FINAL REPORT OF 2011-2012
Aspiring Principals Program
EA12-146-2

DEPARTMENT OF EVALUATION
AND ACCOUNTABILITY

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Dallas Independent School District

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ASPRING PRINCIPALS PROGRAM
2011-2012
EA12-146-2

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Dallas, Texas
September, 2012
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ABSTRACT

The Aspiring Principals program (APP) 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 and training was not implemented in the same way during the second year of implementation with 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 transitioned into a learning community coordinator position after having worked as a principal for one year, and eight were working as assistant or associate principals 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. 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. 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. 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. 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 were either actively applying for jobs, waiting for principalships at particular types of campuses, or were not applying. One of the difficulties in evaluating the Aspiring Principals program was that the program recruited highly qualified candidates who were most likely ready for principal roles without the program. The program faced four difficulties when attempting to determine its effectiveness: 1) the program spent a great deal of time developing soft skills which were harder to measure objectively, 2) not all fellows completed the same number of training sessions throughout the year; some were promoted to principal positions early in the year, 3) not all fellows came in with the same skill sets, and 4) the fellows were in principal and AP roles at campuses across the district with differing histories, student populations, strengths, and issues which needed to be addressed.
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PROGRAM DESCRIPTION

The Aspiring Principals program (APP) was housed under the Dallas Leadership Academy (DLA) and School Leadership and Administrative Services department within the Dallas Independent School district (Dallas ISD). There was a great deal of transition during the 2011-12 school year and the DLA office was renamed the Administrator Professional Development department and several of the staff members were relocated to other offices. The APP staff for the majority of the school year consisted of an interim director (the former program manager) and one other staff member. The original director and coordinator continued to assist the program even though they were not officially involved. The Administrator Professional Development department was reorganized for the 2012-13 school year and the Aspiring Principals program was cancelled. A new principal leadership training program will be implemented in its place. At the time of this report, none of the staff working with APP were kept on for the new training program.

It is also important to note that the Aspiring Principals program was not replicated in the same way for cohort II during the 2011-12 school year. Therefore, the results of this evaluation cannot be applied to expected outcomes for other cohorts. One concerning feature of cohort II training was that in at least two instances, fellows were paired with cohort I fellows as their mentor principals. The program advertised that fellows would get to work with master principals but pairing fellows with new principals directly contradicts that advertised practice. Training was also cut in half due to district policy changes stating that administrators could not be off their campuses for more than half a day. Cohort I was in training all day, one day per week. This was not the case for cohort II. Evaluating the second implementation year (i.e., cohort II) was not within the scope of this evaluation; the evaluator did not know how the training was adjusted to deal with this policy change.

The program had six expected outcomes as outlined in the program workscope:

1. 100 percent of the curriculum would be rigorous and performance-based for program fellows, facilitators and mentors.
2. 90 percent of participants would strongly agree that the professional development prepared them for the principalship.

3. 90 percent of participants would be placed in principal positions within two years of program completion.

4. Program graduates would maintain a campus School Effectiveness Index (SEI) rating at or above the 50th percentile.

5. 90 percent of program graduates would remain in the principalship for at least five years after selection.

6. APP graduates would maintain a rating of proficient or above on yearly appraisals.

As of the 2011-12 school year, ten of the original twenty-one fellows were working as principals and one had been in a principal position but had already accepted another position within the district. One of the 21 fellows did not complete the three-week summer intensive training and so, was not considered a graduate of the program.

Program Components. APP was a 14-month leadership development program designed to recruit, select and prepare assistant and associate principals (APs) and advanced teachers for principal positions in the district. The program began during the summer of 2010. The program used shadowing, teamwork, and a campus-based residency to prepare participants, called fellows, to lead instructional improvements and school operation efforts as principals on their own campuses at the end of the program.

The program was designed to be implemented in four phases: a three week summer intensive training, year-long residency training sessions on identified strands of leadership, a side-by-side residency mentorship with principals, and a summer planning session preparing fellows for the principal application process. The summer intensive curriculum was designed around the 12 Leadership Performance Standards: personal behavior, resilience, communication, focus on student performance, situational problem-solving, learning, accountability for professional practice, supervision of instructional and non-instructional staff, leadership development, climate and culture, time/task/project management, and technology. Each week of training focused on a different set of materials related to: getting to know the school, getting to
know the people at the school, and moving from vision and mission to goals and action plans. The training during the residency year also focused on these 12 performance standards.

The residency training curriculum included several projects, including creating a “data picture” of their school, an implementation map for a district initiative, a coaching plan for campus employees, and a how-to guide from a principal’s perspective of some operational compliance issues. Cohort I completed the three-week summer intensive training during the summer of 2010 and completed their year-long residency training sessions and residency mentorship during the 2010-11 school year. The first cohort was scheduled to complete the summer planning session and the second cohort completed the three-week summer intensive training during the summer of 2011; however, the summer planning session for cohort I was cancelled.

