

**EDUCATIONAL** *Leadership*  
*for a* **NEW ERA**

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**RICE**  
**REEP**

**RICE UNIVERSITY**  
EDUCATION ENTREPRENEURSHIP PROGRAM



## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Over the past decade, a number of remarkable organizations have cropped up that dramatically shape 21st century education reform. Groups like Teach For America (TFA), New Leaders for New Schools, The New Teacher Project, Teach Plus, and the Broad Superintendents Academy have helped reshape notions of how to recruit, prepare, and retain educators and educational leaders. Joining this influx of groundbreaking, reform-minded organizations is Rice University's Education Entrepreneurship Program (REEP), housed at the Jesse H. Jones Graduate School of Business at Rice University.

REEP offers a sharp and significant break with past practice. Rice University is the first institution in the nation to permit aspiring principals to receive a state certification to serve as a school leader through a business school. REEP allows full-time teachers and administrators to pursue either a two-year MBA via the MBA for Professionals track at Rice or a one-year fellowship via the Jones School's Executive Education training program. In addition, REEP's annual Summer Institute works to apply management insights to the field of education for both MBA and fellowship students.

With the graduation of the third cohort in May 2012, REEP will have 89 alumni and 44 current students representing 15 districts and two charters. Thus, now is a good time to cast an eye back on the REEP experience. The authors have identified several key advantages, challenges and lessons learned:

### ADVANTAGES

- *Fresh opportunity to build an innovative program.* Unlike most ed school-business school partnerships, which inevitably draw upon the faculty and programs already in place, Rice was able to build a unique education leadership training program from scratch. This opportunity to start fresh meant that REEP could use the expertise of the Jones School without worrying about stepping on the toes of an ed school or having to use education faculty.
- *Ability to leverage management expertise.* The initial REEP proposal explicitly argued that running schools and school systems has much in common with running a business. "The leadership challenge for education in the Houston area is on the same scale as the management and leadership requirements for corporations such as ExxonMobil and GE."

- *Explicit focus on preparing both district and charter leaders.* REEP explicitly set forth to be a program that would recruit from and prepare leaders for roles in both sectors, seeking also to deepen ties and share learning across the divide.
- *A chance to cultivate the local talent pool.* Unlike education leadership programs with a more national focus, REEP was designed to cultivate the talent pool in one community. REEP's design is intended to offer an alluring new path to potential leaders, to keep those talented leaders in the local ecosystem, to forge new ties across districts and across the district and charter sectors, and to infuse local leadership with thinking and networks that stretch beyond the narrow world of K-12.
- *Opportunity to cherry-pick a national faculty.* One of the advantages of the REEP Summer Institute is that it permits REEP to draw upon leading education thinkers, pay them well for a limited period of adjunct instruction, and thereby avoid the costs and obligations of trying to build an entire education faculty.

### CHALLENGES

- *Squeezing a different approach into a self-assured field.* A key tension for programs like REEP is the attempt to pioneer a new direction in leadership training while having to comply with state-level guidelines that presuppose a particular approach to training school leaders. These "correct" approaches to K-12 leadership imply certainty on questions that most non-K-12 authorities in management and leadership regard as uncertain.
- *Structural and logistical challenges.* Getting REEP started entailed a number of logistical challenges. These included recruiting students, generating faculty interest in the Jones School, building a faculty for the Summer Institute, and negotiating relationships with Rice, districts and other key players.
- *Financial sustainability.* The program requires a hefty philanthropic subsidy to work as it is currently formulated. Unless they design a different financial model, would-be imitators must look for a similarly deep-pocketed and patient investor.

- *Serving both aspiring leaders and seated principals.* Students, staff and alumni all point to the difficulties of designing instruction so that it meets the needs of both potential leaders and sitting principals. They have different needs and reference points and are equipped to make sense of different content.

- *Concerns in business school about student qualifications.* Jones faculty had predictable concerns about whether applicants would be suitable. Part of the deal with both Houston Endowment and Rice was the agreement that there would be no compromising on student quality.

- *Structural impediments to recruiting.* These include difficulty in recruiting students, how thorny the state-to-state transfer of teachers and licensure really is in schooling, and the fact that teachers with five to seven years of experience—those roughly in REEP’s sweet spot—have often started to work on a master’s degree and don’t want to lose those credits to start a new program.

- *Need to limit K-12 cohort size to avoid occupation overload.* Since the MBA for Professionals program was limited to only 100 to 120 students per class, the Jones School had to take care that the REEP cohort didn’t overwhelm the rest of the program with a flood of new students from one profession. Practically speaking, this means that there’s a “ceiling” of about ten to fifteen students per year in the REEP MBA program.

