A Leadership Program with Promising Results

Brief for the Massachusetts Commissioner of Elementary and Secondary Education, Mitchell D. Chester, Ed. D.

February 27, 2014
Introduction

The NYC Leadership Academy was created with the mission to prepare and support school leaders to work in the most challenging schools and to improve outcomes for all students. Since 2003, NYC Leadership Academy has helped individual school leaders — and entire systems — transform schools on behalf of students. Our nationally recognized leadership development model offers practical experience that is aligned with clear, research- and behavior-based school leadership standards and school system policies and reform efforts.

The Turnaround Leadership Academy sponsored by Teachers21 is adapted from NYC Leadership Academy’s signature program, the Aspiring Principals Program (APP). This approach and our programs have had a positive impact on students and communities with the greatest needs. Here are some examples:

- The NYC Leadership Academy graduates reversed the decline in low performing schools while driving gains at a faster pace in closing the achievement gaps in English Language Arts and Math.
- Over the last 10 years, this program has prepared 500 school leaders for New York City; system-wide, this is 1 in 7 principals impacting 682,000 students each year.
- The NYC Leadership Academy graduates transform schools into safe and engaging places for students, for teachers and for the communities they serve.
- The results also show increased stability in schools with 96% of principals coached returning for their 4th year.

This intensive approach is also cost effective — for every $100 invested in leadership development, another student becomes proficient. NYC Leadership Academy’s model has now been adapted in districts and states across the country. The goal of adaptation programs, including the Turnaround Leadership Academy in Massachusetts, is to achieve results similar to or better than those of the NYC Leadership Academy’s New York City-based APP program.

As it is too early to measure school-based results, Teachers21 started to assess progress based on its early indicators of success. Below you will find feedback from surveys of the first cohort of participants, their mentors (while in their residency) and current supervisors.

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1 The NYC Leadership Academy was selected as a national exemplar by the U.S. Department of Education and by the Alliance to Reform Educational Leadership (AREL) and received the highest possible ratings on EDC’s Quality Assessment. NYC Leadership Academy was selected by AREL to lead the national Residency Design Initiative and by The Wallace Foundation to facilitate its six-district Professional Learning Community and develop and disseminate field guides on principal preparation and coaching. NYC Leadership Academy recently won an U.S. Department of Education i3 development grant and has secured millions of dollars in support, both private and public, for its local and national leadership development initiatives.
The Turnaround Leadership Academy (TLA)

The Turnaround Leadership Academy sponsored by Teachers21 is a rigorous preparation program designed to produce leaders for low performing — Level 3 and Level 4 — schools in Massachusetts. It was funded early on with Race to the Top funds and developed in cooperation with NYC Leadership Academy as an adaptation of its highly successful Aspiring Principals Program. The behavior-based leadership competencies that underpin the NYC Leadership Academy’s Performance Matrix and have been found to be critical for new leaders working in challenging schools are a feature of the Massachusetts Academy as well but the Turnaround Leadership Performance Matrix was carefully aligned with Massachusetts administrator licensure standards to ensure full preparation for the Massachusetts context.

The Turnaround Leadership Academy has recently been approved as a licensure program through ESE’s educator preparation office. Next year the program will become known as the Urban Principals Development Program and it will support both aspiring and experienced principals aiming to lead Level 3 and Level 4 schools requiring turnaround. Funding to support the new iteration of the program is currently being sought by Teachers21.

Summer Intensive

For Cohort 1, the program consisted of a four-week, full-time program during summer 2012, where the participants worked in a simulated scenario school environment and engaged in regular 360° feedback sessions, individual and group assignments, and on-going practice assessing instruction and making decisions. In a survey administered following the Summer Intensive, all participants strongly agreed that the experience was more beneficial and rigorous than other trainings that they had attended, and all participants felt strongly that they could apply what they learned to their work in schools.

