed data, quantitative data, and manage that. I think one of the things I would do, as a principal is I would immediately begin working to set up a data management team, a group of faculty that would not only collect data but also process it and interpret it and just constantly analyze things from that regard.

Again, I think ... It really struck me early on the use or the philosophical standpoint of basing what you do on democratic principles. I think that bottom-up initiatives are so much more powerful than top-down initiatives. I think that administrators sometimes think that they have great ideas and they may be, but I have seen the illusion of compliance, the illusion of implementation with those kinds of initiatives. I think, that you need to get the teachers, even students generating ideas and contributing and then running with those ideas. Those are two big things that I have taken from the program: data and democracy.

One of the Fellows, who was in a leadership position prior to the start of the program, explained how he viewed collaboration had changed by the end of the program,

the concept of collaboration, right? I don’t know that I may have been a giant believer in that, in that concept, you know, and so I think my time spent in the program and all the things that we had to read and look at and review and discuss that no one person went in and reinvented the world of education, right? That people had ideas that they had concepts, but school communities are too big and I think without a lot of hands moving a lot of bricks to build these programs in transition, these thought processes they don’t have, right? They eventually die without enough juice. So I think collaboration and respect for the opinions of others are probably two things that I probably either didn’t buy into or value as much as I did after my time in the program.

There were some who came into the program with what might be categorized as an autocratic view of leadership, but the readings and course discussions seemed to have changed their thinking about leadership and organizations. This is congruent with what Townsend et al. (2013) recommend—that we move from a “command and control approach to one that involves collaboration and cooperation” (p. 56).

In regards to democratic ideas one person noted, “One of the books we read dealt very heavily in building a democracy in the classroom.... that was something that was a new thing I hadn’t thought of education as in that light.” She went on to explain,

I feel like cultivating teacher leaders and having that more of a democracy in school helps the kids. If they see us interacting, then positively the kids will pick up on all of that. They know when the administration and teachers don’t get along. And that creates problems and it ruins the culture. Um, so I feel that idea that sort of stuck with me.

A couple of participants noted that is not always easy, but felt it was worthwhile even if, “I know that makes some administrators uncomfortable because you never know sort of how it’s going to fly back at you.” Another noted, “I’ve kind of seen or thought of school leaders as kind of autocratic and this is the way it is, but through the courses [I came to believe] it’s not the best way to do it.” Lastly one person noted that, “he has seen both types of leaders” but he wants to be more democratic in his approach.

Culture was another topic that was relevant to this theme. Peterson and Deal (1998) are among the most recognized authors to note the importance of culture for leaders and the importance of leaders for school culture. As one Fellow recalled that his thoughts about leadership had changed drastically, “one of the things that never really was on my radar, it was the idea of school culture.” Further explaining “culture has been brought up in every class we’ve had here and I see it now as that as a school leader, you have great potential to both cultivate the culture, but also to some case have to battle the culture.”

Jesuit Ideas: Magis/Cura Personalis

Over half of the students indicated previous knowledge of an exposure to these ideas. *Magis* is a Latin word and is explained this way by the university, “Magis (pronounced mäh-gis), roughly translated, means ‘the more.’ A profound and deeply personal Jesuit concept, it’s about doing more, being more and achieving more than originally thought possible” (“What is Magis?”, 2013, p. 18). *Cura personalis* refers to the concept expressed in the university mission statement “Striving to be a ... community that educates and cares for the whole person.” Several indicated that these are ingrained deeply into their lives and how they viewed themselves as educators. It is who they are, but that the program enhanced, honed, or reinvigorated it. Others noted that classmates made it concrete “seeing it in practice,” “I think people who were chosen for the program demonstrate it” or “fostering it in practice and developing appreciation of them.” One example provided of what a participant considered the Magis being implemented included:

We did 10,000 meals as part on an overall day of school. And I took 45 boys with me on a bus and we went out to the seminary and we were in there for an hour packaging meals ... It was

about them seeing. That there is Catholic relief services and all these people ... trying to help somebody... process right of looking at case studies and thinking about how you would take a negative and make it a positive or how you would identify these things. They make you think about when you go back to your own campus and you say I've got that problem or if I had that problem here's what I'd do with people.

