

SCHOOL LEADERS as CEOs



Principals in Action

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EMPIRICAL EVIDENCE OF REEP'S IMPACT
ON SCHOOLS AND SCHOOL LEADERS

SCHOOL LEADERS AS CEOs: Principals in Action

Executive Summary

Most traditional education leadership programs have not kept pace with the rapid changes in local, global, and societal conditions that affect the operation of schools today. The Rice Education Entrepreneurship Program (REEP) addresses this shortcoming head-on by preparing school leaders to run their schools like CEOs. REEP equips them to tackle new challenges in new ways by focusing on five core competencies: leading change, leading people, building coalitions, building the business, and driving results.

The study presented in this white paper summarizes the first empirical evidence of the positive impact that REEP has on school leaders, schools, and students in these schools. Rigorous qualitative research methods including critical ethnography, meaning reconstruction, and pragmatic horizon analysis were employed to analyze more than 600 pages of data collected from numerous observations and interviews with four REEP-trained principals.

Each case study produced evidence that the principals are applying their learning as correlated with the five core competency areas of REEP. Within those competency areas, the principals demonstrated mastery of CEO-centric skills including strategic problem solving; data-driven planning and decision making; effective leadership and motivation; identification of priorities; and techniques of persuasion, influence, and negotiation.

The evidence further indicates that by applying what was learned via REEP, the principals have made positive impacts on school culture, teaching, and learning. Marked improvements in state student assessment scores at the REEP principals' schools bolster these findings. Further, cross-case analysis of the data suggested that in order to change, improve, or transform a school, a leader must know how to impact the efficacy, motivation, and satisfaction of the teachers, which is systematically related to building a positive school environment and school culture.

The CEO-centric skills that the principals gained through their REEP training, in combination with the network of like-minded principals and on-going support from REEP staff, are unique features that set REEP apart from other highly regarded principal preparation programs.

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Today's schools are complex, dynamic organizations in which school leaders face many challenges. They must master finance, operations, curriculum, and discipline. They need to create a vision, foster a culture of achievement, build relationships among diverse groups, and use data to make decisions. They must be creative, flexible, visionary, passionate, and persistent. They must be great educators and effective business leaders. Indeed, effective leadership in schools is the second most impactful school variable behind effective teachers when it comes to student achievement (Halinger & Heck, 1996; Leithwood & Jantzi, 2000).

Although the local, global, and societal conditions in which today's schools operate are rapidly changing, the preparation of principals has remained largely static. An analysis of 31 principal preparation programs across the United States revealed that "preparation has not kept pace with changes in the larger world of schooling, leaving graduates of principal preparation programs ill-equipped for the challenges and opportunities posed by an era of accountability" (Hess & Kelly, 2005, p. 35). And that is precisely the problem that the Rice Education Entrepreneurship Program (REEP) set out to solve by breaking with past practice in the development of school leaders. Rice University is the first and only institution in the nation to permit aspiring principals to receive a state certification to serve as a school leader through a business school.

REEP believes that preparing principals to run their schools like CEOs will enable them to solve problems, manage resources, and transform their schools. To instill this CEO mindset, REEP developed a creative

and complex set of learning experiences for both current and aspiring leaders. In short, REEP is a new approach to education leadership development that equips school leaders to tackle new challenges in new ways.

Without a doubt, REEP's goals are both weighty and lofty. But is the new approach helping to develop effective leaders who make positive impacts in their schools? With five cohorts of REEP-trained leaders working in Houston-area schools as of 2014, the opportunity existed to evaluate the impact that REEP is having on these principals and their schools. This white paper presents the first empirical evidence that REEP is indeed enabling principals to lead change, lead people, drive results, build coalitions, and build the business. Through careful

selection of the appropriate research methodology and rigorous analysis of the data, the study reveals:

- How principals' priorities, decisions, and actions were influenced by their REEP training
- The positive impacts REEP principals make on teacher efficacy and motivation
- The impact REEP principals have on school culture
- The impact REEP principals have on school performance ratings
- The impact REEP principals have on student test scores

Background and Programming of REEP

In 2007, a coalition of business, non-profit, and education leaders explored and launched an idea not yet seen in the education landscape. Their vision was to prepare principals to run schools like CEOs, and to do so at the Jones Graduate School of Business at Rice University. After all, business schools routinely prepare leaders with the mindset and the capacity to run effective organizations. If campus principals are given the tools, skills, and competencies that CEOs possess, they may more effectively deal with the complexity of issues that they face on a daily basis, vastly improve teaching and learning, and in some cases, transform schools that struggle.

While the CEO-centric curriculum was a novel idea, so was the decision to house the program exclusively in a business school. Significantly, Rice does not have an education school. Unlike most education-business school partnerships that inevitably draw upon the faculty and programs already in place, Rice was able to build a unique education leadership training program from

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scratch. The REEP program was thus unencumbered by existing education school programs that have not adapted to the changing demands of K-12 education.

A key partner in the launch of REEP was Houston Endowment Inc. (HEI). Annually, the foundation provides about \$75 million in grant funding to non-profit institutions in the Houston area. HEI's investment of nearly \$16 million dollars in REEP is the foundation's largest single programmatic investment to date. This investment, in addition to support from Rice University, underwrites eight REEP cohorts through 2016. As a condition to have most of their REEP tuition forgiven, graduates must remain in the Houston area as school leaders or as educators seeking to become school leaders. This requirement ensures that HEI's investment has local impact in the greater Houston area. In addition, other support has come directly from local foundations, school districts, and students themselves. The desired outcome is for REEP-trained principals to better serve the teachers and students in their schools and to increase not only the number of students who enter post-secondary education, but also who attain post-secondary success.

PROGRAM TRACKS

REEP offers three programmatic tracks of learning opportunities for leaders. The first is the REEP MBA for School Leaders program. This track leverages the two-year degreed MBA for Professionals program from the Jones Graduate School of Business at Rice University. Most of the educators who pursue the MBA are young teachers who aspire toward and move into junior leadership positions either during their REEP MBA experience or shortly thereafter. The REEP MBAs work side-by-side with leaders from numerous industry sectors who participate in the evening and weekend MBAs while working full-time. They participate in the REEP leadership curriculum during the two-week Summer Institute, during Forum, and during select programming during the two-year MBA period. In addition, REEP offers students in

this track a principal certification program.

