## Summary: Research Project for Cahn Fellows Program Strategic Plan Giulia Cox, Consultant

 **Context**

In February of 2020, The Cahn Fellows Program (CFP) leadership engaged me to perform a research project that would contribute to their 2020- 25 strategic planning process. My primary role was to gather and report information about two questions of interest; 1) “What is the current research consensus on the critical knowledge, skills and mindsets that principals must exhibit in order to be highly successful?” And, 2) “What best practices in leadership education are currently used by high quality leadership learning programs across industries, and to what extent does the CFP help its Fellows to benefit from those best practices? Having gathered information through reviews of literature and interviews to answer those questions, I then was able to report on the CFP’s areas of strength and opportunities for improvement as they set their strategic objectives for the next five years.

**Methods and Findings**

The first question was answered by reviewing related literature and several current principal performance standards documents. Ultimately, four sets of standards were selected for deeper analysis, three from the US and one from Canada. I then used a “crosswalk” approach to identify broad areas of consensus about the knowledge, skills and attitudes that high performing principals possess. Findings resulted in six areas that pertain to high performance:

**Area 1:** Technical Leadership (Instruction, Operations)

**Area 2**: Culture of Capacity Building

**Area 3**: Intending Impacts

**Area 4:** Managing Change

**Area 5:** Managing Self

**Area 6:** Equity and Ethics

The second question was answered by learning about several current executive leadership development programs, including business schools and corporate universities as well as “peer programs” that, like the Cahn Fellows, focus on K-12 principal leadership development. With review and feedback from CFP leadership, I developed an interview protocol designed to elicit key curricular and other information from these programs about their work. I then interviewed 15 people who represented one or more of these program types. Five interviews included current / former business school faculty, six included representatives of principal leadership peer programs, and five included representatives from professional leadership programs focused on government and the corporate sector. The interviews were transcribed and coded, which led to findings of eleven cross-cutting “themes” that are prioritized by the programs under review. These were reported on individually, with descriptions and examples of best practices.

**Theme 1:** Building Capacity

**Theme 2**: Managing Self, Connecting with Others

**Theme 3**: Understanding Problems / Managing Change

**Theme 4**: Promoting the Leadership of Others and Distributing Leadership

**Theme 5**: Equity, Inclusion and Ethics

**Theme 6**: Impact – Outcomes, Eval & Improvement

**Theme 7**: Learning Environment / Teaching and Learning

**Theme 8**: Learning Environment / Trust and Vulnerability

**Theme 9**: Networking

**Theme 10**: Recognition and Respect

**Theme 11**: Sustainability and Retention

**Recommendations**

There is strong evidence that Cahn is already offering very high value to participants, relative to national expectations and to other programs’ offerings. There were no identified areas of underperformance for the program, and five recommendations were offered as opportunities to deepen program quality even further. These were:

1) To deepen opportunities for successful distribution of leadership by learning more about **team dynamics and high performing teams**,

2) To consider using **“design thinking”** as a way to center the needs of students, teachers, and / or parents when envisioning goals and plans for those stakeholders,

3) To commit to being a “lead learner” on topics of **equity, inclusion and ethics**.

4) To intentionally **revise program evaluation** methods to focus on strategic objectives and opportunities for continuous improvement, and

5) To develop **strategies for engaging program alums** that will sustain them in their careers and promote the program and its vision of school leadership broadly.