One student, in relation to *cura personalis* noted, "The idea of the whole student has, has definitely become more present in my mind as, as a school leader." Another participant put it this way "We can focus on getting the grade, being the best school in financial aid or whatever assets we are responsible for. But if we lose sight of the persons we're serving and seeing Christ in them then we failed." While perhaps a little more positive in terms of perspective, this is similar to the tension described by Fuller and Johnson (2014) when they noted "analysis showed that tensions concerning the school's Catholic identity were sidelined in the pursuit of academic excellence as measured by standardized tests, benchmarks, and college acceptance rates" (p. 95). Still another student acknowledged that she had not been in contact with the concept of discernment, "But the discernment piece is something that I feel is important. It links to the social justice element." She was asking not only how and if a decision was "going to affect people, but also..." discerning if a decision's impact was just.

Changing Perceptions of Social Justice

The concepts of social justice and democratic ideas were introduced in the first semester of the program through assigned readings and class discussions, however it was not surprising (given the previous exposure to Jesuit concepts noted above) that several participants replied that they came into the program with an understanding and strong commitment to these ideas. Heft (2006) noted social justice has in political theory commonly been distinguished as procedural and substantial justice, "Procedural justice is doing things in a correct way, as avoiding discrimination in hiring and...Substantial justice is doing the right sort of things" (p. 6).

For some the response was again that the cohort reinforced and made the idea of social justice real, "so again it hadn't changed much but I have seen it, you know in every day concrete examples." One example provided was,

I have 72% of the people in my building qualify you know for state and city and federal funding, and different grants ... I have to figure out what can I do to give these kids opportunities. And some of them are going to college, some of them are going to go into the military, some are going to go into trades. Um, I got to build out that road map so I can say that I gave Johnny every opportunity that he had. And I think that for me is social justice, democratic idea.

Others replied that the program strengthened or intensified the previously held values. One leader noted "Social Justice, that's a big one. ... making sure that I'm not only am I fighting right for

every last opportunity for my students. But I think simultaneously making sure that my students are aware of every opportunity that's out there for them." Two of the respondents provided responses that were congruent with, but expanded on what I recall as the instructor in one of the classes of the type of classroom discussion that occurred.

I don't think they have changed but I think they have been intensified. I'm on a crusade against the practice of what would be grouping and tracking. In especially, in my school specifically but in Catholic schools it's all over the place. ... That goes against ... both the ideas of social justice and democracy that a student is sort of labeled and stocked. And there is no opportunity for this continuous improvement because they are kind of stuck with, stuck with the least amount of resources and the least amount of attention. When they probably need the most amount of attention. So I wouldn't say my thoughts have changed, but more sort of intensified in those two aspects.

I teach in a school...and our focus is supposed to be so much on social justice...and having the opportunity to read scholarly research, specifically on the topic and topics that include social justice issues and you know things like that. It has sort of made clear to me that social justice and in a broad sense and on a national scale and international scale as well as on the interpersonal level. It's not just a touchy feely kind of thing that we say to pay lip service to the mission statement or whatever we have. But it's actually the best and most efficient way for an organization to grow and to change and to make forward progress. The idea of you building a team mentality. The idea of building a community of learners that takes care of its members and has an element of outreach to the rest of society. It's really not only just what we should aspire to be because it just a good thing to aspire to be ...

Yet there were other participants whose response indicated there was some change for them in the area of social justice. One person noted that, "I became aware of the leader's responsibility to promote social justice." Another person indicated that his "eyes opened to leader's role" and he went on to explain that he started a mandatory service requirement in which he felt students are eager to help those less fortunate. One Fellow specified the nature of the service should be "direct, not indirect or donating money or something direct service or not only service but working for the cause to change the underlying systems that contribute to inequity or injustice whether in being politically active or helping others to mobilize." Interestingly, one person made a connection of social justice with a concept the program called "leading with heart" (Palestini, 2011) and made distinction between this, with what was in his mind the old school approach in some Catholic schools—that students have no rights and being in a Catholic school was a privilege, making the point that "leading with heart" or social justice empowered people, even students.