The second track is the REEP Business Fellowship, a 14-month graduate certificate program for leaders. Participants in this strand are mostly seated and experienced principals, although roughly 25% of each cohort is a combination of assistant principals, associate principals, and teacher leaders. The teacher leaders also participate in the principal certification program with the MBA students. The Business Fellowship track comprises three segments. First, REEP contracts with Rice University's Executive Education in the Jones Graduate School of Business to provide the business sessions. Topics include a self-analysis as a leader using 360 and NEO feedback instruments, strategy formation and implementation, accounting, finance, marketing, process management, and power and influence as a leader. Senior faculty members from the Jones School teach these sessions. Second, REEP students participate in a practicum. A combination of Jones School faculty and national faculty provide the sessions that focus on instructional leadership, effective communication, the impact poverty has on learning, the use of educational technology, entrepreneurship, and other topics. Third, each participant presents the results of a leadership project as a capstone performance assessment.

The third track of REEP is the two-week REEP Summer Institute, which brings together both MBA candidates and Business Fellowship candidates so that they may freely interact and mutually benefit from exchanging knowledge. In addition, a few principals who are not enrolled in either track take the institute as a stand-alone offering for professional development. The Summer Institute is an intensive immersion that includes a series of lectures, workshops, and case studies. Organized around applying leadership in education, applying business problem-solving principles to education challenges, and applying entrepreneurship in the real world of

The curricula for all of the REEP program tracks revolve around the concept of the school principal as a CEO who deploys capital—both human and financial—to meet the needs of the community.

education, the institute is designed to explicitly make connections from business concepts and knowledge to educational contexts. The institute is taught by a combination of national faculty, consultants, and the REEP staff.

CORE COMPETENCIES

The curricula for all of the REEP program tracks revolve around the concept of the school principal as a CEO who deploys capital—both human and financial—to meet the needs of the community. Reflecting this laser-sharp focus, everything that REEP students experience in the program is framed around five core competencies: leading change, leading people, driving results, building coalitions, and building the business. Figure 1 summarizes these competencies, and they will be further illuminated by the priorities, decisions, and actions enacted by the REEP principals who participated in the present study.

Assessing the Impact of REEP

Much is at stake in REEP's effort to rethink the development of school leaders and to launch a program that departs radically from the status quo. While a large monetary investment has been made in the program, an even more important responsibility weighs upon the success of REEP: the responsibility to help students in the greater Houston area achieve academic success and go on to post-secondary education.

Indeed, the need for highly effective leaders is appreciable in the greater Houston area. For reporting and support purposes, seven counties surrounding Houston are grouped together by the Texas Education Agency and designated as Region IV. Roughly the same geographic size as Massachusetts, Region IV serves 50 public school districts and 50 public charter schools that represent more than 1.1 million students, 84,000 educators, and 1,400 campuses (Region IV website).

With the success of so many students at stake, it is vital to critically assess the impact that REEP-trained principals have on their schools. Is REEP helping teachers, students, and schools? To answer this question, we conducted a methodologically rigorous study to ascertain the impact of REEP-trained principals on the schools they lead. Four specific research questions guided the study: (1) What are the priorities that REEP-trained principals address to impact teaching, learning, and school culture; (2) what decisions and actions do they engage in to address these priorities; (3) what degree do these actions and decisions correlate to their REEP experiences; and (4) what are the impacts of these decisions and actions on teaching, learning, and school culture?

PARTICIPANTS

Ninety-eight REEP-trained seated principals lead schools in the greater Houston area that collectively house 97,800 students. For this study, we selected four principals from across Region IV to represent different REEP cohorts, different REEP program tracks, and different levels and types of public schools. Each principal was studied individually over a five-month period in the spring of 2014. Three of the principals were in their first year in their buildings. These leaders were selected to determine how they prioritized campus issues and challenges and to ascertain the immediate impact made by the principals. The fourth principal's first year was a start-up year for the school, so this principal was selected to determine what REEP knowledge and skills could be seen influencing a new school and its stakeholders.

The school titles and participant names in this white paper are pseudonyms. Two of the schools—which we refer to as Verde Elementary and Strong Middle School—are part of a large, urban independent school district in Region IV with over 75,000 students. The other two schools—Robins Elementary and Knight Middle School—are part of a different independent school district in Region IV. See Figure 2 for additional descriptive profiles of the schools.

Qualitative research is the best methodology for this study because the research questions can be answered through the pragmatic analysis of the words and actions of its participants, and in particular, the principals.

METHODOLOGY

The qualitative research methodology used in this study is critical ethnography. Qualitative researchers examine social patterns, subjective experiences, and conditions that influence action and experience, and they pursue these by directly examining the “nature of action, experience, and their conditions as part of the methodological framework” (Carspecken, 1996, p. 26). This study utilizes qualitative methods because of the complex variables found within the interactions and relationships of the members of a learning community. Qualitative research allows for a flexible design, and it gives the researcher the ability to adjust the study and make sense of the data in relation to the actions being observed within its context. Qualitative research, however, has its weaknesses. It is dependent on the researcher's observations, and bias is difficult to control. Also, the reality being observed is observed solely from the perspective of the researcher. Despite these limitations, qualitative research is the best

1. The REEP Core Competencies

LEADING CHANGE

Relies on an understanding of change theory, effective interpersonal communication, innovative strategic thinking, and ethical behavior to enable effective leaders to create and maintain a mission driven school culture that embraces change.

- *Maintains a Sense of Urgency:* Convince the majority of our organization that the status quo is more dangerous than the unknown and then form a powerful guiding coalition to lead the change effort.
- *Vision:* Creates, communicates, and empowers others to act on vision/ values
- Uses Innovation to Problem Solve
- Uses Strategic Thinking to Create Short Term Wins, Consolidate Improvements, Produce More Change
- Institutionalize New Approaches
- Establishes and Maintains Vision and the Culture that Vision Creates

LEADING PEOPLE

An effective leader is followed chiefly because people trust and respect him/her. Followers are naturally drawn to a person who exhibits strength and can inspire belief in others. These qualities tend to produce a charismatic effect.