PURPOSE AND SCOPE OF THE EVALUATION

The scope of the evaluation plan was to evaluate the first year of the Aspiring Principals program through evaluation of cohort I fellows in their first year of work after completing the formal training. This evaluation:

1. Examined how cohort I fellows were leading differently in their principal roles as a result of the Aspiring Principals program.

2. Summarized the type and amount of support available to cohort I fellows working as principals including APP staff, mentor principals, and other cohort I fellows.

3. Described the experiences of cohort I fellows not yet in principal positions.

The results of this evaluation were based solely on interviews with Dallas ISD APP program management staff, cohort I fellows, principals supervising those fellows still working as assistant or associate principals, teachers, counselors, and other administrative staff at campuses where fellows were working as principals. Fellows also provided documentation of work they were doing on their campuses which the evaluator reviewed. The evaluator determined that it was inappropriate to evaluate student outcomes during the 2011-12 school year as fellows had not been in their positions long enough to influence these results.
MAJOR EVALUATION QUESTIONS

2.1 How were cohort I fellows leading differently in their principal roles as a result of the Aspiring Principals program?

Methodology

The sample consisted of all APP cohort I fellows who completed at least the three-week summer intensive training in 2010 and were employed as Dallas ISD principals, campus teachers and other administrative staff, and APP management staff. The evaluator collected data through interviews with cohort I fellows, APP management staff, and focus groups with teachers and other administrative staff. The evaluator conducted observations and reviewed existing documentation where available and appropriate. The evaluator conducted interviews with ten APP fellows working as principals and conducted focus groups with a total of 45 teachers and 24 administrative staff members including assistant and associate principals, office managers, counselors, academic coordinators and instructional coaches. One additional fellow completed the three week summer intensive training and then received a principal position for the 2010-11 school year. This fellow then moved out of the principal role during the 2011-12 school year and become a leadership coach for one of the learning communities. This fellow was interviewed despite not working as a principal during the 2011-12 school year.

Results

Leadership Philosophy. Fellows reported on the leadership styles they used and leadership philosophies they ascribed to on their campuses. They reported their leadership styles as being collaborative, reflective, and student-centered, and that they tried to model behavior they wanted to see from staff. Five of the fellows reported that they did not have to make any adjustments in their leadership philosophies once they were in principal positions. One fellow reported that the role play and scenarios used during the APP training helped build realistic expectations of the principal role and adequately prepared fellows for that leadership role. Three fellows specifically mentioned that they had to change the way they lead once they were in the principal roles. Fellows reported needing strong staff support in their leadership roles and reported relying heavily on student data to make decisions. One fellow indicated that she got lucky in that campus staff embraced her new leadership style which differed from the previous
principal. Fellows had to change their leadership styles due to time constraints, necessary adjustments to communication techniques and accountability measures, and issues with staff and building relationships. Fellows reported that they had less time to lead the way they had planned, did not have the staff support that they expected, and had to take more risks than they initially expected. While some fellows reported having the support of the staff on their campuses, other fellows reported being challenged and having difficulty getting staff to comply with their leadership techniques. These kinds of issues were to be expected given that these fellows were only in their first year in principal positions and some adjustment and difficulties were to be expected.

The evaluator asked fellows to define instructional and transformational leadership; two terms often used during the APP training. One of the program goals was to create these kinds of leaders. The evaluator defined instructional leadership as the principal being a subject matter expert with regards to curriculum and instruction and transformational leadership as the principal being able to bring staff together to motivate them to all work towards a common mission, vision, or goal. In addition, transformational leadership could be considered to be the ability to work effectively to change the culture and climate of a school for the better. Fellows seemed to have a strong handle on instructional leadership but definitions of transformational leadership were more varied. Fellows defined instructional leadership as being an expert in instruction, being able to model instructional best practices, being able to monitor and assess instructors, using data to make changes in instruction, focusing on learning versus teaching, bringing weak and strong teachers together, finding resources for teachers, and holding teachers accountable for quality instruction. They defined transformational leadership as being able to shift paradigms in thinking, being flexible and adaptable, transforming expectations of students, moving a campus towards a common goal, providing direction to staff, providing training on best practices, creating high expectations for staff, being courageous and willing to have difficult conversations, finding ways to meet all the needs of their students, and being able to transform the culture of the campus.

The majority of fellows reported that they believed themselves to be instructional and transformational leaders. Some fellows reported that they were instructional leaders but were still developing their transformational leadership skills. Fellows gave some examples of instructional
leadership: helping teachers implement skills learned in professional development in their classrooms, laying out expectations for teachers and visiting their classrooms, knowing about research in the area of instruction, providing modeling for teachers, working with teachers after observations to build skills, asking targeted questions of teachers to increase self reflection. Some examples of transformational leadership were creating solidarity around the mission of serving students, listening to teachers to gain their trust, getting staff on board through teamwork, having programs to engage students on the campus, using student data to monitor student progress, and conducting Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities, and Threats (SWOT) analyses.