A few students noted even more noticeable change. One noted that these were "new ideas did not have a background so did not know they existed." Another responded that he became more

aware of various situations—Catholic school in a wide variety of demographics still accomplishing things. However, still another (who was an outlier from the group on this issue) even asked for a definition (the interviewer was disappointed, but tried not to show that and simply reiterated some of what had been read and discussed in the first class). He then noted, “In an affluent setting it is not as much of an issue—not seen, but classes remind him that injustice exists.” However, someone else also from a wealthy school noted, “if we don’t form that, people who are oriented toward justice and caring, that we fail them too. So yeah, I see it both as my job, but as also teaching it by example and also pedagogy.” This was the more common type of response on social justice.

Another respondent applied the concept of social justice to the Catholic school environment indicating we need to rethink things such as discipline, not just use it punitively, noting that “especially the inner city schools the punitive discipline [is] very rampant and that can just cut a kid’s potential short very, very quickly.” The same person added, “I would say social justice kind of going back to the *cura personalis* caring for the full person like with students not against them, like restorative justice trying proactive discipline.” They also commented that we need to have “low tuition, like trying to make sure [you’re] accessible to the families you are trying to serve.” Clearly the Fellows were thinking about both procedural and substantial social justice issues.

Motivation or Desire to Lead

Most, but not all of the participants indicated that their desire to lead has become stronger. A few indicated that they did want to lead, but the program did not strengthen nor weaken that motivation. One person questioned whether or not she wanted to leave her teaching role with the many challenges for leaders. A few stated it became stronger because in the program and in the cohort you see the impact leaders have, “seeing kind of the some of the actual tasks of the school leader has kind of strengthened one my own belief in myself and I think I will be able to do it when I get there.” One comment from the second interviews noted,

in regards to this program, it really confirmed for me the idea that I want to do more when it comes to education, especially Catholic education in general. When I am in, my current position is an assistant principal for student services at XYZ. When I interviewed for the job over the summer, I basically said to them, I said, I’ll be honest with you as I’m sitting here reflecting on it a year ago, I wouldn’t have been ready to take this position. And it’s not just the work that was done like through the textbooks and stuff in class, but just understanding everything that went with it and it gave me the confidence and the certainty that ... this is what I wanted to do with my life. So there’s my ‘more’ is that I want to continue to do more within that field.

Another stated, “I’m inspired by the other members of the cohort.” Still another talked about his desire to lead in a Catholic school and stated,

it's definitely made it stronger. I already knew that's obviously the direction I was going in, but like I said they have the community of this group; this cohort and to see people that I have formally worked with. To meet new people who are either administrators or teachers or what have you. And seeing how dedicated they are and to see how great people there are. And I mean, I've always, even though I didn't go to a Catholic school I didn't really grow up in that environment I like it. I like being able to talk about faith and serving others and things like that that they don't get in the other schools.

One person in the second interview started talking about leadership in general, but then went even further stating,

It's increased my motivation and desire ... and be passionate about elements of school leadership, but school leadership in a Catholic setting is totally different has a totally different shape to it...There's a purpose beyond those highly desirable goals, there's more for again forming independent bright societal equally aware students, but for living and working for others, living and working in the model of Christ.

Convey (2014) found that "The motivation to teach in the school because it was a Catholic school was an important predictor of the teachers' satisfaction with the school" (p. 4). Similarly, this theme seemed to support that Catholic identity was very important to the motivation of these leaders and potential leaders.