- Develops, Inspires, and Motivates Self and Others
- Leverages Diversity
- Manages Conflict and Provides Feedback
- Builds High-Performing Teams

BUILDING COALITIONS

Relationship and interpersonal skills are critical for the development of human capital, high quality teams, and effective work within any given community. In addition, establishing a true understanding of how to leverage the community is key to successfully lead and develop others and organizations.

- *Stakeholder Management:* Engages and develops community
- *Partnering and Influencing:* Possesses partnering and influencing skills to leverage impact, including inclusiveness, building relationships, and managing up
- Defines, Maintains, and Communicates School Vision and Mission with Clarity
- Effectively Negotiates to Achieve Desired Results
- Possesses Political Savvy and Can Navigate Effectively

BUILDING THE BUSINESS

An effective leader masters a basic understanding of finance, strategy, communication, management, and ethics, which enhance his/ her ability to manage and influence others toward a common vision. Effective leaders are able to motivate groups of people to act toward a common goal.

- *Human Capital Management:* Manages staff recruitment, retention, and dismissal and drives and manages teacher and student evaluation
- *Operational Management:* Develops operational systems that support the school mission, manages facilities, reporting, district relationships, and legal responsibilities
- *Financial Management:* Manages budgets and finance effectively
- *Technology Management:* Manages and utilizes technology to maximize success

DRIVING RESULTS

An effective leader creates an environment where there is an intentional focus on curriculum and instruction, as well as a culture of data driven decision making all leading to the establishment of conditions that support teachers and ultimately the success of students.

- Uses Data to Drive Teaching and Learning
- *Customer Service:* Great leadership involves serving the organization and the people within it.
- *Decisiveness:* A leader who has the willingness to make decisions, even in the face of complexity or uncertainty.
- Planning and Execution
- Instructional Credibility

methodology for this study because the research questions can be answered through the pragmatic analysis of the words and actions of its participants, and in particular, the principals.

The critical ethnography conducted in this study comprises five stages (see Figure 3). The focus of this white paper is on the explanations and relationships discovered in Stages 4 and 5¹. As an overview, though, Stage 1 involved collecting detailed field notes and digital audio recordings of meetings led by the principals. In total, 17 meetings were silently observed and recorded. Preliminary reconstructive analysis of this data was conducted in Stage 2, from which cultural themes emerged.

These themes were then used to refine the questions and probes for the 29 interviews that were conducted in Stage 3. Principals and educators on their staffs were interviewed individually, and this interview data was analyzed with reconstructive meaning techniques to identify cultural themes. During this process, we

also took special note of evidence and themes that were cross-validated when multiple participants made similar remarks about a particular principal or school.

To minimize bias by asking directly about REEP competencies, the principals and educators were questioned in regard to six attributes of effective principals (see Davis & Darling-Hammond, 2012). Asking about evidence of the competencies themselves could be leading in nature, particularly to the principals who are familiar with them. Also, using the six attributes as part of the interview protocol facilitated responses from participants that would likely have been clouded by the nature of the competencies themselves. They are broad, generalized terms with sets of indicators and would not lend themselves to quality interview questions. Most importantly, however, cross-referencing the six attributes with the five REEP competencies established that the principals' decisions and actions as leaders could be correlated to their REEP experiences (see Figure 4).

¹To see the full case study and its methodology, please contact Lawrence Kohn at lyk1@rice.edu.

REEP PRINCIPAL PROFILE

Crystal Romero-Mueller

Tomball Intermediate, 5th and 6th
Tomball ISD



“Our campus has achieved state assessment distinctions. In our campus comparison group of 40 schools, there are 17 schools achieving the same or higher than TIS and 23 achieving lower than TIS.”

Years as principal at this school: 1

REEP Program:

Business Fellowship Cohort IV

School Demographics 2013-2014:

725 students

38% Free/Reduced Lunch

31% Hispanic

61% White

5% African American

3% Other

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2. Profiles of the Four Case Study Schools

School Characteristics (n=)**	Robins EI (PreK-5)	Verde EI (PreK-5)	Strong MS (6-8)	Knight MS* (5-6)
Enrollment	474	442	975	199
Professional Staff	39	29	61	14
Teachers	30	26	54	11
Professional Support	7	2	3	1
Campus Administrators	2	1	4	2
Years Principal at School	1	1	1	2
Education Aides	7	2	4	0
Teachers by Ethnicity and Gender**				
African American	1	5	23	2
Hispanic	2	10	13	4
White	27	9	13	5
Asian	0	2	3	0
Two or More Races	0	0	1	0
Male	0	5	18	4
Female	31	21	36	7
School Demographics (%)**				
Economically Disadvantaged	36.9	96	89.1	93
African American	16.0	1.4	8.8	4
Hispanic	22.2	97.7	88.3	92
White	51.7	0.5	2.3	3
American Indian	0.2	0.2	0.1	0
Asian	5.3	0.0	0.1	1
Pacific Islander	0.4	0.0	0.0	0
Two or More Races	4.2	0.2	0.4	0
2013 Accountability Rating**	Met Standard	Improvement Required	Met Standard	N/A

*Knight MS is in its second year of existence and has no accountability rating yet.

**All data from the 2013 Texas Academic Performance Reports

3. Methodological Stages of Critical Ethnography

	Description	Researcher Actions
STAGE 1 Compile the primary record through the collection of monological data.	Includes note taking, audio recording, observing and is “monological”; researcher is an uninvolved observer.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Silent observer in collaborative meetings • Observes the principal lead collaborative structures • Compiles a “thick record” of detailed notes • Records meetings digitally and transcribes
STAGE 2 Preliminary reconstructive analysis performed.	Analysis of the primary record from Stage 1; involves techniques to reconstruct what has been seen and heard; cultural themes formed	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Performs Meaning Reconstructions • Performs pragmatic horizon analyses
STAGE 3 Dialogical data gathering performed.	Interviewing of participants; the researcher engages in dialogue via prepared questions to help answer research questions	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Uses the deconstructions from stage 2 • Creates a set of predetermined interview questions to collect data
STAGE 4 Discover system relations	This stage involves analyzing the relationships of the studied sites to each other	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Conducts cross-case analysis
STAGE 5 Discover explanations for the system relations	Using a high degree of inference, the researcher explains what was discovered in the previous stages via system theories.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Explanation of findings

4. REEP Competencies Cross Referenced with the Six Critical Attributes of Effective Principals

	Influence teacher feelings of efficacy, motivation, and satisfaction	Establish the organizational and cultural conditions that foster a positive environment for teaching and learning	Promote professional collaboration	Promote and support the instructional abilities and professional development of teachers	Focus resources and organizational systems toward the development, support, and assessment of teaching and learning	Enlist the involvement and support of parents and community stakeholders
Leading Change	X	X		X		X
Leading People	X		X	X	X	
Driving Results		X	X	X	X	
Building Coalitions	X	X	X			X
Building the Business	X	X			X	X

Adapted from Davis, S. H. & Darling-Hammond, L. (2012). Innovative principal preparation programs: What works and how we know. *Planning and Changing*, 43, 25–45.