The program director stated that the program had no way to measure objectively whether fellows displayed instructional and transformational leadership qualities but that through conversation and observation program staff could get a feel for where fellows needed additional training.

Campus Operations. Only two of the fellows reported making no changes to how their campus operated when they took over as principal. This was because the campuses were operating well as a result of the leadership of the previous principal. They reported planning to maintain programs and procedures for the first year and would make changes following a year of observation. The remainder of the fellows reported making changes to the organizational structures and campus schedules, processes, policies, programs, and culture of their campuses.

The fellows listed specifically what changes they made. Fellows made changes to the campus culture through student achievement and behavior awards; assemblies for honor roll, attendance, and citizenship; reading and math events; hallway decoration competitions; community engagement, and efforts to increase staff solidarity. Fellows made changes to policies and procedures such as changing elementary classrooms to be self-contained; changing arrival and dismissal procedures, revising teacher handbooks; creating parent and student handbooks; clarifying expectations regarding teacher and student attendance; and doing SWOT analyses. Fellows provided a list of programs they added to their campuses: recess, science labs, student stores, robotics programs, nutritional programs, gardens and outdoor classrooms, soccer and basketball programs, afterschool clubs, mentoring programs, African American initiatives,
tutoring, Saturday school, and reading clubs. Fellows made changes to teachers work as well. Fellows required teachers to turn in lesson plans, built teacher lounges, added instructional planning time every six weeks, taught teachers how to use data to monitor student progress, created “must have” lists of supplies for teachers classrooms, worked to establish cultures of trust and collaboration, modeled instructional techniques for teachers in the classroom, added planning for dealing with at-risk students, and created staff newsletters. Fellows also added additional services for parents: added communication procedures, created student behavior logs, held open parent meetings with the principal, created Facebook pages for parents to get information about the campus, and created parent newsletters.

Fellows often implemented the same programs on each of their campuses. Fellows reported that this was due to the APP program. Fellows were exposed to campus best practices during the 2010-11 training and they implemented those strategies during their first year as principals.

Benefits of the Aspiring Principals Program. The evaluator asked fellows to reflect on their roles as principals and explain what the program contributed to their skill set. 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. Three fellows reported that the program built up their confidence, though one of those fellows reported that confidence would have come with time, but the program made it come more quickly. One fellow stated that the books and other resources were an invaluable benefit of the program. Several fellows reported that the role playing included in the training helped prepare them for their role. This aspect of the training appeared to help fellows overcome fears and be mindful of how their personalities might come across to their staff; the honest feedback reportedly helped them grow as leaders. Two fellows indicated that the biggest strength of the program was their mentor principals. They stated that the one-on-one work with their principals last year really helped them learn how to actually do the work of a principal.

Retention. One expected outcome of the Aspiring Principals program was that 90 percent of program participants would remain in their principal positions for at least five years.
after selection. When asked how long fellows intended to stay in their principal positions, six fellows reported that they would like to stay in their principal positions until they retire or for as long as possible. Two fellows reported that they did not know how long they would stay; it depended on what opportunities came along, and one reported that they were considering leaving the principal position and going back to doing more hands-on work with students. Three fellows reported they would stay in their positions between five and ten years. Fellows also commented on what their aspirations were with regards to employment with the district. Four fellows indicated they wanted to move up to executive director or area superintendent positions. Two stated they wanted to stay as a principal through one fellow wanted to transfer from elementary to secondary. Fellows also hoped to move into central staff, school leadership, and curriculum and instruction positions.

Teacher Interviews. Teachers had mostly positive comments about the fellows as principals, but about half of the teacher comments were mixed with suggestions for improvement. This was to be expected given that this was the fellows first year as principals and anyone new to a position would encounter a learning curve. Teachers reported that the fellows were organized, good collaborators, approachable and accessible, good communicators, and provided clear expectations. Another common theme was that fellows were dedicated to their campuses and their students. Several teachers commented that fellows were always looking for new resources and were good at finding new resources. Some teachers indicated that the fellows were not very good delegators and micromanaged to a small extent. In addition, teachers during two focus groups indicated that the fellows were less nurturing and harsher than the predecessors. A few teachers commented that they did not expect the new principal to be as good, or better, than their former principals. The teachers all seemed to recognize that fellows would improve with time but commented that the fellows were starting off at a high level.

