

## YES Prep Case Reflection Questions

**As you read the case study –*Saying Yes to Talent: YES Prep’s Leaders Reflect on What it Takes to Staff a Growing System of Excellent Charter Schools*– in preparation for the upcoming convening, please reflect on the following questions:**

1. What were the key human capital strategies YES Prep implemented to improve the quality of teachers and leaders in each school?

2. Consider how YES Prep implemented these two human capital reforms:

- Redesigning teacher hiring and selection
- Refining the observation and evaluation system

For each effort, where did YES Prep maintain flexibility and autonomy for schools and where did YES Prep work to ensure consistency across schools?

3. Based on your reading of the case, how do you think the HR team adds value to YES Prep school leaders’ human capital work? What evidence in the case leads you to this conclusion?

4. How does HR's support of schools look different or the same in your district? Why might your district engage schools differently than YES Prep?

# **Saying Yes to Talent:**

## ***YES Prep's Leaders Reflect on What It Takes to Staff a Growing System of Excellent Charter Schools***

**Case Study**  
*September 2015*

YES Prep Public Schools, a charter school network in Houston, began as an idea. In 1995, a group of teachers, parents, and community leaders were worried that far too many children in their low-income community were slipping through the cracks in middle and high school, and they decided to do something about it. After starting as a small program in an existing public school, YES Prep opened its first charter campus in 1998<sup>1</sup> under the leadership of a Teach For America teacher named Chris Barbic.

In the years that followed, YES Prep grew steadily, school by school, and by the fall of 2015, it had 15 campuses across the Houston area that were educating approximately 10,500 students in grades 6 through 12. Another 5,000 were on a waitlist, hoping for an open spot. More than 85 percent of the students were low income, nearly all were African American or Hispanic, and 20 percent had limited English proficiency. Most entered YES Prep schools at least a full grade level behind in English and math.<sup>2</sup>

Families were drawn to YES Prep by its student outcomes. (See Attachment A.) All of its students matriculated to colleges and universities, and 72 percent of alumni had either completed a degree or were still enrolled.<sup>3</sup> The system earned high ratings from the Texas Education Agency, and several of its campuses were ranked among the top public high schools in the nation. Due to these accomplishments, YES Prep was named the inaugural winner of the Broad Prize for Public Charter Schools in 2012.

When observers asked YES Prep's leaders how they achieved such stellar results, they pointed to various aspects of its education model, including small campuses, integration of middle and high school, extended time, rigorous college-preparatory curriculum, academic interventions, emphasis on developing character attributes linked to postsecondary success,<sup>4</sup> community service requirements, enrichment opportunities, robust support services, and extensive college counseling aimed at not only getting students into college but also providing the supports they needed to persist through degree completion. Equally important, though less often highlighted, was YES Prep's commitment to talent. As then-CEO Jason Bernal<sup>5</sup> and then-Chief Operating Officer Jennifer Hines wrote in an education blog:

[Our] curriculum by itself does not create minds that can handle college-level work. Technology does not create drive or build grit. The longer school day, while helpful, does not in itself create civic-minded young leaders. None of these education "solutions" . . . would yield the kind of outcomes that our students have been able to achieve unless the

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<sup>1</sup> Like other charter schools, YES Prep schools are open enrollment public schools. Students are selected through a random lottery.

<sup>2</sup> YES Prep, *Redefine Possible Campaign Case for Support*, 2014. In 2013, for example, only 19% of incoming sixth graders were on grade level in math and only 15% were on grade level in reading.

<sup>3</sup> YES Prep, *College Initiatives Redefined: Executive Summary*, 2014.

<sup>4</sup> Based on research by Carol Dweck, Angela Duckworth, and others; examples include a "growth mindset," grit, resilience, etc.

<sup>5</sup> Jason Bernal succeeded Chris Barbic as CEO of YES Prep in 2013 when Barbic became superintendent of Tennessee's Achievement School District. Bernal had begun his career with YES Prep in 1997 as a teacher.

right people are making decisions, implementing the curriculum, using data thoughtfully, and squeezing success out of every minute of every week – planning, teaching, assessing, holding tutorials, talking with parents, planning service trips, mentoring, coaching.<sup>6</sup>

Eldridge Gilbert III personified YES Prep’s commitment to hiring, developing, and retaining talent. He had started teaching at its East End campus in 2006, and four years later, after excelling as a dean of students, he became the School Director<sup>7</sup> for its North Forest campus. (See Attachment B.) As the summer of 2015 came to an end, Gilbert was thinking about the upcoming school year and what he hoped to accomplish. For one thing, he wanted to observe his teachers more often to be sure that instructional quality was high in every classroom. In past years, he had spent only about 15 percent of his time on observations, and he wanted this to increase.<sup>8</sup>

