



EVALUATION REPORT

BUREAU OF PROGRAM EVALUATION

Volume 9, Issue 2, October 2015

Reflective Learning in the Assistant Principal Leadership Program in Preparation for School Improvement, 2014–2015

By Venita Holmes, Dr.P.H.

This study explored the extent that the Houston Independent School District's (HISD) assistant principal leadership training program (AP1/AP2) facilitated reflective learning of the 2014–2015 cohorts. In addition, the evaluation examined the academic achievement of students in schools of AP1/AP2 cohort participants. Leadership training applied the ISLLC framework that focused on creating a shared vision within the community, a culture of student learning, efficient management, and ethics to prepare participants for roles as principals. A total of 79 HISD leaders were identified as AP1 cohort participants and 66 leaders were AP2 cohort participants. Eleven training sessions were provided to strengthen their practice as leaders, increase their instructional knowledge, skills, and strategies; and inform their future feedback with teachers in 24 skill areas. In general, all ISLLC standards were reflected by AP1/AP2 survey respondents in at least one of the training sessions, with data for monitoring and improvement, district curriculum implementation, and mentoring staff/modeling as the three most prevalent skill areas considered as benefits in their reflective learning. Gaps were noted in participants' reflections of benefits in skill areas related to clean and safe schools, effective presentation skills, team leading and building, and technology. This may be related to these areas being emphasized in principal leadership training rather than AP1/AP2 training. Considering HISD's focus on literacy, the majority of AP1 and AP2 cohort schools made positive changes on the STAAR reading and English I EOC tests from 2014 to 2015. Recommendations are to continue to develop the program by strongly addressing all state and national educational standards to support assistant principal's roles as leaders and their potential roles as principals in HISD.

Background

The Houston Independent School District's (HISD) Assistant Principal Leadership program (AP1/AP2) offers a viable option for preparing new assistant principals and deans for the role of principal. The Assistant Principal Cohort One (AP1) includes leaders in the first year of the program, while the Assistant Principal Cohort Two (AP2) continues the development and preparation of leaders as second-year assistant principals.

AP1/AP2 professional development is aligned to state and national standards, including the Educational Leadership Policy Standards, Interstate School Leaders Licensure Consortium Standards (ISLLCS), Texas Standards for Principal Certification, and HISD's School Leadership Framework (Houston Independent School District,

n.d.). HISD's "grow your own" leadership development process for emerging school leaders is emphasized in the program. Socratic-style leadership development seminars are embedded in the program to build foundations of educational theory and managerial skill development to meet the job requirements of an assistant principal in an HISD school. An adaptive challenge project that measures the assistant principal's increased impact on student achievement is embedded in daily work. Evidence of the year-long practicum is captured in reflective summaries that are shared with the HISD Leadership Development Team and a mentor who is assigned to each program participant for continuous process improvement.

To that end, this program evaluation explored the extent that the AP1/AP2 program enhanced participants' experiences through reflective learning based on the ISLLC educational leadership standards.

The evaluation also examined the reading achievement of students at schools of AP1 and AP2 participants. Reading achievement is, particularly, important considering the current literacy initiative in the District.

Review of the Literature

Developing effective educational leaders has emerged as a critical component of improving school performance, particularly due to a national shortage of principals who are willing and able to take on daily demands of the job. The literature on leadership development indicates that schools nurture unique learning environments, cultures, and conditions, and should be reflected in school leadership programs. School leadership may be the most important factor in promoting these in-school processes and conditions (Lieberman, Falk, and Alexander, 1994; Louis, Marks, and Kruse, 1996). Attributes of quality school leadership training programs should reflect research-based strategies and be aligned to industry standards.

Numerous research studies have shown that school leaders play a significant role in promoting student achievement (Waters, Marzano, and McNulty, 2003; Leithwood, Louis, Anderson, and Walstrom, 2004; Bellamy, Fulmer, Murphy, and Muth, 2007; Christie, Thompson, and Whitely, 2009). Moreover, growing efforts to reform educational systems have led to the development of policies that directly impact the role of leadership in public schools (Jennings, 2003). Accordingly, in an evolving school climate, educational policymakers maintain that improving teaching and learning must become the primary concern of educational leaders (Jennings, 2003). Consequently, school districts across the nation have assumed responsibility for training staff to lead schools in ever-changing student populations.

