Aspiring Principals Program: 2011-12

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At-a-Glance

The Aspiring Principals program suffered from a great deal of transition during the 2011-12 school year and has been discontinued for the 2012-13 school year. In addition, the Aspiring Principals program (APP) and training was not implemented in the same way for cohort II who received their training during the 2011-12 school year. Cohort II was not included in the evaluation for this school year and the results of this report cannot be applied to expected outcomes for cohort II. Of the 21 fellows in cohort I, one left the program before the end of the summer training session and was not considered a graduate of the program, ten were working as principals, one was promoted into a school leadership position after having worked as a principal for one year, eight were working as assistant or associate principals (APs) and one had been put on administrative leave. This evaluation focused on cohort I fellows who completed their formal training during the 2010-11 school year and were in their first year working outside of the program.

New Principal Leadership Characteristics

Some of the principals did need to make adjustments in their leadership philosophies once they were in their principal position while others said the program had realistically prepared them for their new roles. Fellows reported time constraints, communication issues, and difficulties in building relationships with staff. It was not surprising that fellows reported some difficulties as it was their first year in their positions and it is expected that some adjustments would need to be made.

Most fellows reported making important changes to how their campuses ran while a few reported that they were observing during their first year and would make changes during their second year in the role. Some changes made to the campuses were changes to policies and procedures, clarification of staff expectations, revised campus schedules and organizational structures, and additional services for parents.

Fellows reported that the program increased their confidence, provided them with valuable literature and resources, and helped them learn how to actually do the work of a principal. The most common comment was that the program provided fellows with a network and support infrastructure that allowed them to collaborate and share ideas and experiences.

Teaching staff reported that fellows were organized, good collaborators, approachable and accessible, good communicators, and provided clear expectations. Some teachers indicated that the fellows were not very good delegators and micromanaged to a small extent. During two focus groups, teachers indicated that the fellows were less nurturing and harsher than their predecessors. Administrative staff commented that fellows were excellent at communication and collaboration. They communicated clear expectations and brought teachers and other staff together as a team. Administrative staff reported that the fellows were good listeners, had good people skills, were good with the students, and were encouraging and supportive of staff.

Support Available to New Principals

The program had no formal plan in place to support the APP fellows in their principal positions once completing the year of formal training. The majority of fellows reported having some contact with APP staff but that there was no formal support structure in place. They reported even less support from their mentor principals during the 2011-12 school year, though some of the fellows were still in contact and did receive support. The strongest support came from other cohort I fellows; these relationships continued after the formal training had ended.

Nine fellows participated in a New Principal program during the 2011-12 school year; two participated in this program during the 2010-11 school year. The New Principal program assisted and supported new principals as they diagnosed, developed and implemented action plans for their campuses. New principals were paired with coaches who were mostly retired Dallas Independent School District (ISD) administrators.

Using the campus School Effectiveness Indices (SEI) and yearly appraisal ratings as measures of
program success were not considered appropriate. This was because it was difficult to determine what skills and characteristics the fellows were displaying were due to their own level of ability or to the training they received in the program. Fellows’ comments supported this conclusion. Fellows reported that observations and interviews with teachers, staff, parents and students were all valuable additions to any measures of their success. They were considered appropriate when discussing the success of the fellows in their principal roles.

**Fellows Not in Principal Positions**

APP fellows not yet working as principals were not provided with the same level of support as those who had moved into principal positions. Some of the fellows were still in contact with their mentor principals and more were in contact with other fellows from their cohort, though some wished there was more contact and suggested that because they were still APs they were out of the loop with other fellows working as principals. Fellows suggested it would have been beneficial to receive assistance with the principal application process, semi-regular meetings to discuss issues and concerns, help with building contacts, additional training on how to market themselves, more assistance with preparing for interviews, and refresher training on topics important to the principal role.

Even though these fellows were not working as principals, they stated that they were better at prioritizing tasks, more focused on getting to know their campus, more flexible, and better listeners now that they were out of the program and actually on their campuses full time. Some campus changes fellows made included adding a peer mentor program, using online file sharing for teacher lesson plans, redesigning the Limited English Proficiency (LEP) strategy for a campus, adding professional development, strengthening curriculum planning, adding more oversight and accountability, and increasing parent interaction. A couple of fellows reported that they had not made many changes because it was not their place as an AP to do so.

Fellows were either actively applying for jobs, waiting for principalships at particular types of campuses, or were not applying. Some fellows wanted jobs in certain parts of town while others either wanted new campuses or wanted the opportunity to turn a low performing campus around. Those who were not applying wanted additional years of experience as APs or were waiting until the time was right for them personally to apply. One fellow reported that no principal positions had been posted. No professional development was available for these fellows during the 2011-12 school year through the APP program. But with regard to the benefits of the training they had received during the 2010-11 school year they reported that the program provided constructive feedback, valuable articles and books, a network of people to call for advice and taught them how to deal with people and difficult situations. Some fellows expressed some disappointment with the program stating that they wished the program had focused more on instructional leadership or that they could have accessed the information they needed without the program.

Supervising principals reported that the fellows demonstrated stronger leadership, were aware of what was going on in the district, had useful networks with other fellows in the program, and were better read on relevant literature than those not in the program. They stated that they expanded the role of the AP for their fellows and increased their workload, but were less sure as to whether the level of preparedness was due to the program or due to the skill level of candidates recruited for the program. Principals exposed fellows to as many tasks as possible, held regular meetings and had candid conversations, read articles together, and worked on their skill sets. Two principals expressed concern with the goals of the APP program indicating that they did not think the program should work to promote fellows to principal positions so quickly and that the principals spend a great deal of time training the fellows only for them to leave the next year. Supervising principals commented that the program selected only the most highly qualified individuals and that fellows came in with high levels of intelligence and good skill sets.

**Recommendations**

The evaluator recommended that the program add comprehensive skills assessments and personality inventories to the beginning of training to better assess with what hard and soft skills fellows entered the program. In addition, the program should interview supervisors, teachers, and other staff about the skill sets of candidates before they begin training and conduct extensive observations after training to determine where change and improvement had been made.

Additional information may be obtained by consulting the Aspiring Principals Program Report, EA12-146-2, at [http://www.dallasisd.org/Page/15252](http://www.dallasisd.org/Page/15252)