He was also thinking about a more complicated challenge: how to help some of his teachers see their students differently – not as “empty vessels waiting to be filled,” but as people whose backgrounds and experiences they needed to try harder to understand, value, and build upon.<sup>9</sup>

Meanwhile, Vice President of Talent Nella Garcia Urban and her team were also looking ahead to the new school year. They hoped to make progress on a variety of fronts, many of which stemmed from a new strategic priority that the talent team had defined the previous year: *Recruit, hire, develop, retain, and sustain extraordinary people*.<sup>10</sup>

### Getting the Right People

From the beginning of YES Prep’s existence, its leaders believed that the most important factor in students’ success was the quality of their interactions with teachers. Based on this belief, they sought to hire bright young people who embraced the motto of doing “whatever it takes” to prepare low-income minority students to complete college. Less than 30 percent of the teachers they hired in the early years had an education degree; most came from alternative preparation programs such as Teach For America.

As time went on, however, YES Prep’s leaders became concerned by how long it took many of their teachers – many of whom were young and new to the profession – to “get up to speed.” Moreover, teacher attrition rates were high; most teachers left within two years, suggesting that hiring was awry.

They therefore decided to commission a psychologist to help identify the key traits of YES Prep’s best teachers. This research revealed that teachers’ effectiveness depended far less on “technical skills” than on a set of personality attributes, such as the ability to “rebound” quickly from problems, to be eager to share ideas and feedback, to keep up a rapid pace of work with high energy, and to be a perfectionist, defined as “not being happy with ‘good enough.’”<sup>11</sup>

<sup>6</sup> Jason Bernal and Jennifer Hines, “One Secret to Success at YES Prep: Hiring the Right People,” *Education Week, Rick Hess Straight Up* [Blog], August 25, 2014. Unless otherwise indicated, all quotations from Hines are drawn from this blog entry.

<sup>7</sup> YES Prep’s principals are referred to as School Directors.

<sup>8</sup> Gilbert estimated spending about 45 percent of his time in meetings (with his administrative team, his coach, system leaders, etc.); 20 percent on discipline issues; and 20 percent on operational issues.

<sup>9</sup> Interviews with Eldridge Gilbert III, June 30 and August 19, 2015. Unless otherwise indicated, all quotations from Mr. Gilbert are from these interviews.

<sup>10</sup> Interviews with Nella Garcia Urban, Vice President of Talent at YES Prep, May 28 and August 27, 2015. Unless otherwise indicated, all quotations from Ms. Garcia Urban are from these interviews.

<sup>11</sup> The Bridgespan Group, *YES Prep: Getting the Right People*, September 2009.

Now that they knew what “raw ingredients” to look for, YES Prep’s leaders wanted to be sure to provide all new teachers with the intensive training they needed to quickly gain skills and confidence. As an observer put it, “These students don’t have time to wait for a rookie teacher to figure out how to teach.”<sup>12</sup>

Accordingly, in 2004, senior leaders launched a new program called Teaching Excellence to provide in-depth, on-the-job training and support for beginning teachers. (See Attachment C.) The program consisted of a two-week pre-service induction that focused on classroom culture and management along with other topics; ongoing professional development; and instructional coaching. In 2009, the state of Texas approved Teaching Excellence as an alternative certification program, making YES Prep the first CMO in the state to be allowed to grant teaching certificates.<sup>13</sup>

The Teaching Excellence program was well received and had a positive impact on improving the caliber first-year teachers. But many of the system’s teachers did not come through this internal pipeline, and as time went on, it became evident that YES Prep needed to address inconsistencies in teacher hiring and selection across its growing number of schools. School directors largely did their own hiring, but during the CMO’s early years, they received relatively little guidance or support from the home office to help them do so. As a result of this laissez-fair approach – founder Chris Barbic called it “everybody winging it and doing it their own way”<sup>14</sup> – methods varied from school to school, and so did success. Some school directors excelled at recruiting and hiring, but others did not.

Seeing these challenges, YES Prep’s leaders decided to invest in improving recruitment and selection throughout the system. In 2011, they expanded the recruitment and selection staff in the home office and tasked them with developing new strategies to provide more support to the schools and ensure more quality and consistency system-wide.

When Garcia Urban began leading YES Prep’s talent pipeline activities in 2012, she was eager to put her penchant for systems and processes to use. She developed a centralized database that she, other home office leaders, and hiring managers could use to monitor the system’s human capital needs at any given point in time – information that had not been captured or tracked centrally in the past. She also mapped out a detailed process for what happened at every step of the way from “the moment someone submits an application to the moment they get an offer.”