Finding practical ways to appropriately assess and develop leaders can have an important impact on the quality of leadership and education in schools (Glasman and Heck, 1992; Thomas, Holdaway, and Ward, 2000; Goldring, Porter, Murphy, et al., 2009). Thus, evaluation of leadership programs can be valuable toward improving leadership practices, contributing toward best practices, and providing information for accountability (Reeves, 2005; Waters and Grubb, 2004).

Methods

Study Sample

The study sample was the 2014–2015 AP1 and AP2 cohorts. A list of cohort participants was

provided by administrative staff in the HISD Department of Leadership Development in fall 2014 to the HISD Department of Research and Accountability. There were 79 participants in the AP1 cohort and 66 participants in the AP2 cohort. Demographic characteristics of the cohorts by gender, race/ethnicity, level, and current role in the district were extracted from the 2014–2015 Public Education Information Management System (PEIMS). Schools represented by cohort participants can be found in **Appendix A**.

Measures

Cohort participants were asked to reflect on their learning from professional development sessions (**Appendix B**) by writing “one or two take-aways” that informed their practice as a leader and that enhanced their instructional knowledge, skills, and strategies. They were also asked to address how the training session informed their future feedback with teachers. These reflective comments were coded based on the Standards and Performance Criteria for School-based Administrators rubric and skill areas using interobserver agreement among three program evaluators in the HISD Department of Research and Accountability. There were six standards and twenty-four skills areas used in the analysis (See **Appendix C** for the standards). Nvivo 10 was used to organize and further analyze the data. Combined results of AP1/AP2 cohort respondents are presented, considering that both cohorts attended the same professional development sessions and that they could not be differentiated in the data.

To assess improvement in the academic performance of students at AP1 and AP2 schools, the combined English and Spanish STAAR grades 3–8 reading and English I End-of-Course (EOC) results at the campus-level were aggregated by cohort. The percent of students who met Satisfactory Level II, phase-in I standard was used in the evaluation. The spring 2014 results were compared to the spring 2015 results for first-time test takers.

What was the profile of AP1 and AP2 cohorts during the 2014–2015 academic year?

According to **Table 1**, the AP1 cohort was moderately larger than the AP2 cohort (16.5%). Both AP1 and AP2 cohorts were predominately female (67.1% and 70.8%, respectively), and had higher percentages of African American participants compared to other race/ethnicity subgroups (38.0% and 32.3%).

Higher proportions of elementary-level participants were represented in the AP1 cohort (35.4%) than at other school levels. Comparatively, a slightly higher

percentage of high-school level participants were found in the AP2 cohort (34.8%) than the elementary school (33.4%) and at other school-level cohorts. More participants had a role as assistant principal in the AP1 and AP2 cohorts than other roles (45.6% and 67.7%, respectively).

What were reflective learning perceptions of AP1 and AP2 cohort participants regarding school improvement?

Qualitative analysis was conducted on the reflective comments of the 2014–2015 AP1 and AP2 cohorts to capture their perceptions regarding how the educational leadership training sessions informed their practice as leaders; strengthened their instructional knowledge, skills, and strategies; and informed their future feedback with teachers. (See **Table 2** and Appendix B for a list of the 11 training sessions.) Comments were coded based on skill area and the Standards and Performance Criteria for School-based Administrators rubric. The rubric is aligned to the ISLLC standards. The identity of respondents was anonymous; therefore, participation in a specific training session was not verifiable in the data. In addition, it was not known whether all cohort participants had the opportunity to attend a specific session; thus, the count and percentage of

Table 1: API/AP2 Demographic Characteristics, 2014–2015

	API (n = 79)		AP (n = 66)	
	n	%	n	%
Gender				
Male	26	32.9	19	29.2
Female	53	67.1	47	70.8
Race/Ethnicity				
Afr. Am.	30	38.0	22	32.3
Hispanic	27	34.2	20	30.8
White	20	25.3	20	30.8
Asian	1	1.3	4	6.1
Two or More	1	1.3		
Level				
Elem.	28	35.4	22	33.3
Elem./Middle	1	1.3	1	1.5
Middle	25	31.6	17	25.8
Middle/High	5	6.3	2	3.0
High	20	25.3	23	34.8
Central Office	0	0.0	1	1.5
Role				
Asst. Prin.	36	45.6	45	67.7
Instruct'l Prog Dir.	0	0.0	1	1.5
Teacher Fac.	4	5.1	1	1.5
Other	27	34.2	16	24.6
Teacher	12	15.2	3	4.6

respondents who attended the session and made comments in a skill area were not calculated. Table 2 presents the skill area and the standard that was reflected in at least one of the participant’s comments following the training sessions.