REEP PRINCIPAL PROFILE

Susan Brenz

Yeager Elementary, PK-5th
Cypress Fairbanks ISD



“As a result of the total program, I feel confident that I can alter my leadership approach (pushing, pulling, lifting, and directing) to match the needs of the staff or school.”

Years as principal at this school: 7

REEP Program:

Business Fellowship Cohort IV

School Demographics 2013-2014:

1053 students

53% Free/Reduced Lunch

53% Hispanic

27% White

13% African American

6% Asian

2% 2+ Races

1% Native American

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While many studies focus solely on achievement data to show impact, analyzing the six critical attributes of effective principals in relationship to the REEP competencies allowed for a high degree of inference about the actions and outcomes of the REEP-trained principals. Furthermore, by establishing this relationship, specific REEP tools and skills used by the principals in their school settings were teased out, and we gained a more vivid picture of the impact that these principals have had on their schools.

Lastly, from all of the data and analysis in Stages 1, 2, and 3, the themes that consequently emerged became the focal point for the last two stages of the research. By making connections among the data gathered across the four schools, Stages 4 and 5 provide the mainstay of the evidence in support of REEP's impact. The following section presents findings of the cross-case analysis conducted in Stages 4 and 5 to reveal the positive impact of each of the five REEP competencies on the principals, teachers, students, and schools.

Evidence of the Impact of REEP

We conducted a cross-case analysis to compare and contrast the ethnographic data collected for each of the individual case studies. This research method allowed us to increase our knowledge beyond a single case and to discover overall new meanings that would not be revealed by examining each principal individually. Cross-case analysis illustrated new relationships among the data and also led to new questions and new areas for investigation. This research method allowed us to describe in greater detail the blend of factors that led to the outcomes and impacts of REEP-trained principals and to explain why one case was different or similar to others. Further, cross-case analysis allowed us to compare cases from four different school contexts.

THE REEP COMPETENCIES AT WORK

The ethnographic data that we collected and analyzed from the observations and interviews revealed that the

priorities, decisions, and actions of these principals align with their leadership development experiences in REEP. By cross-referencing the attributes of effective principals with the REEP competencies (as described previously) and then analyzing the data across cases, we discovered similarities and differences among all four cases. The data provides evidence that the principals practice all five REEP competencies in each school, but how, why, and to what degree varies by case. Considering that over 600 pages of detailed ethnographic data support this finding, we will focus on several exemplars to describe the evidence of REEP's impact as it aligns with each of the core competencies. Within the discussion of each competency, we will also highlight specific REEP tools and skills that the principals drew upon while leading their schools. Lastly, we will look at the overall impacts of the principals' REEP-influenced leadership on their schools. These broad impacts and outcomes are driven by a synthesis of the principals' competencies across all five REEP areas. A complete report of the research is available from the author.

LEADING CHANGE

A key component of the REEP competency of leading change is the ability to develop and maintain a mission-driven school culture that embraces change. Creating and communicating a clear vision, while empowering others to act on the vision, drives such a culture. Our cross-case analysis of the data revealed that two of the attributes of effective principals that align with this REEP competency were the most prevalent across all of the cases. Of these, the attribute of establish the organizational and cultural conditions that foster a positive environment for learning and teaching is intuitively most closely aligned with the competency of leading change. Indeed, the data are ripe with evidence that all of the REEP-trained principals made school culture a priority.

The principals' decisions and actions related to school culture, though, varied depending on school context. For example, Robins Elementary and Knight Middle School, unlike Verde Elementary and Strong Middle School, both had existing stable school cultures with satisfied teachers. In the case of Robins, even though a positive culture already existed, the principal improved the culture by using the entry plan methodology that she learned during her REEP training. An entry plan is a tool that all REEP participants learn. It focuses on teaching a principal how to enter a new school, or how to re-enter the school the following year, by gathering input and feedback from the educators in the school as opposed to making assumptions or creating chaos and stress via unnecessary change. The Robins principal engaged every member of the school in the entry plan process in the fall of 2013, and she shared the results of the entry plan with the entire faculty as well as with the parents on the campus improvement team.

The school climate at Robins improved by way of the impact the entry plan had on people. In particular, the data indicates that the teachers relaxed and became more open. Indeed, a clear pattern of positive satisfaction and a positive environment prevail in the data collected at Robins. As a result of using the entry plan, the principal learned about her new school, the insights and ideas her teachers had, and who they were as people and educators. This helped her forge a plan that a collective learning organization could implement. The plan allowed her to see the strengths of the school and areas where she and her faculty could improve the school. The sense of ownership and cooperation this methodology created resulted in a positive school climate.

Indeed, the entry plan taught in REEP had a profound and measurable impact on this school's climate. Robins is part of a school district that employs an external measurement called Tripod. These survey assessments capture critical aspects of school life and teaching practice as students experience them. Robins not only had higher results than the district mean in six of seven indicators, they improved in all seven indicators. In fact, Robins had the highest year-to-year change in the entire district of 49 schools. The biggest change the school itself encountered was new leadership, and the principal's development and use of her entry plan likely correlates to these results.

In the case of Verde Elementary, the principal faced a very different school climate. He entered a school that the state labeled "Needs Improvement" because of low performance on the state-mandated tests. This was also a school with a broken culture. The previous principal, who retired in 2013, simply let the school drift for years. She was not visible and provided little direction for the school. Some teachers reported being scared to come into the building, and they noted that they would have left the school if she returned.

