

# The Tointon Institute for Educational Change at The University of Northern Colorado

## A Brief History and Overview of Programs

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The Tointon Institute for Educational Change has been providing high quality leadership training to K-12 administrators throughout the state of Colorado since 1995. A gift to UNC from Bob and Betty Tointon of Greeley, Colorado helps to fund this enormously successful program which has as a goal to increase the effectiveness of school leaders so that overall student learning will be increased. Since its inception, *the Tointon Institute has worked with more than 1340 principals in Colorado and 411 school teams with more than 3200 teacher leaders.*

Superintendents and other educators nominate principals to attend the Principal Leadership Academy. Principals nominated need to have at least one year of experience, but many attendees have been principals for multiple years. Every year, this academy is oversubscribed. Additionally, due to overwhelming statewide requests, invitations to the School and Teacher Leadership Academies are extended only to graduates of the Principal Leadership Academy who are invited to apply to attend along with a group of teacher leaders from their school. The number of participants in all Tointon academies is limited so that participants can develop relationships and network with other members and so that the presenter-to-participant ratio remains low increasing the effectiveness of the overall learning experience.

Participants in the Tointon Institute's academies are given an opportunity to learn from many of the state's premier practicing educators and professional learning experts and to network with colleagues from districts across Colorado. The program is comprised of residential academies that focus on leadership skill building with an emphasis on instructional leadership that improves student achievement. For the Principal academy, there is also a one-year virtual follow-up program and individualized consultation. The program director and facilitators also provide ongoing support for academy participants in the years following their attendance on an as-needed basis.

All academies are residential, four days for the School and Teacher Leadership Academy and five days for the Principal Leadership Academy and are held in resort locations in Colorado allowing the members in attendance to concentrate on the curriculum rather than daily routine. Sessions are intense and days are full, but the participants unanimously approve of the rigorous schedule.

Presentations are developed for each Academy based on the needs of the group as well as research-based identified needs of school leaders. Sample topics from recent academies include:

- collective efficacy
- vision setting and building leadership for 21<sup>st</sup> century schools
- trust development/reparations with staff and community
- leadership team development and shared leadership
- effective teaming structures and practices
- identifying and understanding personal leadership styles and the consequent effect on staff collaboration and support
- change leadership
- effective implementation of professional learning communities (PLCs)
- building culture and developing sustainable supporting structures for that culture
- using data to target instructional needs and make decisions
- methods of working with constituencies with different value systems
- difficult conversations
- research-based power tools for instruction
- planning for and evaluating effective professional development

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The focus on practical application of skills being learned is a major part of each academy. To this end, participants are given time to engage in systematic reflection about themselves, their teams (for the team academies) and their schools. Participants in the Principal Leadership Academy complete a personal action plan based on feedback they receive from their staffs on a research-based, 360-degree evaluation of their leadership behaviors completed prior to their academy with results being presented and discussed at the academy. Individuals are encouraged to make connections between what is learned in the daily sessions of the academy with their needs that they identify in their action plan. These plans direct the work with the Director and/or facilitators following each academy. During a one-year follow-up program, offered virtually, principals continue their learning in facilitated and targeted discussions, once every six-eight weeks. The development of a strong cohort of principals at the academy makes this ongoing professional development meaningful *and* personal. Participants in the School and Teacher Leadership Academy complete a team action plan based on what their individual school's needs are and are required to incorporate information and skills gained at the academy. This action plan includes planning for how to share information gleaned at the academy with the rest of the staff at their schools upon their return. These action plans guide the work of the school leadership team for the year following their attendance at the academy. Follow-up consultation for teams with the Director and facilitators is available.

The Tointon Institute seeks to create successful schools through effective leadership at all levels. Our program gives school leaders additional leadership skills to function successfully in a rapidly changing school environment while also giving them the opportunity to work with other colleagues and to gain from their experiences and expertise. All Tointon academies provide participants with an academic and stimulating learning environment where they can reflect on their current contexts, move leadership decisions to a more conscious level and focus actions and strategies on critical issues related to school effectiveness and ultimately, to increased student learning. Finally, the Tointon Institute for Educational Change develops a formal and informal statewide networking apparatus for school leaders that has and continues to foster a sustained exchange of ideas as well as a forum in which to explore the dilemmas facing today's school leaders.

#### About the Director

Dr. Janet Alcorn has been the Director of the Tointon Institute since 2001. Prior to this, she was an elementary principal and assistant principal in Jefferson County Public Schools in Colorado for several years. Before moving to Colorado in 1986, Dr. Alcorn taught elementary school in Los Angeles, California. She has a master's degree in educational administration and a Doctorate in Elementary Education. In addition to her role as Director, Dr. Alcorn has taught pre-service K-12 teachers and principal licensure candidates at UNC and serves as a consultant presenting on topics related to school-based and business leadership, the principalship, the standards-based teaching-learning cycle, quality K-12 educational programming, retention of quality principals and teacher leaders and quality professional development of teacher leaders and principals within the state. She received the O'Rourke prize from Learning Forward Colorado for distinguished achievement in staff development in 2010 and in 2015 accepted the CASEY award from the Colorado Association of School Executives (CASE) on behalf of the work of the Tointon Institute and Bob and Betty Tointon's devotion to educational leadership.

***For more information on the Tointon Institute for Educational Change,  
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