Michelle Burgess, who became YES Prep’s new Director of Selection in 2013, built on this work. She and her team developed a rigorous, multi-step process for screening teacher candidates and expanded training and support for school hiring teams. They developed a rubric that they used to conduct the initial screening (see Attachment D), then shared information about promising prospects with school directors, who could choose to interview them and have them conduct a sample lesson. She and her team sought to do “a lot of the heavy lifting” so that school directors could concentrate on finding quality people who were the best fit for their campus. Burgess said:

The annual training we do with the hiring teams provides a great opportunity for me and my team members to hear how things are going and find out what else they need in terms of support. Data is a huge part of this work. We track benchmarks for each school – when positions are being opened, time in process, number of offers accepted, etc. We also set

<sup>12</sup> The Bridgespan Group, *YES Prep: Teaching Excellence*, September 2009.

<sup>13</sup> By 2014-15, ~ 200 teachers were participating in the program annually, including educators from KIPP and a local school district in addition to the YES Prep teachers. The state’s approval enabled the organization to charge \$3,700 per teacher to recoup some of its costs, estimated at approximately \$8,000 per teacher (on average).

<sup>14</sup> The Bridgespan Group, *YES Prep: Providing Every Student with Excellent Teaching*, September 2009.

goals around candidates' satisfaction with the process, and we use those data to look for opportunities for improvement. If a candidate says, "I didn't receive the materials I needed for the sample lesson until the day before," for example, we talk with the school team about what they might do differently in the future. Or if a campus is having a significant number of candidate withdrawals, we look at that together. The data are central to the work we do. In the same way, our central team sets goals around hiring manager satisfaction, and we use those data to adjust what *we* are doing.<sup>15</sup>

As a result of these efforts, YES Prep's teacher selection process became much more consistent and much more rigorous.<sup>16</sup> And as school directors became more confident in the quality of candidates that home office was sending them for consideration, many largely stopped doing their own recruiting.

Gilbert was an exception, however. "When I first became a school director," he reflected, "I relied almost entirely on candidates who came from the home office because I didn't know the difference between the type of candidate I needed for my school versus the type that other campuses needed." But over time, as he gained more experience and developed a clearer sense of what he needed, he often did his own recruiting. The home office talent team did not object to this. Autonomy was fine, and even encouraged, as long as a school leader was getting good results.

### **Developing and Evaluating Teachers**

YES Prep's senior leaders knew that in order to have an outstanding teacher in every classroom, it was not enough to simply hire well; they also needed to provide the development opportunities and support that every teacher needed in order to improve over time.

Teachers who were new to the profession were receiving substantial support through the Teaching Excellence program. And as senior leaders realized that experienced teachers who were new to YES were struggling to adapt to the organization's culture, they added a new program called "New to Blue" to provide more support for this group.

Beyond these specialized programs designed for specific groups of new teachers, all YES Prep teachers received extensive coaching support and professional development within their schools. As Garcia Urban emphasized, "That is where the vast majority of teacher development happens."

Some of this developmental work occurred through workshops and meetings, but much of it transpired through a system of observations, feedback, and coaching grounded in YES Prep's internally developed Instructional Excellence Rubric (IER), a framework that described teacher performance standards in three areas: classroom culture and management, instructional planning and delivery, and responsibilities and values.<sup>17</sup>

The IER had been developed in 2006 in response to teachers' complaints that they were not being given enough specific feedback to help them improve; at the time, teachers were being evaluated based on a single classroom observation, and because there was no clear definition of what constituted effective teaching, the process was highly subjective.

<sup>15</sup> Interview with Michelle Burgess, Director of Selection, June 18, 2015. Unless otherwise indicated, all quotations from Ms. Burgess are from this interview.

<sup>16</sup> In the hiring process for the 2013-14 school year, for example, 448 of the 1,414 applicants made it through the initial screening and were sent to campuses, and only 15 percent (219 people) were hired.

<sup>17</sup> Each domain was then subdivided into indicators for various competencies and/or expectations, with definitions for each along a developmental continuum that ranged from "Unsatisfactory" to "Mastery."

YES Prep's leaders therefore formed a working group of teachers and tasked them with developing new tools and processes for teacher development and evaluation across the system's schools.<sup>18</sup> The CMO's leaders rolled out the IER in mid-2006, and soon after, they unveiled a new structure for observing, developing, and evaluating teachers based on the framework. Under the new system, all YES Prep teachers were observed multiple times each year by their school director and academic dean and received detailed feedback on how to improve their practice. Some observations were quick and non-evaluative, some were "walkthroughs" to gather evaluative data and inform professional development, and some were full evaluative observations followed by a conference with the school's instructional leadership team.<sup>19</sup>

Over time, YES Prep's leaders continued to refine the observation/evaluation system in response to teacher feedback and evidence of how the system was working. In 2014, for example, senior leaders began exploring how to incorporate student achievement data into the system. As they made adjustments and refinements, system leaders' primary goal was to have a system that was primarily developmental, not punitive, and that teachers believed was both constructive and fair. As Head of School Kari Thomas commented in a 2014 article:

