STAND BY ME

LEADERSHIP PROGRAM OFFERS NEW PERFORMANCE GUARANTEE

Dr. Ann O'Doherty & Dr. Stephen Fink

New cars and tires come with warranties. Surety bonds back up contracting work. Appliances may come with service guarantees, high-tech hiking boots with company satisfaction guarantees. And now, borrowing on this effective business model, the College of Education's Danforth Educational Leadership Program is certifying the on-the-job skills of its graduates with an official performance guarantee, one of the first of its kind in higher education.

"We know we can stand by our graduates. They are outstanding leaders. But if for any reason graduates are not performing where you expected them to perform, support will be just one call or one email away," says Ann O'Doherty, director of the Danforth program, a one-year immersion in rigorous academic coursework and fieldwork for aspiring principals and program administrators.

Superintendents who hire Danforth graduates are guaranteed that the new K-12 school leaders have mastered specific equity-driven, learning-focused competencies and can put them to work in daily practice. If superintendents are not 100 percent satisfied, the Center for Educational Leadership (CEL), a service arm of the College of Education and a Danforth partner, will provide the program graduate with side-by-side coaching and other professional development work at no cost to the district or the graduate.

"We are taking the Costco, REI, Nordstrom approach," says Stephen Fink, executive director of CEL, nationally renowned for its research-based, real-world professional development work. "If you are not totally satisfied, we will make it right."

Formally guaranteeing the quality of school leaders is a bold move — eyebrow-raising in some quarters. It is also a smart and timely move for Danforth, an innovative program that is constantly scouting changes on the educational horizon. One of the most formidable challenges has been the accelerating demand for educational accountability moving onto university campuses.

"K-12 education has been under increased accountability for a considerable amount of time. It is a natural extension that higher education would hold its graduates to the same levels of accountability," says Fink, who also serves as affiliate professor of educational leadership and policy studies at the College of Education.

A guarantee that graduates can perform, he says, "just makes good sense."

Danforth's competency-based guarantee is based on six core competencies (see box) distilled by UW educators, district superintendents, school principals, and national thought leaders through a series of intensive work sessions. The collaborators also developed "exit criteria" around each competency goal. ""These people are helping to define what this guarantee looks like," says O'Doherty, who is working with the Danforth Curriculum Council to align curriculum and internship expectations with the exit performance measures.

The program will guarantee one competency at a time. The first competency, introduced this academic year, is, "Improving instructional quality through collaborative professional practice, which research shows is critical to a leaders' ability to deliver on the promise of equity in schools. We are being very thoughtful about what we guarantee and how we do it and the metrics associated with it," says Fink.

Danforth students will be pre- and post-assessed using selected evaluation frameworks at the beginning and end of their academic year. In between, they will be continuously evaluated against the framework through fieldwork in urban,

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suburban, and rural schools, where they are mentored by principals and observed, videotaped, and given feedback by "intern advocates" — retired superintendents and central office personnel, as well as experienced assistant principals and principals engaged in the UW's Leadership for Learning doctorate program. "If the advocates see interns' experiences are not as rich as they could be, they can help them focus less on buses and books and behavior issues, and more on instructional leadership," says O'Doherty.

The two partners, Danforth and CEL, share a strong vision of high-quality, equity-inspired leadership.

Danforth students — who, working in cohorts, must complete a robust 1,000-hour internship with 400 documented hours of instructional leadership — consistently cite the program's focus on social justice as a major draw. "Danforth students are told from the start that they need to identify an area of inequity on their intern campus, find stakeholders who will help them address that, and together unpack assumptions on student learning and the teacher practice holding it in place," says O'Doherty.

The Center for Educational Leadership, a self-sustaining organization that is fee-for-service based, adheres to one ambitious overriding goal: "to close the achievement gap." To that end, its expert faculty, staff, and consultants do professional in-service work at every level of a district, working in partnership with dozens of urban, suburban, rural, and charter schools, as well as management organizations across the nation.

"We live within the schools — so we are able to bring the Danforth program closer to the epicenter of actual practice," says Fink. He points out that Danforth has more than 25 years' of experience developing pre-service leaders, while CEL has more than 10 years developing instructional leadership with in-service leaders. "Together we can align our work to develop

a strong pipeline of leaders for area schools and districts."

Constructing that pipeline involves identifying, recruiting, preparing, and supporting potential leaders who embrace and reflect the increasing diversity of 21st-century schools and are dedicated to high achievement for all students. From this pipeline will emerge next-generation teacher leaders, coaches, mentors, principals, program administrators, and, for those who proceed onto the UW Leadership for Learning doctoral program, district-level leaders.

The pipeline will bring more high-quality, diverse applicants into the Danforth program, which is actively recruiting teacher leaders who embrace an equitable and collaborative approach to leadership — and are not what O'Doherty calls solo-flying leaders. "Closing the achievement gap requires strong, collaborative leaders — not heroes who sweep in, singlehandedly reform a school, then leave, and everything leaves with them," she says.

Principals are the top reason teachers stay in a school, adds O'Doherty. "So it is critical to develop quality leaders who can recruit and maintain quality teachers and ensure that each and every child is learning at a high cognitive demand level."

And that, say the two UW partners, is worth guaranteeing.

FOR MORE INFORMATION:

Center for Educational Leadership:
http://www.k-12leadership.org/

Danforth Educational Leadership Program:
http://depts.washington.edu/k12admin/danforth/

O'Doherty, A., & Orr, M. T. (2013). A case study on leadership preparation program evaluation. In K. L. Sanzo, S. Myran & A. H. Noremore (Eds.), *Successful School Leadership Preparation and Development: Lessons Learned from US DoE School Leadership Program Grants.* London: Emerald Group Publishing Ltd.

Orr, M. T., O'Doherty, A., Barber, M. (2012). *Designing purposeful and coherent leadership preparation curriculum: A curriculum mapping guide.* University Council for Educational Administration, University of Virginia, Charlottesville, VA.

SIX CORE COMPETENCIES

THE MOST CRITICAL KNOWLEDGE AND SKILLS SCHOOL LEADERS NEED TO DELIVER ON THE PROMISE OF EQUITY

6

Shaping and attaining a vision

Improving instructional quality through collaborative professional practice

Engaging families and communities

Marshaling resources

Navigating system-wide data use

Creating systems of accountability and support

THE DANFORTH EDUCATIONAL LEADERSHIP PROGRAM