

Issue BRIEF

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Snapshot of KIPP Leadership Practices through 2010–2011

FINDINGS IN BRIEF:

- KIPP's Leadership Competency Model defines the skills school leaders need and guides development and evaluation
- KIPP combines a tiered sequence of leadership roles at the local level with national staff development programs to generate a pipeline of school leaders
- Founding principals of new schools are selected by a competitive process and complete a one year training program
- KIPP regions focus on teaching and management skills when choosing successor principals

The Knowledge Is Power Program (KIPP) is the largest public charter school network in the United States. KIPP started as a program with two classes of 5th grade students in Garcia Elementary School in Houston in 1994, and the first independent KIPP schools opened in Houston and New York City in 1995. By fall 2013, 141 KIPP schools served approximately 50,000 students nationally. KIPP's influence extends beyond its schools, as important elements of KIPP's model continue to shape district and charter schools across the country.

A key element of the KIPP model is the Power to Lead, which gives principals control of staffing and resources at their schools. Accordingly, KIPP schools' success hinges on developing a pipeline of quality school leaders.

To maintain its recent rate of growth, the KIPP network needs a pipeline of high-quality principals to start new KIPP schools and to replace principals who leave existing KIPP schools. The KIPP network has expanded rapidly: from the 2008–2009 school year to the 2013–2014 school year, KIPP opened an average of 14 new schools annually. Moreover, KIPP schools have rates of principal tenure consistent with other public schools—about three or four years—creating regular openings. The growing number of schools also creates demand for more junior leaders; for example, from the start of the 2008–2009 school year to the start of the 2011–2012 school year, KIPP schools created a total of 96 new assistant principal or dean positions. To prepare leaders for these roles, KIPP has created and implemented interlocking leadership development practices and programs.

THIS STUDY

Based in part on evidence that KIPP schools have significant positive impacts on student achievement, the KIPP Foundation won a competitive \$50 million scale-up grant from the U.S. Department of Education's Investing in Innovation (i3) competition in 2010. KIPP requested the funds to further invest in the development of effective school leaders through national leadership development in the KIPP School Leadership Programs (KSLP), and build supports for schools and leaders at the regional and local levels

(for example, by funding dedicated leadership development staff). As part of the i3 grant, KIPP commissioned Mathematica Policy Research to document leadership practices at KIPP.

Mathematica's i3 study focuses on identifying leadership practices across diverse areas: leadership structure and transitions, and the selection, development, and evaluation of leaders. Most of the data collected so far reflect KIPP leadership practices at a specific point in time—those in place at the end of the 2010–2011 school year—to provide a baseline, or starting point, for

examining how KIPP leadership practices change as i3 funding is distributed through 2015.

Mathematica staff interviewed and surveyed regional leaders at all 22 KIPP regions and school leaders, typically principals, at 96 of 97 KIPP schools, conducted site visits to three regions and one school identified by the KIPP Foundation as having promising leadership practices, reviewed KSLP and Foundation program documentation, and administered an online survey to KSLP participants. The case study findings can be obtained by request from Mathematica or KIPP. For additional detail on KIPP leadership practices and information on research methods, please see the accompanying [technical report](#).

LEADERSHIP AT KIPP

To scale the KIPP approach nationally, KIPP first focused on developing a pipeline of school leaders. In 2000, the founders of the first two KIPP schools, in partnership with philanthropists Donald and Doris Fisher, created the KIPP Foundation to select and train leaders who would open new schools. The Foundation’s primary approach to supporting leadership development is KSLP, which includes several yearlong training programs. KSLP also aims to provide a common learning experience for all KIPP leaders, build professional relationships among leaders in the

same cohort, and create a consistent culture and philosophy at KIPP schools.

To guide efforts to identify, develop, and evaluate school leaders, the KIPP Foundation supported the creation of a Leadership Competency Model that describes the skills, knowledge, and attitudes needed by successful leaders. To develop the model, KIPP Foundation staff held discussions with principals of high-achieving KIPP schools and incorporated findings from the research literature on effective leadership. The Leadership Competency Model is organized around four competency core clusters (see Figure 1). Other competencies, such as instructional leadership and operations management, build on the core competencies and vary by leadership role. To clarify the competencies, the Foundation has identified several key behaviors associated with each competency for each leadership role.