- *Can leaders use what they’re learning?* Business schools often operate under the assumption that leaders have a substantial ability to reallocate time, staff and dollars and to remake routines. However, in K-12, leaders often operate in highly constrained environments.

## LESSONS LEARNED

- *A place like Rice has to be willing to take a risk.* A number of key players in REEP’s founding emphasized the importance of Rice University being willing to sign on to a new, bold idea, highlighting the commitment made by Rice.

- *The need for a funder that can write big checks and take the long view.* Training a small number of entrepreneurial school leaders to have a high-leverage impact is an inherently risky and long-term bet. Unlike Teach For America, whose corps

members have an immediate impact, waiting for educators to become school leaders and then start to exert their influence may take several years.

- *Influentials committed to the effort.* Inside and outside of Rice, REEP enjoyed advocates who helped it clear logistical hurdles, secure funds, develop local relationships, and recruit students and a national faculty. Equally critical was support from the Jones School. On the outside, REEP’s advisory board included key contacts in leadership roles in local school districts, in high-profile charter management organizations, and at Teach For America. This helped with visibility, coordination and recruitment.

- *Importance of the Jones School brand.* Housing REEP in the Jones School was deemed essential by all of the effort’s champions because of the rigor of the degree, the clout of the Jones School brand, and the portability of an MBA.

- *Doubts about whether REEP could be launched at an institution with an education school.* Those involved in launching REEP repeatedly expressed skepticism that they could have built it at Rice if an education school had been in place. Those who had dealt with other local schools of education spoke of the frustrations of having to negotiate ways to ensure that new programs didn’t step on the toes of established programs or faculty members. Rethinking the assumptions of how to train school leaders was thought to be possible only when working on a fresh slate.

- *Context matters.* In the end, the cordial relations in Houston between school districts and charter schools, and the respected position of Rice and Houston Endowment, meant that REEP was able to draw upon the efforts of diverse talent and to answer the needs of an array of clients.

- *The Summer Institute and Business Fellowship tracks are expandable.* While there is a hard ceiling on the number of REEP MBA students that Jones can produce, the constraints on the Summer Institute and the Business Fellowship tracks are much less certain and can expand accordingly.

# EDUCATIONAL *Leadership*

## *for a* **NEW ERA**



The Rice University Education Entrepreneurship Program (REEP) is one of the many remarkable entrepreneurial developments of 21st century education reform. Just as Teach For America (TFA), New Leaders for New Schools, The New Teacher Project, Teach Plus, and the Broad Superintendents Academy have helped reshape notions of how to recruit, prepare, and retain educators and educational leaders, so REEP offers a sharp, significant, and replicable break with past practice. Rice University is the first institution in the nation to permit aspiring principals to receive a state certification to serve as a school leader through a business school. REEP is housed in the Jesse H. Jones Graduate School of Business and leverages the MBA for Professionals track at Rice, allowing full-time teachers and administrators to pursue a two-year MBA or a one-year certificate while continuing their day job. In addition to shifting leadership preparation to a dramatically different milieu, while freeing aspiring leaders from the self-contained world of education leadership and integrating them into the diverse mix of people and expertise present at an elite business school, the program also offers to pay almost the whole of the tuition for candidates who remain Houston-area school leaders. Additionally, REEP provides non-degree options that leverage the faculty of the Jones School and provide surprisingly affordable leadership development opportunities.

What follows is the tale of the creation and implementation of REEP. It's far too early to evaluate REEP or judge its success, and we make no effort to do so. Truthfully, we would be poor candidates for such a task, as one of the coauthors (Frederick Hess) was recruited early on in REEP's creation to serve as an instructor and to help design key elements of the curriculum. There is no

effort here to "prove" REEP's merits. Rather, much interest has been expressed by philanthropists, civic leaders, and business schools in various communities in emulating what Rice University has done with REEP. This report seeks to explain the rationale for and genesis of REEP, what it took to build REEP and some of the stumbles along the way, what REEP entails, and both the strengths and challenges posed by the REEP model. We claim to do no more, and we hope to accomplish no less.

