Fellows Academy Program: 2013-14

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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 program operated during the 2012-13 and 2013-14 school years. There were 57 fellows (cohort I) selected for the 2012-13 school year and 48 (cohort II) selected for the 2013-14 school year. Cohort II fellows participated in training and professional development sessions, a residency experience with a mentor principal, and supplemental work and activities.

Strengths and Areas of Growth – Cohort I and II

Cohort I and II fellows participated in online surveys and in-person interviews, and identified areas of strength within the Fellows Academy program and areas of potential improvement. Two major areas of strength in the Academy training were: the network of fellows and the departmental presentations/rotations. The hands-on practice during the residency in a safe environment was the most common strength identified. Figures 1 and 2 show some of the responses to cohort II survey items. Fellows were asked to rate the quality of their relationship with their 2013-14 mentor principal.

Figure 1: What was the quality of your relationship with your 2013-14 mentor principal (Cohort II)?

Three areas of potential focus were: the order of training topics, mentor principal accountability (place fellows with mentor principals who were receptive to having a fellow on their campuses), and sufficient feedback and in-person support from Academy staff (see Figure 2). Two other common themes were making sure the Fellows Academy training curriculum was fully planned before training began and providing more training on operational topics such as attendance, truancy, discipline, Special Education policies, and test coordination.

Figure 2: During the 2013-14 school year, how often would additional support (from Academy staff, mentor principals, or other fellows) have been beneficial (Cohort II)?

Cohort I – Principals, Assistant Principals and Other Leadership Positions

In April and May 2014, the evaluator conducted interviews with cohort I fellows employed as principals on Dallas ISD campuses for the 2013-14 school year. In addition, the evaluator administered an online survey to campus staff and teachers.

Results of the survey and interviews indicated that cohort I fellows set clear expectations for staff, built teams and increased collaboration, and gained staff trust through consistency and availability to improve campus culture.

With regard to quality of instruction, fellows conducted spot observations and coached teachers on alignment of standards, demonstrations of learning (DOLs) and learning objectives (LOs). Fellows were less likely to report that they had made significant changes to student achievement on their campuses, but indicated that they used data to make decisions for their campus and expected to
see positive academic results. Fellows also created new procedures for arrival and dismissal, discipline, passing periods, lunch, and recess to improve campus operations. Almost all of the fellows repeatedly commented on the necessity to focus first on campus procedures and building infrastructure, then on quality of instruction and campus culture, with student achievement being an indirect result of the preceding work.

Figure 3 shows how campus staff rated their relationship with their cohort I principal fellow. The majority of staff rated their relationship with their principal as Very Positive or Positive (77.5%).

No statistically significant differences were detected between fellow and non-fellow campuses with new principals for the 2013-14 school year on Climate Survey or STAAR results.

**Campus Placements**

As of July 24, 2013, there were 19 cohort I fellows in principal positions, 30 in assistant principal positions and 6 in other leadership positions. Two fellows had left the district. As of July 17, 2014, there were 21 fellows in principal positions, 24 in assistant principal positions and 4 in other leadership positions. Another 6 fellows had left the district (Figure 4 and 5).

As of July 21, 2014, six cohort II fellows had been placed in principal positions, 36 in assistant principal positions, and 3 in other leadership positions (i.e., IB coach, instructional coach and librarian). Two fellows’ positions were yet to be determined and one fellow had resigned.

**Recommendations**

There were six recommendations resulting from the 2013-14 evaluation. Fellows Academy program staff have already begun addressing these recommendations.

1. Provide more opportunities for hands-on training experience (departmental rotations, online database training, follow-up training sessions for graduates).
2. Improve mentor principal selection process by selecting principals with coaching mindset, selecting campuses with appropriate characteristics, and providing mentor principal training and continuous oversight.
3. Hire additional Fellows Academy staff members in order to provide more oversight and in-person support of fellows, mentor principals, former fellow graduates.
4. Continue to refine the Fellows Academy training curriculum to cover the most relevant training topics in the most appropriate order to account for residency timing and fellows who leave the program for mid-year employment opportunities.
5. Conduct more Fellows Academy staff visits to campuses during residency and during first year out of the program.
6. 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, EA14-146-2, at: [http://www.dallasisd.org/Page/888](http://www.dallasisd.org/Page/888).