

Evaluation of Leadership Development Fellows Academy 2015-16

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At-a-Glance

The Leadership Development Fellows Academy (LDFA) was created to address growing needs of the Dallas Independent School District (Dallas ISD) for improved leadership capacity, more effective instruction and leadership, and improved instructional standards that align with district and school curriculum goals (i.e., Destination 2020). This program assisted in increasing the instructional leadership capacity of current and future administrators, and also developed a pipeline of highly qualified school leaders. The three foundational elements of LDFA included student achievement, quality instruction, and philosophy and culture. The program's goal was to produce effective leaders who would develop effective teachers, ultimately resulting in increased student achievement throughout the district.

Any distinguished teacher, assistant principal, or aspiring leader from Dallas ISD (or other educational institution) with at least three years of teaching experience and demonstrated success in improving instructional quality, raising student achievement, and developing positive school culture and climate was qualified to apply for admission into LDFA. Interns¹ were also required to work for Dallas ISD for two years following program completion.²

LDFA began during the 2012-13 academic year and continued through the 2015-16 academic year. The current year started with 34 interns selected through a rigorous performance review process. Five of the interns were hired early in the program for other positions (4 within the district, and 1 outside of the district), leaving 29 program participants. During the 2015-16 school year, interns completed training and professional development sessions, a residency experience with a mentor principal, and supplemental work and activities.

After participating in one day of orientation in June, interns attended the training academy full time from July through the third week in August, when they started their residency. For the rest of the year, Interns attended mandatory academy days one day per week along with other special sessions (e.g., seminars, guest speakers). Interns were also offered an opportunity to participate in

a Spanish for Educators course to help enhance relationships with the community.

Interns were assigned a nine-month residency with a Dallas ISD mentor principal. Some areas in which LDFA interns assisted campuses included, but were not limited to 1) building a positive school culture, 2) aligning curricula with instructional best practices, 3) providing instructional feedback, 4) expanding leadership density, 5) reviewing Destination 2020 in-depth, and 6) assisting in the establishment of campus systems and protocols. LDFA staff members visited campuses to conduct spot observations and to observe the overall campus learning experience.

Academic year 2015-16 was the final year of the LDFA program. Participants in LDFA this year were members of cohort IV. In future years, the district plans to implement restructured professional development programs catering to a breadth of leadership roles. The purpose of this evaluation was to 1) describe the 2015-16 LDFA program, 2) summarize perceptions and experiences of cohort IV interns, and 3) report placement information for cohort IV interns.

Methodology

The evaluator solicited information about LDFA and placement of interns from the director and coordinator of the Leadership Development Academy Department. In addition, the 2015-16 LDFA cohort (IV) completed two surveys. The first (response rate: 89.7%) was administered mid-year in February 2016, and included questions about demographics and experiences with the training to date. In May 2016, interns completed the second survey (response rate: 72.4%). This end-of-year survey primarily focused on experiences with the residency portion of training.

Demographics

Respondents to the mid-year survey (N = 26) were 61.5 percent female, 50.0 percent Hispanic, 23.1 percent white, 19.2 percent African-American, and 7.7 percent Asian/Pacific Islander. The majority (57.7%) of cohort IV were Dallas ISD employees prior to entering the

¹ Starting in 2015-16, the name of participants in LDFA changed from 'fellows' to 'interns.'

² Two-year commitment was contingent upon placement on a campus leadership team within the district.

program. Members of cohort IV held master's (88.5%), doctoral (7.7%), and professional (3.8%) degrees.

Interns' previous experiences varied widely. Prior to the program, they were teachers (53.8%), assistant or associate principals (11.5%), central staff members (7.7%), or other (instructional coaches, administrative interns; 26.9%). Interns reported an average of 8.5 years of teaching (range: 3 to 30 years), and 1.3 years of administrative experience (range: 0 to 7 years).³

Intern Perceptions and Experiences

Training Academy. In general, interns expressed satisfaction with the training academy portion of their experience, as illustrated in Figure 1. When asked what they liked best about training, interns overwhelmingly mentioned the quality and relevance of content, resources, and guest speakers. When asked what they would change about training, interns most often mentioned redundancy and order of topics should be examined. Relatively lower agreement (72%) on the mid-year survey that training topics were arranged in an order that allowed for maximum use during residency corroborated this finding (see Figure 1).