If a teacher doesn't feel that his or her evaluations are fair or if different leaders evaluate differently, the integrity of the process is broken and teachers won't trust the system. For an evaluation rubric to work, all leaders need to understand and apply it in the same way. This is no easy task and requires commitment and resources. . . . The lesson we continually learn is that we have to be completely open about everything and invite our teachers to be completely open in return. If our teachers aren't happy about something, we need to know that, and for them to be happy, they have to know everything – every step, every change, every calculation, every nuance.<sup>20</sup>

Though the home office prescribed the process and tools for YES Prep's development and evaluation system, the school leadership teams were responsible for execution, and this demanded a considerable amount of their time. Though Gilbert believed strongly in the importance of this work, he sometimes found it daunting:

My biggest aha was how much harder my job is than I thought it would be in terms of helping adults. Some are great with students but are disorganized, so I have to do some basic things like have them show me their calendar and teach them how to do a better job of managing logistics. Other times, I have a teacher who looks great on paper but is afraid of the students or can't communicate with their parents. Either way, it's an investment on my part in helping them become better.

Believing that the work of developing teachers was vital not only to teachers' and students' success but to the success of the organization as a whole, YES Prep's senior leaders ensured that schools were appropriately staffed to carry out this work. In addition to the school director, who provided instructional leadership for the school, every school also had a dean of academics who planned professional development based on teachers' needs, as well as two full-time instructional coaches who worked closely

<sup>18</sup> America Achieves, *Spotlight on Promising Practices: Evaluating Teachers on Instructional Rigor*, undated.

<sup>19</sup> The Bridgespan Group, *YES Prep: Ensuring Accountability for Student Success*, September 2009.

<sup>20</sup> Kari Thomas, "Teacher Evaluation Systems Based on Trust, Transparency, and Growth," *Straight Up [Blog]*, *Education Week*, August 27, 2014.



with teachers to review their student achievement data and lesson plans, observe and model lessons, and provide ongoing feedback on ways to improve.<sup>21</sup>

Having so many senior staff at the school level assigned to developing teachers was an expensive commitment for YES Prep, but from the outset, senior leaders had seen it as a necessary investment. They had decided to adjust other aspects of the schools' programming – for example, allowing higher class sizes – to cover these expenses within the confines of the budget.

### **Developing School Leaders**

As it became more systematic about developing its teachers, YES Prep was also strengthening its efforts to develop its school directors: a pressing need as the system kept adding more campuses. As its business plan noted, “The likelihood of successful replication will be significantly enhanced if school leaders are developed from within the organization. Further, hiring from within is an important recruitment incentive for attracting and retaining high-performing educators to YES.”<sup>22</sup>

From the beginning, YES Prep cultivated most of its school leaders internally rather than hiring them from the outside. In 2012, the talent team decided to codify these informal processes by establishing a new program called Leading Excellence, designed to identify high-potential educators early in their careers and provide structured opportunities that would prepare them for future leadership roles.

Applicants were chosen through a rigorous process that included interviews with YES Prep's senior leadership team, and those selected entered the pipeline for future school director roles or other leadership positions (e.g., academic dean). The Leading Excellence program began with a week-long immersion workshop, followed by ongoing professional development and coaching from an experienced school leader. (See Attachment C.)

YES Prep educators who were tapped to become school directors played an integral role in developing plans for their new school. Then, once the school opened, the school leaders were given substantial autonomy to lead their campus – for example, developing school goals (in collaboration with staff) and determining what types of professional development staff needed. As they did so, they received ongoing support from the senior team. Home office leaders monitored each school's adherence to essential elements of the YES Prep culture and school model, and data from these audits played an important role in school directors' evaluations.

### **Keeping Talent**

Despite its best efforts to hire selectively and provide substantial professional development and support, YES Prep – like most other urban school systems – struggled to keep talent over time. Some critics asserted that burnout was inevitable in charter systems like YES Prep, given the demands they placed on teachers and staff, including long hours, high expectations, and “whatever it takes” mindset. But Garcia Urban rejected this way of thinking. “There's this narrative about charters burning and churning people, and we do not in any way, shape, or form want to be a part of that,” she emphasized.<sup>23</sup>

Regardless, attrition was a considerable challenge. In any given year, students had a high likelihood of having first-year teachers or a first-year school leader, or both. In 2014-15, for example, five of YES

<sup>21</sup> Barry Newstead, Amy Saxton, and Susan Colby, “Going for the Gold: Secrets of Successful Schools,” *Education Next*, Spring 2008.

<sup>22</sup> YES Prep Business Plan, 2011.

<sup>23</sup> Stephen Sawchuk, “Charters Look to Change Perceptions on Teacher Turnover,” *Education Week*, June 2, 2015.

