All Means All: A Case Study on Intentional School Director Talent Pipeline Initiatives at an Urban Title 1 School District

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Abstract

Bogotch (2002) proposed that educational leadership cannot be separated from social justice, and this is a sentiment that is taken to heart at an urban Title-1 school district in Houston, Texas. To intentionally address the need for such alignment between mission and practice, the district implemented a recruitment and talent development initiative that actively sought to change the district's talent pool. This program develops effective leaders through a fellowship that focuses on building and leading an effective team, coaching and managing with excellence, and solving high-impact, complex problems. Using a position-subject approach (Conrad, Haworth, & Millar, 2001), this paper evaluates the extent to which the program uplifts diverse voices in school leadership and the extent to which the program successfully prepares participants for leadership roles. This manuscript includes a description of a successful and inclusive school leadership pipeline, an explanation of challenges and resistance faced for both leadership initiatives, and strategies to continue growth in this particular area of educational leadership through data collected via survey, interview, and autoethnographic reflections.

Keywords: *school leadership; talent pipeline; leadership pipeline; diversity initiative*

Introduction

Bogotch (2002) proposed that educational leadership cannot be separated from social justice and this is a sentiment that is taken to heart at an urban Title-1 school district in Houston, Texas. Important to note that all three of the authors have been directly invested in the programs being studied. One of the authors was a former participant in the Campus Leadership Training Program (CLTP), while the other two authors have dedicated significant time and effort to support and develop each program. To that effect, we intentionally switch from a third-person narrative to a first-person narrative so our relationship to the topic is clear and consistently noticed.

Our district has worked to create exemplary recruitment and talent development initiatives directly related to school leadership. Throughout this paper, the strategic initiatives will be referred to as the CLPT and the School Leader Pipeline Program (SLPP). The names have been changed to allow for anonymity. Both CLTP and SLPP have identified areas of growth for talent development and have actively worked to make change happen in our district's talent pool.

CLTP, a program launched in 2013, has had six cohorts since it began. The goal of CLTP is to build a pipeline of high-performing leaders who serve to fulfill our district's mission and vision (Appendix A). CLTP develops effective leaders through a fellowship that focuses on building and leading an effective team, coaching and managing with excellence, and solving high-impact, complex problems.

In 2014, CLTP split into two separate programs - one geared towards leadership roles on campus including, but not limited to, deans of instruction, deans of students, directors of academics, and the second program focused on school leadership. The two tracks are designed to address the individual needs of the leaders, regardless of title or position in the organization. This article will focus on the school leadership principal track. Current school leaders (principals) and system administrators (district-level positions) make a concerted effort to identify potential candidates, mindful of the goal of including a greater number of minority teachers, and to encourage them to prepare for and apply to the program.

By continuing and improving these programs, our district aims to achieve three overall goals: (1) improve teacher/employee retention rates, (2) increase teacher, manager, and school leadership effectiveness, and (3) increase the number of minority professionals participating in leadership development across the system. As the cultural demographic shift continues to transform the face of our city, our district is committed to bridging the opportunity gaps that, if left unchecked, will continue to widen. Diversity in leadership, especially in the communities where our district operates, allows for authentic engagement both in and outside of our system. Additionally, diversity of thought facilitates creativity, innovation, and initiative. Our district is invested in empowering cohorts of diverse leaders through professional development opportunities so that the students we serve can see themselves in our staff.

Beginning in the 2018-2019 school year, our district began a more extensive school leadership program, as discussed previously, known as the School Leader Pipeline Program. To ensure that our district has exceptional leaders, trained and ready to assume the role of School Director, we must maintain a 50% coverage ratio in the School Director Pipeline. Specifically, if our district has 20 schools across Houston, there must be a minimum of 10 proven leaders in the pipeline. While they are in the pipeline, school directors in waiting will participate in cohort retreats to learn from one another, from experts, and from field experience. In addition to retreats, participants receive customized 1:1 support and personalized coaching. Once they have committed to assume the direction of a school, these school directors in training will transition out of their current roles to spend time shadowing current school directors and planning for their first year leading a campus. In the first year of the program, it had seven residents, six of whom represent various communities of color.

While the CLPT focuses on building skills that will make for a successful leader in whatever leadership capacity an individual might serve, the SLPP builds the technical skillset needed to be an effective School Director through its curriculum, cohort experience, and mentorship programming. To qualify for this program, residents needed to have demonstrated high performance in their current leadership roles at their current schools and a commitment to service within those school communities.

While both programs developed out of necessity in the school district, it is imperative we evaluate them for their effectiveness. To that end, we are focusing this study on two research questions:

1. To what extent does the *CLPT* and the *SLPP* successfully uplift diverse voices in school leadership?
2. To what extent does the *CLPT* and the *SLPP* successfully prepare participants for leadership roles within their district?