Catholic Education Identification

Perhaps the strongest theme present in the first interviews and which continued in the second was the identification that these participants had with Catholic education. One person put it this way, "it's just part of kind of my, I guess my identity to be part of Catholic education." This theme ran through each conversation over most of the questions. It was summarized well in this quote,

I like the fact that very often Catholic schools have a core set of values and it's a values that kind of shape our day around or a mission around or the way we lead students...I'm witnessing people in those roles so closely and I'm just like thinking about ways that I would love to help play a role in that community and changing that community...I still like to look at the big picture and ... this is this is an awesome opportunity. If it should arise in the future and these types of, its again it's not just the classes it's not just the practicum, it's not just...the time that you know writing papers or reflecting on things, or doing action research. It's the whole collective thing that really (pause) gives me that drive to want to do it [be a leader in a Catholic school] one day because again I'm one of the few that's not necessarily in one of those positions right now. So, I'm still really you know really passionate about it.

A few noted that even though the pay was less they still preferred Catholic education, "there is a positive in being in the Catholic schools ... You get into the kids and instill in the kids the students, where in public school it might be more money but I don't think they're doing the same things for

the students.” There was one exception to this wholehearted commitment to Catholic Education (in addition to the one person leaving the cohort who was not interviewed, and will not be working in Catholic schools next year). One person noted that while he was interested in leadership in a private Catholic school he was not interested in working in an archdiocese or a public school. While he was planning on fulfilling the 3 year expectation to remain in a Catholic school, he did note that he would even work in a private non-Catholic school if the opportunity arose later in his career. Aside from these two exceptions there was emphasis on Catholic identity which was consistent in the interview data and what we remember from the class discussions. While not specifically considered in this study, a finding from Maney et al. (2017) that “the Catholic identity of schools must become an intentional aspect of the planning, orientation, training, and evaluation of the faculty and administration” (p. 36) could be an important consideration as the second cohort of Maguire Fellows program moves forward.

Theory to Practice

As professors, we were particularly interested in whether the program was relevant to their practice and so each interview included the question, “Do you think the program has helped you in placing leadership theory into effective practice?” The participants who were not in administrative roles were quick to point out that they did not have the opportunity to fully implement their new knowledge, but would often say in some way they tried or at least reflected on considering the concepts. One person stated, “As of yet I haven’t had much chance to put it into practice because it’s not quite my role, yet. But ... I’m thinking about things differently. That my perspective on things is changing.” He added that, “I’ve gained the ability to see the long term goal and at least to try to put the pieces in the right order. To move people in that direction.” Another person noted, “I haven’t done a lot of the effective practice yet. But as we started this semester of course the practicum ... I’m taking on a lot of hands-on leadership yet but it’s kind of in the works. So, I’m already seeing how the theory will come into play even though it hasn’t yet.” Still another person noted that in at least one class case studies helped in this area,

That particular class [EDL 665] and looking at the, looking at what the theories say about different types of leadership and kind of reflecting on my own practice. Okay this is, this is the type of leadership that most appeals to me but at times this type of leadership is necessary. So it was, it was good for me to see that. And it was good for me to kind of think about the way I, the way I attack leadership problems and the way I want to versus the way I probably should is helpful, was helpful to see.

Other participants who were in administrative roles noted things such as, “in all the classes that we have had so far. I have learned something from that. And definitely implement it into something that I do or a new or a situation I might learn you know than maybe just jumping the gun I kind of

thinking about it.” Another leader noted that Dr. [name of professor] meshed theory to practice, “very practical ... How can I really on a daily bases take information and apply it to my job and certainly with that law class, the things that we discuss, the issues that he has dealt with.” He further noted,

it’s a rare opportunity if you’re on the job as an administrator, you have to force to take the time to think. To think, to think about theory. I know it’s common as an administrator to be overwhelmed with the mundane activities, clerical tasks and things like that. And you don’t do a lot of higher order thinking a lot of times while on the job. And think about the theories. So, one thing that taking the courses that does make you think about the theory ... it’s good to do. I mean, it’s good to come across things and discuss things in the classes and sometimes you can take those things and you can apply them immediately even to what you’re doing on the job. And that’s a very good thing ...