Prep's eleven campuses had school directors who were in their first year.<sup>24</sup> Furthermore, from one year to the next, the CMO lost approximately one out of every four teachers.<sup>25</sup> Some were terminated because of lackluster evaluation results,<sup>26</sup> but the rest left of their own choice, whether to teach elsewhere or to enter other careers or graduate school.<sup>27</sup>

Recognizing that such a high rate of attrition was costly both financially and operationally, YES Prep's leaders rolled out a new program in the fall of 2011 called the Teacher Continuum, which consisted of a series of career pathways designed to attract and retain high-performing teachers, along with new compensation structure. The Continuum defined levels of performance ranging from "Practiced" to "Advanced," linked to YES Prep's teacher evaluation system. As teachers moved up the levels, they were eligible for special roles and projects as well as higher compensation. (See Attachment E.)

The Continuum had a positive impact on teacher satisfaction, and some teachers stayed in the system longer because of the improved compensation and the new career opportunities they were now able to access. Yet attrition continued to be a vexing challenge, and 2014 data revealed that the average teacher in YES Prep stayed only about 2.5 years.<sup>28</sup> This troubled senior leaders like Garcia Urban, since internal analyses showed that more experienced teachers were generating better student achievement results. In short, far too many new teachers were leaving before the real "payoff" in terms of effectiveness.

Home office leaders decided to ask teachers and staff to provide input on the topic of retention, and in mid-2014, they formed a Talent Persistence Task Force to advance this work. Through staff surveys and "listening tours" at campuses, teachers were asked about what changes would compel them to stay. Their responses zeroed in on four areas: recognition, opportunities, flexibility, and compensation.

In the summer of 2015, Garcia Urban and YES Prep Superintendent Mark DiBella unveiled a new program called "Commit to Five" that had been designed based on this input. The goal of the program was as its name conveyed: for all YES Prep staff to pledge to stay in the organization for at least five years. (Leaders chose this time frame based on research showing that the median tenure for any single job in the U.S. was 4.6 years.)

Commit to Five would provide new district- and campus-level recognition opportunities for teachers who demonstrated excellent results. It would also provide more varied professional opportunities for teachers, such as the chance to mentor other teachers or enter a leadership track. Highly effective teachers would also be able to earn flexibility, especially around the use of time (e.g., more flexible scheduling, self-selected professional development, or additional flex days). In addition, YES Prep announced that it was increasing teacher salaries at every level of the Teacher Continuum. First-year teachers would now begin at an annual salary of \$47,000, while those in the Advanced group would begin at \$67,000.<sup>29</sup>

YES Prep's human capital leaders were excited about Commit to Five's potential and hoped it would inspire more of the system's talent to remain in the system for a longer time.

<sup>24</sup> Internal data, provided June 2015. The average number of years of school leadership experience across YES Prep schools (2014-15) was just under 2.5 years.

<sup>25</sup> The attrition rate among teachers who met or exceed expectation was 16 percent.

<sup>26</sup> Robert Maranto, "Tough Teacher Evaluation and High Morale?" *Educational Leadership*, February 2014.

<sup>27</sup> Some observers pointed out that this was partly due to the fact that many of YES Prep's teachers came from Teach For America, which required only a two-year teaching commitment. See, for example, Brian Thevenot, "Charter Schools Battle High Teacher Turnover," *Texas Tribune*, January 27, 2010.

<sup>28</sup> Internal data, July 2015.

<sup>29</sup> YES Prep, *Commit to 5* [slide deck], August 2015.



### **Increasing Diversity and Confronting Bias**

Amidst these efforts aimed at attracting, developing, and keeping great teachers were efforts aimed at diversifying the teaching force. As a Latina from Texas's Rio Grande Valley, Garcia Urban had noticed YES Prep's shortage of minority teachers when she came to the organization. Although she and her team had been able to make progress over time through a series of diversity initiatives, there was clearly more work to be done.

This was a priority for Gilbert, too. As he commented:

While teacher quality is ultimately what's most important, I think it's really important for students to be taught by teachers who look like them. The challenge is that the supply of outstanding minority teacher candidates is so small. Part of it is that young, talented people don't want to be teachers; they want to become doctors or lawyers or obtain other high-status positions. On top of that, some talented teachers of color don't want to work at YES. People tend to be hesitant about coming into an organization that looks so white, even if we are not as white as we may seem.

In an effort to diversify the system's employees, YES Prep's recruitment team began recruiting more broadly and using new marketing materials that highlighted the schools' mission and diversity. By 2015, YES Prep alumni were also providing an increasingly important pipeline of teacher candidates for the system: by now, more than 30 alumni had returned to teach after completing college. This was doubly beneficial, as it also further reinforced the charter system's strong internal culture.