REEP approaches educational leadership in a distinctive fashion, directly challenging some key conventions that have shaped K-12 leadership preparation. Explicitly rejecting the notion that education leadership is a "unique" endeavor, REEP instead presumes that, while education poses some particular difficulties, the key leadership challenges are broadly similar to those in other sectors. Indeed, REEP consciously mixes MBA students with peers from other sectors and favors instruction that force students to wrestle with case studies from myriad sectors other than K-12 schooling. REEP's mission explicitly embraces an entrepreneurial mindset and tools, rather than the educational "best practices" and prescriptive "instructional leadership" that form the core of most educational leadership programs. Eschewing set lists of correct answers and "this-is-how-we-do-it" instruction, REEP favors a broad approach to management preparation and a skeptical treatment of educational routines. REEP students are encouraged as leaders to develop the "right questions" versus the "right answers." By focusing on the development of the school leader, the program implicitly asserts that the school is the unit of change for public education.

# THE SCHOOL LEADERSHIP CHALLENGE

A little over a decade ago *Education Week* reported, “Nowhere is the focus on the human element in public education more prevalent than in the renewed recognition of the importance of strong and effective leadership. . . . The remarkable degree to which [groups] are coming together to focus on a single issue is bringing with it millions of dollars in research grants and program funding, with a strong emphasis on reshaping the training and preparation of principals.”<sup>1</sup>

Despite the emergence of a few promising programs like New Leaders for New Schools, the Broad Superintendents Academy, and KIPP’s Fisher Fellowship program, there remains a crying need for new models and leadership talent. Emphasizing the need for strong leaders to turn around low-performing schools, Secretary of Education Arne Duncan declares, “Nothing is more important. There’s no such thing as a high-performing school without a great principal. It is impossible. You simply can’t overstate their importance in driving student achievement, in attracting and retaining great talent.”<sup>2</sup>

In 2011, Michael Casserly, the executive director of the Council of the Great City Schools, observed that urban superintendents fret about finding high-quality principals. He quipped, “These people don’t grow on trees.”<sup>3</sup> Richard Lemons, a professor at the University of Connecticut, has observed, “The percentage of good candidates [for principal positions] has decreased. Where we used to have 10 qualified people for a job, we now have five. There are fewer names in the hat.”<sup>4</sup>

The importance of strong school leaders shows up in teacher morale and receptivity to other reforms. Public Agenda has reported that teachers who lack supportive principals “are more likely to complain about issues like testing, the lack of freedom to be creative, and to say there are too many kids with discipline problems.” Indeed, nearly 90 percent of teachers who deem their principals ineffective fear that principals would use merit pay to play favorites.<sup>5</sup>

In practice, more obvious has been a different kind of problem, with school leaders generally unable or unwilling to meaningfully identify or address mediocre teacher performance. For instance, The New Teacher Project’s influential 2009 report “The Widget Effect” noted that in districts where teachers can only be rated “satisfactory” or “unsatisfactory,” over 99 percent of teachers are rated satisfactory.<sup>6</sup>

## THE DEMANDS OF 21<sup>ST</sup> CENTURY SCHOOL LEADERSHIP

For all the disagreements about how to improve K-12 schooling, there is agreement that there’s a pressing need for stronger, more effective school leaders. Former Columbia University Teachers College President Arthur Levine has issued an exquisite, and intimidating, rendering of the job description for contemporary school leaders:

“In a rapidly changing environment, principals and superintendents no longer serve primarily as supervisors. They are being called on to lead in the redesign of their schools and school systems. In an outcome-based and accountability-driven era, administrators have to lead their schools in the rethinking of goals, priorities, finances, staffing, curriculum, pedagogies, learning resources, assessment methods, technology, and use of time and space. They have to recruit and retain top staff members and educate newcomers and veterans alike to understand and become comfortable with an education system undergoing dramatic and continuing change. . . . Few of today’s 250,000 school leaders are prepared to carry out this agenda.”<sup>8</sup>

Traditional preparation programs have not selected, trained, or socialized administrators to operate in an environment of outcome-based accountability, evolving technology, and heightened expectations. The result is that districts and charter schools must scramble in seeking leaders with the inclination, skills, and preparation to provide entrepreneurial leadership. In 2006, the Southern Regional Education Board concluded, “States and districts cannot depend on universities to change principal preparation programs on their own because the barriers to change within these organizations are too deeply entrenched.”<sup>9</sup>

The Rice University Education Entrepreneurship Program (REEP) is an attempt to help answer this challenge. Whereas most leadership preparation reform focuses on tweaking courses, adding cohort elements, or restructuring the time commitment, REEP seizes upon the opportunity to leverage the management training in a business school in an attempt to dramatically rethink what future leaders study, where they’re trained, who they’re trained by, and how they’re selected.



