PLA Portfolio #2: EDLD 6794 Principal Internship II

My name is Alex Hill, and I am the assistant principal at Loy Norrix High School – one of two major high schools in the Kalamazoo Public School system. I was named to this position in January 2021, after 10 years of being a teacher and special education director in a different district. With my two and a half years’ experience as an assistant principal and completing all but two of the courses required to obtain my Master of Arts in Educational Leadership degree – I will clearly demonstrate that I have already mastered the knowledge and skills established as the course’s learning outcomes/standards. I am submitting this portfolio to seek prior learning assessment (PLA) credits for EDLD 6794.

Course Learning Objectives/Standards

Due to the length of the excerpts of the EDLD 6794 learning outcomes/standards, I have listed them below. The full specification for each of the learning objectives/standards can be found in this NELP Program Recognition Standards document.

Candidates who successfully complete a building-level educational leadership preparation program:

Learning Outcome/Standard 5: Community and External Leadership:

Understand and demonstrate the capacity to promote the current and future success and well-being of each student and adult by applying the knowledge, skills, and commitments necessary to engage families, community, and school personnel in order to strengthen student learning, support school improvement, and advocate for the needs of their school and community.

Learning Outcome/Standard 6: Operations and Management:

Understand and demonstrate the capacity to promote the current and future success and well-being of each student and adult by applying the knowledge, skills, and commitments necessary to improve management, communication, technology, school-level governance, and operation systems to develop and improve data-informed and equitable school resource plans and to apply laws, policies, and regulations.

Learning Outcome/Standard 7: Building Professional Capacity:

Understand and demonstrate the capacity to promote the current and future success and well-being of each student and adult by applying the knowledge, skills, and commitments necessary to build the school’s professional capacity, engage staff in the development of a collaborative professional culture, and
improve systems of staff supervision, evaluation, support, and professional learning.

Sources of Learning/Experiences

It was in January 2021 that I began my role as an administrator. Right from the start I was given my specific job responsibilities as an AP and my list of teachers I’d be responsible for observing. The start to my career was very unconventional. I started halfway through the school year and not the typical school year – our school was fully virtual. I began my administrative duties from behind a computer screen – the administrative team and secretarial staff were the only ones in the building. I became involved in the administrative team decisions immediately. Our administrative team met weekly for hours discussing procedures and protocols. One of the biggest surprises I first learned, was the large number of languages identified being spoken in our school building. Over 40 languages are documented as being spoken, this information can be found in our school information system. I was shocked to learn that our district had been very proactive for the need for having systems of communication that was multi-lingual. The need to be able to communicate with all community stakeholders is of the upmost importance (Standard 5). All our district and building wide mass communication to parents and stakeholders has the availability to be translated into over 120 different languages, an example is shown in Artifact 1.

Prior to this summer, I struggled with communication with some of our parents. Communicating with parents whose primary language was not English, was difficult, especially via phone. Sometimes I was only able to rely on student translation to communicate with parents – which is a burden, because you’re not exactly sure what the student is telling their parents (try and avoid trouble). This summer, as the summer school administrator, I worked closely with our bilingual department in piloting an interpreter program called Alboum. This program allowed me to speak with families, regardless the language barrier. The instant feedback gained from the parents was fantastic. Our summer program had over 100 students who were new to this country and it gave the parents a sense of relief, knowing that there would not be a language barrier with their student’s education. I will discuss the ins and outs of this experience in a following section.