When asked about noticeable changes the fellows in their roles as principals had made to how the campuses were being run there were two groups of answers. The first was that the campus had been running smoothly prior to their taking on roles as principals; thus, there was no need to make major changes to campus operations. The second was that improvements had
been made. Teachers reported that the fellows added book studies, parent outreach initiatives, academic initiatives such as additional science classes, student stores, afterschool clubs, more planning with teachers. In addition, fellows made changes to testing schedules, arrival and dismissal procedures, and committee assignments. Only one focus group of teachers led to discussion about negative changes. In this instance, the teachers reported that the fellow ran the school with too much leniency resulting in an increase in discipline problems. In a few cases teachers reported that no changes were made, but that some changes would be a good thing for the campus. Almost all teachers reported that the fellows had strong instructional leadership skills. They indicated that fellows were good at providing resources for teachers to improve instructional techniques, that they conducted adequate numbers of observations, and that they appeared to have expertise in the area. There were only a few instances where teachers reported that while fellows appeared knowledgeable on classroom management techniques they were not knowledgeable about the subject areas when it was not their own (i.e., from when they were teachers). All of those comments were followed by comments about how teachers expected the fellows to improve with time.

**Administrative Staff Interviews.** Administrative staff members were asked to comment on the APP fellows working as principals. They discussed how the fellows compared with previous principals for whom they had worked and what were their strengths and areas for growth. Assistant and associate principals, counselors, instructional coaches, academic coordinators, data controllers, registrars and office managers had many positive comments about APP fellows and identified many strengths of the fellows in their principal roles. Staff reported that APP fellows excelled at communication and collaboration. Fellows communicated clear expectations and brought teachers and other staff together as a team. They stated that fellows were good listeners, had good people skills, were good with the students, and were encouraging and supportive of staff. Administrative staff had a long list of positive characteristics to associate with the fellows: determined, committed, diligent, enthusiastic, visible, personable, approachable, empathetic, and efficient. Staff stated that fellows were focused on great teaching and were instructional experts.
When discussing areas for growth, staff were less forthcoming. During one focus group, staff commented that a fellow was struggling with time management. Staff participating in another focus group reported that the fellow was still learning the principal role. But these same staff members were confident that the fellow would improve with time.

Administrative staff also reported on the noticeable changes APP fellows had made to how their campuses ran since becoming principals. The lists were similar to those of teachers but administrative staff seemed to be more aware of changes than were teachers. Administrative staff listed new testing procedures, initiatives to improve student academic achievement, student stores, safety patrols, grade level collaboration and meetings, curriculum and assessment improvements, partnerships with community businesses, increased parental involvement including PTA involvement, strengthening collaboration of teaching staff, enrichment programs, book and article studies, Facebook pages for parent engagement, academic and other reward programs for students, community fundraisers, student discipline programs, allowances for staff professional development. Several staff members did report that fellows made no noticeable changes to how the campus ran. In some cases, staff reported that the previous principal had left the campus in good shape and that the campus needed no changes. In some cases the fellows made minor changes to existing programs. Staff from a couple of campuses reported that fellows purposefully made no changes and indicated they preferred to observe for the first year and intended to make changes where necessary during their second year as principal. Administrative staff were more likely to report that fellows were strong instructional leaders but were becoming transformational leaders.

2.2 What were the types and amount of support available to cohort I fellows working as principals?

Methodology

The sample consisted of all APP cohort I fellows who completed at least the three-week summer intensive training in 2010 and APP management staff. The evaluator collected data through interviews with 11 cohort I fellows (ten were in principal positions and one was in a leadership coach position) and with the APP program director.
Results

Support. The program did not have a formal plan in place for supporting fellows once they were out of the program and in principal positions. Originally the program planned to visit campuses and observe fellows on a regular basis, but with staff cuts this became impossible to maintain. Fellows working as principals did begin a new principals program during the 2011-12 school year. This program will be discussed in later sections. The program director reported that the program had planned to have a professional development conference for cohort I fellows but that this plan had not materialized.

Fellows reported what kinds of support they received from APP staff during the 2011-12 school year. All but one fellow reported that they received some kind of support. One fellow indicated that they received no support from individual APP staff. APP staff visited campuses and were available via phone and email. Fellows indicated that even if they did not need support or assistance they knew the APP staff would make themselves available and be responsive if necessary. Several fellows reported that APP staff were always prompt when responding to requests for assistance.

Four fellows reported that they did not receive any support from their mentor principal during the 2011-12 school year. This mentor-mentee relationship did not appear to continue after the formal program ended for some fellows. Two fellows reported that they never really had a mentor principal because they became principals themselves relatively early in the 2010-11 school year. In some cases the mentor principals had retired or left the district and were not available to provide support. Six fellows did report that their mentor principal from the 2010-11 school year was available for support and that they had had some contact with them via email or the phone and that they knew their mentor principal would be available if they needed them for support. Two fellows reported having actual in-person contact with their mentor principal. Because this component of APP was not one of the strongest and most developed, it is not surprising that the mentor-mentee relationships were not maintained at a higher level.

