At-a-Glance

The Dallas Independent School District created the Leadership Development/Fellows Academy in response to the Destination 2020 plan and tasked the program with increasing leadership capacity and supporting principals in campus efforts to improve quality of instruction, raise student achievement, and create a positive school culture and climate. The Leadership Development/ Fellows Academy has been operating since the 2012-13 school year and has graduated three cohorts. Cohort I had 57 fellows, cohort II had 48, and cohort III had 33 fellows. They participated in in-house training as well as a residency/mentor principal experience on a Dallas ISD campus. An Assistant Principal Fellows Academy was added for the 2014-15 school year and included 86 first, second, or third year assistant principals on topics that would allow them to better serve their principals and campuses.

Cohort I through III Experiences

Fellows Academy cohorts I through III completed online surveys and in-person interviews soliciting information about their experiences in the Fellows Academy program. Results of the surveys and interviews indicated that all three cohorts had similar experiences. Their experience in the Fellows Academy training was highly positive. Figure 1 shows cohort II agreement with items related to their Fellows Academy experience.

The residency component was one of the most valuable components of the program when implemented appropriately, but most fellows reported that more on-campus support from Fellows Academy staff would have been beneficial. Some fellows were reassigned to more than one mentor principal, indicating that this component of the program needs to be developed and refined further. The Academy fellows indicated that the network with other fellows and Dallas ISD staff and the hands-on experience during training and the residency were the most valuable aspects of the program. Comments about the residency experience revolved around five themes: 1) having an experienced principal to learn from was valuable, 2) practicing skills in a real-world setting was beneficial, 3) mentor principals needed more training and direction from Fellows Academy staff, 4) Fellows Academy staff needed to be more selective when recruiting mentor principals, 5) more information about the principal selection/hiring process would be beneficial. Fellows from all cohorts have also requested additional training on Dallas ISD systems, policies, and procedures such as Chancery, SDS, Exceeds, Oracle, budgeting, hiring, action planning, and master scheduling. Fellows from all cohorts reported that they did not receive much on-campus support from Fellows Academy staff, but did believe that should they need assistance, Fellows Academy staff would be able to provide it. Figure 2 summarizes cohort III responses to a related survey item.

There were not enough Fellows Academy staff members to provide adequate levels of campus support to fellows. During the 2014-15 school year, the executive director originally over the program had been promoted to assistant superintendent, the director was promoted to an executive director position, and the program was run on a daily basis by a manager, and coordinator, and a principal facilitator; this left the program woefully understaffed.
Assistant Principal Fellows Academy

AP fellows remained in their current positions on campus during their participation in the program. They had the opportunity to participate in 19 training sessions held throughout the year. A review of attendance data showed that fellows attended between zero and 15 sessions with an average of five sessions per fellow. Thirteen of the 86 fellows did not attend any of the training sessions. Assistant Principal Fellows Academy fellows completed online surveys. The results show that Fellows Academy staff were not always present for training sessions and did not always actively participate. Some AP fellows (40%) reported having a difficult time leaving their campuses for training (Figure 3).

Figure 3: Assistant Principal Fellows, Ability to Attend Training

AP fellows rated the training favorably and specifically valued the opportunities to network and collaborate with colleagues, learn about best practices, and the information guest speakers were able to provide. AP fellows suggested that the Fellows Academy program provide more opportunities for AP fellows to network with Dallas ISD leadership, increase the visibility and support for the AP component of the Fellows Academy, and provide more on-campus support including demonstrations of topics covered in training.

Fellow and Non-Fellow Comparison

An analysis of cohort I fellows in principal positions and their non-fellow counterparts showed no statistically significant differences when analyzing changes in quantitative indicator scores from one school year to the next (i.e., STAAR scores, Climate Survey results, SEI scores, performance rubric and systems review scores, and numbers of disciplinary referrals). There was a statistically significant difference between STAAR social studies exam scores for the 2014-15 school year. Students at campuses with fellows were more likely to pass at level 2 or higher than students at campuses with non-fellows. Non-fellows had higher SEI and performance review scores than did fellows.

Non-fellows also had lower numbers of disciplinary referrals on their campuses than did fellows. Overall, the data indicate that fellows and non-fellows were having similar levels of impact on their campuses over time.

Campus Placements

The largest proportion of Fellows Academy fellows in cohorts I, II, and III were placed in assistant principal positions as of July 29, 2015 (39%, 65%, and 85%, respectively). About 20 percent of cohort I fellows had resigned from the district as of the release of this report. About 15 percent of cohort II fellows had resigned. Most fellows remained in their same positions from one year to the next. Fellows Academy staff reportedly did not track placement of AP fellows because the program was designed to provide training to APs that would better prepare them to support their campuses and principals. The Title II workscope did state that these fellows would be eligible to compete for leadership positions; however, the training did not focus on preparing them for this process.

Recommendations

There were five recommendations resulting from the 2014-15 evaluation.

1. Revise the program training curriculum to include more training on district policies, procedures, and databases such as Chancery, SDS, Exceeds, Oracle, budgeting, hiring, action planning, and master scheduling.
2. Improve the mentor principal selection process by:
   a. Selecting principals with a coaching mindset
   b. Selecting campuses with appropriate characteristics (i.e., not only needing a fellow to fill an empty staff position)
   c. Providing mentor principal training and continuous oversight to ensure mentors are fulfilling their obligations as a mentor.
3. Increase the budget for the Fellows Academy to allow for hiring of additional Fellows Academy staff members in order to provide more oversight and in-person support of fellows, mentor principals, former fellow graduates.
4. Conduct more campus visits during the residency component and during fellows’ first year out of the program.
5. Provide more guidance and training regarding the principal selection process as well as support for fellow graduates still going through the process.

Additional information may be obtained by consulting the Fellows Academy Program Report, EA15-146-2, at: http://www.dallasisd.org/Page/888.