KIPP regions collaborate with the Foundation to select and develop leaders. To capitalize on administrative efficiencies, nearly all KIPP schools are now part of geographically based regions (for example, KIPP DC and KIPP Houston) that operate as charter management organizations under a license agreement with the Foundation. Usually encompassing a metropolitan area and governed by a local board, KIPP regions work with the Foundation in many areas, but have distinct responsibilities and substantial

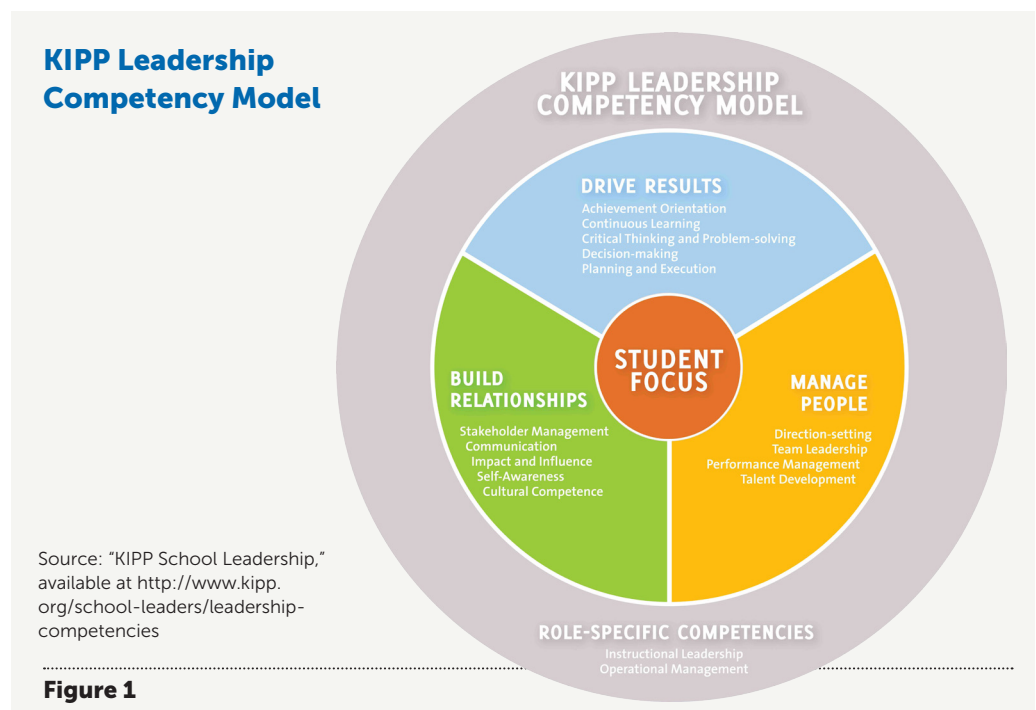


Figure 1

autonomy. For example, KIPP regions collaborate with the Foundation on recruiting and selecting principals who will found new schools in the region, but independently hire replacement principals at existing schools. Regions set general leadership practices and culture at their schools; hire and dismiss school leaders; and provide local professional development (PD), including leadership training. Outside of the leadership domain, regions often provide support to their schools on curriculum, operations, and development.

Each KIPP region and school has the autonomy to develop and implement leadership practices within the broad KIPP national operating framework, responding to local contexts and enabling innovation that can be shared. However, the intentional local diversity does not preclude a typical KIPP approach to leadership. In a few areas, the Foundation has identified and shared promising practices developed by regions and schools; in other areas, KSLP, the Leadership Competency Model and the KIPP operating framework can also support the use of common leadership practices across the network.

Schools establish a tiered sequence of leadership roles.

roles, managed locally, that develops staff through experience on relevant tasks; and (2) nationally run KSLP PD programs that develop staff through training and coaching.

Structuring roles to develop leadership skills.