Figure 1: Mid-Year Perceptions of LDFA Training



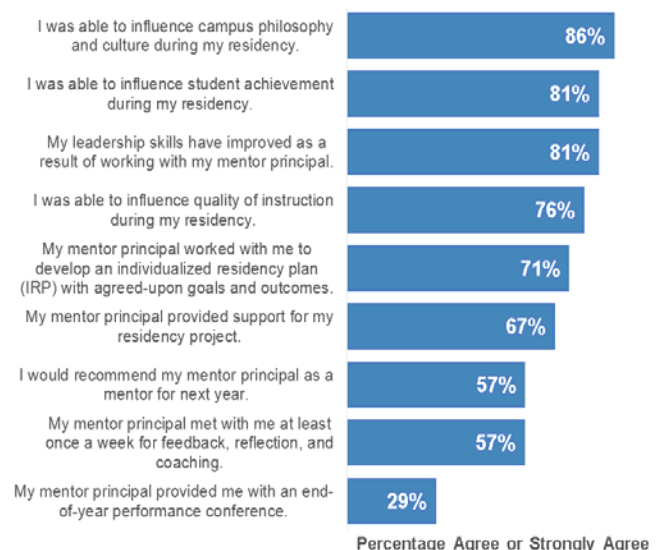
Source: Mid-year survey administered to cohort IV fellows in February 2016.

Interns indicated several areas of training they believed would be helpful to add or expand. Themes mentioned most often included: 1) school-level specific training, 2) more training on discipline, and 3) hands-on systems training using actual data.

Residency. Interns' ratings of the residency program were more varied than those of the training portion. As shown in Figure 2, over 75 percent of respondents agreed or strongly agreed with statements regarding their positive influence on campus philosophy and culture (86%), student achievement (81%), and quality of instruction (76%) during the residency, and also that their leadership skills had improved through working with their mentor principals (81%). The percentage of interns agreeing or strongly agreeing with statements about the mentoring-related actions of their assigned principals were relatively lower. Most notably, 57 percent of interns reported that they would recommend their mentor principal as a mentor principal next year. Finally, it is possible that the 29 percent agreement that mentors provided an end-of-year conference is artificially low because they were administered after survey completion in mid-May.

Missing data for six interns reduced the response rate for questions regarding the quality of mentor/mentee relationships during the residency. Out of 15 available responses, 66.7 percent of interns reported a positive or very positive relationship with their first mentors assigned,⁴ indicating a moderate level of dissatisfaction.

Figure 2: End-of-Year Perceptions of LDFA Residency



Source: End-of-year survey administered to cohort IV fellows in May 2016

³ Percentages throughout document may not add to 100% because of rounding.

⁴ Five of the fifteen reporting interns indicated that they were assigned to two mentors during their residencies. Of the five, three (60%) reported positive or very positive relationships with their mentors.

Overall. Interns expressed strong agreement overall when asked if they felt LDFA prepared them in areas relevant to leadership. All interns (100%) felt they deepened their understanding of district policies and procedures and felt adequately prepared to implement strategies to improve campus philosophy and culture and to improve student achievement. Most (95%) interns agreed or strongly agreed that they deepened their understanding of the impact of their professional leadership skills on others, that they were adequately prepared to implement strategies that will improve quality of instruction, and that they had discovered their professional leadership strengths and weaknesses. Interns also widely agreed or strongly agreed (91%) that they were adequately prepared to use district databases. In contrast, 76 percent of interns agreed or strongly agreed that they deepened their understanding of the principal selection process. This finding indicates a potential area for program growth.

When asked where they felt they made the most impact during their residency, interns most often mentioned 1) coaching/mentoring teachers, 2) contributing to positive student/school culture, 3) tutoring students, 4) fostering parent involvement, and 5) leadership/systems improvement. Interns most frequently mentioned that they most liked the following aspects of the residency: 1) having a role on campus and feeling needed, 2) the ability to affect change, and 3) the hands-on practice. When asked what they would like to change about the residency, interns most often cited that they would like to see 1) more training/oversight of mentors, 2) an earlier start to the residency to help develop relationships with school staff, 3) better placement opportunities and assistance post-program, and 4) more structured (and required) observations, feedback, and guidance from mentor principals.