Residency

The Summer Intensive was followed by a year-long full-time residency where the participants worked one-on-one with a trained mentor principal in a school, applying what they had learned. The structure is important to note: the training experience is designed to bring each participant closer to the real responsibilities of the principalship with each phase of the program:

- the Summer Intensive models the job in a simulated environment;
- the residency allows the participant to take on real school-based responsibilities with less of a safety net, but with the close guidance of the mentor principal; and
- during the residency, the participants spend one day per week back in training, giving them both a chance to reflect on and learn from their experience while also adding new knowledge and skills to take back to their schools.

This residency was a critical component of the TLA participants’ development. Participants reported growth in all areas of the performance matrix — in particular, the areas of supervision of staff and leadership development — and attributed the vast majority of this growth to their TLA experience.

In addition to positive results from the participant self-evaluation, residency mentor principals who were leading the residency schools, felt strongly that the residency experience benefitted TLA participants, themselves as mentors, and their schools. All mentors reported that they would be willing to serve again in this role. Some of what they had to say about their mentees included:
• (My mentee’s strengths included) terrific emotional Intelligence; humility to know that s/he has a lot to learn (don’t we all?); great communication skills; great connection with students
• (My mentee) worked with us on using assessment data to focus our math support services in all grades. S/he took the time to analyze student data and assess the available staff for support.
• Improved ELA Team instruction and outcomes for students. Improved Advanced scores from 8% to 28%. Supported our ELA team in using a Cycle of Inquiry to determine shifts in instruction needed to improve scores and improve student learning.
• (My mentee) was in charge of the year-long professional development for Common Core and s/he both presented the latest content available and s/he ensured that the protocols used during the workshops were appropriate for (my school’s) staff.

Mentors also commented on how the TLA experience impacted them as professional learners, providing comments such as:
• I learned much from (my mentee). I am not sure if it was the individual or the program but s/he was by far the most productive and effective intern I have had. To date I have mentored 10 principal interns. S/he taught me what a prepared intern should look like before they take on the role of principal. I also learned much about Common Core.

Who Are the Turnaround Leadership Academy Graduates?
Turnaround Leadership Academy’s first cohort of six leaders graduated and were endorsed in the summer of 2013.

Four of the six graduates are already principals, and the two additional graduates are now assistant principals in Massachusetts schools. This 100% placement rate within one year is comparable to the placement rate for the NYC Leadership Academy’s Aspiring Principal Program in New York City, where an average of 94% of graduates are placed as principals or assistant principals within a year. All six graduates are leading schools with a range of challenges, serving 2,200 students in five Massachusetts districts.

The Turnaround Leadership Academy program is highly selective: Of the 56 applicants who completed applications, 10 were admitted. This 18% acceptance rate is aligned to NYCLA’s acceptance rate, which is approximately 20%. Nationally, TLA would be considered a highly selective program.

Of those who were admitted, 80% were teachers — coming directly from the classroom into this principal training program. One of the other participants was a Dean and the other a graduate student. As it is much more typical in Massachusetts for a teacher to first move into the position of an assistant principal before becoming a principal, this movement from teacher to principal is evidence of the confidence superintendents have in the Turnaround Leadership Academy program graduates.

What Impact Are Turnaround Leadership Academy Graduates Having in Their Schools?
Feedback from supervisors in January indicates that Turnaround Leadership Academy graduates are already making a positive impact on their schools. In a recent survey, all supervisors reported that the performance of these leaders this year has been either good or excellent. They generally rated these leaders as more proficient than other new leaders in a range of leadership competencies and felt that
they were mostly or completely ready to undertake leadership tasks such as the continuous improvement of teachers. More specific feedback from supervisors included:

- *(This graduate is)* **extremely focused on the important issues of teaching and learning and how to move teachers to stronger performance**
- *During the summer, before school started, (this graduate) took it upon him/herself to visit every student's home and speak with their parents.*
- *(This graduate) has made progress with developing much needed systems in his/her building, s/he has established clear protocols, developed lines of communication, and s/he is taking an active role in his/her building by leading from the 'front.'*
- *I think (this graduate) is a star. Our relationship is very strong; s/he makes sure s/he includes me in the loop. S/he thinks very much out of box, yet s/he is a traditionalist in many other ways. S/he is very comfortable with him/herself which is not always the case with first time leaders...My instincts and what I have seen so far tell me that s/he is a profoundly talented leader.*