**Case Studies of Internal Leadership-Training Programs at Successful Charter Management Organizations in California**

Prepared for: California Charter Schools Association

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**Table of Contents:**

## Executive Summary

The goal of the following case studies is to examine internal leadership-training programs and successful school leaders who went through the leadership training within charter management organizations (CMOs) in the state of California. Though academics, scholars, and researchers disagree on the structures and mechanisms through which school leaders impact student achievement, they agree that effective school leadership is a precondition for effective schools.

While the following case studies cannot be generalized across all CMOs, there are common key factors that lead to school success for each CMO examined. There are a total of four school case studies. Each study elucidates the process by which school leaders are trained and provides reflections from school leaders during their time within the program and up to three years after assuming a leadership role.

Over the course of the case studies, five common themes were evident. The following are practices and frameworks that were emphasized within each internal leadership-training program:

1. **Vision-**
   The values and beliefs that inform the work play a pivotal role in how each leader operates, aligns goals, and executes initiatives and programs. A vision statement typically orients the work that will get done over the coming years for the school. Brevity, specificity, consistency, and emotional connection are common themes that arise within creating an excellent vision in the following cases and in influencing others.

2. **Instructional Coaching-**
   School leaders make multiple decisions every day about the school's strategic path towards academic success. Data drive many of these decisions for instruction, action-steps, strategic plans, and interventions. Accompanying data-based decisions is real-time feedback, subsequently followed by problem and asset mapping. Honing the skill of how to interpret previous actions and how those actions will inform future steps is part of the instructional coaching framework.

3. **Management Techniques-**
   Managing professionals towards results is essential to moving the needle forward for students in education. Concentrating on effective ways to invest in the best employees, identifying what can be changed and what cannot be changed, and distinguishing between development needs and serious performance issues is all part of managing a school towards goals and expectations.

4. **Culture of Achievement-**
   School climate is very important. Expectations for teachers, students, parents, and other key stakeholders are vital for cultivating school culture. Setting very clear roles, goals, and plans contributes to the climate and aligns stakeholder actions with school goals.

5. **Continuous Improvement Model-**
   Feedback systems, strategic planning, and change in action-steps based upon information and data are indelible frameworks for tackling goals. Problems are identified, changes are implemented, and analysis of interventions or change to processes is evaluated to determine if expected change occurred.

## Context

*Current K-12 education landscape across the United States*

Leadership is one of the primary determinants for whether or not a school runs effectively and efficiently. Though academics, scholars, and researchers disagree on the structures and mechanisms through which school leaders impact student achievement, they agree that effective school leadership is a precondition for effective schools. However, leadership structures and leadership-training programs across schools and districts are dramatically different.

These differences have evolved from an array of new ideas and leadership structures introduced by increased alternatives for stakeholders. Alternative educational models have become more prevalent as transparency into student data has improved awareness of student outcomes. Stakeholders in education with more information about schools have created a new dynamic, allowing the public to demand better educational results and alternatives to failing institutions.  However, there are many factors contributing to lack-luster improvement for student achievement over the past decade. In fact, the academic achievement gap is growing.

Politics, budgets, professional development, and human capital availability are representative factors contributing to inconsistent leadership quality in schools, and therefore contribute to the ineffective results and lack of improvement in schools. Further complicating these overarching factors are the structural differences due to a school's designation: public charter, public district, private, magnet, and so on.

Because the complexities that exist within each school system impacts leadership frameworks, it is difficult to know which leadership training is successful, replicable, and scalable. Making it even more difficult to identify successful schools and programs is the lack of a clear, uniform definition of success. The new debate around what success even looks like and how it should be measured was ushered in by George W. Bush's marquis education initiative, No Child Left Behind (NCLB) in 2001.

With the arrival of NCLB, accountability has become the newest education fad. The law's impact on schools and communities is messy and poses several problems.  One of these is an over reliance on standardized student test scores to assess educational accountability.  Even with the simple shift towards accountability systems based on student achievement tests, there have been dramatic impacts on teachers, administrators, families, communities, and other stakeholders.  As test scores have become a symbol for teaching effectiveness and the mechanism for accessing greater accountability transparency, other forms of education delivery have proliferated. Charter schools, for profit schools, alternative schools, and on-line education programs have increased their market share in the K-12 system. The community school, while still a majority provider, is shrinking.

The accountability framework not only served as fodder for changing the landscape of education, but also has brought to light weaknesses in the United States public school system—inevitably prompting the question "Who's to blame?" Such a question has sparked new methods of examining teachers and administrators. Evaluation systems are being overhauled, with heightened sensitivities from stakeholders who demand better schools. Such an environment in this new era of rapid results and continuous improvement has made good leadership mission critical. Therefore, a clear definition for accountability and leadership responsibility needs to be created. To get at what good leadership practices are and how those practices lead to successful school management, criteria for a successful school must be defined.

*Defining school success*

The California Charter Schools Association (CCSA) is my client; therefore, I will use CCSA's successful school definition as the bar for what a successful school is. CCSA has recently created its own accountability framework that defines successful schools. While the definition is comprehensive for CCSSA's mission and vision, it cannot be easily leveraged across United States public school systems. The scope of the definition and the project is therefore charter-school and state specific.

CCSA defines success by meeting one of the three following criteria:
1. Academic Performance Index (API) score that is above the $25^{th}$* percentile of performance for all schools in California in most recent year (API = 744).
2. 3-year cumulative API growth of at least 50 points (2012-13 growth + 2011-12 growth + 2010-11 growth).
3. Similar Students Measure (SSM) band of "Within" or above at least two out of the last three years.

* Criterion is 25th percentile in 2013-14 and will rise gradually to the 33rd percentile over five years.

The first criterion is based on the state standard for adequately meeting state mandated scores on standardized tests, the second criterion is based on continuous improvement of student performance on state mandated tests over time, and the third criterion is based on student scores on state mandated tests compared to other students with similar demographic backgrounds. Narrowing the successful school scope by having a clear, working definition makes it possible to identify good school leadership.

With the ability to identify successful charter school networks, there are two questions that must be answered. The first, how do top charter schools prepare new school leaders through leadership-training programs? The second, what are the attributes of a successful leader?

*Common Themes Across the Four Charter Management Organizations*

While the following four case studies address a variety of populations within California, there are common themes across the leadership training programs. These themes may be a product of the charter culture as much as a product of the environment and nature of the training programs as well. All four leadership-training programs are internal and structured to grow leaders from within the organization, or to identify outside candidates that are highly aligned with the mission and vision of the organization. The charter management organizations discussed in the case studies are established programs that have gone through several growth iterations, refining the systems for training leaders as they have grown. Therefore, they are ideal instances for examining how programs evolve over time.

With a backdrop specific to the framework of internal programs, the following five characteristics are evident across each charter management organization's leadership-training program, regardless of how building the capacity or skill was actually executed:

1. Vision
2. Instructional Coaching
3. Management Techniques
4. Culture of Achievement
5. Continuous Improvement Model

**Vision:**

The values and beliefs that inform the work play a pivotal role in how each leader operates, aligns goals, and executes initiatives and programs. A vision statement typically orients the work that will get done over the coming years for the school. Brevity, specificity, consistency, and emotional connection are common themes that arise within creating an excellent vision in the following cases and in influencing others.

**Instructional Coaching:**

School leaders make multiple decisions every day about the school's strategic path towards academic success. Data drives many of these decisions for instruction, action-steps, strategic plans, and interventions. Accompanying data based decisions is real-time feedback, subsequently followed by problem and asset mapping. Honing the skill of how to interpret previous actions and how those actions will inform future steps is part of the instructional coaching framework.

**Management Techniques:**

Managing professionals towards results is essential to moving the needle forward for students in education. Concentrating on effective ways to invest in the best employees, identifying what can be changed and what cannot be changed, and distinguishing between development needs and serious performance issues is all part of managing a school towards goals and expectations.