Yet another leader, replied,

Yes, definitely in the area of data. I think something that’s probably in the one area that I wasn’t I’m still a little uncomfortable with it. But there is, we’ve done a lot of practical work with. In looking at it and how do you look at it, what do you do with it once you have all of this stuff. You know, how to break down data ... Obviously, I’m in administration right now. So maybe it would be different for someone that’s in the classroom now and doesn’t get to put into practice every day, or only sometimes. But I have found some very practical things like that I brought back. We just did a PD on (pause). I ran the PD on PSAT scores. And how to, what to do with that data ...

Suggested Changes to the Program

We also were very interested in the students’ thoughts about what went well and what might be improved. The positives were that they liked having a set schedule meeting the same night of the week for the whole two years, “definitely don’t change the class schedule...just being able to tell my family and friends don’t even bother Wednesdays for the next two years.” In the second interview the following was added, “And even the fact that then it continued through the summer that you knew Wednesdays was the day that you were giving up to be able to do this. It was excellent.” Also many expressed very positive feelings about the cohort model (getting to know each other very well). One comment was, “you see the other members of the cohort, it’s inspiring the hard work that they’re doing every day. It shows me, I think I knew this already, but when you see living examples...” They built relationships that actually carried over to help the system. One principal noted,

There’s a school two miles down from us...we compete with heavily. Everyone can say we are the part of a large system, but...It [the cohort] actually strengthened the relationship between

the schools; where now we're picking up and calling each other over multiple things. Like there is not a problem, you know, if there is an issue, like we kind of like move beyond the, [rivalry] it's still there, the competing and big deal, [Interviewer: community, the alumni and all that. It's still going to feel], right it is there, but we have to realize, you know, what our roles are and I think like, you know, that that piece there helped with it to see, you know, John Doe who started the program he was teaching now he's an assistant principal out of ABC. So to see people getting in these positions, I think there's a great thing, you know, that there's the diocese is seeing the leadership in them and they're seeing it in themselves. So I think that's a plus, you know, some good people in [the cohort].

While most seemed to appreciate the hybrid approach and being done in two years, there was also some concern expressed about it being a lot in a short amount of time. One suggestion was to "Maybe I don't know if there were two tracks or something. Either you spread it out or you have a more condensed version of it. Might be an off shoot for some people who are stretched very thin." In order to finish in two years there are a few terms when students take two classes and do field work. This pressure seemed to be felt especially in relation to the field work class—being a struggle. The statement was made that; "Field work is difficult 360 hours on top of everything else." The same question about time to completion arose in the second interview, but again there was not a clear answer to the issue of whether the condensed intense two year time line that was used or stretching it out so as to lessen the stress during the field work terms would be better.

The field work class was very much viewed as a positive with numerous comments about the value of this experience being made. In fact, there was even a couple of participants that suggested meetings be added specifically to have more face to face discussion of the "internship year, the field work, I think we should meet more...Either about the research or even just about the assignments. We haven't met at all. There's a lot of assignments. In general it would have been nice to either talk with [the professor] or to talk to other people."

One person asked if we could improve the "communication goes on between the two professors while those are running. Um, sometimes it's been overwhelming when we've had two due in the same." Also a few expressed concern about the online discussion board, "I feel like the discussion board online are really eh. It might be a necessary evil to a means to an end, but I don't feel like we've really had the good discussions. The memorable lessons are the ones that have been face-to-face." Another put it this way, "sometimes I feel like the discussions is a matter of checking off a box. And okay, so I wrote that and now I'm going to write so that I can write my responses and then I don't look at it again." Also in relation to instructional technology (IT) the program had hoped that being hybrid would assist in integrating IT throughout, but a couple of Fellows expressed that they would have liked to see more explicit discussion of IT issues (e.g. what is the latest and best examples of specific programs or applications).

One professor used guest speakers that she brought in and a student responded “That, was awesome. Having people from all walks of education...come in and you know speak...That was really great.” One other person suggested changing the order of the classes so that the leadership class (EDL665) would be earlier in the sequence. Several individuals did not have any suggestions for changing the program. In the second interviews there were also a couple of participants worried about the PRAXIS test required by the state in order to obtain principal certification. While the program did not specifically spend much time on that the interviewer expressed his firm belief that these individuals would not have any trouble passing that test.