Cohort I fellows reported that they had maintained relationships with other fellows from their cohort. There was only one fellow who reported having little contact with other fellows.
Fellows reported that they stayed in contact through email, text messaging, and phone calls. One fellow indicated that a blog had been set up. Four fellows indicated that they met with other fellows in person. Fellows reported sharing information and documentation, providing emotional support, answering questions, and troubleshooting ideas about issues and concerns. Results of the 2010-11 evaluation indicated that fellows highly valued the relationships they formed with other fellows. These relationships seemed to be continuing after the formal program had ended. Fellows did appear to have formed smaller groups of contact within the larger cohort. There were informal networks within the larger group. In general, the fellows who were still working as APs seemed to be left out of the communication circles the fellows working as principals had developed.

The majority of fellows reported that they did not need any additional support from the APP program. Fellows identified four areas where they would have benefitted from additional support: dealing with budget and parental issues, maintain contact with principals for support after the first year as principal, and being placed on campuses with stronger existing administrative staff such as APs. Several fellows mentioned the benefits of the new principal program which is discussed in the next section.

**Professional Development.** Nine of the eleven fellows interviewed for this section participated in the New Principal program offered during the 2011-12 school year. Two of the fellows participated in the program during the 2010-11 school year as they moved into their principal positions during that year. These fellows reportedly were not invited to attend the training this year. The New Principal program was developed to assist and support new principals as they diagnosed, developed and implemented action plans for their campuses. New principals were paired with coaches who were mostly retired Dallas ISD administrators. The program also brought new principals together during training sessions to discuss issues they might be facing on their campuses and to develop a network for principals to problem-solve together and give and receive feedback on problems of practice. This program was expected to increase retention of new principals and enhance the leadership role on these campuses. The program was not included in the scope of the 2011-12 evaluation; thus, there are no outcomes associated with this
program discussed in this report. Fellows reported that the program was very informal and allowed them to discuss issues they were having on their campuses. They reported that they met as a group once a month at the beginning of the year but meetings became less frequent as the year progressed and the program director confirmed this report. Meetings were held after school. Fellows met with their coaches on an as needed basis though some fellows stated that they met regularly with their coach. Fellows stated that the program gave them useful tools to take back to their campuses including relevant literature and group activities, created a useful network of colleagues, allowed them to interact with staff from key departments, and clarified expectations of them as principals. One fellow reported that there were no benefits to participation because it was a repeat of APP training. Fellows reported that no other professional development opportunities were provided as a part of the Aspiring Principals program.

**Evaluation.** Two expected outcomes of the Aspiring Principals program as outlined in the program workscope were that fellows would maintain a campus School Effectiveness Index (SEI) rating at or above the 50th percentile and that they would maintain a rating of proficient or above on their yearly appraisals. Five of the ten fellows working as principals knew approximately what their campus SEI rating was. The remaining fellows indicated they would need to look up that information.

Fellows commented on whether the expectation that they will maintain a campus SEI rating at or above the 50th percentile was a good measure of their success as a principal and whether it was a good measure of the success of the APP program. Six fellows thought the SEI rating was a good measure of their success while five fellows did not. Fellow’s comments were split between the SEI being a valuable way to hold principals accountable and the rating being an unfair determination of their success. Some fellows stated that it would take them more than just one year to improve their SEI ratings and that using it as a measure of their success before that point did not allow them time to deal with pre-existing issues. One fellow reported that if fellows went into campuses that already had high SEI ratings then they did not have to do the same amount of work as those who came into struggling campuses. There was some indication that fellows thought the SEI rating included more than what they were responsible for as principals.
and that campus success should be measured using other data such as discipline, morale, and community involvement. Several fellows indicated that the SEI rating was a good measure when paired with campus observations.

Only one fellow reported that the SEI rating was a good measure of the success of the program. Fellows commented that the program brought in already highly qualified candidates, and so, their success could not be attributed to the program. One fellow did indicate that as a result of APP, she was better able to communicate with staff which she believed would ultimately improve her SEI rating.

Fellows also commented on whether the yearly appraisal was a good measure of their success as a principal and whether it was a good measure of the success of the program. The majority of fellows reported that the yearly appraisal form was a good way to measure their success. Only one fellow did not agree that it was a good tool. As with the SEI ratings, fellows reported that the tool was most useful when executive directors came out to their campuses to observe them directly. The fellows seemed most positive about the tool when they had actually met with their executive director and worked together to set goals for the year. A few fellows indicated that their yearly appraisal did not take into account all of the things they do as principals and did not take into account that it was their first year as a principal. None of the fellows indicated that the yearly appraisal was a good measure of the success of the APP program. Fellows listed other ways in which they would like to be evaluated. Suggestions included reviewing student discipline data, timeliness of teacher evaluations, promotion of college readiness, school climate, the social behavior of students, and parental involvement. They also requested more direct observation on a regular basis and that their evaluators talk with teachers, parents and students about their work as principal on the campus. Several other suggestions focused on creating a different appraisal tool for new principals, taking into account campus and student population differences, and looking at performance over time.
2.3 What were the experiences of cohort I fellows not yet in principal positions?