**Culture of Achievement:**

School climate is very important. Expectations for teachers, students, parents, and other key stakeholders are vital for cultivating school culture. Setting very clear roles, goals, and plans contributes to the climate and aligns stakeholder actions with school goals.

**Continuous Improvement Model:**

Feedback systems, strategic planning, and change in action-steps based upon information and data are indelible frameworks for tackling goals. Problems are identified, changes are implemented, and analysis of interventions or change to processes is evaluated to determine if expected change occurred.

## Case Study A

*The following is a short description of School District A's mission, vision for success, and the roadmap for how to achieve results.*

**School District A**:

  **School District A's** mission focus operates under the belief that all students can attend and succeed in college regardless of socio-economic background. Without such a belief, the resultant consequence is a continued opportunity gap between privileged communities and historically disadvantaged populations. By ensuring underserved populations are able to attend and succeed within a collegiate context, new opportunities come to bare: ability to pursue passions, gain access to better networks and career opportunities, become self-sustaining, as well as provide support for community and family.

  The district's end goal is achieved through specific pedagogical tenants and strategic tactics. Differentiated teaching methods are used to meet student-learning needs. Both internal and nationally recognized curricula are used to push student growth, and establish exceptionally high standards for student expectations. Ultimately, students learn basic competency, critical thinking skills, and real world problem-solving strategies.

  These standards of expectations for **School District A** students are driven by personalized plans. These individualized plans are tailored to capture student needs and aid teachers in addressing those needs when pushing students to engage challenging material.

  **School District A** incorporates a hybrid instructional model balancing direct teaching, project based learning, and computer based learning, to foster an environment that encourages individual scholarship, small group learning, and collaborative exploration and discovery. The belief is that students are prepared for success in college by combining these media for learning with targeted and purposeful lessons that focus on skill capacity building rather than content specific knowledge.

  In the end, teachers are viewed as the key lever for ensuring student success. It is through rigorous and continued feedback that teaching staff is encouraged and developed. The model embraces the philosophy that exceptional teachers lead to exceptional results.

  To ensure exceptional teaching, data are used to drive planning, execution, and strategy for targeting student proficiency in mastering knowledge and skills. However, while teachers are the most important internal avenues for student success, family is the most important academic partner in providing students opportunities for success.

*The following is a case study exploring the structure and purpose of the internal leadership development program within **School District A**. The program director and a current school leader were interviewed. Light is shed on reasons for success within given charter management organization school districts by examining the thought process for why certain elements of the program exist and how leaders of schools execute responsibilities within the schools they lead.*

**School District A Leadership Training-program Director:**

Before coordinating the school leadership-training program for **School District A**, the Director of Leadership Training worked within the education field for 29 years in historically disadvantaged communities. Twenty of those years were spent as an administrator within the traditional public school system. The Director also spent a few years working in a private educational company, developing leadership skills and managerial experience that was not afforded her within the traditional system. She left the traditional school system because there was little opportunity for leadership development and career growth. With her wealth of knowledge, vast experience, and skill set, the Director brought with her a strong capacity for delivering professional development that is both relevant and comprehensive to urban school districts facing challenges within historically disadvantaged populations.

Along with her breadth of experience came a mindset well aligned with **School District A**'s mission and vision. She states, "I have always, always had a passion for working with underserved children. So, that put me on the trail for getting into a charter school, because I knew they thought out of the box and I knew the key components were about serving our children. I also knew they put emphasis on developing leaders."

The program she would lead and coordinate would involve two systems: principal residency and principal development. While principal residency prepares future school leaders, principal development continues on the job training for first and second year school leaders.

Principal residents are recruited from both within **School District A** and outside the district. The major differences between the two groups being one, the institutional knowledge that comes from working within **School District A**'s culture and two, the added bonus of getting leadership training and mentorship from a current school leader familiar with the roles and responsibilities of school leadership.

*Principal Residency*

To ensure the right people get on the bus, the candidates for the principal residency program are vetted through a rigorous screening process involving phone and in person interviews, role-play for managing and coaching an adult, and the delivery of a twenty minute professional development segment.

Once accepted into the program, potential school leaders are placed into three tiers. The first tier is teachers aspiring to become school leaders, but with no formal leadership experience at the school level. These school leader residents are participants in the program for a year before being considered for school leadership positions. The second tier is internal or external Assistant Principals, Deans of Students, or College Counselors. This program is considered more immersive, as the candidate continues to execute a current leadership role, while attending workshops with a cohort of leaders on a similar path. These candidates spend six months within the leadership-training program. Finally, the third tier is for school leader candidates who left the

program early and assumed a leadership role either due to a school leader stepping down or being asked to leave. Candidates in these positions join the cohort of school leaders who are in the principal development program.

Tier one internal and external candidates receive similar placements within the program. Three to four candidates are placed within regions of the district, and those regions typically have four to five schools. Within the region, school leader candidates are placed on one school campus for the first semester, and then an alternative campus for the second semester. The purpose for shadowing two different leaders within the region is to broaden candidates' experience by observing how leaders execute duties, culture, and instructional leadership that have the "same focus but different flavor." The belief behind the value of shadowing school leaders for a year: modeling and mentoring are at the heart of successful training.

The material difference between training an internal candidate receives versus an external candidate is external candidates receive extra training around **School District A's** culture, engagement with adult learning within that culture, data driven decision making, and goal alignment to action-based decisions.

While the domains on which principals are assessed are standardized—shared vision, sustained high expectations, staff management, instructional leadership, and partnership with family and community—the way in which each school leader executes those responsibilities with fidelity can assume different forms. For example: how one leader communicates college success may differ from another leader, but both leaders can have the same intended impact.

Exposure to different leadership flair is meant to help school leader candidates develop their own style. Candidates build their capacities through a myriad of school leader functions over the course of the year. However, the major program focus is on instructional leadership, vision development, and execution.

In fact, skills surrounding hiring and financial management are de-emphasized in the program, so school leaders can emphasize instruction.  Financial managers are placed with every two or three schools, helping principals create, maintain, and execute budgets.  Human resource managers are at each campus to manage recruitment and retention of potential staff.  This strategy is intended to lessen the burden these tasks would impose on school leaders.  The purpose for such narrowed focus, is so school leaders can concentrate on meeting the goal of student success in becoming college ready through strong instruction, driven by exceptional teaching.

*Principal Development*

After successful completion of principal residency, new candidates now operating schools are expected to continue training while on the job with a cohort of other new school leaders. The principal development program is meant to provide support for the first two years of school leadership. As the Director of leadership training put it, "They are not seasoned, and therefore need extra support."

The goal around the principal development program is to build a solid framework and lens for making the right call at decision-points, tackling obstacles, overcoming challenges, and meeting expectations. Between weekly cohort meetings and continued feedback, as well as development by mentor principals and the Director of the leadership-training program, school leaders hone their craft. To ensure consistency, the leadership rubric drives all conversations and development of school leaders. Discussions specifically center around how the leader can grow

along the different strands of the domains: shared vision, maintained high expectations, staff management, instructional leadership, and partnership, family, and community. School leaders are expected to pre-assess themselves before starting the school year and continue to assess themselves against the rubric throughout their leadership development process.

**School District A School Leader:**

*Context for the work ahead*

Shayne undertook a turnaround school in his first year. "It was a big a job. It was a lot." Shayne had 10 years experience in the education system prior to tackling the challenges of turning around an existing school. He was an Assistant Principal for a year, a therapy counselor within a different school in the same charter management organization for three years, and a teacher for six years in a large city district.

"I was a Principal Resident. It was sort of like a retreat. I had a mentor and I read a lot of books about leadership and talked with other future leaders a lot about leadership. It wasn't really hands on." Shayne believed there was a bit of disconnect between what was happening on the ground with his mentor and the topics covered during the retreats.

