

EVALUATION BRIEF

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A comparative analysis of sixth-grade students' perceptions of school climate at YES Prep Lee and an HISD Middle School.

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With the growing numbers of charter schools competing for the same students that normally enroll in public schools, educators have the charge to analyze the benefits of choosing these alternative school environments. This brief will include a description of the Yes Prep Public Schools, an open-enrollment public charter school system, and one of its newest schools, Yes Prep Lee. Yes Prep Lee is housed at Lee High School in the Houston Independent School District (HISD). Results from a school climate survey at Yes Prep Lee, and comparison results from an HISD middle school will also be outlined.

Background

Yes Prep Public Schools was founded in 1998. "Yes Prep exists to increase the number of low-income Houstonians who graduate from a four-year college prepared to compete in the global marketplace and committed to improving disadvantaged communities" (www.yesprep.org). The school system has five campuses serving approximately 2,000 students in grades 6–12. In 2007, Yes Prep Southeast campus was recognized as one of the best high schools by Newsweek magazine (<http://www.newsweek.com/id/39380>). Yes Prep Public Schools have also earned high ratings from the Texas Education Agency for nine years in a row (www.yesprep.org).

In the fall of 2007, a new Yes Prep campus opened inside of HISD's Lee High School. The Yes Prep school system is renting the space from HISD. The new school enrolled approximately 130 sixth-grade students. Yes Prep at Lee plans to expand each year by adding one grade such that the beginning cohort of sixth-graders will remain together until twelfth-grade completion.

Data and Methods

Student demographic data were supplied from Yes Prep Public Schools. A total of 108 Yes Prep Lee sixth-graders completed the *School Climate Survey: A Comprehensive Assessment of School Environments*. A total of 152 HISD sixth-graders

from a comparable middle school completed the survey. The survey examined students' reflections of their school on ten subscales: (1) teacher-student relationships, (2) security and maintenance, (3) administration, (4) student academic orientation, (5) student behavioral values, (6) guidance, (7) student-peer relationships, (8) parent and community-school relationships, (9) instructional management, and (10) student activities. The number of questions comprising each subscale ranged from 3 to 12. The questions are presented in **Appendix A**.

A five-point Likert scale was used as a format for the questions making up each of the subscales: "Strongly Disagree" = 1, "Disagree" = 2, "Neither Agree nor Disagree" = 3, "Agree" = 4, "Strongly Agree" = 5, and "Don't Know" = 6. The survey data were aggregated into Microsoft EXCEL databases and the Statistical Packet for Social Sciences (SPSS) was used to calculate statistics. Items marked "Don't Know" and missing data were not included in calculating percentages or mean scores. All statistics were based upon the total number of valid responses.

What are the student demographics at Yes Prep Lee?

Table 1 (see page 2) displays the demographic characteristics of the students enrolled at Yes Prep Lee as of the fall of 2007. Table 1 reveals that 53 percent of Yes Prep Lee students were male and 47 percent of students were female. Ninety-four

	N	%
	108	100
Gender		
Male	57	52.8
Female	51	47.2
Ethnicity		
African American	7	6.5
Hispanic	101	93.5
Limited English Proficiency		
Yes	70	64.8
Economically Disadvantaged		
Yes	86	79.6
At-Risk		
Yes	79	73.1

percent of the students were Hispanic and 65 percent of their students were classified as having limited English proficiency. Eighty percent of the YES Prep Lee students were economically disadvantaged and 73 percent were at risk.

What are the home schools of the Yes Prep Lee students?

Ninety-two percent of the students that enrolled in Yes Prep Lee in 2007–2008 reported that they were zoned to an HISD middle school. **Table 2** provides a summary of these responses. Yes Prep Lee sixth-graders reported being zoned to nine different HISD middle schools, with 63.8 percent of the students being zoned to Long Middle School.

How do Yes Prep Lee students and HISD students rate the school climate?

To explore any differences in perceptions of school climate between Yes Prep Lee and HISD 6th graders, a comparison sample of HISD students were surveyed. The mean scale scores of the *School Climate Survey* are presented in **Table 3**. The table reveals that Yes Prep Lee students rated their school higher on all subscales of the survey than the comparison sample of HISD sixth-graders. The Yes Prep Lee students reported a mean score of 48.4 on the teacher-student relationships subscale, which was 11.9 points higher than the

Home School	%
Long	63.8
Dowling	7.6
Revere	7.6
Sharpstown	4.8
Grady	1.9
Welch	1.9
Fondren	1.0
Patrick Henry	1.0
Pershing	1.0

Table 3. Mean Scale Scores for School Climate Survey

Subscale (Maximum Scale Value)	Yes Prep Lee	HISD School	Difference*
Teacher-Student Relationships (60)	48.4	36.5	-11.9*
Security and Maintenance (35)	25.7	17.7	-8.0*
Administration (30)	24.4	15.4	-9.0*
Student Academic Orientation (20)	17.3	11.9	-5.4*
Student Behavioral Values (15)	9.4	6.6	-2.8*
Guidance (20)	16.6	12.2	-4.4*
Student-Peer Relationships (20)	14.9	10.6	-4.3*
Parent and Community-School Relationships (20)	15.3	10.5	-4.8*
Instructional Management (35)	29.2	21.4	-7.8*
Student Activities (20)	14.7	11.0	-3.7*