Methodology

The sample consisted of cohort I fellows who were not yet working in principal positions. The evaluator collected data through interviews with these fellows, APP management staff, and the principals supervising these fellows on their campuses. The evaluator conducted interviews with eight APP fellows who were working as assistant or associate principals. One fellow was on administrative leave during the course of the evaluation and was not interviewed. This fellow was an AP prior to being put on leave. The evaluator also conducted interviews with seven principals supervising the fellows. One cohort I fellow was a principal and was also the supervisor of a fellow working as an AP.

Results

Support. While the majority of APP fellows reported having minor contact with APP staff during the 2011-12 school year, they also stated that they had not received substantial support from the program during the year. Two fellows reported that they had no need for support from APP staff. The remaining fellows indicated that more formalized support would have been beneficial. Five of the fellows reported continued contact with their mentor principals from the 2011-12 school year; the other three fellows reported that they had no contact. All fellows reported having at least some contacts with other fellows from their cohort to differing degrees. A small number of fellows stated that they 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 reported that additional support would be beneficial including 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.

Leadership. Fellows reported on how their leadership style changed during the course of the 2011-12 school year. They stated that they were better at prioritizing tasks, more focused on getting to know their campus, more flexible, and better listeners. One fellow reported that the leadership philosophies of APs were not of importance because campuses ran based on the
principals’ leadership philosophies; it was not the role of the APs to lead based on their own leadership philosophies. Two fellows reported that their leadership philosophies had not changed over the course of the year. Another fellow stated that she had started to go back to old habits but was getting back on track.

The fellows reported what changes they had made to how their campus ran during the 2011-12 school year. Some of the changes 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, increasing parent interaction, locating and retrieving missing textbooks, and using cognitive coaching strategies with staff during meetings. A couple of fellows reported that they had not made many changes because it was not their place as an AP to do so.

The cohort I fellows who were not working as principals were still continuously developing their instructional and transformational leadership skills. Fellows commented that they asked for feedback from staff regarding campus activities, worked with teachers during classroom visits, built their transformational leadership skills through building teacher trust and providing support, implemented book studies and other professional development opportunities, worked with individual departments to build capacity, and built and maintained strong relationships with staff.

Retention. There seemed to be three groups of fellows with regards to their search for principalships: those who were actively applying for jobs, those who were waiting for principalships at particular types of campuses, and those who 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. Almost all fellows reported that once they were in principal positions they would want to stay for the long term. Only one fellow reported that they would stay less than five years. When asked what their future aspirations were with regards to employment with the district, they reported that they wanted to
stay in their principal positions or were interested in assistant superintendent, professional development, and campus leadership positions.

**Professional Development.** Fellows reported that there was no professional development for them during the 2011-12 school year. The Aspiring Principals program training ended as of the 2010-11 school year and because they were not in principal positions they were not invited to attend the training program for new principals.

**Benefits of the Aspiring Principals Program.** Fellows listed several benefits to the Aspiring Principals program. They reported that the program provided constructive feedback, valuable articles and book, and a network of people to call for advice. They stated that the group projects were helpful and especially the cognitive coaching. They also reported that the program taught them how to deal with people. Fellows did report some concerns about the APP program. The stated that perhaps they could benefit the district in other positions besides Principalships and that maybe they should be applying for those jobs. There was also concern because they did not feel like the program had prepared them for a principalship at a higher level than any other candidates who had not received the training. One fellow stated that the program had focused a great deal on soft skills but had not spent enough time focusing on instructional leadership. Another fellow indicated that they had not gained any additional skills from the program and that they would have gotten the same mentorship experience whether they were in the residency or not. There did seem to be a disconnect between the fellows who entered the program as teachers and those who entered as APs. There was less of a connection or network between these two groups.

**Supervising Principal Interviews.** The evaluator interviewed the principals to whom the fellows reported. Principals commented on the benefits of having an APP trained AP. They 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. Principals indicated that fellows were very knowledgeable when they came in but that the program may have sharpened their skills.
Several of the principals stated that they were not sure if the program made any difference and that the fellows were already highly qualified. These principals indicated that the program chose candidates who were already prepared for principal positions and did not need the additional training.

Most principals reported that they were able to increase the role of the AP and could increase the workload associated with the position. There was less certainty as to whether this was because of the APP program or because the fellows were already highly skilled professionals. Principals stated that the fellows could carry a heavier workload, that they were task oriented, hard workers, and got work done fast. One principal reported that they pushed all of their APs and that the APP program did not contribute to the workload the fellow could maintain.

Principals did think that fellows displayed instructional and transformational leadership and that they were continuously developing those skills. Some of the leadership characteristics listed were that fellows were very creative, always increasing their skill sets, intuitive, good followers as well as leaders, knew what good instruction looked like and could coach teachers, were always trying new ideas, involved themselves in discussions with staff, and were very strong instructionally. One principal reported that the fellow was a strong instructional leader but needed additional growth in the areas of diplomacy and management style.