Systems

One theme that was not evident in the first interviews that was found in the second interviews was about the Catholic educational system. Several participants noted the difference between Diocesan schools compared to private Catholic schools. While both groups appreciated learning about each other, one private educator suggested that there was enough of a difference that if a separate cohort could be formed that might be beneficial. One leader, commented that

if I was in a private Catholic school, I'd be really excited about opportunities to drive new ideas and concepts, but being...inside the archdiocese and system, your ability to really make sweeping changes and reform and be more of a speed boat and less of a titanic. It's a problem. It's a concern, right? About sustainability and about changing with the environment around you. And so I think being xxx, the program has kind of given me pause for concern that all of the things that we read and looked at and talked about and did, I'm just don't seem to be happening within the diocesan structure. And you'll wonder about its longevity and you wonder about what does that do when you're trying to get people excited about opportunities and they feel that unfortunately things are just being done the same way they've always been done.

Another Fellow expressed hope that the program gave him about the future:

But I think that what this program proved, the fact that the Maguires want to put money into this is really says something. You know that they were already putting money into our kids and I got to see that. So to have a foundation that is that powerful that is going to invest in our administrators is I think says a lot about the Catholic school system as a whole. That it is actually going somewhere that it's not dying—it was maybe 10 or 15 years ago.

Numerous Fellows noted that having practicing diocesan administrators as part of the faculty was a strong positive. They seemed to feel there was a good balance of full time university professors and practicing administrators teaching the courses. The discussion of diocesan issues was enriched by having those with knowledge and experience in the specifics of the system. Although one private school participant implied that not all of those types of discussions were relevant to their situation, most found the collaboration and variety of perspectives valuable.

This collaboration of university faculty and practitioners was made possible through the Maguire Foundation and was considered to have positive outcomes, similar to the collaboration described by Rieckhoff et al. (2018), which “was part of a foundation grant provided to a large Midwestern urban university in collaboration with area Catholic schools” (p. 182).

Special Education

The Special Education course was offered in the second summer of the program therefore comments about that course came in the second interviews and were extremely positive. While some did not mention it at all, those that did were emphatic about the value and need for this course. One leader noted, “I don’t think it’s a Catholic school versus public school versus charter school anymore, but the fact remains that students are not coming out of the elementary schools with a lot of proficiency in math and reading and ... IEPs.” The issue of serving students with special needs is growing in Catholic schools and these Fellows recognized that reality.

Action Research Project

Another issue which did not emerge from the first interviews was the action research project done within the field work class. This was viewed very positively, but one Fellow commented that,

Another example I really enjoyed working with again, the action research project that we did...I really felt like when I was doing that action research, that I was really having an impact in and on the school...This is one of the drawbacks if I could comment on the program. I wish I had done that sooner. I wish we had started a project that we carried through for almost two years. I know that might have been a lot of work, but I felt like the research that I was doing for that project really is just beginning. And I really would have liked to have more data for the end of the project. I turned it in, but I only had one [semester of data], the students because it is progressive we’re taking data from the performance year which is 3 times and they’ve only taken one round this school year so if I have had another year we would have more data. So would have had a year to set up the project and then a year to collect data on the project that would have been a little bit more successful

Key Assessments and Grade Point Average

This section of the paper provides information on the aggregate academic performance of the Maguire Educational Leadership Fellows including the fall 2017 semester. To assess the academic performance of the Maguire Educational Leadership Fellows, aggregate Grade Point Average (GPA) data were collected and presented in this report. Students’ performance in key assessments in EDL 665 (Administration and Planned Change) and EDL 680 (Law and American Education) were collected and are presented as well. Based on these assessment measures, the Maguire Educational Leadership Fellows are performing proficiently and are learning the knowledge, skills, and dispositions required of today’s educational leaders.