*Purpose for becoming a school leader*

Shayne became a Principal primarily because he was able to observe very closely a school leader doing exceptional work with students. Before joining the program he thought that principals dealt mostly with adults. However, as he observed his very capable principal, he realized much of the work that the principal performs has enormous impact on students and their access to opportunities. "It became the way for me to affect the most change. I loved being a counselor. I loved counseling, but this was somehow bigger. I had an ability to learn and grow so much more. It has been challenging. More challenging than anything else I have done in my life, but I love it."

Shayne considered becoming a school leader for a couple years before officially entering a leadership-training program. He decided to enter **District A's** program because of his mentorship pairing.

*Experience in the leadership-training program*

Shayne presumed that **District A** would have a robust program, but the program was not as robust as Shayne had expected. "It just wasn't that experience I really would have benefited from. It fell short in a number of ways because it was still being planned." He continued with saying, "However, they were working through what it should look like in the future and how to execute the program better." The program put Shayne on-deck to be a school leader, but it did not quite adequately prepare him in many respects.

Shayne shadowed a school leader, but he still didn't feel quite prepared. However, for Shayne, at the end of the day, the pressure of the failure or success of the school resting on a leader's shoulder cannot be trained for people to truly handle. How one performs under that kind of pressure just cannot be taught and can only be learned on the ground. "There was a true sense

of high expectations by **District A** to meet student needs, but how that plays out is challenging to teach."

**School District A**, however, worked to have Shayne critically think through personal or professional obstacles and advantages. Shayne recounted, "If you are working in a setting where you are at a school that commits to provide a rigorous education for marginalized communities, then wow, you have things to settle about why you are in this work and what it means whether you are a person of color or white and what it means to access privilege. What does it mean to work in a community like this? How are you with your race stuff? How are you with your privilege stuff? The training program worked to have us work through that stuff."

*The result of change*

It is Shayne's second year and he has turned over half of the staff. He has brought in many "awesome individuals who have made some really big differences in the culture." According to Shayne, the climate has completely changed with how students "enjoy being in the school: the uniforms, and the students, and the staff, and the climate have definitely changed about students taking school seriously and wanting to go to college. It's been a really big change."

Some barriers Shayne faced when leading the school, however, involved the process of "storming, forming, and norming." Shayne had to become a very directive oriented leader. "It is never easy to be that kind of leader. It is more of a dictator than anything else." Shayne struggled when working through the changes, but getting the "right people on the bus" was crucial for Shayne to build a culture and climate that was conducive for high academic expectations.

*Personal reflection about the program and first year as school leader*

Shayne wanted the program to provide him with models and stories similar to situations he faced. He wanted to know more about when and how things happened. He wanted to know how the leaders and staff and students felt or reacted during the process of change. However, Shayne benefited from observing his previous leader, who was his mentor in the program. Shayne's observation provided a springboard for his own success, in spite of his unease in decision-making processes during the first year of his leadership role.

The program prepared Shayne for evaluating data and planning and reviewing assessments; but that was success for the academic side and not necessarily the cultural side. Shayne believes, while all those pieces are crucial, the first priority should be ensuring that "the right people are on the bus." After the right people and the right culture are established, and the curriculum developed, only then are students being served. "Without the right culture, students in special populations get left behind. They are sort of the canary in the coalmine. If they aren't being successful, then I am not being successful."

During the first year, Shayne wished the program had fostered stronger connections with other school leaders—ensuring leaders are connected through established programs and channels. "Being a school leader can be extremely lonely." Shayne believed that it could have helped him learn about best practices but also validated having challenges as a normal part of being a school leader.

But more importantly, Shayne believes there needs to be a mechanism to assess progress of a potential school leader throughout the program and the ability to let failing individuals go, because "leading a school is really hard work that not everyone is cut out for."

*The future*

Shayne believes if you can get the right culture, it is easier to ensure that everyone is on the same page. "If goals are well aligned, it is easier to check what comes next."

Shayne continues to be a school leader because he deeply believes in the mission of the school. Shayne also takes great pride in being Latino, serving a school attended by Latino students. He was a first generation college graduate and is helping his students work towards that same goal. If his school is successful in meeting that mission, over 90% of Shayne's students will be first generation college goers. For him, meeting such a goal is "tremendously moving." Working towards "fighting 500 years of inequity" can only be successful, if someone sticks around to do it. There needs to be a change and it is extremely meaningful."

**Reflection:**

**School District A** focuses the school leader role on two primary components: instructional leadership and a culture of high expectations for student success. Such emphasis is achievable for two key reasons. The first is the concentrated support from the leadership-training program on instructional leadership and building a culture of achievement. The second is support staff that assists in financial management and human capital acquisition. By building in capacity for instructional leadership and culture geared towards student outcomes, expectations for school leader success can be very focused. However, the district is still working through how to establish a school culture given the context the leader faces for the school in which he or she leads. As the program enhances its ability to differentiate training based on potential leaders' previous experiences, the skills and knowledge on which the leader must focus can be better tailored.

**Key Components:**

*Vision*

The School district focuses on raising achievement levels for under-served children. There is a clear goal for the charter management organization, making it easier to align leadership-training programs and identifying potential candidates aligned with the charter vision. Moreover, both the Leadership-Training Director and the school leader had experience with under-served populations before entering current roles.

*Instructional Coaching*

Instruction is emphasized by the leadership-training program Director. In fact, other typical responsibilities like financial management and budgeting are specifically de-emphasized to allow leaders more opportunities to focus on student outcomes and instructionally coaching teachers.

*Management Techniques*

Shayne was able to shadow a school leader throughout his time, and observe her management style and techniques. However, Shayne wanted to observe other forms of management specific to his current school's needs. Specifically, Shayne wanted more case studies, discussion, or real time observation. Shayne was given the opportunity to observe his mentor coach teachers and develop his skill for identifying problems and creating action-steps for solutions.

*Culture of Achievement*

Improving student outcomes for historically disadvantaged students is a significant piece of the culture for **School District A**. In fact, Shayne spends extra time focusing on creating a culture and environment where students most at risk can thrive. Furthermore, cultural norms are reinforced, such as uniforms and instructional practice. The framework for culture was also a district-wide standard driven by normative practices and expectations for students, staff, and parents.

*Continuous Improvement Model*

Shayne's school has already changed practices in both cultural norms and student expectations in behavior and academics. Part of the process was Shayne's critical thinking around failing current practices and necessary next steps for students in the coming year. Shayne instituted interventions targeting specific teacher and student populations, creating a system for identifying necessary change to the school.

*The following is a short description of School District B's mission, vision for success, and the roadmap for how to achieve results.*

**School District B:**

 **School District B's** mission operates under the belief that regardless of demographics or geographical location, students can learn and achieve at high levels. In the end, students can meet expectations and be prepared for success in college. It takes teachers, school leaders, students, and parents coordinating with one another to reach these goals. From the District's perspective the only way to reach those goals is by using data to drive decision-making. However, this is strategy is only made possible through dependence on key levers such as more instructional time, exceptional instructors, and a strong culture centered on achievement.

 Collaboration within school and collaboration between schools are at the heart of success. Without a coordinated and purposeful framework for fostering collaboration, success for student achievement, and eventually college success, becomes more challenging to ensure. Continuous improvement is always possible, because excellence is dynamic, and therefore the journey towards excellence is the end goal, rather than excellence as a(n) static, attainable, absolute.

 Accompanying a spirit of continuous improvement through collaboration is leader autonomy. Leaders have the freedom for making decisions and executing vision, curriculum, culture, and instruction that best meets the student needs. This ensures the most effective and efficient road to student success. The key standardized components are the framework that defines a healthy school and the process for leadership development. With strong guidance from school leaders and teachers, students are set-up for success in college. By learning skills and knowledge in both academic pursuits and moral character norms, students become prepared to tackle challenges and obstacles that had otherwise squelched success for students with similar demographic backgrounds.