These problems are particularly acute in urban schools. The New Teacher Project has reported “there is a shortage of high-quality principal candidates available to urban schools,” explaining that, “Urban districts suffer from...relatively low quality candidates in general and a heavy reliance on internal candidates.”<sup>7</sup>

## A PREMIUM ON CONVENTIONAL WISDOM

Educational leaders, at all levels, are handicapped by limited exposure to organizations outside K-12. For instance, The American Association of School Administrators has reported that the traditional career path for superintendents “involves moving through organizational hierarchy of a public school district...most superintendents have entered the education profession as teachers and then became building-level administrators.” Indeed, 80 percent of superintendents follow a career path that leads from teacher to principal to superintendent (with two-thirds serving in the district central office en route).<sup>10</sup> Principals are drawn almost entirely from the ranks of former teachers, and almost all receive their leadership training in schools of education.<sup>11</sup> More than 99 percent of superintendents have been teachers, with two-thirds starting out in K-8.<sup>12</sup> Two-thirds taught for at least six years and half of all superintendents obtained their first administrative position before age 30.<sup>13</sup>

Few leaders have had much experience working outside the confines of K-12 education – and they express little desire to do so.<sup>14</sup> On one hand, it’s good that our school systems are led by committed veteran educators, but this also means that most leaders have never had much opportunity to see how budgeting, accountability, personnel evaluation or compensation are tackled outside of K-12. Meanwhile, although educational leadership lies at the intersection of two vibrant and powerful bodies of thought—education and leadership—it tends to be the province of a narrow population of “education administration” specialists.

A consequence of their socialization and preparation is that most principals and superintendents inhabit a culture that puts a premium on business-as-usual solutions. Although managers in most organizations take for granted the utility of rewarding effective employees and sanctioning ineffective ones, such views are atypical in schooling. Public Agenda reported in 2006 that only one in five superintendents, and even fewer school leaders, thought linking consequences to student learning could be a “very effective” way to improve teacher quality. Just 11 percent of superintendents said “putting more business practices into how school systems are run” would be a “very effective” strategy for improving school leadership.<sup>15</sup> Meanwhile, a majority of principals believed that teacher quality could be boosted “very effectively” by increasing professional development or decreasing class size. In short, there is deep skepticism of measures that borrow on leadership approaches from beyond K-12.

Education leaders sense the problem. In 2006, 61 percent of superintendents and 66 percent of principals agreed that “typical leadership programs in graduate schools of education are out of touch with the realities of what it takes to run today’s school district.”<sup>16</sup> Principal preparation programs devote little or no attention to such issues as removing mediocre employees or using data to overhaul operations. Courses emphasized complying with legal and financial regulations while giving short shrift to how leaders might utilize data or technology.<sup>17</sup>

And the education leadership canon consists almost entirely of authors who focused on the “unique” challenges of school leadership. The most commonly assigned authors included such school leadership icons as Tom Sergiovanni, Michael Fullan, Lee Bolman and Linda Darling-Hammond. Absent were such influential management thinkers as Michael Porter, Jim Collins, Clayton Christensen and Tom Peters. As a result, leaders who have spent their entire careers in K-12 education may have had little exposure to different ways of thinking and may learn to regard familiar routines as inevitable and immutable.<sup>18</sup>

Whatever the merits of today's educational leadership programs, and however well they do preparing some individuals for school and district leadership, there is a compelling need for savvy educational leaders who are equipped to tackle new challenges in new ways. There's a need to recruit, retain and educate leaders who can bring to their roles the kinds of skills, expertise, and thinking that is rarely found in K-12 or conventional educational leadership programs. One of the more remarkable such efforts underway today is the Rice University Education Entrepreneurship Program at Rice University in Houston, Texas.



**RICE**  
JONES GRADUATE  
SCHOOL OF BUSINESS

**“ ...REEP SEIZES UPON THE OPPORTUNITY TO LEVERAGE THE MANAGEMENT TRAINING IN A BUSINESS SCHOOL IN AN ATTEMPT TO DRAMATICALLY RETHINK WHAT FUTURE LEADERS STUDY... ”**

## THE REEP PHILOSOPHY

Experts in educational administration frequently dismiss the broad body of work on leadership and offer their own formulations. Prominent thinkers on educational leadership, such as Thomas Sergiovanni in *Leadership for the Schoolhouse*, argue that “corporate” models of leadership cannot work in education and that, “We [must] accept the reality that leadership for the schoolhouse should be different, and...we [need to] begin to invent our own practice.”<sup>19</sup> Such simple-minded dichotomies are mistaken. There is neither one style of “corporate leadership,” nor a unique “educational leadership.” Rather, given that some schools or districts need managers while some need leaders, and because it is difficult to draw hard and fast distinctions between these, the sensible course is to opt for flexibility whenever feasible.