The fellows were receiving additional training from their supervising principals to better prepare for the principal role. 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. 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. One principal asked the fellow not to leave until all of the projects they started were complete; this was partly so that the fellow could benefit from seeing a project through from beginning to end.

Principals did see some benefits of the program. They reported that they saw the fellows grow during their time in training, that they became less defensive, and that they read the same
books as principals did in training which was a benefit. However, many of the principals stated that they were unsure whether the program had that much of an impact on the fellows. Comments included that the program selected only the most highly qualified individuals and that fellows came in with high levels of intelligence and good skill sets. One principal stated that the program should recruit candidates who were in need of more training in order to be prepared for the principal position.

SUMMARY

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 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 transitioned in a learning community coordinator position after having worked as a principal for one year, and eight were working as assistant or associate principals 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.

Leadership Style. 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.

Instructional leadership was the principal being a subject matter expert with regards to curriculum and instruction. Transformational leadership was the principal having the skill set
necessary to bring staff together to motivate them to all work towards a common mission, vision, or goal. Fellows believed themselves to be instructional and transformational leaders and reported that they were continuing to grow in those areas. Examples of instructional leadership were helping teachers implement skills learned in professional development in their classrooms, laying out expectations for teachers and visiting their classrooms, knowing about research in the area of instruction, providing modeling for teachers, working with teachers after observations to build skills, asking targeted questions of teachers to increase self reflection. Examples of transformational leadership were creating emotional attachments to why staff were working with students, listening to teachers to gain their trust, getting staff on board through teamwork, having programs to engage students on the campus, using student data to monitor student progress and conducting Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities and Threats (SWOT) analyses. There was no way to measure objectively whether fellows were instructional and transformational leaders but observation and interviews provided subjective measures.

**Campus Operations.** 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. Changes affecting campus culture included student achievement and behavior awards; assemblies for honor roll, attendance, and citizenship; reading and math events; hallway decoration competitions; community engagement, and efforts to increase staff solidarity. It appeared that many of the programs and techniques fellows implemented during the 2011-12 were shared with them during the APP training.

**Benefits of APP.** 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.
Retention. One fellow reported that they were considering leaving their principal position to go back to doing more hands-on work with students, three stated they would stay in their positions for between five and ten years, two said it depended on what opportunities came along, and six wanted to stay in their positions for the long term. Fellows were also interested in executive director or area superintendent positions, central staff, school leadership, and curriculum and instruction positions.

Teacher Interviews. Teachers had many positive comments along with some suggestions for improvement. Teaching staff reported that fellows were organized, good collaborators, approachable and accessible, good communicators, and provided clear expectations. Fellows were also perceived as dedicated to their campuses and its’ students. Teachers observed fellows looking for new resources and indicated that they were good at finding new resources; however, 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. A few teachers commented that they did not expect the new principal to be as good, or better, than their former principals. The teachers all seemed to recognize that fellows would improve with time but commented that the fellows were starting off at a high level.

Teachers provided information about the changes the new principals had made on their campuses. Those included adding book studies, parent outreach initiatives, academic initiatives such as additional science classes, student stores, afterschool clubs, and more planning with teachers. In addition, fellows made changes to testing schedules, arrival and dismissal procedures, and committee assignments. Fellows were perceived as being able to provide resources for teachers to improve instructional techniques, they conducted adequate numbers of observations, and they appeared to have expertise in the area.

Administrative Staff Interviews. Assistant and associate principals, counselors, instructional coaches, academic coordinators, data controllers, registrars and office managers had many positive comments about APP fellows and identified strengths of the fellows in their principal roles. Fellows were reportedly 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. Staff had a long list of positive characteristics they associated with the fellows: determined, committed, diligent, enthusiastic, visible, personable, approachable, empathetic, and efficient. Staff stated that fellows were focused on great teaching and were instructional experts.

Administrative staff reported on noticeable changes to how the campuses ran and listed examples including new testing procedures, initiatives to improve student academic achievement, student stores, safety patrols, grade level collaboration and meetings, curriculum and assessment improvements, partnerships with community businesses, increased parental involvement including PTA involvement, strengthening collaboration of teaching staff, enrichment programs, book and article studies, Facebook pages for parent engagement in the campus community, academic and other reward programs for students, community fundraisers, student discipline programs, and allowances for staff professional development. Some staff members did report that no changes were made which is in line with fellows reporting that they planned to observe during their first year.

Support. 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 from 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. Fellows reported sharing information and documentation, providing emotional support, answering questions, and troubleshooting ideas about issues and concerns. Fellows identified four areas where they would have benefitted from additional support: dealing with budget and parental issues, maintain contact with principals for support after the first year as principal, and being placed on campuses with stronger existing administrative staff such as APs.
Professional Development. 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 ISD administrators. The program included training sessions to discuss issues they might be facing on their campuses and to develop a network for principals to problem-solve together and give and receive feedback on problems of practice. Fellows reported that the program was very informal and that scheduled meetings were held at the beginning of the year but were less frequent as the year went on. No other professional development opportunities were available for fellows through APP.