Upon his arrival, the REEP-trained principal met with all of the teachers, sized up his new school, and quickly recognized the broken culture, lack of direction, and disengaged faculty that was not instructional-sound. The principal worked diligently to change the school culture and climate, largely by partnering with the teachers to create a mission, vision, and set of school values, all of which clearly permeated the school. He promoted a "no excuses" culture that was driven by the new Verde Rams school logo featuring the school's core values (see Figure 5).

He also helped to create the Verde Pledge, which students recite daily after the Pledge of Allegiance and the Pledge to the Texas Flag (see Figure 6). The data reveals that teachers feel a sense of direction and a sense of urgency to perform better for the students, and that the students can often be heard discussing the schools values.

The data also reveal that the principal at Verde relied heavily on the REEP network and the resources he gained through REEP to begin moving Verde in the right direction. Although he indicated that he reads REEP material

5. Verde Rams School Logo



6. The Verde Pledge

R.E.A.C.H

Give me an R.....R

What do we want?Respect

Give me an E.....E

What do we need?.....Enthusiasm

Give me an A.....A

What are we going to do?Achieve

Give me a C.....C

What do we have?.....Citizenship

Give me an H.....H

What do we expect?.....Hard Team Work

R.A.M.S

Reach for Success

and uses the programs' resources, he gives the most credit for his ability to improve Verde to the conversations with his fellow REEP principals and REEP staff. He, like the principal at Robins, feels highly supported and knows he can get input, advice, and help at any time. This level of confidence shows as he plans for greater improvement in 2014-2015. He has an established mission, vision, and set of values for the school. Teachers see and feel the improvements in themselves and the school, and he will have an assistant principal and eight new teachers next school year.

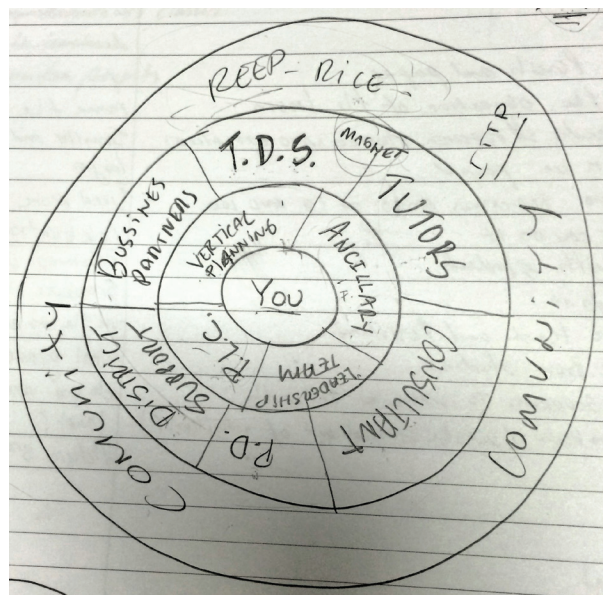
LEADING PEOPLE

A key attribute of effective principals that correlates with the REEP competency of leading people is the ability to influence teacher feelings of efficacy, motivation, and satisfaction. Our cross-case analysis revealed that this attribute, along with the previously discussed attribute related to culture, was one of the most prevalent across all of the cases. As such, the data were again ripe with evidence that all of the REEP-trained principals made leading people a priority.

While some actions related to building culture are also relevant to leading people, such as providing a clear

vision and valuing the input of others, the data reveal several decisions and actions of the REEP-trained principals that are especially salient to school leadership. The decisions and actions of the principal at Strong Middle School, for example, clearly demonstrate her competency to lead people. Like the principal at Verde, the principal at Strong faced a school with many dissatisfied teachers. The school was considered unsafe by several teachers, since students were not in class on time and many fights occurred. The principal at Strong acted strategically with her personnel to help improve the school. First, she quickly identified two camps of teachers in her school. One was a camp of teachers who were aligned with her vision and on-board with the work that would be required to realize it. The other camp was a status quo group of teachers who were not interested in the vision or changing the way things were done at Strong. The principal lost six teachers after the first semester, and two were from the latter camp. The other four left due to family emergencies and to enter the private sector. She could not find adequate replacement teachers, so she chose to use hourly

7. Teacher Support Resources at Verde



hires in the classrooms rather than hire six inadequate teachers who she would have to onboard and most likely support the next year. Furthermore, she strategically focused her efforts on the teachers in the first camp. These teachers described her as trustworthy, supportive, transparent, open, change-oriented, and resourceful. The principal deliberately paid attention to, praised, and supported the teachers that she wanted to keep, and she had candid conversations and interactions with those who eventually resigned at the end of the year. In so doing, she built a cadre of strong, supportive teachers and hired new, effective teachers who were aligned with her vision.

Furthermore, the principal at Strong clearly articulated how her REEP MBA helped her to lead the teachers in her school. She credited the transparency with which she interacted with people to the courses she took at REEP in organizational behavior and crisis management. This skill set helped her institute change in the school that resulted in building a coalition of motivated and satisfied teachers. It also taught her to be honest with those who would have to leave. Further, her REEP Summer Institute experience taught her how to alter her leadership style based on context. She also noted that the authentic role-playing in which she participated at REEP helped her in many of the situations in which she found herself as a principal. Claiming not to possess these skills inherently, the principal at Strong credits REEP with teaching her how to listen and gather input from the people she leads, and not to think that she has all the answers.

Another key attribute that contributes to leadership is promoting and supporting the instructional abilities and professional development of teachers. The cross-case analysis revealed that this attribute was not prevalent in all of the cases, but it was particularly evidenced in the cases of Verde and Knight. The principal at Verde, for example, developed his teachers as an instructional

REEP PRINCIPAL PROFILE

Gillian Quinn-Pineda

KIPP Northeast College Preparatory,
9th–10th



“REEP taught me to think beyond what other schools do and build a school that is responsive to our students’ needs.”

Years as principal at this school: 1

REEP Program:

MBA Cohort II

School Demographics 2013-2014:

120 students (adding a new grade in the next two years)

90% Free/Reduced Lunch

33% Hispanic

67% African American

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leader. That is, he did not simply lead meetings, but he made them into positive interactive lessons for his teachers. The data reveal his relentless focus on helping his teachers improve their teaching through these interactive lessons, in addition to helping them understand the complexities of the state's student assessment testing. He also brought in an external consultant to help teachers improve their instruction. The data from the interviews with teachers at Verde provide further evidence that professional development is a priority for this principal. He regularly emails teachers about relevant training opportunities, and he makes a point of asking teachers what they need and how he can support them. In fact, he drew a diagram all of the levels of support that his teachers have available to them (see Figure 7).