In order to address these questions, this case study will take a positioned-subject approach (Conrad, Haworth, & Millar, 2001). A positioned-subject approach assumes that the subjects under investigation are actively reflecting on and constructing meaning in their work. It will also be grounded in critical theory (Bogdan & Biklen, 1998). Critical theory focuses on researching how this work benefits those groups traditionally identified as marginalized and the CLPT and SLPP both focus on this initiative.

The method of data collection will include in-depth interviews with the directors of both programs as well as an auto-ethnographic reflection by our district's head. To achieve triangulation, a series of surveys will allow for diverse perspectives and voices to share their experiences in both programs. The purpose of these surveys will be to highlight key successes within our district to prioritize marginalized voices and to innovative leadership pipeline practices. It will also highlight opportunities for continued growth as the SLPP program is in its inaugural year and will require updates.

Ultimately, this manuscript will include a description of a successful and inclusive school leadership pipeline, an explanation of challenges and resistance faced for both leadership initiatives, and strategies to continue growth in this particular area of educational leadership. Implications on future work will be made at the close of this article.

Literature Review

School leadership in general, and the uplifting of diverse leadership more specifically, has been the focus of our school district since the creation of the Diversity Initiative in 2015. The stated purpose of the Diversity Initiative was to "embrace diversity and inclusion to advance social justice." In other words, the initiative focused on staff diversity and inclusion as a driver of equity for children and their communities.

To this end, our school district was intentional in its commitment to recruitment and leadership development. Our school district operated under the assumption that the way candidates interact with organizations, and apply for positions, has fundamentally changed. To address these changes, our school district adopted a more targeted approach. This more proactive recruiting model is known as a talent pipeline.

To address these major themes, this literature review will begin with a brief description of talent pipeline approaches to recruitment and then delve deeper into other studies with a focus on preparation programs for exemplary school leadership. Due to the newness of the talent pipeline models, the majority of sources will not come from academic journals. On the other hand, due to the robustness of research on effective leadership development programs, the majority of sources regarding this topic will come from peer-reviewed journals.

Talent Pipelines

A talent pipeline can most easily be defined as "a collection of candidates that are engaged and can be contacted when relevant roles are created" (Slater, 2019). A necessary component of

talent pipelines is the ability for them to be *relationship*-centric. This means that rather than an organization investing time in searching for qualified candidates, the focus is on building relationships with potential talent for future roles and opportunities. A study completed by Beamery titled "The State of Talent Acquisition 2017" interviewed nearly 600 talent leaders in various business sectors to identify key priorities for hiring. In the study, 82% of recruiters identified proactive recruiting (also known as talent pipelines) as the major priority (Slater, 2019).

To further differentiate within the context of this study, a program like CLPT would be defined as a talent pool while the SLPP would more accurately fit the definition of a talent pipeline. The major difference between the two is that in the pipeline, the candidates are actively undergoing some sort of pathway towards the eventual destination like a school director position. In a talent pool, however, candidates are grouped and categorized by their talent. There is a less defined end goal for the talent pool.

Slater continues to highlight key benefits for organizations to transition to a talent pipeline recruitment approach. Intuitively, talent pipelines produce better candidates. This is due to the long-term approach to hiring as opposed to a more traditional model of filling a vacancy by rushing to find a candidate. In Slater's approach, the candidates are already assembled. Another major benefit, which aligns to the scope of this study, is that talent pipelines have demonstrated that they increase diversity in hiring practices (Slater, 2019). These relationship-building talent pipelines provide organizations with the time to both identify diverse prospective candidates and to build a relationship with those candidates.

This paper will continue with a brief description of the process of developing a leadership pipeline based on the work of Jay A. Conger and Robert M. Fulmer in the Harvard Business Review. Rather than using the term talent pipeline, the authors name this process succession management. The definition, according to Conger and Fulmer (2003) is "combining succession planning and leadership development in a comprehensive process for finding and grooming future leaders at all levels of the organization (pg. 1)." This approach requires the adoption of a talent mindset:

- Time is made for in-depth talent assessment
- There is differentiation between strong and weak performers
- There are challenging assignments to inexperienced but high-potential managers

While this study focused on big businesses such as Dell, Dow Chemical, Eli Lilly, PanCanadian Petroleum, Sonoco Products, and Bank of America, the major takeaways are easily transferable to a school district and its hiring and recruitment processes.

To confirm this correlation, a school leadership study conducted by Linda Darling-Hammond, Michelle LaPointe, Debra Meyerson, Margaret Terry Orr, and Carol Cohen (2007) examined eight pre- and in-service principal development programs. These programs were selected based on evidence of strong outcomes in their preparation programs. Additionally, each of these programs demonstrated unique approaches to the actual programming. For the purpose of this article, while Darling-Hammond, et. al., describe this process as leadership development programs, we will substitute the term talent pipeline as a point of clarity and connection between the sources included in this literature review.