In general, the six standards were reflected by AP1/AP2 respondents in at least one of the training sessions; however, four skill areas were not reflected

Table 2: AP1 and AP2 Cohort Reflections by Training Session based on Standards and Performance Criteria for School Based Administrators Rubric, 2014–2015

Standards and Performance Criteria Skill Area	Training Sessions ¹										
	I	II	III	IV	V	VI	VII	VIII	IX	X	XI
Change Management (Standard 1)						X	X				X
Clean and Safe School (Standard 3)											
Collaboration with Community (Standards 1, 4, 6)						X	X		X		
Communicate Effectively (Standards 1, 3, 4)										X	X
Consensus Building and Negotiation (Standard 1)						X					X
Core Values and Beliefs, Visions/Mission (Standard 1)	X			X							X
Data for Monitoring & Improvement (Standards 1, 2, 3, 4, 6)			X		X		X		X	X	
Decision Making (Effective) (Standard 3)						X	X	X			X
District Curriculum Implementation (Standards 2, 3)	X				X	X	X		X		
Fair and Equitable Treatment (Standards 2, 5)										X	
Finance and Budget (Standards 1, 3, 4, 6)			X						X		
Mentoring Staff, Modeling (Standards 1, 2)		X		X				X		X	X
Presentation Skills (Effective) (Standards 3, 5)											
Professional Development (Standard 3)		X			X		X				
Professional Growth Process Feedback (Standards 4, 5)								X			X
Safe and Supportive Learning Environment (Standard 2)										X	X
Staff Documentation (Standards 3)										X	
Student Achievement (Plans) (Standards 1, 2)					X		X				
Teachers (Struggling and Underperforming) (Standards 2, 3, 4)										X	X
Team Leading and Building (Standards 4, 6)	X									X	X
Technology Use (Standard 2)											
Testing (Coordination) (Standards 2, 3)											
Time Management (Effective) (Standards 3)								X	X		
Walkthroughs (Standards 1, 2, 3, 4)				X	X						
Total	3	2	2	3	5	7	4	5	8	10	

¹Note: Training Sessions - I = Linked Learning; II = Just Do It; III = Attendance Improvement; IV = Phun with Fonics; V = Ideal ELL Classroom; VI = FACE – Student Achievement; VII = Closing the Achievement Gap- Dual Language is the Answer!; VIII = Tick, Tock: Don’t Count Every Hour in the Day, Make Every Hour in the Day Count; IX = To Spend or Not to Spend?; X = Coach Like a Knight; XI = Doing TADS Right!

in their learning (clean and safe schools, presentation skills (effective), team leading and building, and technology use) (Table 2). Respondents who attended the *Doing TADS Right!* session provided comments that addressed learning in the most skill areas (n = 10), which covered all of the six standards. The skill areas addressed in the *Doing TADS Right!* session were (1) change management; (2) communicate effectively; (3) consensus building and negotiation; (4) decision making (effective); (5) mentoring staff, modeling; (6) professional growth process feedback; (7) safe and supportive learning environment; (8) teachers (struggling and underperforming), and (9) team leading and building).

In contrast, survey respondents reflected learning in the least number of skill areas for the *Just Do It* and the *Attendance Improvement* training sessions. Reflective learning comments for the *Just Do It* session were related to mentoring staff/modeling and professional development; whereas, the *Attendance Improvement* training session focused on data for monitoring and improvement as well as finance and budget. In addition, data for monitoring and improvement; district curriculum implementation; and mentoring staff/modeling were the three most prevalent skill areas that API/AP2 participants communicated reflective learning.