To further advance YES Prep's diversity efforts, Garcia Urban and Burgess established system-level metrics such as the racial, ethnic, and gender composition of the staff and the characteristics of incoming hires, and they began to monitor these data regularly. Then, they began to monitor how different groups were faring over time – for example, how many Hispanic women teachers YES Prep was keeping.

These efforts had a tangible impact, as the system's teaching force as a whole became more diverse (See Attachment F). Yet Garcia Urban saw that there were still large differences across individual schools; some were very diverse, but others were not. As a result, her next goal was to begin tracking diversity metrics at the school level. "The more data we have," she said, "the more we will know where the challenges are and the faster we can move toward our equity goals."

Burgess and her team, meanwhile, decided to re-examine their practices with an eye toward understanding where there might be hidden biases. As she explained:

As our team talked about the importance of having our students be exposed to diverse backgrounds and experiences, we recognized that what that means in practical terms is that there is no "typical" candidate. In other words, we don't want to just hire people with certain backgrounds. That made us ask if there are diverse candidates who we may be screening out – for example, because they don't have a great resume or interview – but who have something important to offer.

To educate themselves about hiring biases, Burgess and her team spent a few months in 2014 doing internal diversity and cultural competency training led by a colleague with experience in this area. Based on this work, they then offered a bias training workshop for the school directors. After doing some initial reading and "pre-work," the school directors came together for two hours to explore various types of bias that could be influencing them as they decided which teachers to hire for their campuses. "The framing,"

Burgess said, “was that this was an effort to raise awareness. ‘Let’s be honest,’ we said. ‘When you do x, it could be this type of bias, so let’s talk about that.’”

The school directors found the experience eye-opening, and at the end of the workshop, they reflected on how to apply what they had learned. Gilbert, for example, realized that he needed to include more people in the interviewing process. “Sometimes,” he said, “I see potential in a candidate that others do not see or vice versa. I realized that by including more people in the process, we could press each other – for example, asking what each of us sees as evidence of different aspects of potential.”

### Looking Ahead

Diversity was one of the many issues on Gilbert’s mind as he readied himself and his staff for the beginning of the 2015-16 school year. From his perspective, hiring more minority teachers was important but insufficient. What he was trying to figure out for the upcoming year was how to get many of his teachers, especially those who were young and “not always very humble,” to engage with their students in a different way.

Too often, Gilbert perceived, teachers in urban schools like his seemed to assume that students’ families and communities, mostly minority and poor, had given these young people little of value. But he believed that this “deficit mentality” undermined effective teaching and learning:

I think many teachers who join the urban schools movement see the communities and families that students come from as the “problem.” The message seems to be, “This is a bad neighborhood where nothing good happens. We are well educated and middle class, so if you abandon everything out there and do what we tell you to do, you will succeed.” But I don’t think that is a very healthy way of interacting with kids and families. So as we focus on diversity, a question I am thinking about is, how can we value our kids’ experiences and acknowledge that they are people with worth that we are adding to, and that we’re not adding from zero?

I think the answer is that we have to train our teachers how to be better in working with students whose needs and circumstances look very different from theirs, and how to be culturally competent and responsive to kids and what they live on a day-to-day basis. When a teacher says to me, for example, “my students have no idea of what an inference is.” My response to that is, “That isn’t true. These kids are making inferences all of the time. They are just not inferences that you recognize because they are outside of your frame of reference.”

In the coming months, he wanted to work with his leadership team to find ways to help teachers understand and value their students’ experiences in more meaningful ways. This, he believed, was at the heart of what it meant to be an effective teacher in an urban school like his.