*The following is case studies exploring the structure and purpose of the internal leadership development program within School District B. The program director and a current school leader were interviewed. Light is shed on reasons for success within given charter management organization school districts by examining the thought process for why certain elements of the program exist and how leaders of schools execute responsibilities within the schools they lead.*

**School District B Leadership Training-program Director:**

 Before coordinating the school leadership-training program at **School District B**, the Training Program Director worked within the Washington, D.C. Public School system as a principal recruiter. At first, this individual was specifically tasked to recruit principals who had managed successful school turnarounds. Subsequently her role shifted into broader recruitment of highly talented school leaders who would lead public schools for DCPS. Her goal was to find leaders prepared to tackle the challenges and obstacles that come with a diverse student population and a historically disadvantaged and underserved community—over 70 percent of students in DCPS are in free and reduced lunch school programs. The Director, along with her

experience in recruiting school leaders, also gained experience from working on political campaigns and working within the private sector.

Her diversity of experiences and previous work in recruiting talent for leadership roles in a school system, gave her a framework well-steeped in identifying leaders aligned with achieving the goals of **School District B**: student success and college-readiness regardless of socio-economic background.

The program the Director coordinates has three components, two fellowships and a residency. One fellowship (Fellowship I) prepares individuals to start their own school. The program lasts a year and specifically targets building the capacity of a school leader to launch an effective school that leads to better student outcomes. The second fellowship (Fellowship II) is for potential school leaders who need experience in leadership development or instructional learning. There is some overlap between the two fellowships for preparing future school leaders. The final preparatory program is the principal prep program. This program prepares current school Assistant Principals, Deans, or Counselors to takeover an existing school. The principal prep program is also a yearlong and participants continue to work at their school campus while training in the program.

*Fellowship I*

**Fellowship I** is for individuals who need experience in leadership development or instructional learning. For example, maybe the teacher or leader has a significant amount of experience in teaching with scripted curriculum, but the school they are going to launch includes blended learning models as well. The fellow must have additional training on how to coach and manage within a system that incorporates blended learning. Moreover, the potential school leader within **Fellowship I** coming from a school system that is not highly aligned with **School District B's** culture, needs more coaching and training around a climate fostering the mission that all students will go to college.

Roughly 60-80 percent of **Fellowship I** participants go on to found schools. The remaining individuals that elect not to continue within the Fellowship II program usually discover they do not want to found a school. They realize being an assistant principal or counselor is a better fit or that they are not well suited for school leadership. **Fellowship I** is far more exploratory, than **Fellowship II**.

*Fellowship II*

**Fellowship II** provides leadership candidates time and space to plan reflectively for a school opening. The Fellowship is "not a time to cut teeth on coaching or manage and lead other adults." Rather, **Fellowship II** is to, "give space for leaders with experience in managing adults familiar with **School District B's culture**, and working towards results, the opportunity to grow in honing a school vision and building the architecture for what striving for success will look like in their school. It is a time for the fellow to capture competencies for really strong best practices to incorporate into their school: go and observe blended learning in Silicon Valley, strong underpinnings for culture in charters in Texas, character building programs in New York."

To ensure students are getting the best scholastic and character building program within **School District B**, **Fellowship II** gives its future school leaders three opportunities during the fellowship year to observe best practices at other schools within or outside the district, ask

questions of school leaders running programs they wish to incorporate, and explore necessary structures for executing similar programs with fidelity.

The fellowship also has a summer institute designed to give potential school leaders the framework necessary for success. Visions are created, school plans are mapped, and leadership plans are created. Collaborative learning teams meet to hone skills and develop areas for growth. Instructional guides lead sessions and mentor potential school leaders while they develop the skills and the capacity to lead a school.

By the end of the yearlong fellowship, over 90 percent of the potential school leaders go on to found a school. Those who do continue usually withdraw due to extenuating circumstances, such as charter application approval or personal reasons. Part of the high completion rate of the fellowship and subsequent founding of a school is because of the rigorous screening process.

There is a lengthy application process including student achievement data, letters of recommendation, and essays. After thresh hold criteria are met within that process, candidates are screened through an hour long phone call, flown out to the region to be interviewed in person, and asked to sample teach. The potential leadership candidate must also get the green light from more than just one source: teachers and students are even part of the vetting process.

*Fellowship I and Fellowship II*

Both **Fellowship I** and **Fellowship II** operate under the notion that the potential school leader will continue on to found a school. Several sessions throughout the year are geared towards that end. The fellows travel to workshops on financial management, teacher recruitment, student enrollment, marketing the brand, establishing culture, messaging a vision, managing a board, strategic planning, and so forth. Essentially, the few day sessions help potential school leaders get a "heavy, deep dose of a narrow topic" and unpack all the pieces that are within that focus.

During the teacher recruitment sessions, for example, leaders are taken through the entire process from the 30,000-foot perspective all the way down to the actual process of hiring founding teachers. The future school leaders must identify and answer questions such as what do you value in a teacher? How do you turn those values into competencies? Is that a competency you want in a first year teacher when founding a school? What questions must you ask founding schoolteachers to get at those competencies?

Throughout the year the potential school leaders are working from an individualized development plan that is created at the beginning of the fellowship, constantly checking progress against the goals as set forth in the beginning. Part of this process is self-reflective, but leadership coaches, who push the potential school leader's critical thinking as well as guide them as they develop knowledge and skills for starting a successful school, drive part of the process as well.

By the end of the fellowships, the leadership candidates present capstone projects that capture their learning and present a clear vision of the school they will open. Depending upon the region or site the school is located, continued learning and mentorship is executed differently.

*Principal Residency*

This program is very specific to the site at which the potential school leader works. The goal of the principal residency is to prepare the candidate for assuming leadership of a school

rather than opening one. The skills necessary for assuming leadership of a specific school require the program to be very individualized and completely dependent upon the current structures and systems the school already has in place.

**School District B School Leader:**

*Background and purpose for joining the leadership-training program*

Danice was a grade team leader before entering the leadership program. Additionally, she was the youngest person in the training program cohort of twenty potential school leaders and had taught for only two years. Danice stated that most fellows had at least four more years of experience than her, but she felt compelled to enter the leadership-training program as quickly as possible, irrespective of her limited experience. "There just aren't enough positive schools, and the city cannot afford to have as many schools that are failing across the region as there are. The average ACT scores for the district in the city was 15.5, which was one of the lowest in the country." Danice saw the only way to change the current situation was to become a school leader and work towards better student outcomes.

*Experience in the training-program and first year as a leader*

During the program, Danice crafted her own vision of excellence, but observed that, "people go into the program with different wants and needs and the one thing I like about the program is you get to pick out with the development team and executive coaches once every two weeks what you need." For Danice, since she was tasked with launching a future high school, she wanted to understand how other high performing schools functioned. She also wanted to see the great visions and excellent instructional leadership within the charter school system across the country.

Her primary goals included honing her teacher feedback skills, coaching, building a vision for an exceptional culture, and observing classrooms with strong cultures. She also met with innovative leaders. Moreover, she spent significant time understanding the tools needed to build the best-tailored program and how this meshed with her own idea of what it looks like to be a successful school leader.

Danice primarily worked with an Executive Mentor, who had eight years of experience leading a charter school in Boston. She also bonded with two other Leaders-in-training who had worked at charter schools in Chicago. Building a tight-knit professional community with people outside her school was key. "Being a school leader, there is no one else at the school with the same responsibility. It can be a tough and lonely position." Danice pointed out, "It is difficult to bounce ideas off of individuals when you are trying to figure out the best course of action." Working with regional leaders was crucial for Danice's growth and development throughout her first year as a school leader.

*Continued Development*

In her second year, she still reaches out to other leaders to perfect her vision and gain access to best practices. Danice struggled with small, yet not inconsequential details. "How does credit recovery work within the state? This was something that was important, but not a part of

the training. I got a lot of what I needed for visioning, creating a culture, and coaching, but other things I came up against and could really only learn on the ground." Danice believes the program did an excellent job preparing her, but there are some things you just don't know until "you get in a school and dive-in."