What was the campus-level reading performance of AP1 and AP2 cohort schools?

The academic performance at campuses of AP1 and AP2 cohort participants was used to measure the impact of the program on students’ academic achievement at their schools. **Figure 1** reflects the positive or negative change in the percent of students who met Satisfactory Level II, phase-in 1 standards

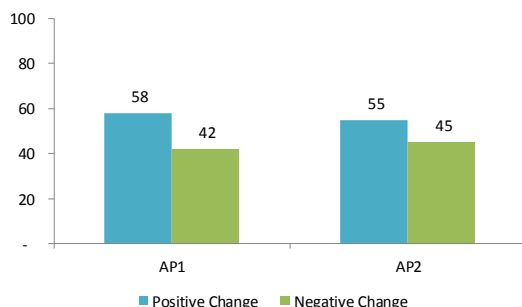


Figure 1: Percent of campuses of AP1/AP2 cohort participants with positive or negative change in percent met Satisfactory Level II, phase-in 1 standards from 2014 to 2015 on the combined STAAR grades 3-8 English and Spanish reading tests, first-time test takers (TEA-Pearson Student Data File, May 2015)

on the first administration of the STAAR reading test. The 2014 STAAR reading test results were compared to the 2015 reading results to detect changes. Combined grades 3–8 English or Spanish results are presented by cohort.

As shown in Figure 1, the majority of AP1 and AP2 campuses had a positive change in the percent of students who met Satisfactory from 2014 to 2015 (58% and 55%, respectively). It is also evident that students at AP2 campuses had a slightly higher percentage of students who experienced a positive change in their reading test performance over the years tracked.

Figure 2 depicts the percent of AP1 and AP2 campuses that had a positive or a negative change in the percent of students who met Satisfactory standards on the STAAR English I EOC exam from 2014 to 2015. The majority of campuses in both cohorts had a positive change in English I. AP1 cohort campuses had a moderately higher percent of campuses that had a positive change in STAAR EOC English I results compared to AP2 cohort campuses (71% vs. 60%, respectively).

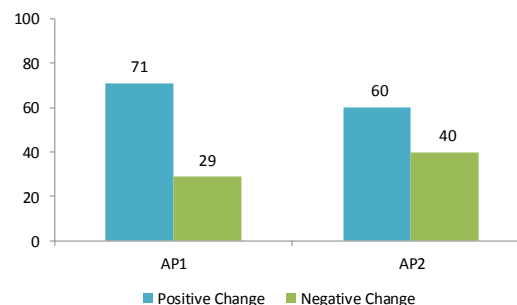


Figure 2: Percent of campuses of AP1 and AP2 cohort participants with positive or negative change from 2014 to 2015 on the English I End-of-Course, first-time test takers (TEA-Pearson Student Data File, May 2015)

Discussion

The Assistant Principal Leadership program (API/AP2) was designed to prepare leaders in HISD for the role of principal. The program was based on national and state educational leadership standards and HISD’s “grow your own” leadership development model. During the 2014–2015 academic year, cohort participants were exposed to 11 training sessions that focused on the standards. The trainings were designed to enhance participants’ practice as leaders; increase their instructional knowledge, skills,

and strategies; while providing effective feedback to teachers. Reflection is a critical component of the program and was used to gather information about participants' experiences in these areas. In addition, the reading performance of students at schools lead by AP1/AP2 participants was analyzed under the assumption that exposure on the national and state educational leadership standards would strengthen participant's school leadership skills (Van Meter & Murphy, 1997), and improve student achievement.

This evaluation found that AP1 and AP2 cohort participants indicated reflections in each of the six educational leadership standards; however, four of the twenty-four skill areas were not reflected in their learning (clean and safe schools, effective presentation skills, team leading and building, and technology use). The lack of reflections in the four skill areas may be, partially, related to the fact that these skill areas are emphasized in leadership training for new principals rather than assistant principals. The study also found that the majority of AP1/AP2 cohort schools achieved positive changes in their STAAR reading and English EOC I exam scores from spring 2014 to spring 2015.

There were several limitations to the study. First, the identities of participants who attended trainings and provided reflections were not known. Therefore, reading performance of students at campuses, although analyzed, may not be directly linked to participation in trainings. In addition, the small sample and lack of statistical controls limits generalization of the findings beyond the study sample.