In my previous district, which was in a virtual setting, scheduling was easy. Assign a student two classes they needed for graduation – as they finished a course, another was added, no restrictions. Coming to a district with 85 teachers and over 1,800 students who needed to have five classes was quite the puzzle. Then, I learned that you must add in contractual (teacher) restrictions – class size, prep time, overages, and common prep periods were all new language buzzwords that I had never heard of as being “bad things”. Learning how to assist in completing the master schedule (Standard 6) was no easy task. Through many hours of collaboration and modifying many different drafts, the administration team got all the teachers scheduled – meeting contractual obligations. Once teachers’ schedules are set, adding students through the registration process had to begin. Technically an on-going situation, the actual registration process lasted two weeks. Students and parents would come into the building and make sure all information in the school information system is correct, get their new school ID and finally meet with their guidance counselor or an administrator to schedule classes. Most of the schedule would be set at the end of the registration window, however, students who did not attend the registration have the option to finish the courses in the first few days of the school year.

Teacher evaluations were something that I was comfortable performing, from my prior
experience. However, I went from using the Marzano teacher evaluation model to using the Charlotte Danielson’s Framework for teaching model. I had to go through a two-day training with instructors from the Charlotte Danielson’s Framework organization. This was quite the experience because I was used to attending these trainings in a group setting – this training was one on one. I had mixed feelings about this going into the training, but it turned out to be a very valuable experience. I was able to get all my questions answered in great detail and Instantaneously a copy of the training manual is provided in Artifact 2.

Since I began at the mid-way point of the year, I was able to shadow my principal in many areas. In my first couple weeks of being an assistant principal, I was able to sit in on a few mid-year teacher evaluations. I was able to see the process happening from beginning to end, I was able to take notes and ask follow-up questions to my principal in the end. After sitting through three or four meetings, I was finally able to do them on my own. The one major thing that I took away from the process, was that yes, you must complete the steps of the process – however, no two meetings are going to be the same. I found that you must use your own style when conducting the meetings. Three years later, I’ve had several of the same teachers I’ve evaluated, and I’ve learned their teaching styles and demeanor and has made me a more effective evaluator.

Mastering Knowledge and Skills

In this section I will demonstrate how I have mastered the knowledge and skills for this course’s learning outcomes/standards. I will show how I have used them in my role as assistant principal at [Redacted] for two and a half years through various artifacts and examples. Each standard will be addressed separately and thoroughly.

Learning Outcome/Standard 5: Community and External Leadership

As previously mentioned, I was able to pilot a new initiative within our bilingual/ESL department. During our summer school “Newcomers” program I dealt with over 20 different languages being spoken. Artifact 1 represents a screenshot of the home screen of the translation program used by administrators/teachers to communicate with our bilingual families. In one situation, I had a student who just recently moved from Afghanistan who missed the bus. She spoke very broken English and her parents didn’t speak any at all. After making the call home myself, I realized that I needed to utilize our resources, Aloum, to communicate with the parents and student. Once logging into the system, I used the language drop-down menu and had the student choose her language (Dari). The way the program works is that I click on live translation on a computer, tablet or phone and an interpreter comes into a video chat. I then dial the number of the parents and we are entered into a three-way video chat. I was able to effectively communicate with the parents, through the interpreter and get the student picked up from school. The parents were very appreciative of the interpreter and being able to have clear communications with the school. Screenshots/Artifacts of the conversation would be available, however due to privacy concerns of the student, parents, and interpreter I will not be able to share.

Another key means of communication with our stakeholders are monthly meetings with the Parent Teacher Organization. When we returned to “normal” school (Post-COVID19 – a full
virtual year) we began our PTO meetings in person. We were averaging between 5-10 parents per meeting. With the significant increase that we saw with our virtual parent/teacher conferences during the virtual year, I suggested to our administrative team that we try to hold our PTO meetings virtually. At first, I was met with resistance from our school principal – because this has been the protocol for years. After our next meeting, and a small number of participants again, we decided to pilot it. We blasted out robocalls, social media posts and emails to all stakeholders. Our very next meeting we tripled our attendees and by the end of the school year we had nearly 100 participants attending our meetings. During these meetings, which were 1-hour long – the administrators took 30 minutes to give updates in our specialized areas, we then allowed 30 minutes for a question-and-answer period. We were able to gain valuable information from our stakeholders in relation to school improvement and engagement. Going forward into next year, we will be able to continue to grow the organization and the level of collaboration between school administration and our stakeholders (Standard 5 – Components 5.1 & 5.2).