* T-tests revealed that all mean differences were statistically significant at the $p < .01$ level.

students from the comparison school. For example, 88.9 percent of YES Prep Lee students strongly agreed or agreed that their teachers make extra efforts to help them, while 68.0 percent of the comparison school's students reported this belief. For the security and maintenance subscale, there was a mean score difference of 8 points, with YES Prep students feeling more secure and satisfied with their campus. As part of the administration subscale, students were asked to rate their agreement with the statement. 'The administrators in this

school set high standards and let teachers, students, and parents know what these standards are'. Approximately, 67.5 percent of Yes Prep Lee students strongly agreed with this statement, while 14.6 of the comparison school's students strongly agreed. When asking students if they felt that their classmates understand why they are in school (student academic orientation), 70.9 percent of Yes Prep Lee students strongly agreed compared to 26.5 of the HISD comparison sixth-graders. Seventy-four percent of Yes Prep Lee students strongly agreed that their teachers or counselors encouraged them to think about the future (guidance). For the HISD comparison students, 26.7 percent felt they were encouraged to think about their future. (The response rates for all survey questions by school are available upon request.)

Conclusions

This first attempt to explore differences between a local charter school and an HISD school indicates that Yes Prep Lee students rate their charter school significantly more positive on school climate indicators as compared to HISD students. Research studies have shown that positive sentiments about school and high levels of school connectedness can directly relate to higher levels of achievement (Henderson & Mapp, 2002). The next examination of Yes Prep Lee students and HISD students will be a comparative analysis of how school climate perceptions relate to student academic performance over the school year.

References

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

School Climate Survey: A Comprehensive Assessment of School Environments

TEACHER-STUDENT RELATIONSHIPS

1. Teachers in this school like their students
2. Teachers in this school are on the side of their students
3. Teachers give students the grades they deserve
4. Teachers help students to be friendly and kind to each other
5. Teachers treat each student as an individual
6. Teachers are willing to help students
7. Teachers are patient when a student has trouble learning.
8. Teachers make extra efforts to help students
9. Teachers understand and meet the needs of each student
10. Teachers praise students more often than they scold them
11. Teachers are fair to students
12. Teachers explain carefully so that students can get their work done

SECURITY AND MAINTENANCE

13. Students usually feel safe in the school building
14. Teachers and other workers feel safe in the building before and after school
15. People are not afraid to come to school for meetings and programs in the evening
16. Classrooms are usually clean and neat
17. The school building is kept clean and neat
18. The school building is kept in good repair
19. The school grounds are neat and attractive

ADMINISTRATION (Principal, Assistant Principal, etc.)

20. The administrators in this school listen to student ideas
21. The administrators in this school talk often with teachers and parents
22. The administrators in this school set high standards and let teachers, students, and parents know what these standards are
23. Administrators set a good example by working hard themselves
24. The administrators in this school are willing to hear student complaints and opinions
25. Teachers and students help to decide what happens in this school

STUDENT ACADEMIC ORIENTATION

26. Students here understand why they are in school
27. In this school, students are interested in learning new things
28. Students in this school have fun but also work hard on their studies
29. Students work hard to complete their school assignments

STUDENT BEHAVIORAL VALUES

30. If one student makes fun of someone, other students do not join in
31. Students in this school are well-behaved even when the teachers are not watching them
32. Most students would do their work even if the teacher stepped out of the classroom

GUIDANCE

33. Teachers or counselors encourage students to think about their future
34. Teachers or counselors help students plan for future classes and for future jobs
35. Teachers or counselors help students with personal problems
36. Students in this school can get help and advice from teachers or counselors

STUDENT-PEER RELATIONSHIPS

37. Students care about each other
38. Students respect each other
39. Students want to be friends with one another
40. Students have a sense of belonging in this school

PARENT AND COMMUNITY-SCHOOL RELATIONSHIPS

41. Parents and members of the community attend school meetings and other activities
42. Most people in the community help the school in one way or another
43. Community attendance at school meetings and programs is good
44. Community groups honor student achievement in learning, music, drama, and sports

INSTRUCTIONAL MANAGEMENT

45. There is a clear set of rules for students to follow in this school
46. Taking attendance and other tasks do not interfere with classroom teaching
47. Teachers spend almost all classroom time in learning activities
48. Students in this school usually have assigned schoolwork to do
49. Most classroom time is spent talking about classwork or assignments
50. Teachers use class time to help students learn assigned work
51. Outside interruptions of the classroom are few

STUDENT ACTIVITIES

52. Students are able to take part in school activities in which they are interested
53. Students can be in sports, music, and plays even if they are not very talented
54. Students are comfortable staying after school for activities such as sports and music
55. Students can take part in sports and other school activities even if their families cannot afford it