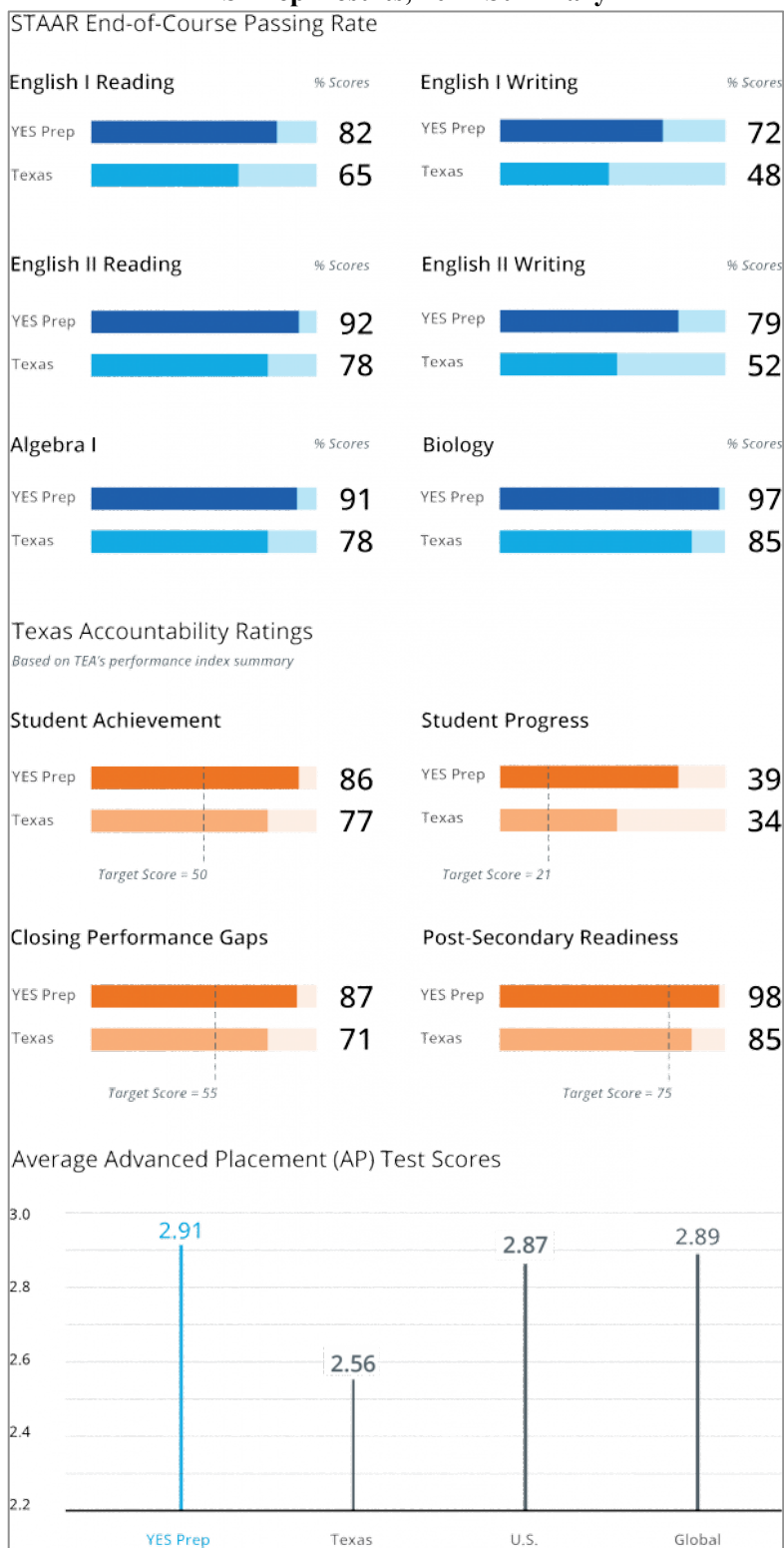
Garcia Urban was also thinking about the new school year. One issue that was very much on her mind was how to make more headway toward the talent team’s new strategic priority: *Recruit, hire, develop, retain, and sustain extraordinary people*. Over the past few years, she felt that she and her team had made steady progress on multiple fronts – recruiting, hiring, development, and retention strategies in particular. But the “sustain” element was new.

As Garcia Urban reflected:

It's different from retention. Retention is about keeping more teachers from one year to the next, but sustainability is about persistence over the longer term. In the past, sustainability wasn't a part of the conversation at YES Prep; the mindset was that the work was hard and turnover was inevitable. But now we are looking at it differently. We're asking questions like, how many first-year teachers does a kid have over their career at YES, and what is the impact of that? What does sustainability in the teaching profession look like, both at YES and nationally?

"That is a very different conversation," she said, and it was one that she and her colleagues were committed to having in the year ahead.

## Attachment A: YES Prep Results, 2014 Summary



Source: YES Prep website

## **Attachment B: Selected Leader Bios**

### **Eldridge Gilbert III Bio**

- Education: Bachelor's degree in Psychology and Africana Studies, Brown University, 2005; MBA degree, Rice Education Entrepreneurship Program, 2010
- Joined Teach For America corps in New Orleans, evacuated to Houston after Hurricane Katrina and began teaching at KIPP New Orleans West (in Houston), 2005
- Teacher, YES Prep East End, 2006
- Dean of Students, YES Prep East End, 2007
- School Director for YES Prep Public Schools, 2010 - present

### **Nella Garcia Urban Bio**

- Education: Bachelor's degree from Rice University in English, Spanish and Political Science, 2003; Master's degree from Sam Houston State University in Education Leadership, 2006
- Teacher, YES Prep North Central, 2004
- Literacy Specialist, Teach For America, 2008
- Senior Director of Teacher Development, YES Prep, 2008 - 2012
- Managing Director of Talent Pipeline, YES Prep, 2012 - 2014
- Vice President of Talent, YES Prep, 2014 – present

## Attachment C: YES Prep Teacher and School Director Development and Support Programs

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### YES Prep Teaching Excellence

Teaching Excellence, novice teacher development program, provides rigorous and relevant training and individualized coaching that supports new teachers through their crucial first year. Proven and adopted by schools aiming for higher standards, Teaching Excellence supports more than 300 teachers at YES Prep, KIPP Houston, Uplift, and Spring Branch ISD. For those teachers who are not already certified, our program also offers teachers a certification pathway.