Having the strong network of leaders to whom Danice can reach out and leverage has been very beneficial. For Danice, she was able to learn from others making similar mistakes and from others' mistakes. Danice has created tweaks to her own strategic plans and action-steps. She continues to meet four times a year with the other leaders and maintains close relationships in-between sessions.

*Continued leadership and personal reflection*

Danice remains a school leader, as she felt no one else was championing access to high quality schools. Danice believed it was her duty to determine how to best serve the students and continues to tackle that challenge. "The need isn't getting any less, in fact it is massive. There need to be more leaders who will step-up and serve the kids who are not being served."

Danice thought about the schools needed in her region, the vision that needed to be set, and continued improvement for student outcomes two years before the program and well into her current year as a leader. Danice recalled that her fellowship training, prior to the leadership-training program, was beneficial. "It gets you to start thinking bigger picture earlier. The quality of individual sessions varies; however, it was important for having a framework to know whether or not being a school leader was going to be right for me."

Danice would love to observe more schools when they go through their onboarding process, because it is those "first eight weeks when you are building that culture and have everyone buying-in, because it is communicated so well, that the school will be excellently run and produce results." Danice believes that culture is the most crucial element to reaching student success. "You show me a leader who believes otherwise, and I would like to meet them and really see how well that school is doing."

**Reflection:**

There is no standardized approach for attaining excellence. Programs utilizing blended learning, character building programs, or scripted learning can all be successful in accomplishing the mission based goal for all students becoming college ready and attending college. The most important aspect, and the key to success, is strong leadership. This piece of the puzzle is so important to **School District B**, that even "if every other condition is right: talent market is strong, need for **School District B** is high, district partners want to collaborate and are on board, a great board exists, and funding is plentiful, the school won't open without the right school leader." While Danice was the youngest potential leader in her cohort, she was assessed as being the right leader and a prepared leader to launch a successful school.

Leadership at all levels is the backbone of the system. This has become so important that even informal leadership programs exist, as well as teacher leader development for master teachers. **School District B** operates under the auspice that the more involved employees are at developing their own capacity for leadership, the more successful a school will be at preparing students for college. "Finding great people and great leaders is the key for success."

Because the model is highly decentralized, it allows regional support to be highly adaptive and foster autonomy. The idea is that great leaders know what is best and how to get there when given the space to make decisions that are right for student achievement. Mentorship is a part of the system, but it looks different depending upon needs of the new school.

**Key Components:**

*Vision*

School District B seeks to close the achievement gap between historically disadvantaged students and typically more advantaged populations. By focusing the vision on academic success regardless of socio-economic background, there is a clear picture for what the charter management organization focuses upon. Danice specifically views vision and culture as ultimate parts of having a successful school. For Danice, being able to message and execute that vision makes it possible to meet achievement goals. The training program gave Danice leeway to explore different successful ways to create a solid vision and messaging such a vision. However, more improvement to the training program is possible.

*Instructional Coaching*

Danice also focused on instructional coaching by observing other school leaders coaching teachers and by practicing at some of the schools, which she observed. Moreover, Danice's network has been invaluable in developing her skill to coach teachers towards student academic achievement goals.

*Management Techniques*

Danice focused less on management techniques during her program. However, she continued to get feedback and continued support for managing expectations and communicating important points to her subordinates by observing other leaders onboarding staff and setting clear expectations. At least one session focused on managing staff to expectations, but more can be done throughout the Fellowship.

*Culture of Achievement*

Much of the culture is built around the vision of students being ready for college. Since the end goal is clear, the culture built for reaching those goals puts academic success as the most important piece to the college success puzzle. The culture is reinforced through student expectations, academic rigor, and data-driven instruction focused upon student achievement.

*Continuous Improvement Model*

Because interpreting student data and developing teacher instructional knowledge and skills is an enormous part of the vision and training, the leader's focus is on interpretation of data, next steps based on data, and assessment of effectiveness based upon continuous data collection. Without building frameworks that focus on data collection, interpretation, implementation, and assessment of intervention, the key skills emphasized as important for school leaders at **School District B** would be negligible.

## Case Study C

*The following is a short description of School District C's mission, vision for success, and the roadmap for how to achieve results.*

**School District C:**

      **School District C**'s mission focus operates under the belief that young students from low-income neighborhoods, who lack access to high quality schools, deserve access to an excellent education. Empowering teachers, engaging parents, and ensuring a rich and vibrant community, drive that access. If elementary school achievement gaps can be closed, then the probability for better outcomes and later success is dramatically increased for students with historically disadvantaged backgrounds. These goals are reached by focusing on teacher and leader development, unique 21$^{st}$ century instruction, and community engagement.

      Schoolteachers and leaders receive continuous feedback through instructional coaching, professional development, and leadership programs that target growing professionally and personally. Without excellent teachers and school leaders, the mission is not possible to accomplish. Therefore, the work environment fosters collaboration, development, and personal satisfaction.

      Accompanying the environment for a healthy workplace is a unique, differentiated approach to achieve student needs in educational attainment. By incorporating a blended learning model into the pedagogical practice, traditional instruction is combined with technology and tutoring. Allowing for such targeted instruction permits greater differentiation for students who are catching up—comfortably moving at a pace that meets their needs—and for pushing forward students who are ahead—giving those students the opportunity to stay challenged and motivated.

      Lastly, parents serve as the mechanism that drives closing the achievement gap beyond the classroom. The community is encouraged to volunteer at the school, supported in healthy practices of aiding students in homework and serving as a positive role model.

      It takes all three pieces working in unison to ensure the success of a student. The achievement gap that exists between low-income students and higher-income students is not a result of innate ability, but rather the result of access to excellent educational opportunities and the environments in which students learn.

*The following is a case study exploring the structure and purpose of the internal leadership development program within **School District C**. The program director and a current school leader were interviewed. Light is shed on reasons for success within given charter management organization school districts by examining the thought process for why certain elements of the program exist and how leaders of schools execute responsibilities within the schools they lead.*

**School District C Leadership Training-program Director:**

      Before coordinating the school leadership-training program for **School District C**, the Director of Leadership Training started as a teacher in the south Bronx, teaching middle school. Over the course of the next ten years, she became passionate about education opportunities and education reform.

In the process of thinking through reform, the big question she came to **School District C** to answer was "how do you get the best teachers and school leaders to come teach and lead in low-income communities?" This is the question she has been tackling for the past four years. Getting excellent educators and leaders to come to **School District** C stems from the belief that "outstanding school leaders can change lives for kids."

To attract excellent educators and leaders, **School District C** had to solve for creating jobs and career paths for individuals who excelled at teaching and leading students to success. Building the brand was part of the process and required the following: first, a high performing network attracts candidates for teaching and leading; second, positive results for students early on give a boost to image; third, evidence that high performing groups of students can continue to push themselves well beyond current grade levels. Collectively, these branding concepts are crucial for proving effectiveness.

Beyond the record of results and building the brand, schools must believe in three important tenants that drive the work: commitment to parents and community engagement, commitment to parents driving the work very early on, and commitment to encouraging advocacy by the parents as the community moves forward.

In tandem with community is focusing inwardly on developing staff, teachers, and school leaders. Developing these key stakeholders allows for better fidelity in reaching student outcomes through individualization and innovation for students. The schools must meet students where they are through tutoring, online learning, and differentiation within the classroom individualization is attainable.

*Vetting internal and external candidates*

Knowing that all these components are important for a successful school in **School District C**, the director must be strategic when identifying internal candidates. That means the Director must be very clear on what the leadership responsibilities are for each job. Defining responsibilities and helping future leaders understand what role they will play—originally the Assistant Principal was driving culture, now the Assistant Principal has shifted into focusing on teacher development—means that the criteria for identifying potential candidates is clearer to capture. Getting very clear then on underlying competencies and what it takes to be good at those jobs is essential.