School Leadership Preparation Programs

Much like the current trends on teacher demographics, school leadership data shows that K-12 school principals identify overwhelmingly as White and to this effect oftentimes do not reflect the diversity of the student populations that they serve (Castro, et. al., 2018). This policy brief sponsored by the University Council for Educational Administration acknowledged current policies geared towards increased diversity in the teaching workforce and proposed that the same focus be directed towards increasing diversity in K-12 school leadership. Of the policy recommendations, two fall within the scope of this study. Castro, Germain, and Gooden (2018) suggest that "institutions of higher education and school leadership programs can foster partnerships with current school leaders and provide training opportunities to help them identify and recruit promising teachers of color into leadership programs" (pg. 1). CLPT and the SLPP are intentional in this regard--engaging in the talent cultivation of leaders of color early and often ensuring that the diversification of the pipeline is a perpetual practice rather than a point in time attempt.

The other recommendation suggests the inclusion of pathway opportunities like a talent pipeline. The goal is to engage in early recruitment and effective mentoring programs for teachers of color. Both programs discussed in this study include a mentoring component. Every member of CLTP and the SLPP are paired with a senior leader in our district. All members of the executive team, including the CEO, participate as mentors demonstrating the organizational commitment to proactively clearing the path for future leaders to learn and grow. These mentoring relationships last for at least one year and include monthly in-person touchpoints where mentees bring problems of practice ensuring that the mentorship is both targeted and practical.

As stated previously, the academic research on school leadership preparation programs is much more robust than on talent pipelines geared towards the education sector. To that effect, this literature review will focus on highlighting key takeaways from Stanford University's School Leadership Study titled "Preparing School Leaders for a Changing World: Lessons from Exemplary Leadership Development Programs" by Darling Hammond, LaPoint, Meyerson, Terry Orr, and Cohen (2007).

Essentially, this study of thirteen preservice and sixteen in-service programs found that preparation programs with innovative approaches yielded participants who felt better prepared for their intended role and had a better understanding of leadership practices than others with more conventional preparation (Darling-Hammond, et. al., 2007). One innovative practice outlined in the study was a cohort model and had current administrators as program facilitators. In both the CLTP and the SLPP, members of our district executive team facilitate a number of the leadership courses that are required for the successful completion of the respective programs. For example, in the CLTP, the CEO is responsible for the required sessions titled Managing Conflict and Building Trust. In the SLPP, the CEO delivers a required session on titled Courageous Leadership.

Another critical characteristic of leadership preparation programs is that the components are connected via such actions as field-based projects, action research, and problem-based learning. Both CLPT and the SLPP incorporate several of these specific types of program work. For example, at the end of the CLTP, program participants (divided into cohorts) are required to present findings of their action research to the entire executive team and the Board of Directors. Action research projects always focus on relevant and urgent needs of the organization. In the past, the action research has included parent engagement, college initiatives programming, and diversity, equity, and inclusion professional development planning.

Methodology

We decided to implement a qualitative approach with this study because of the benefits of this method of study. One of the major advantages of adopting a qualitative approach is that subjects can be evaluated in greater detail. For example, during our interview process, we were able to utilize a semi-structured approach so, while maintaining fidelity to the core interview questions, we were able to dig deeper into areas that we may not have initially considered. Qualitative research devotes itself to the subtleties noticed in the information that has been collected. This allows for increased detail and opportunities for insight during data analysis.

Additionally, we adopted the qualitative approach because it lends itself to data collected based on human experiences. The human experience is complex. Individual perspectives will be nuanced. While we may be able to determine some consistencies between accounts, the nuances of human experiences can be better identified and discussed from a qualitative approach. Especially with our purpose of highlighting key successes within our district to prioritize marginalized voices and to innovative leadership pipeline practices, we must consider even the outliers during this case study.

Our case study took a positioned-subject approach (Conrad, Haworth, & Millar, 2001). As stated earlier, a positioned-subject approach assumes that the subjects under investigation are actively reflecting on and constructing meaning in their work. One of our authors, speaking as a former employee in our district, notes that constant reflection was prioritized and instrumental for growth at any level, whether it be teacher or administrator.

The participants in this study came from three sources and all participants are based on convenience as they all come from within the same school district and are active in the same SLPP. Our first source will be one of our authors, the current CEO for our district. He will provide an auto-ethnographical account of his experiences of lessons learned through his own school director training and his role in the development of a radically new approach in our district. Our second source of participants will come from the directors of CLTP and the SLPP. These interviews will highlight the successes and the areas for continued improvement within both initiatives. Our final participant source will be individuals who opted into survey participation. Each of these individuals are a part of a convenience sample, meaning that they are current participants. The participants did not receive any benefit from participation and were allowed to opt-out at any point.