Grade Point Average (GPA)

The students completed the following courses:

- EDL 600 (Educational Leader Researcher and Reflective Practitioner);
- EDL 660 (Measurement and Evaluation);
- EDL 655 (Interpersonal Relations);
- EDL 665 (Administration and Planned Change);
- EDL 675 (Curriculum Development and Practice);
- EDL 680 (Law and American Education);
- EDL 670 (Educational Leadership and Human Resource Development);
- EDL 690 (Managing Financial and Material Resources);
- SPE 620 (Fundamentals of Special Education Practices);
- EDL 685 (Seminar in Administration of Curriculum and Instruction);
- EDL 695 (Advanced Fieldwork I); and
- EDL 696 (Advanced Fieldwork II).

The mean cohort GPA was 3.94 with a standard deviation of 0.11. While GPA may not provide a lot of useful information about a group, by comparison there were 144 students at this time in the regular university program of the same courses, but targeted to public schools whose mean GPA was 3.73 with a standard deviation of 0.35.

Key Assessments

Key assessments have been identified in specific courses. Data from these key assessments are collected and used to make an informed decision whether students are learning the knowledge, skills, and dispositions necessary to be successful educational leaders. All students were rated proficient in diagnosing an educational organization's challenges and providing theory-based solutions, which was key assessment 1 (see Appendix A). The students' performance in this assessment provides evidence students have the capacity to collaboratively develop, articulate, implement, and steward a shared vision of learning for a school. In addition, the students understand and can collect and use data to identify school goals, assess organizational effectiveness,

and implement plans to achieve school goals. All students were rated proficient in the second assessment (see Appendix A). The students' performance on the second key assessment provides evidence that they understand and can efficiently utilize human, fiscal, and technological resources to manage school operations.

Additionally, all students were rated proficient in the third key assessment which was a Final Course Activity (see Appendix A). The students' performance shows evidence that they understand and can promote school-based policies and procedures that protect the welfare and safety of students and staff within the school. Furthermore, students understand and can evaluate the potential moral and legal consequences of decision making in the district. All students were rated exemplary in the Leadership Plan (see key assessment 4, Appendix A). The students' performance on key assessment 4 shows evidence that they understand and can develop comprehensive curriculum plans. Furthermore, students can develop and supervise the instructional and leadership capacity in a building. Lastly, there was a key assessment (see key assessment 5, Appendix A) for an action research project in which candidates met expectations for student performance in criteria/learning objective 1, 2, and 4. This provides evidence that candidates have demonstrated the ability to understand, collect and use data to identify goals, assess organizational effectiveness, and understand and promote continual and sustainable school improvement.

Summary and Conclusions

Catholic identity was the most consistent theme which was often infused in other discussions. Other important themes included; perceptions of leadership, changing perceptions of the Jesuit ideas of *Magis/cura personalis*, changing perceptions of social justice, and perceptions of motivation or desire to lead. One respondent noted "two big things that I have taken from the program: data and democracy." A couple of Fellows expressed that they would have like to see more explicit discussion of IT issues (e.g. what are the latest and best examples of specific programs or applications). The cohort model was also viewed positively by participants. Data supported that this program for leadership succession was positively viewed by participants in addressing a critical void for Catholic schools. The program and support provided by the foundation provided hope for some who were in need of inspiration.

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Appendix A

The M.S. in Educational Leadership with Principal Certification program at Saint Joseph's University has seven areas of competencies aligned to the Educational Leadership Constituent Council (ELCC) standards (2011). Students who complete the program are expected to demonstrate the knowledge, skills, and dispositions in their coursework and also in their practice as educational leaders.

Key Assessment 1

Standard: ELCC 1.1: Candidates understand and can collaboratively develop, articulate, implement, and steward a shared vision of learning for a school. [See the Educational Leadership Constituent Council (ELCC) standards (2011).]

ELCC 1.2: Candidates understand and can collect and use data to identify school goals, assess organizational effectiveness, and implement plans to achieve school goals.