Weekly communication with our stakeholders is vital. Stakeholders must be kept abreast of current activities happening at our school. Each week, the administrative team releases our “Weekly Newsletter”, via email to all stakeholders – an example can be found in Artifact 3. This example was a letter sent out the first few weeks from returning from our virtual year. It was a reminder of COVID-19 protocols amongst other informative information and educational resources. This newsletter can be translated in over 100 different languages within the page, ensuring that all stakeholders have equal access.

One of the challenges under my umbrella of administrative duties is monitoring student attendance and the consequences attached to them. Over the years, I’ve followed a progressive discipline plan when dealing with tardy and attendance issues. During the 2022-2023 school year I’ve designed a system as follows in order, by the number of occasions: for example: 1st – 2nd offense – phone calls home, 3rd – 4th offense – after school detention, 5th offense – parent meeting/attendance contract Artifact 4. During the parent meeting, the student and parent meet with me and go through the attendance contract will full understanding of expectations and the consequences attached to them. Since implementing the attendance contract, we have decreased the number of tardies and absences by 5%.

Learning Outcome/Standard 6: Operations and Management

As mentioned previously, scheduling is quite the task to tackle. The way the master schedule process works is that each administrator is responsible for a core subject area – with the dean being responsible for one core and all electives. My responsibility is to schedule the sciences. This process begins with taking all the teachers who teach a science course and placing them on the “big board”. This is a 14x14ft board that is hung on a wall in a conference room. We have five class periods per day, teachers have 4 sections and 1 prep period. We start by arranging them by their preferred prep period. We separate teachers by the hour that they teach a specific course, for example, teacher A has three sections of Biology A and one section of Biology B – teacher B has two sections of Biology A and two section of Biology B. We separate them through the five hours of the day, ensuring that the least number of ‘duplicate’ classes in the same period are offered. Artifact 5 is an example of this upcoming years master schedule.
Being the direct supervisor for our paraprofessionals means that I oversee their daily responsibilities and scheduling. When dealing with the scheduling I must consider several things. Which students need a 1:1 paraprofessional, which students/teachers need assistance in transitioning, which class periods have the most need for additional support, ensuring the paraprofessionals breaks don’t overlap each other or analyzing their strengths and weaknesses for the necessary support. Artifact 10 is the most recent example of the most recent paraprofessional schedule I created for the 2023-2024 school year.

Over the years I have done extensive work with our restorative justice interventionist. Together we have collaborated, researched, and formed an effective restorative justice program. There was a need to reduce the number of suspensions at our school. After our first year (2021-2022 school year) of implementing the initiative, we saw a 7% decrease in behavior related suspensions. We were not satisfied with this number, so we decided that this process needed to expand. We needed the teachers buy-in in the classroom to harness the full effect of restorative practices. I requested two hours of professional development time for a teacher training session. During this session we informed the teachers on what restorative practices were – then we were able to train and demonstrate how to effectively implement the practices in the classroom. The outcomes were outstanding, the 2022-2023 school year showed a 19% decrease in suspensions and a 24% decrease in teacher referrals. As one of the 24 schools in the district, we have shown the biggest decrease in suspensions and referrals for last year. We were asked by several other administrators on what our “secrets” were. I shared out the presentation Artifact 6 we used to train our staff to the other administrators (Standard 6).

Every year our administration team looks over the handbook to adjust and revise. This year, I adjusted our dress code policy and created a new cellphone policy. With the help of an Ad hoc committee, I created and started the implementation process of a school-wide no cell phone policy. In this policy it also lists out the consequences aligned with it through the district and statewide progressive discipline model (Standard 6 – Component 6.3). Artifact 7 is a copy of our LN handbook – pages 7-8 represent the newly implemented cell phone policy and behavior matrix. Additionally, the rest of the handbook represents the work that I did, in collaboration with our team to ensure our school operates on an equitable, ethical, and legal basis.

