



Interim Report on the Evaluation of the Texas Principal Excellence Program (TxPEP)

Prepared for the Texas Education Agency

March 2008

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Executive Summary

This interim report on the evaluation of the Texas Principal Excellence Program (TxPEP) summarizes the legislation creating the program; provides an overview of program content and organization; describes the overall evaluation design; and presents preliminary findings on participant characteristics, participation in TxPEP events, and program implementation and quality. Potential implications of what is known to date and next steps in the evaluation then are discussed. Challenges in linking professional development for principals to improvement in student achievement outcomes—especially directly and especially in the short term—also are noted. Although these findings are preliminary, they do offer insight into the experiences of principals participating in the TxPEP program.

Key Evaluation Questions

The evaluation of TxPEP includes both a summative component (focusing on program impact) and a formative component (focusing on program implementation and quality). The summative evaluation addresses the following questions regarding program impact:

- What is the impact of the TxPEP program on participants' leadership ability?
- What is the impact of principals' participation in TxPEP on student performance and graduation rates?
- What is the impact of principals' participation in TxPEP on school-level indicators including, but not limited to, teacher retention?
- Do program outcomes vary with principal and/or school characteristics (e.g., years of experience as principal, school and district type, campus rating, percentage of minority students in the school)?

The formative evaluation addresses the following questions regarding program implementation and quality:

- Is the program being implemented with fidelity (i.e., as planned)?
- Is the program being implemented with high quality?
- Is the program content relevant to the day-to-day responsibilities of participating principals?
- Is the program useful (e.g., are participants incorporating what they learn in their day-to-day work in schools)?

The data necessary to address the summative questions regarding program impact are not yet available. These data will be collected in spring and fall 2008. However, baseline data on TxPEP participants' leadership ability and preliminary data on participation in TxPEP events are summarized in this report. Data from the initial round of principal focus groups and interviews with program staff are examined to begin to address the formative evaluation questions regarding program implementation and quality and the relevance and utility of program offerings for TxPEP participants.

Preliminary Findings

This report highlights and expands upon the following findings:

- A total of 318 principals from 304 schools attended the TxPEP summit and first two workshops. Attendance rates for the initial TxPEP summit and first workshop were high (over 95%), but attendance declined to 88% for the second workshop.
- TxPEP participants are primarily from academically unacceptable (AU) campuses. Most are also from elementary schools and suburban districts.
 - 81% ($n = 258$) of participants were from AU campuses; 19% ($n = 60$) were from non-AU campuses.
 - More than 40% of participants ($n = 121$) were from elementary schools; 9% were from elementary/secondary (Grades K–12) schools ($n = 25$); 31% were from middle schools ($n = 88$); and 19% were from high schools ($n = 54$).
 - Approximately 40% of participants ($n = 116$) were from suburban districts, 27% ($n = 78$) were from urban districts; 18% ($n = 51$) were from rural districts, and 14% ($n = 41$) were from charter schools.
- Overall, TxPEP participants rated themselves favorably on the three assessments used to measure leadership ability. However, there were noticeable differences in participant responses by campus rating. On two of the assessments, principals from AU campuses consistently rated themselves higher on leadership measures than those from non-AU campuses.
 - Principals whose students scored lower on the Texas Assessment of Knowledge and Skills (TAKS) rated themselves higher on change management, ethical leadership, and school/program evaluation.
 - Principals from schools with greater percentages of minority, economically disadvantaged, or special education students had higher ratings for one or more of the following leadership areas: building learning communities, ethical leadership, resource management, and/or school/program evaluation.
- Generally, interviews with TxPEP program staff suggest that the program is being implemented with fidelity to stated program objectives. Participants find the program content to be of high quality. However, participants' perceptions of program relevance and utility generally were less favorable.
 - The focus on abstract leadership theories and management models in the workshops does not appear to resonate with participants. Focus group participants articulated a need for hands-on, successful strategies that they could apply immediately when they returned to their schools.
 - Focus group participants valued the advice of their cohort consultants, who are successful school leaders. However, participants indicated that they would prefer to have more guidance than currently is offered from successful principals.

- Participants reported that the webinars are most relevant to their needs as school leaders.
- Principals noted that they would find TxPEP more relevant if they had more choice about what courses or webinars to attend.
- Networking with other principals was seen as the most useful aspect of the program.
- Focus group participants and program staff offered several suggestions for program improvements:
 - Provide participants with greater access to educational leaders who have demonstrated success in AU schools.
 - Hold the TxPEP summits and workshops during the summer to better align with school schedules.
 - Find ways to make management and leadership models more relevant to principals.
 - Provide principals with more choices with respect to program offerings.

Implications of Preliminary Findings

The preliminary findings have several implications for the future implementation of TxPEP:

- Program staff should continue to monitor attendance to ensure that TxPEP participants, particularly those from AU campuses, are fully participating in the program.
- Although TxPEP participants' ratings of their leadership ability were quite high on baseline leadership assessments, there is room for growth during the course of the program. For participants who overestimate their leadership abilities at the beginning of the program, one might expect to see a decrease in leadership ratings on later assessments as they gain a better understanding of sound leadership practices.
- Given that principals are having difficulty applying the management models and practices emphasized by TxPEP in their schools, program staff may need to find ways to demonstrate the relevance and usefulness of these models to principals.
- Program staff might consider tailoring program offerings to participants' experience and situations. Courses could be differentiated based on years of experience as well as participants' professional and organizational development plans.

Next Steps in the Evaluation

Evaluation activities that will be undertaken from February through October 2008 include the following:

- Analyzing comparison group principals' responses to the Principal Leadership Survey that was administered in late December 2007 and early January 2008.
- Collecting and analyzing data about principal, school, and teacher outcomes needed to address the summative evaluation questions regarding program impact.

- Collecting and analyzing additional data from TxPEP participants and program staff needed to address the formative evaluation questions regarding fidelity of program implementation and the quality, relevance, and utility of program offerings.