The principal placed the teacher in the center of the circle, campus resources in the next circle, district resources in the next circle, and external resources outside the campus and district in the outer circle. Notice that he included REEP in the outer circle, emphasizing the importance that the principal places on REEP in supporting his work.

BUILDING COALITIONS

The interpersonal skills needed to develop and maintain relationships are critical for the development of human capital, high quality teams, and effectiveness within any given community. In addition, understanding how to leverage the community is key to successfully leading

and developing people and organizations. The core REEP competency of building coalitions reflects the vital role that these skills and abilities play in effective school leadership.

Recall that the two attributes of effective principals that we discovered to be the most prevalent across the cases were influence teaching efficacy and establish a positive culture, evidence for both of which we have previously described in relation to their correlated REEP competencies. Also recall from Figure 4 that these same two prevalent attributes are closely aligned with the REEP competency of building coalitions. As such, the evidence of those attributes also provides clear indication that the decisions and actions of all of the principals were influenced, to varying extents, by their focus on the interpersonal skills and sense of shared vision that are required to build successful coalitions.

One attribute of effective principals, though, that is correlated with this REEP competency but not shared with the previously discussed competencies is enlist the involvement and support of parents and community stakeholders. Analysis of the data yielded evidence of this attribute in the decisions and actions of the principals. Although this attribute was not as prevalent in the data as the others, the principals at all of the schools engaged the community and enlisted help from parents to varying extents. The Verde principal, for example, hosted a series of well-attended parent social nights, and he plans to involve parents more next year to support instruction. The Knight principal does home visits, and parents are active and often inside the school. The Strong

principal appointed a parent/community liaison who has brought more parents into the fold. Relatedly, the principal explained in her interview for this study that she can now write more concise and informative letters and emails to parents and faculty than she could prior to attaining her REEP MBA. In particular, she lauded the communication classes in the program, which taught her to carefully plan how and when to communicate, as well as to deeply consider her audience.

Perhaps the most compelling evidence of coalition building, though, was at Robins. The PTA at the school had a reputation as being powerful and getting what they wanted in terms of school time and events. After analyzing all the events the PTA had created over the years, the principal determined that much of what was being offered was diminishing instructional time. Her desire for students to do better academically drove her to work with the strong parent group to help them realize the importance of instructional time and to recognize that it was being compromised by too many “fun” events. Parents with successful or struggling students listened and agreed to protect instructional time. Importantly, the principal’s description of her actions was validated by the observations of the teachers we interviewed, some of whom mentioned that the principal was protecting their instructional time from parents who could be pushy. By making coalition building a priority, the principal at Strong evidenced the influence of her participation in REEP.

BUILDING THE BUSINESS

Several of the attributes that we discovered contribute to the competencies discussed thus far also feed into the core REEP competency of building the business (see Figure 4). An effective school leader should understand finance, strategy, communication, management, and ethics, all of which facilitate managing, motivating, and influencing others toward a common vision. A key indicator that a leader is attentive to building the business of the school is a focus on effective human capital management. Indeed, our cross-case analysis of the data revealed that the most prevalent attributes enacted by the REEP-trained principals related to a focus on increasing teacher efficacy, motivation, and satisfaction, as well as a focus on building positive, mission-driven cultures conducive to teaching. A commonality among all of the cases was the supportiveness and appreciation that the principals displayed toward their teaching staffs. The explicit focus on mission and vision evidenced at Verde and Knight further indicates the priority of these principals to build the business of their schools.

We did not, though, find mention of the skills and knowledge related to the specific content areas of this competency (e.g., finance and business ethics) to be prevalent in the data. Perhaps the principals viewed these skills as tools, or as means to an end. For example, when the skills enabled the principals to achieve bigger

picture goals, the skills were explicitly mentioned by the participants. Recall the principal at Strong who credited her REEP communication courses for her ability to communicate more effectively with parents and teachers. The principal at Knight credited his REEP finance and accounting courses for his ability to confidently conduct the school’s business. He also credited his REEP marketing classes for his ability to “sell” the school to families, in addition to crediting his REEP strategy courses for his problem-solving skills. Overall, the data indicate that the REEP principals enact the competency of building the business through their focus on human capital management, culture, and shared vision, as well as through the application of specific business skills gained from their REEP coursework.

DRIVING RESULTS

The fifth and final REEP competency—driving results—empowers school leaders to create a culture of data-driven decision-making that supports teachers and, ultimately, promotes the success of students. Our analysis found evidence that all four of the principals leveraged data in their decision-making. Further, they encouraged their teachers to do so as well.

Perhaps the most striking evidence of the enactment of this REEP competency is found at Verde Elementary. The principal of this school regarded data-driven decision-making to be of such import that he included the terms in both the school’s mission statement as well as its values statement:

Mission Statement: Within a NO excuses culture, Verde Elementary creates master readers, creative thinkers, and college-driven scholars through purposeful instruction, data-driven decision-making, and relentless team work.

Values Statement: Verde Elementary defines purpose through actions, and our actions define excellence. With an intensive focus on the acquisition of essential knowledge and skills and a NO excuses attitude, Verde Elementary provides daily opportunities for all scholars to engage in purposeful instruction, for educators to make timely data-driven decisions, and for all stakeholders to participate in the process of preparing our scholars for college, so that mastery at Verde is not an isolated action, but an unceasing HABIT.

Moreover, the Verde principal demonstrated a focus on data through his actions. In weekly Professional Learning Community (PLC) meetings with his teachers, for example, the principal taught the teachers how to analyze and use test data to inform their instruction. In one PLC meeting, he spent 30 minutes teaching a team of teachers about the four indices of a state student

assessment test: passing rate, growth, performance at high levels, and college readiness. The principal continued this interactive lesson until he was certain the team not only understood how the system worked, but they also knew how to analyze specific students and their levels of performance in order to do help them do well on the test. A particularly notable feature of these meetings, references to which recurred in the data, was the “data wall” that the principal instituted to as a focal point in the meeting room.