**Learning Outcome/Standard 7: Building Professional Capacity**

It is no secret that teacher and staff retention, is a growing issue alongside their being a teacher shortage. Our district alone, holds many open houses and hiring events for upcoming teachers spread throughout the state. Once these teachers are referred to our building, our hiring team assembles a panel to do interviews. The questions we use for teachers are HR initiated, therefore I only get the opportunity to analyze and question potential candidates. When it comes to the hiring of paraprofessionals and other support staff positions, I am the person in charge of creating a line of questions for each position. Artifact 8 is an example of a set of questions that I was able to modify for a position that has been in existence in our school for some time. The attendance interventionist position in the past solely focused on tracking students and alerting
them when they hit certain benchmarks. We modified that position to be a more proactive member of our behavior team. The position now requires a much more interactive approach to working with our students with attendance issues. I modified and added five questions to the list of questions to ask.

Entering the 2022-2023 school year, we noticed that we had an excess of funds in our Title I account. The character development coach position would focus on a group of students who meet a certain criterion based on academic, behavior and attendance statuses. Artifact 9 is the line of questions that I created for the position. I selected this line of questioning to ensure that candidates wanted to really be a part of our family, were motivated to helping our most at-risk and needy students, and that they had experience in dealing with students. We had eight candidates apply and our team went through the applications and resumes and decided to interview five of the candidates. Through the process, we had a great set of interviews and afterwards we compiled the scores (as noted on the questionnaire) and debated on who we thought would be the best fit. In the end, we did choose an excellent candidate.

As mentioned before, I use the Charlotte Danielson method when evaluating our teachers. Teacher evaluations happen in a process. The first step is to create an individualized development plan. This plan is used to set goals for teachers to work on and achieve during the school year (Artifact 12). The second step is to have several walkthroughs on each teacher throughout the year – done by each administrator and documented using Artifact 11. Walkthroughs are a snapshot of any given lesson. This form can be completed in a short time and is housed in a central location for each administrator to access. Next, teachers must have a formal observation. This is like the walkthrough process, however the amount of time spent in the classroom is greater. There are several categories spread out through four domains that evaluate all aspects of teachers inside the classroom as shown by Artifact 13. After the formal observation is conducted, I assign them a post-observation reflection to have them fill out prior to a meeting (Artifact 14), where the observation results are discussed. The final step in the evaluation process is to take Artifact 15 and use all the data collected from the school year – walkthroughs, observations, meetings and data reviews to fill out the summative evaluation form. Teachers can receive any one of four ratings: Ineffective, Minimally Effective, Effective, or Highly Effective. Each teacher goes through this process yearly (Standard 7 – Components 7.3 & 7.4).

Reflection on Learning

The past two and a half years as being the Assistant Principal at has been exhilarating, stressful, and overall, a truly fantastic experience – I love what I do. I started this role without any formalized (schooling) training – only my experiences from my undergraduate coursework and my experience in previous educational roles (teaching, coaching, director). Relying on my colleagues for advice and on the go training, I was able to fit into my role comfortably and overtime start applying my graduate coursework studies to implementing best practices. Based on teachers, supervisors, students, and families input and commentary, I believe I have been doing an exceptional job. Proof of this can be found in my most recent summative evaluation given by the school’s principal (Artifact 16). I have received the overall rating of
“Effective” in the domain areas of: Results, Leadership, Systems, Processes and Capacity. I have received the same rating all three years that I’ve been evaluated. The major reasons for my success at Loy Norrix are that for over 10 years, I’ve lived in and been a part of the community. I know the community struggles and concerns. I also have a great support staff of veteran colleagues that I leaned about for advice and guidance. Having the opportunity to take courses at Western Michigan University, while actively working the job gave me real-time skills to apply best practices when implementing new initiatives. Everything noted within this portfolio demonstrates that I have earned PLA credits for EDLD 6794.