Considering the evaluation findings, recommendations are to continue to expose participants to skills areas that are currently being addressed in the AP1/AP2 training, given that they are national and state standards. In addition, consider providing training in skill areas that were not as strong in participants' reflections in order to strengthen their leadership abilities and to better prepare them for possible roles as principals in HISD.

References

- Bellamy, T., Fulmer, C., Murphy, M., & Muth, R. (2003). A framework for school leadership accomplishments: Perspectives on knowledge, practice, and preparation for principals. *Leadership and Policy in Schools*, 2(4), 241-261.
- Bellamy, T., Fulmer, C., Murphy, M., & Muth, R. (2007). Five Ideas for Reframing Principalships. *Education Leadership and Administration*, 19, 57-74.
- Christie, K., Thompson, B., & Whitely, G. (2009). *Strong Leaders, Strong Achievement: Model Policy for Producing the Leaders to Drive Student Success*. Education Commission of the States Retrieved from <http://www.ecs.org/clearinghouse/79/23/7923.pdf>
- Glasman, N. S., & Heck, R. H. (1992). The changing leadership role of the principal: implications for principal assessment. *Peabody Journal of Education*, 68(1), 5-24.
- Goldring, E., Porter, A., Murphy, J., Elliott, S. N., & Cravens, X. (2009). Assessing learning-centered leadership: Connections to research, professional standards, and current practices. *Leadership and Policy in Schools*, 8, 1-36.
- Houston Independent School District. (n.d.) Department of Leadership Development. *Leadership Framework*. Retrieved from <http://www.houstonisd.org/leadershipdevelopment>
- Jennings, J. (2003). *Keeping Score Tests are vital but will not fix education alone*. Center on Education Policy. Retrieved from <http://www.cep-dc.org/displayDocument.cfm?DocumentID=135>
- Lieberman, A., Falk, B., & Alexander, L. (1994). *A culture in the making: Leadership in learner-centered schools*. New York: Columbia University Teachers College, National Center for Restructuring Education, Schools, and Teaching.
- Leithwood, K., Louis, K., Anderson, S., & Walstrom, K. (2004). *Learning From Leadership Project: How leadership influences student learning*. Retrieved from <http://www.wallacefoundation.org/knowledge-center/school-leadership/key-research/Documents/How-Leadership-Influences-Student-Learning.pdf>
- Louis, K. S., Marks, H., & Kruse, S. (1996). Teachers' professional community in restructuring schools. *American Educational Research Journal*, 33(4), 757-798.
- Reeves, D. B. (2005). *Assessing educational leaders: Evaluating performance for improved individual and organizational results*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Corwin Press.
- Thomas, D. W., Holdaway, E., & Ward, K. (2000). Policies and practices involved in the evaluation of school principals. *Journal of personnel evaluation in education*, 14(3), 215-240.
- Waters, T., & Grubb, S. (2004). *The leadership we need: Using research to strengthen the use of standards for administrator preparation and licensure programs*. Aurora, CO: Mid-continent Research for Education and Learning.
- Waters, J. T., Marzano, R. J., & McNulty, B. A. (2003). *Balanced leadership: What 30 years of*

research tells us about the effect of leadership on student achievement. Aurora, CO: Mid-continent Research for Education and Learning. Retrieved from, http://www.mcrel.org/products-and-services/products/product-listing/01_99/product-82#sthash.7aOkQ3QF.dpuf

Van Meter, E., & Murphy, J. (1997). *Using ISLLC standards to strengthen preparation programs in school administration.* Washington, DC: Council of Chief State School Officers.

For additional information contact the HISD Department of Research and Accountability at 713-556-6700 or e-mail Research@Houstonisd.org.