The monological and dialogical data collected to study the other REEP principals yielded evidence that they, too, were focused on creating data-driven cultures within their schools. Recall that the principal at Robins, for example, drew upon the entry plan methodology she learned in her REEP training. A critical attribute of this methodology is its emphasis on the collection and analysis of data. In a meeting to share the results of her entry plan, the principal asked staff and faculty to self-select into groups to look at the data in relation to students. The principal did not join a group, but rather, she visited each group to help clarify and answer questions when needed. In doing so, she encouraged them to analyze the data for themselves and to make suggestions for school improvement. Not only was her own decision-making driven by data, but she also encouraged a culture of decision-making within her team as well.

Similarly, the principal at Strong relied upon data to decide upon her priorities. In 2011-2012, Strong had a 95.69% attendance rate, which slipped to 95.50% in 2012-2013. Recognizing the problem from this data, the principal made it a priority to improve attendance when she entered her role at the school. To address the issue, she led dropout committee meetings, that focused on attendance. The committee included the attendance clerk, truancy officer, counselor, family and student engagement coordinator, truancy case manager, and an assistant principal. These meetings were data-driven, using several reports to identify students with attendance issues. The committee scoured the reports and decided which students to monitor and how to improve the school’s procedures and processes related to attendance issues. The end-of-year data showed an improvement in attendance of .12%, which is substantial considering that the aggregated data for attendance across the entire district revealed a 1% drop in middle school attendance.

At Knight Middle School, the principal also relied on data to help him support his teachers. In weekly One-on-One, or O3, meetings, the principal and his assistant principal meet with the teachers. In one of the meetings observed for this study, the school leader studied assessment data closely and offered the teacher feedback on themes he saw in the data in an effort to help him teach more effectively. The principal also reviewed a record, called an O3 template, which he used to track teachers’ progress on professional and personal goals.

In addition, all of the principals were understandably concerned with the data provided by state assessments of both school and student performance. The data also provides measurable evidence of an important broad impact that these REEP-trained principals have had on

their schools, teachers, and students. The next section highlights further evidence that the five core competency areas of REEP are indeed preparing its participants to be effective school leaders.

Broad Impacts of REEP-trained Principals

Although causality cannot be determined conclusively from the ethnographic data collected in this study, the quantitative data provided by state assessments of students and school performance provide a measure of the broad impact that the principals have had on their schools. Aside from the previously identified impacts related to specific REEP competencies, the broad impacts on student and school performance most likely result from the confluence of all five REEP competencies.

In Texas, all students in grades 3 through 8 take the State of Texas Assessments of Academic Readiness (STARR) test. It emphasizes “readiness” standards, which are the knowledge and skills that are considered most important for success in the grade or course subject that follows and for college and career. Robins Elementary showed significant growth from 2013 to 2014 in 14 of 16 measurements on STAAR.

Also, Robins is part of a school district that employs an external measurement called Tripod. These survey assessments capture critical aspects of school life and teaching practice as students experience them. The survey results provide valuable feedback and insights concerning classroom-learning conditions. The Tripod survey used by the district looks at seven key indicators known as the 7Cs: caring about students, challenging behavior, controlling lessons, clarifying students, captivating students, conferring with students, and consolidating knowledge. Robins not only had higher results than the district mean in six of seven indicators (see Figure 8), they improved in all seven indicators. In fact, Robins had the highest year-to-year change in the entire district of 49 schools. The biggest change the school itself encountered was new leadership, and the

REEP PRINCIPAL PROFILE

Dario Violta

Pugh Elementary, PK-5th
Houston ISD



“The concept of Distributed Leadership sessions by James Spillane made a big difference in developing a culture of routines led by different staff members. Due to the improvement of the culture of the school, we were able to decrease the number of discipline suspensions from 49 to 2.”

Years as principal at this school: 1

REEP Program:

Business Fellowship Cohort I

School Demographics 2013-2014:

440 students

98% Free/Reduced Lunch

98% Hispanic

2% Other

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principal's development and use of her entry plan likely correlates to these results.

In the case of Strong Middle School, recall that the principal entered a toxic school culture and lost several teachers mid-year who were not on-board with her plans for improvement. Surprisingly, the Strong Middle School did not lose much traction in terms of state mandated test scores, and in some areas improved. Deficits were to be expected in some areas due to the teacher turnover from the first semester, in addition to being short an assistant principal for the majority of the school year. When STARR reading scores for 2013 and 2014 are examined by cohort year over year, gains are seen in students from 7th to 8th grade, while a loss is seen in math scores from 6th to 7th, but a substantial gain from 7th to 8th. However, there are losses in same-grade scores in 8th grade social studies, writing, science and Algebra 1.

As a charter school within a host school, Knight Middle School draws the majority of its students from the middle school in which it is housed. It is therefore meaningful to compare Knight's STAAR scores with those of its host school. This comparison reveals that Knight outperformed the host school in every category of STAAR measured for similar grades. Knight had 11% more students pass the reading test and 22% more pass the math test than the host school. Although both schools decreased in science scores, Knight notably decreased 7% less than the host school.

Knight also uses the Measures of Academic Progress (MAP) assessment to gauge student progress. MAP is provided by the Northwest Evaluation Association (see www.nwea.org) and is a widely used norm-referenced test in the United States. Figures 9 (5th grade MAP) and 10 (6th grade MAP) indicate whether or not the students met their "magnitude of growth," which is a multiple of

the "typical" annual growth calculated by the NWEA MAP assessment.

The green columns in Figures 9 and 10 indicate that on average, the students in the indicated quartiles met their magnitude of growth. So, in 6th grade in all subjects, the bottom quartile, on average, met magnitude of growth in all subjects. These are strong results for Knight, as the impact the school is having on its most experienced students, sixth grade, is evident. The fifth grade results from fall to spring are highly encouraging as well.

Finally, recall that Verde Elementary was labeled as "Improvement Required" by the Texas Education Agency Accountability Rating System due to low STAAR scores for the year. The no excuses culture nurtured by the Verde principal, however, produced strong results of achievement on the state test. Verde is no longer an "Improvement Required" school; it has now "Met Standard." Figure 11 details the difference in Verde's STAAR scores from 2013 to 2014.