The materials used in this case study are different interview protocols and a survey. The readers can see the survey question types in the tables that follow, and the interview protocol will be attached in Appendix B. The readers must note that these interviews were fluid and semi-structured to allow for the space to dig deeper during the interview process. Questions focused on exclusionary practices for traditional leadership roles, the strengths of CLTP and SLPP, personal experiences in these programs, and opportunities for growth and hopes for the future. After the data was collected, we coded for high-frequency responses and looked for emergent themes which will be discussed in section IV.

Again, the purpose was to judge the effectiveness of the current programs and, as the study progressed, it showed a necessity for increased data collection and an inherently stronger alignment to the goals of this paper by focusing on the SLPP.

Results

All of the responses that were collected were meant to help assess the two guiding research questions:

1. To what extent does the *CLPT* and the *SLPP* successfully uplift diverse voices in school leadership?
2. To what extent does the *CLPT* and the *SLPP* successfully prepare its participants for leadership roles within their district?

Our school organization's CEO composed an auto-ethnographical reflection in which he focused on how his lived experiences, coupled with his understanding of larger systemic injustice and inequity, led him towards advocating for programs like CLPT and the SLPP. Following this, we will deep dive into surveys and interviews completed by program directors and program participants.

Auto-ethnographical Account[1]

In December 2005, I left for winter break as the 6th grade math teacher at my school, and when I came back after break in January 2016, I was introduced to the staff as their new principal. Over that break, the current principal transitioned out to prepare to open a new district campus, and I was approached, without an application or selection process, to lead the school. My preparation for assuming this new role and increased breadth of responsibility was non-existent. At that time, our district explicitly embraced a "sink or swim" and "trial by fire" attitude when it came to school leader development. In part, we were moving so fast as a start-up organization, with such limited resources, that we believed we had no choice but to embrace this approach. In part, this approach reflected a deep, though only superficially explored, belief that the best way to create leaders was through living the crucible of leadership with real, high stakes.

To assess the strengths and weaknesses of my preparation is to presume that there was any formal preparation at all. There was not. My preparation was merely an assessment of how I was performing in my current job as a 6th grade teacher and the grade level chair and assumed that strong performance in my current roles would translate to strong performance in an expanded capacity. A major flaw in this preparation philosophy is clear in retrospect. If I succeeded in my new role as a leader, then the success was assigned to the pathway—or lack thereof. However, if I failed then the failure was assessed to me personally.

My independent nature and natural, though sometimes unfounded belief, that I can overcome even the toughest obstacles created an opportunity for me to thrive in this environment. However, as our district has since realized, this approach can be especially problematic for aspiring female leaders and aspiring leaders who are people of color. From the time I can remember, my leadership was encouraged and promoted. This is not true for all. My potential was affirmed and encouraged. This is not true for all. The stakes of personal failure for me were manageable and safeguarded. Again, this is not true for all. A system that relies solely on the inherent confidence (for me bordering on arrogance) of its aspiring leaders will undoubtedly lose capable leaders on the journey and miss the opportunity of discovering fully capable leaders who do not fully match the archetype.

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1. Note that during this section of the paper, we change our writing from a group focus to "I" statements. This is because this section focuses solely on the experiences of one of our authors.

The only way I have found to break the cycle which disproportionately favors white males, and other privileged leaders, is to develop intentional interventions that expand the pipeline and support aspiring leaders through that pipeline. The pipeline must be wide enough to capture many varieties of leaders and have a strong enough flow to ensure that all capable leaders emerge. However, the pipeline must also be unapologetic about articulating and instilling shared organizational values in its leaders in a way that do not force the individuals to assimilate. This is a tricky business—such is the nature of leadership development.

CLPT and the SLPP were born out of the intersection of evolving organizational values and specific organizational needs. They were created to solve both philosophical and mathematical problems. Philosophically, I became convinced that without formal leadership development programs, we would destine ourselves to a monolithic school leader cohort—one that largely did not reflect the demographics of the students our district exists to serve. Mathematically, it was impossible to ignore the fact that our informal leadership development approach was being outpaced by our growth and our need for new leaders. In other words, we launched CLTP first, and then the SLPP, to ensure that we had both a diverse leadership pipeline and a sufficiently large pipeline to serve the thousands, soon to be tens of thousands, of our district's students.

While these programs are still relatively new, the diversification of our team of school directors is unquestionable. Five years ago the majority of this team were white males. Now this team is majority people of color and a majority are women. Over that same time, I have come to believe deeply that diversity is a necessary, but insufficient, measure of success. Diversity must be the foundation of success, but in isolation it tells us very little. What I am most proud of at our district is that by any practical measure we are now, five years after the inception of these programs, both a far more diverse organization and a far more successful one. We serve far more students. We keep far more students. Their achievement is stronger. Our staff members are measurably more satisfied, and we are retaining them longer.

CLTP and SLPP have not just made us a more diverse, inclusive organization. They have made us a better, stronger organization for the 13,500 students we are privileged to serve. What I do note from the results of our survey and the more descriptive responses is there is a disconnect. Participants and program directors are able to articulate incredible pride in these initiatives and yet, within the confines of the survey, there were gaping opportunities for growth. This study will inspire clearly defined action-steps for increased program reflection.