Evaluation. 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.

Assistant and Associate Principal Interviews. 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.

Fellows 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. Fellows did make some changes in how their campuses were run. Some of the changes 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, increasing parent interaction, locating and retrieving missing textbooks, and using cognitive coaching strategies with staff during meetings. 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 regards 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 without the program.

Supervising Principal Interviews. 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 comments that the program selected only the most highly qualified individuals and that fellows came in with high levels of intelligence and good skill sets.

One of the difficulties in evaluating the Aspiring Principals program was that the program recruited highly qualified candidates who were most likely ready for principal roles without the program. The program faced four difficulties when attempting to determine its effectiveness: 1) the program spent a great deal of time developing soft skills which were harder to measure objectively, 2) not all fellows completed the same number of training sessions throughout the year; some were promoted to principal positions early in the year, 3) not all fellows came in with the same skill set, and 4) the fellows were in principal and AP roles at campuses across the district with differing histories, student populations, strengths, and issues that needed to be addressed. These issues made it difficult to determine whether the APP program was actually meeting its desired goals. Based on interviews over the 2010-11 and 2011-12 school year, observations, and review of program materials, the evaluator believed that the strengths of the program were that it provided fellows with a network of individuals with whom they could talk about problems and concerns and gave them a “toolbox” of resources and materials that they could use on their campuses. Given the highly qualified individuals recruited into the program, it was likely that these fellows would have found these same resources and created their own networks of support on their own and without the APP program. But, the program allowed them to get up and running on their campuses more quickly and they were able to take on responsibilities associated with their new positions at a faster rate than if they had not participated in the program. The program director and fellows agreed with this conclusion.
RECOMMENDATIONS

The following are recommendations based on the findings of the 2011-12 evaluation:

1. Add a comprehensive skills assessment and personality inventory to the beginning of training to better assess what hard and soft skills fellows enter the program with. This will enable the program to more easily determine the effect of the program on fellows.

2. Interview supervisors, teachers, and other staff about the skill set of candidates before they begin training, and conduct extensive observations after training to determine where changes and improvements have been made.

Though the Aspiring Principals program was discontinued for the 2012-13 school year, the evaluator chose to include the recommendations from the 2010-11 school year so that any Dallas ISD staff members working on new leadership training programs could potentially benefit from the lessons learned in that evaluation. The recommendations resulting from the 2010-11 evaluation included the following:

3. The program should review their program goals, thoroughly review program activities and components, and make adjustments in program procedures to align actions with stated goals.

4. The program should identify the best practices with regards to fellows leaving the program and adjust training and mentoring requirements accordingly.

5. The program should evaluate mentorship selection options (including which types of principals are best and what kinds of campuses would provide the best learning environments), taking into account what is achievable and what is best for both fellows and mentor principals. Program managers should have autonomy, with consultation from executive directors when appropriate, when selecting mentor principals.

6. Once the program has determined what mentor selection process works best, taking into account the program goals, the program should create selection criteria for mentor principals. The evaluator recommends against using the fellows’ current place of employment as the selection criteria for mentor principals, except where appropriate.
7. The program should explore options for funding fellows as full-time interns rather than district employees as assistant or associate principals. This would allow the fellows to benefit more fully from the experience and free principals to spend more time training and developing their mentees.

8. The program should create an evaluation protocol for fellows and mentor principals to measure progress throughout the program. If a fellow or mentor principal is not meeting expectations, the program should have established procedures in place to address these issues. This includes creating tools to ensure accountability such as fellows’ completion of required assignments and mentor principals working with fellows on established standards and skills.

9. The program should further explore stipend allowances for mentor principals and develop clearer protocols and procedures for distributing these funds.

10. The program should complete the design of the program and determine what components will or will not be included based on what is realistic, what will meet the needs of fellows, and what will best help them achieve program goals. If components are to be included, ensure that the infrastructure exists to follow through with that part of the program. If the program is required to deviate from this plan, adjust all documentation to reflect the changes.

11. The program should provide materials and information to program applicants and potential mentor principals further in advance and make those materials detailed to a level that adequately explains the expectations of the program.

12. The program should provide information to fellows about their residency placement in advance of completion of the summer intensive training to allow time for planning and preparation.

13. The program should track all program transitions including entry and exit dates, campus locations, and participant demographics.

14. The program should develop training curricula in a way that enables replication from cohort to cohort. Specifically, create documentation that clearly outlines the material
covered. In addition, the program should utilize more electronic materials or make electronic copies of materials to better enable evaluation of the program and work towards creating a centralized training curricula/manual.