The reading and math scores for third grade bilingual students dropped because the principal was unable to find any certified teachers for these classrooms. However, if cohort data are analyzed from 3rd grade to 4th grade and 4th grade to 5th grade, some impressive increases in passing rates are noted. Though not a cohort comparison, the 2014 students in 5th grade writing had a 13% increase in writing and science, and they had a 15% higher rate of passing than last year's 5th grade. The no excuses mission, increasingly positive culture, professionally developed and motivated teachers, and an increasingly active and supportive community driven by a REEP-trained principal made these gains possible. Verde will continue its no excuses mission in 2014–2015, with more improvement expected.

8. Robins Elementary: Tripod Survey Results

Levels of student engagement in the 7C's and composite	District	Robins 2013	Robins 2014
Caring about students	83%	82%	87%
Challenging behavior	77%	78%	81%
Controlling lessons	56%	52%	57%
Clarifying students	82%	79%	85%
Captivating students	64%	51%	56%
Conferring with students	61%	63%	65%
Consolidating knowledge	70%	65%	72%
Composite	71%	67%	72%

9. Knight Middle School: Comparison to Goals for 5th Grade MAP¹

MAP Growth	Actual <25%	Goal <25%	Actual 25-49%	Goal 25-49%	Actual 50-74%	Goal 50-74%	Actual >74%	Goal >74%
Math	1.65	2.00	1.78	2.00	1.39	1.75	1.38	1.75
Reading	1.52	3.00	1.41	1.75	.96	2.00	1.06	1.75
Language	1.54	2.00	.92	2.00	.65	1.5	.36	1.5
Science	2.60	2.75	2.50	2.25	1.99	1.75	2.03	1.75

10. Knight Middle School: Comparison to Goals for 6th Grade MAP¹

MAP Growth	Actual <25%	Goal <25%	Actual 25-49%	Goal 25-49%	Actual 50-74%	Goal 50-74%	Actual >74%	Goal >74%
Math	2.47	2.00	1.87	2.00	1.72	1.75	1.24	1.75
Reading	3.15	3.00	1.39	1.75	1.88	2.00	.72	1.75
Language	2.20	2.00	1.05	2.00	1.39	1.5	1.07	1.5
Science	2.69	2.75	2.38	2.25	2.83	1.75	1.62	1.75

¹Goals listed are school created. Color-coding indicates whether scores surpassed the charter foundation goals (green), met 1-year growth (yellow), or did not meet 1 year (red). All scores are fall to spring.

11. Verde Elementary: Passing Rates on STAAR Test Results from 2013 to 2014

Grade	Subject	2013 Scores	2014 Scores	Gain from 2013 to 2014 by Cohort
3	Reading Bilingual	95	63 ²	NA
3	Math Bilingual	90	57 ²	NA
3	Reading	63	58	NA
4	Reading	69	68	8% gain
5	Reading	61	88	28% gain
3	Math	38	56	NA
4	Math	33	62	63% gain
5	Math	46	82	148% gain
4	Writing	63	76	NA
5	Science	64	79	NA



²These students did not have a certified teacher the entire school year.

Conclusion

This study provides direct evidence that REEP-trained principals are applying what they learned from their collective REEP experiences. Each case studied produced evidence that principals are applying their learning as correlated with all five REEP competencies. Importantly, this applied learning was not part of the principals' knowledge and skills prior to entering REEP. The evidence also indicates that by applying what was learned via REEP, the principals have made positive impacts on school culture, teaching, and learning.

Of particular note, our cross-case analysis suggests that the pathway to making a positive impact on schools is paved foremost by influencing teacher efficacy, motivation, and satisfaction, as well as by establishing positive school environments and cultures. All of the principals

demonstrated these attributes well beyond any of the other four attributes of effective principals. Each principal recognized that in order to focus on teaching and learning, the school must have efficacious, motivated, and satisfied teachers working within positive school cultures. Teachers who are not efficacious cannot optimize learning experiences for their students and are quite possibly ineffective. Building efficacy and motivation and the ability to create a positive school environment directly align with all five REEP competencies. In sum, the data and analysis indicate that in order to change, improve, or transform a school, a leader must know how to impact the efficacy, motivation, and satisfaction of the teachers, which is systemically related to building a positive school environment and school culture.

While REEP principals gain these skills via programming, it can be inferred that they seek and gain the support offered through the network of principals and the REEP staff. This support is most often needed once they enter a school for the first time or take over a challenging school. Such support involves providing technical assistance, coaching, and thought partnership for the principals who need it. As evidenced in two of the cases, the REEP network and staff were primary resources

that the principals relied upon to move their schools forward. Indeed, this network of like-minded principals and on-going support from REEP are two of the unique

features that sets REEP apart from other highly regarded principal preparation programs.

Houston Endowment has invested \$16 million dollars to create principals who can not only lead effectively but who can also lead and turn around the most challenging schools in the Region IV area. These principals are incredibly essential to the success of the schools they serve and the students who attend them. As demographics continue to change in Region IV, the challenge of leading schools will become more complex. With the support of Houston Endowment and Raise Your Hand Texas, REEP will continue to be a driving force to meet and conquer these challenges.

This study provides empirical evidence that the investment is paying off for the 2000 students served by the principals at Robins, Verde, Strong, and Knight. Across the Region IV area, six cohorts of REEP-trained principals (98 seated principals) are currently serving 97,800 students. By the eighth REEP cohort, 160 principals will serve 156,000 students. That works out to an investment of about \$100 per student—or the cost of one textbook or a decent calculator. We estimate this investment falls to nearly \$50.00 per student as a new cohort of students is added yearly to each school and exposed to the skills and talents of these principals. With principals trained as CEOs, the future seems promising for the Region IV area. Indeed, REEP's "new level of thinking" is helping to solve the problems and challenges faced by today's schools that most traditional education leadership preparation programs are not.

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REEP PRINCIPAL PROFILE

Tiffany M. Chenier

McNamara Elementary, PK-5th
Houston ISD



“Our English Language Learners (ELLs) had significant gains on STAAR Reading (+14%), Math (+13%), Writing (+34%) and Science (+25%).”

Years as principal at this school: 8
REEP Program:

Business Fellowship Cohort V

School Demographics 2013-2014:

870 students

98% Free/Reduced Lunch

79% Hispanic

17% African American

3% White

1% Asian

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