Course: EDL 665

Assessment: Case Study Analysis: Strategic Planning

This key assessment required students to engage in problem-based learning case study analysis concerning the aforementioned standard in relation to the promotion of student achievement. Students were asked to:

1. Prepare a one-page case study analysis report.
2. Diagnose the strengths and weaknesses of the Module topic(s) in the case study.

Students were provided the following questions: a) Does a strategic plan exist? b) Does the strategic plan begin with a vision statement? c) Are the goals and objectives clear and measurable? d) Is the planning process ongoing?

3. Prescribe solutions to address the weaknesses found in the diagnosis.

Key Assessment 2

Standard: ELCC 3.2: Candidates understand and can efficiently use human, fiscal, and technological resources to manage school operations.

Course: EDL 665

Assessment: Action Research Project

This key assessment required students to:

1. Use the topic of Achievement Gap and to select a sub topic:
 - i. Achievement gap in the context of gender, race, ethnicity, and/or social class.
 - ii. Achievement gap in the context of curricular balance (i.e., disparities in the representation of subjects/disciplines in the curriculum) and/or deficiencies in student achievement in various subjects (e.g., deficient achievement in a particular subject such as math, science, etc.).
 - iii. Special education achievement gaps.
 - iv. Achievement gap in relation to some students not having access to accelerated and/or appropriate curriculum tracks and courses (e.g., Advanced Placement courses, remediation processes).
 - v. Achievement gaps due to deficiencies in curriculum, instruction, and/or assessment.
 - vi. Achievement gaps in relation to teachers' years of experience and/or professional development.
 - vii. Achievement gaps in relation to class size and/or staffing.
2. Prepare and conduct an action research project about the topic in the context of your school district
3. Prepare a report on your findings that includes the sections as identified in the Organization of the Action Research Project Paper section.

Key Assessment 3

Standard: ELCC 3.3: Candidates understand and can promote school-based policies and procedures that protect the welfare and safety of students and staff within the school.

ELCC 5.4: Candidates understand and can evaluate the potential moral and legal consequences of decision making in the district.

Course: EDL 680

Assessment: Final Course Activity

This key assessment required students to engage in a problem-based learning activity concerning a school law issue. In addition, students were asked to demonstrate their competence in displaying impartial and reasoned judgment in relation to a school law issue; demonstrate their competence to accurately interpret and apply laws, policies and regulations to promote the success of students; and demonstrate their ability to communicate effectively with all stakeholders. Students were asked to:

1. Review the final exam questions in the course.
2. Research all relevant information about the issues.
3. Respond to all the questions.

Key Assessment 4**Standards:** ELCC 2.1-2.4:

ELCC 2.1: Candidates understand and can sustain a school culture and instructional program conducive to student learning through collaboration, trust, and a personalized learning environment with high expectations for students.

ELCC 2.2: Candidates understand and can create and evaluate a comprehensive, rigorous, and coherent curricular and instructional school program.

ELCC 2.3: Candidates understand and can develop and supervise the instructional and leadership capacity of school staff.

ELCC 2.4: Candidates understand and can promote the most effective and appropriate technologies to support teaching and learning in a school environment.

Course: EDL 685**Assessment:** Leadership Plan

This key assessment required students to submit an outline for Issue A, B, and C of the Leadership Plan. The purpose of the required outlines is to assist you in preparing for the final paper/report for all three issues. These outlines are based on current Pennsylvania Department of Education (PDE) terminology around comprehensive planning and action plans.

Key Assessment 5**Standards:** ELCC 2.1-2.4 (see above)**Courses:** EDL 695 and EDL 696

Description of the Assessment Instrument: The Action Research Project (ARP) is an opportunity for the administrative intern to practice the skills that school leaders need in their efforts to improve schools. You will engage in authentic building-level action research. This is where an action research team will identify a problem or issue that needs to be addressed through examining school data; examine past research about how best to address this problem; and work to implement, monitor, and research a building-level improvement plan. This project will occur over the span of the 12-month practicum. The intern will report out at various stages during EDL 695 and EDL 696 with a final paper due at the end of the practicum.