Program Directors

CLTP was established in 2013 and was borne out of a conversation with the executive team about the need for a proactive, offensive (rather than defensive) approach to leadership development. From a conversation at a coffee shop with notes hastily scribbled on napkins to the allocation of resources and a full-time director in the following budget cycle, CLTP went from an idea to a formal structure in less than 6 months—such is the nature of progressive, positive change at our district. A few years later, the SLPP followed a similar path from idea to implementation and addressed the acute need of filling principal-level roles in the organization proactively and with a diverse talent pool. After the origination of these programs, director leadership extended to Heads of Schools. In this model, each school has a School Director who is mentored by a Head of Schools. A Head of Schools is responsible for a region in our district and has previously demonstrated leadership potential in a School Director role. These Heads of Schools are now also working with the talent pipeline through the SLPP. For our study, the program director interviews were limited

to three participants. We acknowledge that the numbers below do not represent a wide range of responses, but feel that we can extrapolate meaning within the context of identifying the potential opportunities for continued study.

Two of the respondents were male and the other was female. One identified as African American. One identified as a member of the LGBTQIA+ community. Each of these individuals had more than five years in the classroom, followed by anywhere from seven to nearly 20 years of experience in leadership roles.

Table 1: Perceptions of Program Directors for the CLTP[2]

Does the program...	Not at all	A little	Moderate amount	A lot	Very well
Create a collaborative learning environment	0.00%	0.00%	**100.00%**	0.00%	0.00%
Use data to monitor school progress, identity problems, & propose solutions	0.00%	**50.00%**	**50.00%**	0.00%	0.00%
Lead a well-informed, planned change process for school	**50.00%**	0.00%	**50.00%**	0.00%	0.00%
Engage staff in decision-making about school curriculum and policies	**50.00%**	0.00%	0.00%	**50.00%**	0.00%
Develop broad agreement among staff about the school's mission	**50.00%**	0.00%	**50.00%**	0.00%	0.00%
Mobilize the school's staff to foster social justice in serving all students	0.00%	**100.00%**	0.00%	0.00%	0.00%
Develop a clear set of ethical principles to guide decision-making	0.00%	**50.00%**	0.00%	**50.00%**	0.00%
Handle discipline and support services	**50.00%**	0.00%	**50.00%**	0.00%	0.00%
Analyze current systems for equity approach	0.00%	**50.00%**	**50.00%**	0.00%	0.00%
Work with parents to support students' learning	0.00%	**50.00%**	**50.00%**	0.00%	0.00%
Collaborate with others outside of the school for assistance and partnership	0.00%	**50.00%**	**50.00%**	0.00%	0.00%

Two of the indicators that solicited the highest response were "engag[ing] staff in decision-making about school curriculum and policies" and "develop[ing] a clear set of ethical principles to guide decision-making." A specific way that these programs target these initiatives is by formally introducing cohort members to the organization's decision-making framework—IRADP,

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2. The survey has been modified from Stanford's School Leadership Survey (2007).

which is an application of Bain's highly successful RAPID framework).[3] This process starts with an intentional focus on input gathering (the "I" in IRADP) as the necessary first step in all major decisions made at our district—highlighting our district's commitment to broad stakeholder engagement as the underpinning to any ethical decision-making framework. Additionally, in the interview portion, program directors highlighted that while participating in the program, the mentor-relationship as one of its foundational and most beneficial pillars.

As identified by the program directors, a demonstrated area of growth for these programs would be to increase the focus on analyzing current systems for an equity approach and develop a clear set of ethical principles to guide decision-making. When asked about why these programs were prioritized, one program director responded, "because we need to increase access to the opportunities to lead our organization and ensure that we are mining for people that may not have had access to the roles." Another participant suggested that it was "unclear how we track the success of the program with data and performance of participants to make adjustments each year in the fidelity of the program." This disconnect was readily apparent in contrast between survey and interview responses. While the survey tended to be more critical of the program, the interview responses shifted towards a more positive outlook. This leads us to conclude two things: (1) the program has been successful in how the participants and leaders emotionally connect to this model and (2) the program has not, to date, focused on the intentionality of its components.

Table 2: Perceptions of program directors for the SLPP

Does the program...	Not at all	A little	Moderate amount	A lot	Very well
Create a collaborative learning environment	0.00%	0.00%	0.00%	**100.00%**	0.00%
Use data to monitor school progress, identity problems, & propose solutions	0.00%	0.00%	0.00%	**100.00%**	0.00%
Lead a well informed, planned change process for school	0.00%	0.00%	**66.67%**	33.33%	0.00%
Engage staff in decision-making about school curriculum and policies	0.00%	0.00%	**66.67%**	0.00%	33.33%
Develop broad agreement among staff about the school's mission	0.00%	0.00%	**66.67%**	33.33%	0.00%
Mobilize the school's staff to foster social justice in serving all students	0.00%	0.00%	**66.67%**	0.00%	33.33%
Develop a clear set of ethical principles to guide decision-making	0.00%	**33.33%**	**33.33%**	**33.33%**	0.00%
Handle discipline and support services	0.00%	0.00%	0.00%	**100.00%**	0.00%

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3. IRADP (Input, Recommend, Agree, Decide, Perform). RAPID is a tool used to clarify decision accountability and assignment of roles when making decisions.