Regions intentionally use junior leadership roles to identify promising leaders and develop staff leadership skills. Strong teachers with leadership promise might become grade level or department chairs, and chairs might then become deans or assistant principals, creating a pool of principal candidates. This pipeline creates leaders who are familiar with KIPP practices and have diverse leadership experiences, providing prepared replacements when a principal takes on a new role, leaves the region, or founds a new school.

In recent years, new KIPP schools are increasingly building this pipeline shortly after the school is created. As new schools add grades, they typically expand the number of leadership roles to create a deeper pipeline. (New KIPP schools usually open with one grade and add an additional grade each succeeding school year.) Although only 25 percent of KIPP schools that opened in the 2008–2009 school year had an assistant principal or dean position in their first year of operation, that proportion increased to 56 percent among schools opening in 2010–2011. Most KIPP schools that have been open three years or more have at least two junior leaders, such as assistant principals or deans, increasing the likelihood that at least one of these leaders will be ready to fill a principal opening and the school will retain at least one experienced junior leader.

KEY FINDINGS

KIPP constructs leadership roles and leader development programs to create a pipeline of new leaders. To staff new schools and fill vacancies, the KIPP Foundation and KIPP regions aim to build a leader pipeline that produces trained and experienced school leaders (see Figure 2). This pipeline has two key elements: (1) a tiered sequence of leadership

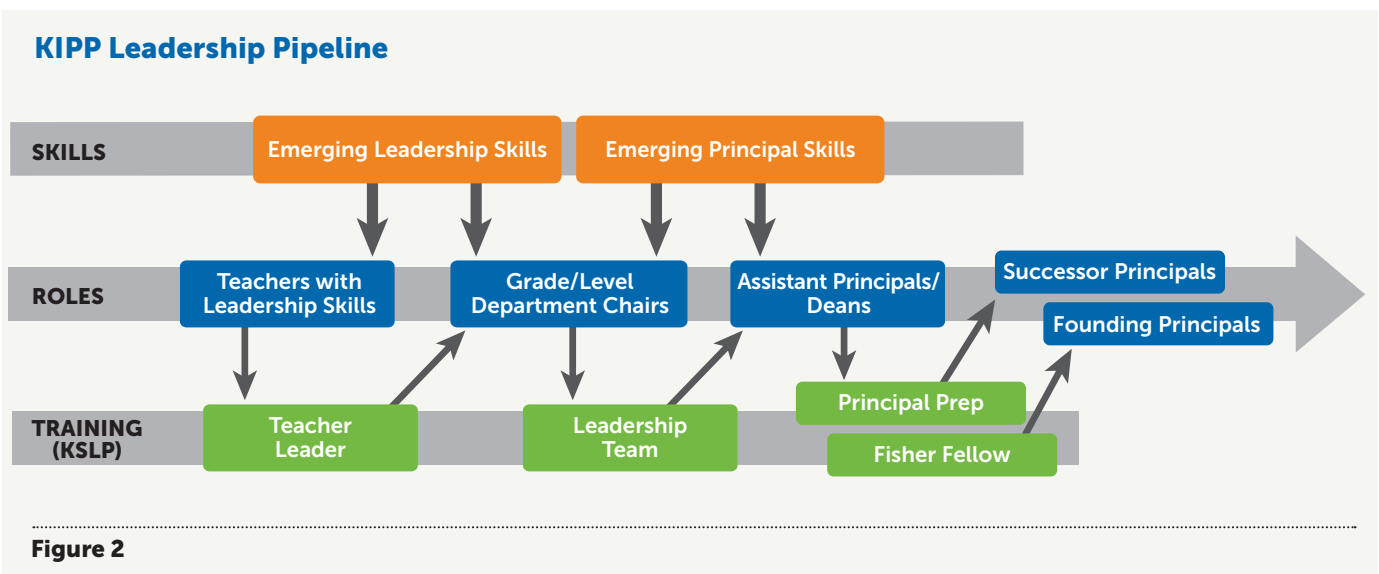


Figure 2

Some KIPP schools assign diverse leadership responsibilities to assistant principals to enhance their preparation to become principals, an approach the Foundation encourages. Although some schools have specialized leaders such as a dean of instruction, the KIPP Foundation believes that creating assistant principal roles with responsibilities spanning instruction, management, and culture provides junior leaders experience across the diverse areas principals oversee. About 49 percent of KIPP schools have staff with responsibilities encompassing instruction, management, and culture.