Similar care must be taken when identifying an outside candidate; however, less can be known for certain. When examining internal candidates it is easier to identify whether or not the teacher has been successful in the classroom, because data and results are standardized across the district. Furthermore, classroom observations have occurred and therefore the school leader can speak to the capacities and skills of the potential leadership candidate. While the candidate "doesn't necessarily have to be the very best, they need to be good." Another piece that can be observed by internal candidates is whether or not they have interest in leading and if they have the ability to influence other staff members (taking on leadership roles on campus).

Candidates for principal preparation are mostly internal—last year 70% were internal and 30% were external. In the end, however, 100% of principals have been with **School District C** for at least a year before leading a school. This is generally in the capacity as an Assistant Principal while being involved in the leadership-training program.

All candidates must provide principal recommendations and observations of their body of work, along with demonstrating competencies for making decision, data driven decision-making,

building relationships and influencing others, and operating productively and efficiently. Many of these capacities are evaluated during interview activities and role-plays.

*Capacity and skills of Program*

The program is a full calendar year in its current capacity. Leaders are drawn by the brand, opportunity for advancement, and "on the ground" experience while in the training program. During the year, the individuals within the program are evaluated on several competencies, with intangibles such as sheer drive and grit also considered, even though they are not necessarily captured by the rubric.

Instructional leadership and teacher coaching are the most important competencies that school leaders must become proficient. Leaders must have "an instructional eye and discern the issues and strengths within a given classroom." Leaders must also have the coaching structure skills to move the conversation forward and help teachers grow. Lastly, within coaching and instructional leadership, leaders must know enough pedagogy and curriculum to scaffold an approach for teachers and identify a best course of action for making the most effective changes in educational delivery.

The most important component after coaching is leadership presence: setting a vision, communicating a vision, and involving multiple stakeholders. "Being able to get others around you to buy in, and being able to use that vision to assess the work you are doing is crucial to getting best results."

Related to leadership presence is management: are you able to set goals with people? Hold them accountable? And, have difficult conversations when needed?

This means the Assistant Principal roles shifted over time from a culture coach and operations manager to strictly an instructional coach and vision setter. This is because **School District C** schools were hitting a plateau in student achievement outcomes. Students were performing adequately, but unfortunately, had a tough time moving into advanced levels after year two or three. It was good, but not where the organization wanted to be. School leaders needed a higher level of instructional leadership and instructional expertise. Instructional leadership has become such a focus of **School District C** that new roles for operation specific leadership were created so Principals and Assistant Principals could focus on instructional leadership.

In addition to the yearlong position as an Assistant Principal, the individual is also exposed to several days of professional development during the summer and ten days of professional development throughout the year. Other elements of further training include; an all day school visit to another high performing campus, additional coaching directly from principals, and supplementary coaching from the district.

*Future of the Program*

**School District C** wants to get school leaders involved more in running workshops or as a mentor for Assistant Principals in a more official and structured way. Including these additions is targeted interventions and capacity building depending on potential future leadership position. The primary consideration for placing new leaders is determining whether the assignment is a start-up school versus placement for a succession principal: a succession leader is super strong

instructionally and can move a school from good to great, while leaders for Start-ups must be tough, gritty, and relentless.

Also have regional leaders of schools spend at least one day a week at those newer school leader sites. Create more robust system for the clustered schools where principals come together once every two weeks and do a consultancy protocol to tackle challenges that are faced by leaders. Changes in the coming years will also include extended timelines for Assistant Principalship. Right now it is a one to two year position, but needs to extend to a three to five year position to better train future school leaders in instructional coaching and differentiated instructional visions for the campus.

**School District C School Leader:**

*Current leadership*

It is the second year for Peg as a school leader. She founded the school from the ground up, and was able to welcome 500 students, build a culture of achievement, and form a collaborative team.

Being able to see the vision she had in her mind transpiring in real life was an amazing and rewarding accomplishment.  For her, the experience as a whole has been "just awesome." She has also been able to add her own emphasis on values within the school. She encourages her students, her staff, and the community to partake in community service both at the school and in the greater community.

*Before leading a school*

Before founding the school Peg taught two years as a kindergarten teacher within the district, then became part of the leadership-training program as a teacher in her second year, before becoming an Assistant Principal in her third year. By her fourth year in education Peg was founding a school within **School District C**

Peg decided to join the leadership program because she always knew she wanted to teach and go eventually into school leadership. She has always loved teaching and finds it very rewarding. Teaching in **School District C**'s environment is dear to her. However, she felt she could have greater impact as an administrator.

*Experience in the leadership-training program*

During her assent to leadership Peg found discussions around what it meant to be a leader outside the classroom to be the most helpful, followed by reading through case studies, and applying consultancy protocols and tackling problems on campus.  (Consultancy protocols where other school leaders shared challenges in projects on their campus and the leadership-training cohort shared problem-solving ideas).

During the discussions Peg got to talk with colleagues about management and how to manage with current school leaders. The program gave her greater touch points to other leaders in the network of schools. It gave her opportunities for observing differing styles from leader to leader and excellence across different leaders at different schools in the district.

Within the program, but outside the workshops, Peg valued on the ground learning and the introspection she got as an Assistant Principal. Because the job closely mirrored the everyday duties of the principal, it was easier for Peg to benchmark her growth and development against the leader on her campus. She learned how to have teacher retention conversations, how to hire, how to have a strong evaluation process for teachers, and how to coach with a particularly difficult teacher. Peg also received daily coaching and continued modeling from her Principal. The principal as a mentor helped her learn how to better plan and prioritize objectives. The principal helped Peg figure out what levers were most important for ensuring student success.

Other components Peg got better at by interacting with her Principal was communication, especially through email—writing direct emails with asks, but without sounding harsh. Principal coach was most impactful for Pegs growth in day-to-day training, but Peg still wish she had more time to work on instructional coaching and mentorship of teachers. She was only an Assistant Principal for a year before she founded a school.

Beyond the on the ground training and workshops were other perks. Peg got to go to the east coast and observe instruction and culture at other Charter Management Organizations. The experience helped Peg focus her instructional vision. She was even given more time to work on her vision during the second semester of her Assistant Principal year. Peg was able to partner with a principal candidate on the same track and present her vision and receive feedback, and to check her vision against other models.

The key skills Peg acquired to get to vision point and execution were, first, how to create a strong vision, second, how to communicate vision and articulate expectations, and third, how to hold people accountable to the vision.

*Peg's vision over the years*

In the next year, Peg wants to craft a more refined vision, and be crystal clear to the staff on each component. For peg, different components exist, so differentiated professional development can exist for each grade and each teacher, because needs are different. "Culture is an umbrella, but instructional vision gets more granular when driving towards better outcomes."

For Peg last year, when it came to student achievement, results were lacking. Results showed that at the end of the first year the students had done well, but not exceptional. Peg wants to shift gears and have her vision capture a future oriented approach and a preemptive approach. Tons of data streams help inform what teachers need to focus on, but rather than responding to data as reactive, there needs to be an emphasized approach on seeing potential pitfalls before the data even exists. Before the year even starts, Peg needs to articulate her vision, proactively addressing gaps so data doesn't cause anyone to pivot away from expected approaches unexpectedly.

Peg didn't have clear indicators her first year, but built better metrics her second year. However, she hadn't fleshed out how these metrics would be used to tackle next steps and long-term planning. Indicators for Peg involved mini-goals towards larger goals (Example: By the end of the year students need to meet proficiency in writing. Different indicators along the way of knowing they are on track existed, but next steps depending upon progress were not built into the vision. Students are writing at least four times a day for the first month as a mini-goal, but what action steps does the teacher take due to information gathered from the exercise?).

*Continued growth*

Peg still receives coaching and has an external consultant principal who talks with her every week; they go to each other's campuses every week. The CEO comes and walks through classrooms and talks about overall strategy for the school with her. Peg finds all these components to be constructive or positive with actions to be taken driven by the data being seen.

Peg wants to stay a school leader because she is deeply invested in the community. She sees so much potential and has built relationships. She wants students to realize they are making gains. There is so much to learn and she wants to be a master at the job and in the role.