Analyze current systems for equity approach	0.00%	0.00%	**33.33%**	**33.33%**	**33.33%**
Work with parents to support students' learning	0.00%	33.33%	**66.67%**	0.00%	0.00%
Collaborate with others outside of the school for assistance and partnership	0.00%	**66.67%**	0.00%	33.33%	0.00%

Of the two programs, the SLPP performed better on the survey. On a Likert-style survey where a one indicated "Not at all" and a five indicated "Very well," the SLPP tallied 100% for "a lot" of success with "Creating a collaborative learning organization," "Using data to monitor school progress, identify problems, & propose solutions," and "Handling discipline and support." Its two lowest scoring indicators were related to "working with parents to support students' learning" and "collaborating with others outside of school for assistance and partnership." For this program, the program directors were clear. One program director stated, "equity is the lens through which we look at everything we do, including student achievement and curriculum design, leadership competency, operations, systems, schedules, and talent. Ideally, we are building empowered leaders who are advocates for the communities they serve."

As with other successful school leadership training programs, this includes a strong mentor relationship and specific action-based tasks. An area for growth for the CLTP and the SLPP is a call for increased tracking and data collection on program effectiveness. The directors of this program also called for adopting a method for tracking progress with qualitative and quantitative data during participation. In working to analyze the findings of this initial report, our district CEO noted these recommendations and will be discussing the impact of this study later in this paper.

Program Participants

The participants were asked to reflect on their experiences either with CLPT or with the SLPP. By adopting a positioned-subject approach to inquiry, we acknowledge that relating "teacher perceptions 'as is' is… critical to the authenticity of [the] study" (Wolfe, 2012, p. 8). For this specific survey and interview protocol, we were limited to five participants. As with the previous survey results, we acknowledge that the participant pool is limited. Still, the responses elicited from participants have been critical for program reflection and moves for future work and, as a result of this, will be included in the findings.

Of these participants, four were male and one was female. Four of the participants identified themselves as either African-American or Black. One of the participants clarified that although they identified as Black, they were actually bi-racial (Black/Mexican). The fifth participant preferred not to identify the racial identity. In addition, another of the participants identified as a member of the LGBTQIA+ community. While one of the participants had only two years of teaching experience, the others had at least four years in the classroom. The number of years in educational leadership ranged from four to nine years of experience.

Table 3: Perceptions of Participants in the CLTP

Does the program...	Not at all	A little	Moderate amount	A lot	Very well
Create a collaborative learning environment	0.00%	33.33%	0.00%	**66.67%**	0.00%
Use data to monitor school progress, identity problems, & propose solutions	**33.33%**	**33.33%**	**33.33%**	0.00%	0.00%
Lead a well-informed, planned change process for school	0.00%	0.00%	**100.00%**	0.00%	0.00%
Engage staff in decision-making about school curriculum and policies	0.00%	**33.33%**	**33.33%**	**33.33%**	0.00%
Develop broad agreement among staff about the school's mission	0.00%	**33.33%**	**33.33%**	**33.33%**	0.00%
Mobilize the school's staff to foster social justice in serving all students	0.00%	33.33%	**66.67%**	0.00%	0.00%
Develop a clear set of ethical principles to guide decision-making	0.00%	0.00%	0.00%	**66.67%**	33.33%
Handle discipline and support services	**33.33%**	**33.33%**	**33.33%**	0.00%	0.00%
Analyze current systems for equity approach	0.00%	**50.00%**	**50.00%**	0.00%	0.00%
Work with parents to support students' learning	0.00%	**33.33%**	**33.33%**	**33.33%**	0.00%
Collaborate with others outside of the school for assistance and partnership	0.00%	33.33%	**66.67%**	0.00%	0.00%

Generally speaking, the participant perspective on both CLTP and the SLPP was more favorable than the perspectives shown in the program director surveys. Nearly 70% of participants identified their program as one that created a collaborative learning organization. All participants stated that their program developed a clear set of ethical principles to guide decision-making. With regard to engaging in social justice approaches, one participant wrote, "through the nature of our work and the topics we explored [during the program], we were inherently working to develop skills to be leaders of equity and tackle barriers to equity."