Once hired into a leadership position in the future, interns most frequently indicated they would like to further develop their skills and knowledge regarding fostering climate and culture and handling discipline.

Staff Support. The 2014-15 evaluation⁵ recommended increasing campus visits during the residency component. This year, LDFA staff made improvements in this area. The number of interns reporting two to five LDFA staff visits during their residencies increased 22 percentage points to 52 percent. In addition, 24 percent of interns reported that more on-campus support from LDFA staff would have been beneficial, a decrease of 28 percentage points from the previous year. These

results indicate higher satisfaction over the previous year with support from LDFA staff during the residency.

Cohort IV Placement Information

The Leadership Development Academy Department provided placement information for cohort IV. A detailed placement list is included in the appendix. As of August 1, 2016, the largest proportion of LDFA interns had resigned from the district (32.4%). When placed in positions in the district, cohort IV interns were most frequently placed as assistant principals and teachers.⁶

Recommendations

Although LDFA will not continue into future years, the following recommendations are offered as district leaders consider restructured professional development opportunities.

Continue to improve mentor selection and training.

A relatively low proportion of interns reported satisfaction with their mentor/mentee relationship during residency. Stakeholders should ensure that a more rigorous process is in place to select and train potential mentors, verifying that they have the desired motivation and skills to provide interns with the strongest experience possible. Staff should also consider more direct monitoring and guidance of mentor principals to ensure that program standards are followed.

Consider enhancing and tailoring training to more specific needs.

Some interns expressed that they wished they had more specific training for their needs, such as school-level-specific training, discipline training, and systems training with actual data. Providing 'rotations' or more modules in these areas for interns would improve the depth of confidence in these areas.

Enhance focus on life beyond training.

Many interns expressed lack of knowledge about the principal selection process and desired more opportunities after program completion. Although the availability of jobs is not in direct control of the program, more knowledge about how the application process will proceed once jobs are available would be beneficial to interns.

References

Douglas, N. (2015). *Fellows Academy 2014-15 End-of-Year Report*. <http://www.dallasisd.org/Page/39269>.

⁵ See Douglas (2015).

⁶ Reduced Assistant Principal positions in 2016-17 throughout the district may have contributed to low placement rates.

For more information, contact Program Evaluation at 972-925-6457.

Appendix: LDFA Cohort IV 2016-17 Assignments (As of August 1, 2016)

Name	Position Acquired	Assigned Campus	Campus Level
Ruiz, Anabel	Principal	Pleasant Grove	Elementary
Aguirre-Garcia, Grace	Assistant Principal	Rosemont	Elementary
Hernandez, Araceli	Assistant Principal	Preston Hollow	Elementary
Bates, Elena	Assistant Principal	Marsh	Middle
Carter, Fredrick	Assistant Principal	Quintanilla	Middle
Dickson, Gabrelle	Assistant Principal	Spruce	High
Jyles, Natoyia	Assistant Principal	North Dallas	High
Velasco, Roberto	Assistant Principal	Early College Campus, TBD	High
Wilson, Jerald	Assistant Principal	Conrad	High
De la Guardia, Irma	Assistant Principal	TBD	TBD
Mehdizadeh, Erika	Campus Instructional Coach	Walker/Cabell	Elementary
Altieri, Nici	Teacher	Sanger	Elementary
Carrizales, Mario	Teacher	Gooch	Elementary
Mitchell, Christina	Teacher	Rosemont	Elementary
Savala, Stephanie	Teacher	Barbara Manns	Middle
Wraggs, Georgetta	Teacher	Edison	Middle
Reed-Christenson, Krystal	Teacher	Spruce	High
Thomas, Sabin	Teacher	TBD	
DeJesus, Ricardo	TBD		
Easter, Dawn	TBD		
Gonzales, tracy	TBD		
Lane, Patrice	TBD		
Robles, Jose	TBD		
Badillo, Eliezer	--	Resigned	
Chapa, Cassandra	--	Resigned	
Evangelista, Loren	--	Resigned	
Garcia-Rubio, Laura	--	Resigned	
Green, Chassidy	--	Resigned	
Lopez, Pedro	--	Resigned	
Lowery, Clark	--	Resigned	
Meek (Kallis), Stephanie	--	Resigned	
Rodriguez, Guy	--	Resigned	
Roman, Joseph	--	Resigned	
Vargas, Felipe	--	Resigned	