If Peg could share anything with someone coming into the role it would be the following: first and foremost, remind yourself why you are in the job. Second, take care of yourself, excellent school leaders take time for themselves and prioritize health and happiness. It overflows into the work. Third, be super-strategic with your time and make sure you are highly planned before the week starts. Trust your gut but use data as a guide. Lastly, never ever give-up on students or families no matter how hard situations get sometimes.

**Reflection:**

**School District C** emphasizes instructional coaching and vision setting. Examining the districts vision, developing the leadership-training model, and promoting the leadership story, is clearly articulated throughout the entire organization. While there will be continual improvement to the model over time, there is a structural foundation that has a very clear purpose. The district values developing leaders and encourages collaboration; such an environment has led to favorable results and a mindset for continual improvement.

**Key Components:**

*Vision*

Both the program and Peg put a heavy emphasis on the importance of vision and communicating that vision to build buy-in and set clear expectations for students and staff. The vision drives most of Peg's decision making, and the program worked to enhance Peg's ability to create a clear vision and message.

*Instructional Coaching*

Peg spent a year focusing on instructional coaching: analyzing data, problem solving with teachers, and creating next steps. Peg was afforded the opportunity to hone her instructional coaching craft through the programs full year Assistant Principal role. She was further developed with the internal coaching that continued through her first year as an instructional leader of a school.

*Management Techniques*

Peg was able to observe her mentor's management style and reflect upon how she needed to craft her own style. While learning valuable management skills from her mentor and school

leader as an Assistant Principal, she still had room for growth. Reflection after her first year helped Peg realize she needed to set a clearer expectation and vision for holding students and staff accountable.

*Culture of Achievement*

Driving the culture of the school is the specific mission **School District C** works to accomplish: elementary school students with historically disadvantaged backgrounds can achieve at the highest level in schools. With such a strong message, building the culture around that becomes clearer. Data-driven decisions, clear expectations of students and staff, and practices centering on teacher effectiveness aid in crafting the culture created at the school.

*Continuous Improvement Model*

Peg's reflection about her own vision, previous year challenges, and future action-steps for the coming year are parallel to the continuous improvement method. Moreover, systemic opportunities to practice leadership skills, instructional coaching, and culture building as an Assistant Principal with accompanied feedback by a mentor, helps build the capacity to critically self-assess and make actionable next steps.

## Case Study D

*The following is a short description of School District D's mission, vision for success, and the roadmap for how to achieve results.*

**School District D**:

 **School District D's** mission focus operates under the belief that every student is capable of college and career readiness. While some students will select career paths or community colleges, the process of preparing to attend a four-year college helps young people avoid the knowledge and skill deficits that result from placement in non-college prep, high school diploma programs. Regardless of the life path students ultimately choose, **School District D** offers access to high-performing public schools that pave the way for them to succeed in college, career, and life.

 Such a process is captured in the dynamic and innovative way in which **School District D** educates students. First, **School District D** believes that at the core of excellent results for students is excellent teaching. Second, in order for students to realize their maximum potential and thrive, they need genuine, trusting relationships and a transparent environment. The students and teachers must know and respect one another. Lastly, every student receives consistent, relevant, and personalized support that is seamlessly integrated into the school day. This is possible through the technology platform utilized for curriculum and instructional dissemination. The emphasis is on student-driven learning.

 Students push themselves, and are able to access content from electronic platforms 24/7. Furthermore, students can tailor their instruction and move at a pace that is right for them. Ultimately, the goal is to give students the capacity to succeed by building habits and skills that foster critical thinking in all activities and endeavors.

*The following is a case study exploring the structure and purpose of the internal leadership development program within **School District D**. The program director and a current school leader were interviewed. Light is shed on reasons for success within given charter management organization school districts by examining the thought process for why certain elements of the program exist and how leaders of schools execute responsibilities within the schools they lead.*

**School District D Leadership Training-program Director:**

 Before coordinating the school leadership-training program for **School District D**, the Director of Leadership-training worked within the district as a school leader four years after it was founded.  Since joining, that school has gone from a school that had never graduated a student, to a school that has sent 96% of students to a 4-year college. It has become one of the top 100 high schools in the country.  In these last seven years, he has taught 9th – 12th grade in Oakland.  He has also taught internationally in San Jose, Costa Rica and Guanajuato, Mexico.

 He came into his current role as a Leadership trainer while leading a school within **School District D**. He believes that the program is meant to build leadership skills, and values the capacity it builds for all participants who choose to enter the program.

 For current teachers, the leadership development is done during professional development time and some times during the summer and weekends.  Unique about the program is that it is

open to everyone in the organization. The program is meant to build everyone's capacities and help him or her work on leadership development. Leadership as a broad category is the core of the whole program. It is leadership, and not necessarily principal preparatory that is the purpose. It is all about how to lead. The program is tailored to teach what leadership skills are necessary to be a successful executive in the organization.

There are two components to the program: the Leadership Fellows component and the Principal Leader Team component. The former is open to everyone, while the later is the continual coaching and feedback model used to train leaders already running a school.

*Leadership Fellows*

Leadership fellows are current teachers interested in opening a school or in leadership roles in general. The Leadership Fellows get extra peer coaching and feedback. Fellows will also go through case studies and present them to the Principal Leader Team. The two teams become very tightly wound together and support one another. For example: The Fellows were tasked with a project based learning experience where they had to develop an entirely revamped curriculum to launch in the fall. The Fellows worked closely with the Principal Leader Team throughout the project and got feedback periodically. The final curriculum project was pitched at the end of the summer for the Principal Leader Team to either approve or have the Fellows go back to the drawing board.

The project-based learning is accompanied with case studies that help the Fellows develop critical thinking skills, communication skills, how to incorporate feedback when working towards an end goal, and lastly how to learn from failures.

The program lasts for two or three years, depending upon whether fellows want to be on a fast track or not. All activities are the same either way; it is just a longer process with three-year program. Key Components within the program are **School District D**'s rubric for Leadership Core skills: relationship building; vision, values, and goal setting; instructional leadership; operations; and managing. Operations contain lessons on budgeting and managing stakeholders to help the school raise money.

*Principal Leader Team*

Everyone who runs a school sits on the Principal Leader Team: Principals, Assistant Principals and Chiefs. They meet once a week to do leadership development. This time is not used to problem solve for campuses, but rather to think more broadly about leadership and management in practice. The program is professional development through peers and thought partners who are held to the same expectations as other school leaders in the district.

The district believes the peer learning aspect is so valuable that leaders get together two hours per week to do leadership development and spend an entire day off-site once a month for the same purposes. "It's not about being reactive to needs now, but being proactive." For example: leaders talked about hiring and the values they look for in teacher candidates. The conversation started at high-level discussion around competencies wanted from staff—the conversation took place many months before the hiring season even started.

Before **School District D** got larger, the fellows joined the conversations as well. But, because the program got bigger, logistical elements of the program had to change.

*Changes to the model*

Components have been added. Technology is now leveraged throughout both the Fellowship and Principal Leader Team. The training for Leaders and Fellows now models the way students learn and participate in skill and capacity building. Leaders and Fellows have access to content 24/7 and take online assessments in real time with immediate feedback.  Everyone will be learning in the same model across the organization. The idea is to promote critical core skills, like leadership development skills. Then there will be content online they can access anytime and work through exercises at their own pace. This process enables the individual the opportunity to practice skills any leader would need for success.

The program will shift from papers and everyone sitting in one school to an actual internet interface and database where it is all held online or done in real time. Professional development will even mirror student learning. This will also make it easier to access data on where certain leaders are in their growth process and target extra lessons, coaching, or project based learning opportunities.  This methodology helps build the capacities of leaders in areas where they are weak. The program will essentially end up differentiating for leaders, because of needs. Based on data showing where a leader is at in progress towards building a skill and capacity, more lessons or support is given. It mirrors a differentiated classroom.