Standardizing leadership roles across a region can foster a clear leadership pathway from classroom teacher to principal, facilitating relevant training and building on-the-job skills. Standardized roles also enable leaders to transfer between schools and even between school types (elementary, middle, and high schools). Although most schools continue to have the freedom to define their own leadership roles, some regional staff described plans to try to further standardize these roles in the future to build deeper pipelines.

Professional development for national and local needs. Emerging KIPP leaders receive PD from two primary sources: (1) the national programs

offered by KSLP and (2) local PD programs and experiences provided by KIPP regions. KSLP builds relationships among leaders from different regions and aims to create a consistent culture and philosophy at KIPP schools. Complementary regional training can target and be tailored to specific leader, school, or regional needs.

At the national level, separate yearlong programs target the leadership skills appropriate for each role in the leadership pipeline (Table 1). Future principals in the Fisher Fellowship complete a yearlong, full-time program before founding a new school. Other part-time programs prepare emerging leaders for both their current and future responsibilities as teachers and leaders at KIPP schools.

As indicated in Table 1, KSLP blends classroom training and learning retreats with leadership observations and responsibilities, and with individualized coaching. Each KSLP activity aims to develop specific leadership competencies. All KSLP participants receive instruction during regular retreats and most programs also provide a five-week summer institute. Most programs require participants to develop individualized leadership plans that identify the participant’s professional development goals; participants then use these plans to frame discussions and evaluate progress toward those goals three times annually.

KSLP professional development programs are configured to help emerging leaders take the next step in the career ladder

Selected KIPP Schools’ Leadership Programs and Training Activities

Program	Number of Participants Through 2010–2011	Target Leadership Role	Training (classroom, residencies, coaching)
Fisher Fellowship (established 2000)	125	Founding principal	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Four-day orientation • Five-week summer program • Three three-week residencies at schools • Three three-day retreats • Biweekly coaching for 50 minutes
Principal Prep (established 2003)	135	Successor principal	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Four-day orientation • Five-week summer program • Three three-day retreats • Biweekly coaching for 50 minutes
Leadership Team (established 2007)	135	Assistant principal or dean	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Four-day orientation • Five-week summer program • Three three-day retreats
Teacher Leader (established 2007)	242	Grade level or department chair	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Three-day orientation • Two three-day retreats

Table 1

Fisher Fellows also create a school design plan and conduct three-week site visits (residencies) to observe practices at several KIPP and KIPP-like schools. Finally, Fisher Fellows and Principal Prep trainees receive individualized coaching every two weeks for a year. More than 90 percent of KSLP attendees in each program report being satisfied or very satisfied with the quality of training. More than 70 percent of attendees in each program of believe that the training is highly relevant or essential to their current job.

Regions develop leaders through coaching, trainings, and assigning new tasks.

Most KIPP leaders also participate in PD created and implemented by each region. About 73 percent of principals report receiving coaching from their region, and about 41 percent report attending conferences, trainings, or meetings provided by the region. In response to specific developmental needs, KIPP regions or individual principals often ask staff to handle responsibilities similar to that of the leadership role for which they are considered, but at a smaller scale or more basic level. Regions also use individualized meetings that focus on managerial challenges. In addition, the Foundation provides regions with tools for developing and evaluating competencies for use at regional programs and schools. For example, the Foundation provides role-specific road maps to regional leaders that can identify strengths or competencies needing development for job progression, and 360 reviews that can solicit competency-based feedback from stakeholders, such as teachers.