Appendix A
AP1 Schools

ADVANCED VIRTUAL ACADEMY	LONG MIDDLE
BASTIAN EL	MADING EL
BLACKSHEAR EL	MADISON H S
BONHAM EL	MARSHALL MIDDLE
BRISCOE EL	MCNAMARA EL
BROOKLINE EL	MILNE EL
BURNET EL	MORENO EL
CHAVEZ H S	NEFF ECC
CORNELIUS EL	NEFF EL
EAST EARLY COLLEGE H S	ORTIZ MIDDLE
EASTWOOD ACADEMY	PATTERSON EL
FONDREN MIDDLE	PECK EL
FONVILLE MIDDLE	PILGRIM ACADEMY
FORESTBROOK	PIN OAK MIDDLE
FURR H S	RAY DAILY EL
GREGORY-LINCOLN ED CTR (6-8)	REVERE MIDDLE
HALPIN EARLY CHILDHOOD CTR	SCARBOROUGH EL
HAMILTON MIDDLE	SCARBOROUGH H S
HARTMAN MIDDLE	SHARPSTOWN INTERNATIONAL SCHOOL
HENDERSON J EL	SHERMAN EL
HENRY MIDDLE	SUGAR GROVE ACADEMY
HIGHLAND HTS EL	THURGOOD MARSHALL EL
HINES-CALDWELL	VALLEY WEST EL
HOUSTON MATH SCIENCE AND TECHNOLOGY CENTER	WEST BRIAR MIDDLE
JEFFERSON EL	WESTSIDE H S
JOHNSTON MIDDLE	YATES H S
JORDAN H S	YOUNG MEN'S COLLEGE PREPARATORY ACADEMY
KEY MIDDLE	YOUNG WOMEN'S COLLEGE PREP ACADEMY
LAMAR H S	
LANIER MIDDLE	
LAW EL	
LEE H S	

Appendix A (cont'd)
AP2 Schools

AUSTIN H S	JACKSON MIDDLE
BENAVIDEZ EL	JONES H S
BLACK MIDDLE	LANIER MIDDLE
BONHAM EL	LEE H S
BRAEBURN EL	LONG MIDDLE
BRIARGROVE EL	LOVETT EL
BURBANK MIDDLE	MADISON H S
BURRUS EL	MCREYNOLDS MIDDLE
CLIFTON MIDDLE	NORTH HOUSTON EARLY COLLEGE H S
CONDIT EL	SANCHEZ EL
CRESPO EL	SHARPSTOWN INTERNATIONAL SCHOOL
DE CHAUMES EL	SHEARN EL
DEADY MIDDLE	STERLING H S
DEANDA EL	THE RUSK SCHOOL
DEBAKEY H S FOR HEALTH PROF	THOMPSON EL
EDISON MIDDLE	TWAIN EL
ELMORE ES	WASHINGTON B T H S
ENERGY INSTITUTE HS	WELCH MIDDLE
FONWOOD EL	WEST BRIAR MIDDLE
FORESTBROOK	WESTBURY H S
FRANKLIN EL	WESTSIDE H S
GORDON MANDARIN CHINESE SCHOOL	
HAMILTON MIDDLE	
HARTMAN MIDDLE	
HENDERSON J EL	
HENRY MIDDLE	
HILLIARD EL	
HOGG MIDDLE	
HORN EL	
HOUSTON ACADEMY FOR INTERNATIONAL STUDIES	
HOUSTON MATH SCIENCE AND TECHNOLOGY CENTER	

Appendix B
2014–2015 AP1/AP2 Training Sessions

1. Linked Learning
2. Just Do It
3. Attendance Improvement
4. Phun with Fonics
5. Ideal ELL Classroom
6. FACE – Student Achievement
7. Closing the Achievement Gap- Dual Language is the Answer!
8. Tick, Tock: Don't Count Every Hour in the Day, Make Every Hour in the Day Count
9. To Spend or Not to Spend?
10. Coach Like a Knight
11. Doing TADS Right!

Appendix C
ISLLC Standards

Standard 1: Facilitating the development, articulation, implementation, and stewardship of a vision of learning that is shared and supported by the school community

Standard 2: Advocating, nurturing, and sustaining a school culture and instructional program conducive to student learning and staff professional growth

Standard 3: Ensuring management of the organization, operations, and resources for a safe, efficient, and effective learning environment

Standard 4: Collaborating with families and community members, responding to diverse community interests and needs, and mobilizing community resources

Standard 5: Acting with integrity, fairness, and in an ethical manner

Standard 6: Understanding, responding to, and influencing the larger political, social, economic, legal, and cultural context