Lastly, as the district grows, the Principal Leader Team will begin to splinter into regional pod teams and create an extra layer. Each region will have 12-15 leaders associated with a Principal Leader Team and then a leader from each region will go to a larger regional leadership development meeting.

**School District D School Leader:**

*Before the leadership program*

Before becoming a school leader, Tim Taught for five years within **School District D**. Tim brought with him a lot of history and institutional knowledge when he joined the fellows program. He joined the program because he recognized that "leaders are the ones shaping the teacher leaders and the future leaders." Teachers, to Tim, do a ton of leading in a lot of capacities, so he wanted to also get better trained in leading as a teacher as well. The biggest thing Tim believes the culture at **School District D** valued was putting people in leadership experiences to build leadership capacities.

*Leadership-training program experience*

The actual two-year fellow program, Tim recalls, was "for anyone, not just anyone who wants to become a site leader. It is for anyone who wants to learn how to be a strategic thinker." Tim continued with "while I was doing it just to develop that capacity, I realized I was truly aligning with the organization. I was pushing my learning and self to grow and realized I wanted to lead a school."

For Tim it was helpful to have a leadership program. It helped him build the capacity to talk to teachers, build a framework for solving problems, and creating rational for communicating initiatives. The strengths of the program have helped Tim accurately predict the needs for the organization, teachers, and the community.  This was all because the framework of

the program was inquiry based. He went and he studied something. Going through the process Tim learned new strategies, and then he got to practice them.

*As a school leader and reflection about leadership-training program experience*

As a leader this year, Tim has been dealing with change management. The district just rolled out a new vision for the school models, leveraging a lot more technology and online platforms and including workshops that model certain learning skills necessary. "New things are happening and it took teachers a lot of time to wrap their heads around teaching skills in class and not content in class." For Tim this has been an exciting challenge because he believes in building relationships with his staff and helping his staff build the framework for why this new platform is good for students. To Tim, it is a vision that affects teachers in a positive way and it is his duty to message it as such.

When reflecting on his current challenge Tim remembers being put into similar challenges for messaging a vision, and failing, but he also remembers being encouraged to learn from it and understand how to tackle other obstacles in the future. "That kind of thinking 'it is okay to fail,' but quickly learn and get better and really push one self and others to do better is a mindset that is most valuable" to Tim.

Key skills Tim learned to tackle challenges were creating a vision for what was desired instructionally and a big picture for long-term goals. How to strategically think about his plan and building relationships through management and informal channels was crucial for his success. The questions Tim continues to ask are how do I better and more effectively coach colleagues? How do I make sure people feel being heard, but leverage opportunities to push individuals as well? Fortunately, Tim is coached regularly and talks to colleagues about strategies for tackling issues that arise. He also remembers lessons he learned while doing problem based learning modules, and presenting the information to the Principal Leadership Team. It was in those sessions that Tim realized he could, and wanted to lead a school.

The visioning piece was where Tim grew the most in the leadership-training program: practical skills and high-level thinking. During that time he got better at communicating with teachers and was able to check his progress against the vision like a north star guiding his campus. Skills learned for visioning really align to standards of success: vision is geared around student outcomes and culture. Tim's vision and ability to communicate helped shift his actions into successful outcomes.

*The future*

Tim is still learning on the job. "There are lots of teams where we are continually learning, once a week we have two hour meetings for leadership development. Once a week for an hour and a half we meet as heads of schools and look at data and student outcomes and learn about coaching instructionally. Once a month we have an all day meeting where people get together and do more leadership training."

Even aside from the time blocked for development Tim has a principal coach, mentors, and the CEO helping him problem solve. "There are structures at all levels that support growth." As Tim notes, "I definitely say I stay in leadership and this organization because of the people and the mission and the vision of the organization. Cannot speak more highly of the people that I work with."

**Reflection:**

**School District D** focuses the school leader role on two primary components: broader leadership and a culture of collaboration. Such focus is allowed for two major reasons. The first is the continued focused support from several leaders and colleagues. The second is the space and time allotted for developing leadership capacities as well as strategies for tackling obstacles that arise within the district. By building in these two key pieces of the program, expectations for school leader success can be very focused.

**Key Components:**

*Vision*

All students will be able to attend a four-year college if they choose to do so, is at the heart of the charter management organization. The Director of the leadership-training program and Tim both thought critically about how that looks: for the future, the year, and even day-to-day operations. Creating clear goals, expectations, and communication about what that looks like was also fostered through hands-on training that forced potential school leaders to collaborate. This dynamic also helped to build final products based on a shared vision. Tim took those lessons and applied them as a school leader, building long-term goals and a big picture for years to come for his school.

*Instructional Coaching*

Collection of data, interpretation of data, and next steps based on data is built into the functional school pedagogy. Technology captures student data that is shared with teachers, administrators, and students. This sharing of progress helps the different stakeholders assess a student's current capabilities and where the student has room for capacity building.

*Management Techniques*

**School District D** harnesses professional learning communities to discuss different managerial decision processes, and to help leaders think through decisions in a supportive and collaborative peer-to-peer learning environment. This continual professional development helps school leaders trouble-shoot ideas and learn from other leaders' experiences.

*Culture of Achievement*

Driving the culture of achievement is the structure and framework for student learning. Mirroring that structure are developments in adult training and capacity building. Accompanying the structures and frameworks emphasizing technology proficiency is the belief that teachers are at the heart of successful student outcomes. This belief is reflected in continued capacity building through both formal and informal leadership opportunities.

*Continuous Improvement Model*

**School District D** uses technology to collect data quickly and in real time, so teachers, administrators, and students can track growth, knowledge, and skill building capacities. The information collected on each student drives the creation of individualized education plans that meets each student's needs.

**<u>Conclusion</u>**

Each school serves very different populations. Some serve elementary school students others serve middle school or high school students. Even the missions from school to school are different. One school focuses upon closing the early childhood achievement gap, two others focus on serving the historically disadvantaged and underserved populations. The remaining school, regardless of socio-economic status, focuses efforts towards preparing all students for the potential to attend a four-year college if they choose to do so.

Moreover, beyond different mission focus for each charter management organization, the leadership-training program mechanisms and framework for training leaders are dissimilar. Some have a heavy emphasis on mentorship programming while working within the school as a leader, others build cohorts of those interested in crafting leadership skills in general, while other programs still focus upon specific and targeted plans depending upon school leader need.

Regardless of the mechanical differences, all the charter management organizations examined produce successful student outcomes as defined by the California Charter School Association. Highlighted in the case studies are the different mechanisms along with the functional focus of each organization.

Ultimately, it is the focus, and not the mechanisms, that are a large part of building school leader capacity. By narrowing charter management organization mission and vision scope, a framework for expected results is created. There is a tangible desired outcome inherently built into the organization's branding. With that as the backdrop, crafting a clearer vision, ultimately leads to better expectations and improved accountability.

With instructional coaching and management techniques, there develops a process for built-in feedback loops accompanied by formal mechanisms for either coaching to expectations or managing to expectations. With either tool, the motivation for the school leader to implement a technique is the same for all the charter management organizations examined: data for student outcomes. Having the ability to influence others through capacity building and establish firm expectations through direct management provides more tools when working towards each school's desired outcomes. There is a tension between the two, and finding the balance is part of the process elucidated in the case studies.

The culture of achievement naturally progresses from the functional framework of a vision and well-crafted tools for leading people towards meeting the expectations of that vision. The culture of achievement has similar tensions that management and coaching have. On the one hand, urgency to meet goals is critical. On the other hand, leaving room for team-building and fostering relationships that contribute to outcomes is also important.

All of the components that were found within each charter management organization would not be functionally possible to execute without the mindset fostered by a culture driven by continuous improvement. In the case studies, every leadership-training program and every school leader took a critical lens to previous outcomes, examined the results, created new action plans based on data, and will repeat the process during the following cycle.

While none of these components are necessary for other charter management organizations to thrive, examining the process by which these charter management organizations train leaders is important for highlighting common key mindsets and skills that led to successful schools and most importantly, successful student outcomes.