Founding principals are selected by a national competitive process focusing on the skills identified in the KIPP Leadership Competency Model, such as instructional leadership. The KIPP Foundation created the yearlong Fisher Fellowship to develop principals for new schools. Fisher Fellows are chosen through an initial screening and three rounds of interviews that focus on the leadership competencies, with a strong emphasis on teaching effectiveness. A committee composed of KIPP Foundation and regional staff, such as executive directors, chief academic officers, and principals, selects the fellows. A successful candidate will progress through four rounds of selection: an application review, telephone interview, regional interview, and a final set of interviews with several teams. Candidates who progress past the application review submit a videotaped lesson and lesson plans, and they

discuss their students' achievement results during a telephone interview. Regional visits typically last one to three days and include interviews with regional leadership, teaching a sample lesson, and observing and providing feedback on a lesson taught by another instructor (a core principal responsibility). At each stage of the process, trained staff evaluate candidates using rubrics that rate candidates on several model competencies. Fewer than 10 percent of those who apply for a Fisher Fellowship are selected.

Almost all regions prioritized different skills when identifying a principal who would found a new school versus a principal who would succeed a principal at an existing school. Regional leaders tended to believe that founding principals should be entrepreneurial, visionary, and able to establish processes and build community support to attract new students. In the selection of successor principals, regions consider the ability to influence change within an existing structure as a key attribute.

Local leadership teams select successor principals, typically using the pipeline development process that focuses on teaching and management ability. To choose successor principals, most KIPP regions rely primarily on the development and evaluation processes inherent in their leadership pipeline. This is a less formal process than is used in the selection of founding principals. In the 58 percent of regions that use this approach, regional staff often identify a promising junior leader for the role, observe the candidate performing relevant tasks, discuss the candidate's performance with their colleagues, and contribute to the development of an individual development plan to prepare that leader for the role of principal. About a quarter of the regions solely use more formal selection processes, such as reciprocal visits to both the hiring and candidate's schools, sample lessons, and observing the candidate provide instructional feedback to teachers. About 16 percent of regions used a formal application process to hire some principals (hiring others informally), presumably because there was no obvious pipeline candidate.

Principals are commonly viewed as managers, but when selecting principals, KIPP regions prioritize teaching ability (82 percent) as much as management ability (77 percent). Regional leaders specifically look for a successful record

KIPP regions focus on teaching ability as well as management skills when choosing principals.

teaching students (often demonstrated by high student achievement), instructional knowledge, and knowledge of their content areas. Similarly, 85 percent of KIPP principals view themselves as instructional leaders, listing that as one of their primary responsibilities (90 and 75 percent of principals mentioned managing others and managing operations as primary responsibilities, respectively).

KIPP regions strive to plan for leadership transitions. All KIPP regions reported assessing the depth and breadth of their pipelines, typically at least once a year, to plan for transitions in leadership. As part of these assessments, regional staff gauge whether and when specific schools will need a successor principal. Regions seek input from principals about their transition plans and possible replacements. In addition, regional staff seek to identify low-performing principals who might have to be transitioned out of their role.

The KIPP Foundation recommends identifying a successor principal 18 months before the outgoing principal leaves; this enables necessary PD and a gradual transition of leadership duties. However, from the 2008–2009 school year to the 2010–2011 school year, most KIPP schools identified successor principals fewer than 6 months in advance. Although most regional and school leaders understand and aim to follow the KIPP Foundation’s general framework for leadership, resource and staff constraints can hinder implementation of promising practices.

CONSIDERATIONS AS KIPP SCALES UP

The KIPP network continues to grow, with regions planning to add 23 schools in fall 2014. To succeed, new KIPP schools require high quality leaders, as the KIPP model provides principals with substantial autonomy. Attracting, identifying, and developing these leaders during periods of rapid growth has and will continue to challenge the KIPP Foundation and KIPP regions.

The Foundation has focused i3 funds on expanding national and regional capacity to develop leaders. To help regions and schools identify, recruit, train, and evaluate leaders, the Foundation provides regions with funds to hire directors of leadership development and performance evaluation managers. The Foundation is also creating successor principal residencies and having successor principals participate in school reviews to improve leadership transitions. To build pipelines earlier at new schools, the Foundation provides funds to staff assistant principal positions during a school’s second or third year of operation. The Foundation has also added additional spaces for KSLP training and created and refined management tools based on the Leadership Competency Model.

A subsequent report will describe how KIPP leadership practices changed during the i3 funding period. That report will also describe practices during the 2014–2015 school year, identifying trends, continuing challenges, and promising practices at more than 160 schools in the KIPP network.