Teaching Excellence is a three-part model:

- ❖ **INDUCTION**  
Induction is a two-week phase that is the foundation of our teachers' learning for their first year. Facilitated by our instructional coaches, Induction takes place in July and brings together the entire cohort of over 300 teachers.
  - ❖ **INSTRUCTIONAL COACHING**  
When the school year begins, each new teacher is paired with an instructional coach to work with throughout the first year. The instructional coach observes the teacher multiple times per month and provides actionable feedback to accelerate growth and effectiveness.
  - ❖ **PROFESSIONAL LEARNING SATURDAYS**  
Each month teachers gather together for Professional Learning Saturdays (PLS), which consist of a focus on content pedagogy, as well as the instructional and cultural needs of new teachers. PLS courses are taught by master teachers and instructional coaches who work to create a learning experience that is both responsive to teachers' needs and centered around collaboration.
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### YES Prep Leading Excellence

The Leading Excellence Program exists to build a pipeline of future leaders within the organization who aspire to lead at a high level and fulfill the YES Prep mission and vision through their leadership. With the growth of our organization and our commitment to open new schools, we need high performing talent at all levels and across all teams. This program features an intense leadership coaching model, a pedagogy for leadership, and action-oriented deliverables geared towards developing emerging leaders in preparation for future endeavors within the organization.

Leading Excellence is a four-part model:

- ❖ **IMMERSION WEEK**  
The first phase of the Leading Excellence Program, Immersion Week, steeps the fellows in the best practices of leadership and gives them an opportunity to connect as a team.
- ❖ **PROFESSIONAL LEARNING**  
Each month, participants focus on a particular leadership skill and practice executing it throughout the month with coaching support. Fellows engage within an online community to discuss the topics in practice along with their required reading reflections.
- ❖ **LEADERSHIP COACHING**  
A leadership coach works with each fellow to give them feedback on their developing skills as well as general mentoring and guidance throughout the year.
- ❖ **EVALUATION**  
Receiving direct, action-oriented feedback is an essential component in making sure all future leaders have a clear understanding of their strengths and weaknesses, as well as how to move forward.



### Attachment D: YES Prep Teacher Screening Process

	<b>Mission Alignment</b>	<b>High Expectations &amp; Achievement</b>	<b>Growth Mindset</b>	<b>Professionalism &amp; Communication</b>
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Essay #1</li> <li>• Essay #2</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Essay #2</li> <li>• Essay #5</li> <li>• Leadership experience</li> <li>• GPA, Transcript</li> <li>• References</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Essay #3 – Failure</li> <li>• Essay #4 – Feedback</li> <li>• Essay #6 – GPA</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Overall formatting</li> <li>• Essays</li> <li>• Resume format is professional and clear</li> </ul>
	Applicant demonstrates a desire to impact student achievement specifically in communities that YES works with as well as a strongly held belief that all students are capable of learning.	Applicant demonstrates a strong work ethic and a willingness to accomplish lofty goals as a professional and for their students. Applicant holds themselves and their students to high, rigorous standards.	Applicant holds the belief that their abilities can be developed and improved through coaching, dedication, and hard work. Applicant views feedback as a positive resource for personal and professional development and ultimately, student achievement.	Applicant models professional interactions in all personal communications, written and verbal. Applicant demonstrates stamina and stability, conducting themselves with decorum and responsibility.

Candidates are given a score of a 1 (highest) to 3 (lowest) in each category and then given an overall score based on the individual category scores.

### Attachment E: YES Prep Teacher Continuum, 2014

YES Prep rewards teachers who make significant gains in student achievement. Teachers' salaries are not determined by the number of years they have spent in the classroom but instead by the quality of their instruction and planning. YES Prep has created pathways to develop teachers who desire roles outside of the classroom as well as opportunities for those who seek to develop into master teachers. The YES Prep Teacher Continuum allows great teachers to earn a competitive salary on an accelerated timeline, without leaving the classroom.

#### Basic Continuum Structure

The Continuum is an articulated leadership pathway for teachers comprised of four levels:

- ❖ NOVICE - \$44K
- ❖ DEVELOPING - \$46-50K
- ❖ PRACTICED - \$54-64K
- ❖ ADVANCED - \$66-80K
- ❖ MASTER TEACHER FELLOWSHIP - +\$10K  
(up to 10K above base and/or significant release time)

Teachers who meet or exceed expectations for performance at each level for a specified number of years are eligible to be promoted, or "gateway," to the next level.

## Attachment F: YES Prep Teacher Characteristics, 2014-15