Table 4: Perceptions of Participants in the SLPP

Does the program...	Not at all	A little	Moderate amount	A lot	Very well
Create a collaborative learning environment	0.00%	0.00%	0.00%	**60.00%**	40.00%
Use data to monitor school progress, identity problems, & propose solutions	0.00%	0.00%	0.00%	**100.00%**	0.00%
Lead a well-informed, planned change process for school	0.00%	0.00%	40.00%	**60.00%**	0.00%
Engage staff in decision-making about school curriculum and policies	0.00%	20.00%	**40.00%**	**40.00%**	0.00%
Develop broad agreement among staff about the school's mission	0.00%	0.00%	20.00%	**40.00%**	**40.00%**
Mobilize the school's staff to foster social justice in serving all students	0.00%	20.00%	**40.00%**	20.00%	20.00%
Develop a clear set of ethical principles to guide decision-making	0.00%	0.00%	20.00%	**40.00%**	**40.00%**
Handle discipline and support services	0.00%	20.00%	**40.00%**	**40.00%**	0.00%
Analyze current systems for equity approach	0.00%	**40.00%**	**40.00%**	20.00%	0.00%
Work with parents to support students' learning	0.00%	**60.00%**	20.00%	20.00%	0.00%
Collaborate with others outside of the school for assistance and partnership	0.00%	20.00%	0.00%	**60.00%**	20.00%

Much like the responses for program directors, those responding as participants in the SLPP also demonstrated a more positive opinion. Indicators that measured an 80% or higher for "A lot" and "Very well" included: (1) creating a collaborative work environment; (2) using data to monitor school progress, identify problems, and propose solutions; (3) develop a broad agreement among staff about the school's mission; (4) develop a clear set of ethical principles to guide decision-making; and (5) collaborate with others outside of the school for assistance and partnership. The two indicators that elicited the least favorable responses were (1) analyzing current systems for equity approach and (2) working with parents to support students' learning.

What is noteworthy, however, is when we compare the survey responses to the interview responses. While the majority of responses indicated that an analysis of current systems for equity approaches happened only "a little" or "a moderate amount" of time within this program, each of the participants, when interviewed, highlighted social justice and equity as frameworks for the program. One participant stated:

From the beginning, this program has been centered on social justice and equitable access to educational opportunities. Through the program, we have explored issues that are barriers to equity for both students and staff. We are constantly challenged to check our biases as we lead and make decisions that affect those we lead and serve (Participant Interviews, 2019).

Additionally, two of the residents specifically praised the program for accepting people of color as residents.

A final area of success highlighted in the participant interviews showcases the action-based approach of this program. The participant stated, "constant practice has given me the opportunity to experience many of the most difficult challenges I may encounter, failing and correcting, before I ever find myself in the real event."

Discussion

One limitation of this study was the small pool of responses that were gathered. Due to major work and program deadlines around the time of scheduling interviews and survey completion, a smaller percentage of participants actually completed both the survey and the interview questions. This lends itself to an extended study to have follow up interviews and provide time for a larger pool of participants to complete the initial surveys and interviews. As a result, we must clearly state that the findings are inconclusive and warrant extended research. The extension would include an initial call for increased participation from both program directors, current program participants, and past program participants. Additionally, the original scope of including both programs would need to be modified to focus solely on the SLPP. This program yielded more favorable outlooks from both the directors and the participants and, in its original year of implementation, is primed for data collection and responsiveness to data analysis.

Our district is an organization fully committed to continuous improvement, and with a fully staffed Analytics and Research team responsible for data analysis and reporting, our district has operationalized its commitment to using data as the primary driver in this improvement cycle. The data we have collected and will collect on the effectiveness of CLTP and SLPP will be no exception. Where they show positive progress, our district will redouble efforts and investments; and where they show concerning or ineffective trends, our district will make real-time adjustments to ensure the ongoing effectiveness and sustainability of both programs.

In conclusion, our district's commitment to diversity is something teachers and school administrators *see*. In the words of one SLPP participant, "Our cohort is living proof of why diversity is important. By having five leaders of color, one woman of color, two previous school leaders, a Teach for America alum, differing sexual orientations, and levels of religion, it shows our entire organization we value diversity in many different ways."

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Mark DiBella began his career in education as a 1999 corps member with Teach For America teaching 5th grade at Garcia Elementary in the Houston Independent School District (HISD). Inspired by founder Chris Barbic's vision, Mark left his position at HISD in 2001 to join YES Prep—at the time, a small charter school in southeast Houston where he served in various campus-based positions. In 2010, Mark joined the YES Prep Head of Schools team to manage all YES Prep campuses. From 2011- 2013, he served as the Vice President of Operations and Growth before

moving into the role of Superintendent for the next three years. During his time as Vice President and Superintendent, Mark executed YES Prep's growth strategy and surpassed their vision to serve 10,000 Houston children. For his unwavering commitment to educational equity and undeniable results, the Board of Directors named him Chief Executive Officer in April 2016.