In my two and a half years of being an administrator, I have learned and grown immensely. I still have room to grow and plan on doing so during the 2023-2024 school year. In the areas of Standard 5 I plan on growing our building communication, both with our bilingual families and our parent teacher organization membership. I plan on using the beforementioned Alboum program to help fully integrate our families into our school. The number of families who are new to the country doubled for this upcoming school year; we now have two full cohorts (classes). Using this program will help fill the void that our families have felt in the past – broken and lack of communication. It is my plan, with our teachers to host an open house for those families and with the help of our district translators to inform the parents of what we can offer to them to ensure that communication is accessible and available to them. The growth shown last year in our PTO was significant. Though the number of participants grew, it is still under 10% of our parent/guardian population. We’ve already begun the process during our beginning of the year orientations and registrations on informing parents about the PTO and all that it does. We had registration and informative tables set up and had several interested parties show interest. In the next two weeks, we have several building events, I’ve invited current PTO leaders to set up an information table to try and recruit more participants. The more stakeholders we have involved in our school the better opportunities our students have.

Restorative practices are a passion of mine. With our new initiatives in place this year to increase restorative practices in classrooms, it is my mission to ensure it’s effectiveness. I have already established a schedule to be in all 17 of my teachers (cohort) classrooms to help implement and facilitate restorative practices into their daily lessons. With my training and experience with restorative practices, I’ll be able to give real-time examples and feedback when applying the appropriate practices in the classroom. The ideal outcome of this real-time training to teachers’ is to help reduce the number of classroom behaviors (referrals).

One of my greatest strengths is relationship building. Support staff are often overlooked in many areas. It is my plan to meet regularly with our paraprofessional staff; weekly. The start of this will come before the school year starts. I want to sit down with them and go through the paraprofessional handbook with them. I want to explain expectations and assignments for the year. From there, I want to have an open discussion on their needs and wants. I want them to know how much they are valued and appreciated – without them, our school does not function near the same capacity. I want to celebrate them, often. I plan on highlighting their work throughout the year – things they often do that goes above and beyond what their job duties entail. I will also ensure that our PTO highlights them as well – last year the PTO celebrated by
buying lunch for groups within our building, unfortunately out paraprofessional staff were not highlighted. This year they will have the opportunity to be celebrated like they deserve.

The reflections above simply connect to the learning outcomes/standards required for PLA credits for EDLD 6794 – they are not a full list of improvements that I am focused on for the upcoming school year. They, along with the rest of this portfolio provide enough evidence to earn the credits for this course.

**Appendix: Artifacts**

There are a large number of artifacts/evidence linked throughout this portfolio – they can be found here in this Google Drive Folder. All artifacts are listed below in numeric order.

Artifact 1: Artifact 1 – Alboum Screenshot
Artifact 3: Artifact 3 – Weekly Newsletter example
Artifact 4: Artifact 4 – Attendance Contract
Artifact 5: Artifact 5 – Master Schedule example
Artifact 6: Artifact 6 – Restorative Justice Training Power Point
Artifact 7: Artifact 7 – Student/Parent Handbook
Artifact 8: Artifact 8 – Attendance Interventionist Interview Questions
Artifact 9: Artifact 9 – Character Development Coach Interview Questions
Artifact 10: Artifact 10 – 2023-2024 Paraprofessional schedule
Artifact 11: Artifact 11 – Walkthrough form
Artifact 12: Artifact 12 – Teacher Individualized Development Plan
Artifact 13: Artifact 13 – Observation form
Artifact 14: Artifact 14 – Post-Observation Reflection form
Artifact 15: Artifact 15 – Teacher Summative Evaluation form
Artifact 16: Artifact 16 – Personal Summative Evaluation form