Kelly DeMoya graduated from the University of Texas at Austin and upon graduation, she worked in the YES Prep Home Office where she transformed collaboration among leadership into a proactive framework. After leaving YES Prep, Kelly contracted with the Houston Endowment to assist in the implementation of Theory of Change for K-12 Education portfolios before continuing her education with an MBA from Rice University. Kelly now works as a senior strategy consultant for Accenture.

APPENDIX A
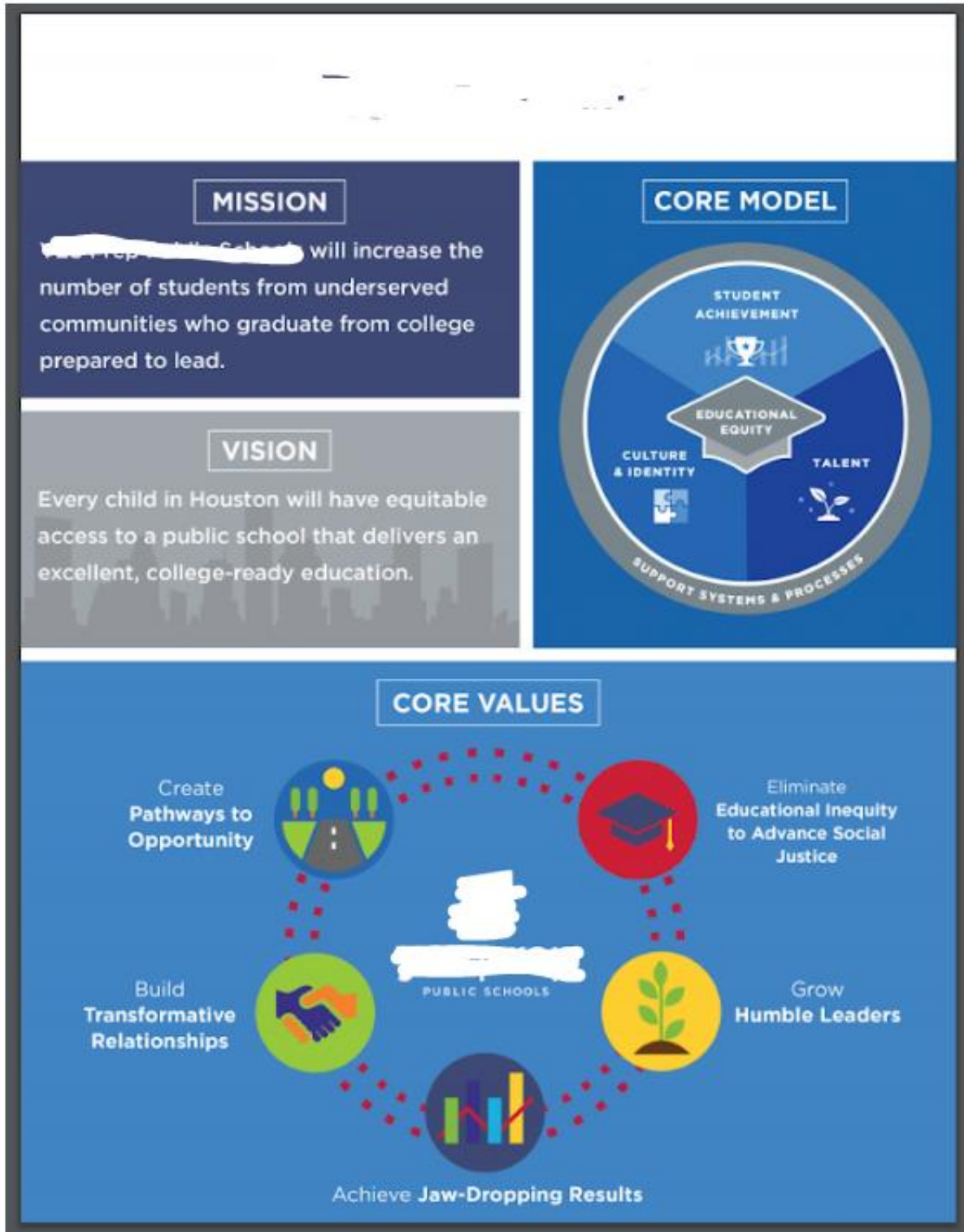
APPENDIX B

Semi-structured Interview Questions (Program Participants):

1. In what ways does this program intentionally address social justice?
2. In what ways does this program bridge opportunity gaps?
3. What impact does this program have on improving teacher/employee retention rates?
4. How does this program increase your leadership effectiveness?
5. Why is diversity in leadership important?

Semi-structured Interview Questions (Program Leadership):
1. What specific training did you receive to prepare you to lead this program?
2. How are these trainings aligned with the mission of social justice?
3. Why does YES Prep need to strategically invest in preparing minority-identifying individuals for leadership roles?
4. What is a strength of this program?
5. What is an area of growth for this program?