In fact, the best public administration and business programs routinely prepare people for a host of public and private sector positions and focus on skills and knowledge bases rather than on narrow preparation. On the other hand, education leadership programs teach the same kinds of classes—in finance, facilities, personnel management, political leadership, and so on—but apply them narrowly and prescriptively to schooling. In a world of accountability, research-based instruction, more flexible compensation, entrepreneurial opportunities, site-based

budgeting, and fast-evolving technology, educational leaders need to draw upon nontraditional skills.

Renowned leadership authority Warren Bennis, author of 27 books on leadership, knows a little something on this score. He explained, “I don’t think [leadership] is yet a ‘field’ in the pure sense. There’s something like 276 definitions of leadership. You can’t say that there is a paradigm, any agreed-upon set of factors, that is generally accepted.”<sup>20</sup>

Today, educational administration is a sub-specialization of the sprawling field of leadership and management. Construing educational administration as a self-contained field has severed its links to the larger body of management knowledge and practice, and dampened the attention that the broader management community pays to education. The result is a field of educational administration unfamiliar with and uninterested in the broader body of work on management theory and practice. The result is training that does not introduce educators to broader management networks and does not expose them to the body of thought that conventionally trained executives deem essential. The lack of cross-pollination has left educational administration an isolated, intellectually suspect, and lightly regarded backwater.



*ANDREA HODGE,  
REEP EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR*



# LAUNCHING REEP

The Rice University Education Entrepreneurship Program (REEP) was launched fall 2008 at Rice University's Jones Graduate School of Business.<sup>21</sup> Rice University is an elite institution in the heart of Houston, the biggest city in Texas, the nation's fourth largest metropolitan area, and home to one of the nation's 10 largest school districts. The program, while envisioned as a particular solution for Houston's challenges, represents an invigorating model for how colleges and universities across the land might start to think differently about training educational leaders.

## CREATION OF A COALITION: UNIVERSITY AND FOUNDATION

A key partner in the launch was Houston Endowment, founded by Jesse H. Jones (namesake of the Jones School) in 1937. It gives about \$75 million a year in the Houston area, making it a key player in the Houston community. Houston Endowment had been investing in teacher quality since the 1990s. Director of Research and Planning George Grainger estimated that by 2004, the foundation had invested around \$10 million in teacher quality over a period of five to six years and was "frustrated by the lack of institutional traction."

That frustration prompted the foundation to "move up the food chain" to school leadership, where individuals would be in a position to reallocate resources and to have a more far-reaching impact on their schools. Grainger recalls that, while the foundation was in the midst of this reappraisal, Leo Linbeck III came to him, in summer 2007, "with this crazy idea to create a very different track from the regular education leadership world."

Linbeck is an adjunct professor in the business schools at Rice and a lecturer at Stanford University's Graduate School of Business; president and CEO of Aquinas Companies, a major Houston-based construction and construction-services company; and an influential voice in charter schooling and Texas school reform. Linbeck's "crazy idea" was to remove school leadership training from the world of education schools and embed it in the MBA track at Rice University's Jones Graduate School of Business. He reasoned that the selectivity of such a program, the rigor of the instruction, the prestige of the degree, and the opportunity to interact with aspiring leaders outside education would both attract and catalyze a critical mass of dynamic school leaders. "We thought offering a high-value credential at an elite institution would make it possible to attract a different level of talent," Grainger said. He and Linbeck imagined that even a limited number of such leaders could have a big impact on local schools. (A 2010 analysis of REEP by consultants McKinsey & Company calculated that despite the program's relatively small size, within

a decade it would graduate enough students to potentially fill the principalship in every low-performing school in the Houston region.)

Grainger and Linbeck took their idea to Rice University leadership. Rice president David Leebron, former dean of Columbia Law School, had been seeking to boost Rice's involvement in the Houston community since he started his tenure in July 2004. One of the four areas the university targeted was K-12 education.

At first, Rice was reticent. While President Leebron was committed to doing more to support K-12 improvement in Houston, Rice was a small institution without a school of education. The key was pointing out that Rice was never going to be a bulk provider of teachers or leaders, but that REEP, if it proved successful, would permit Rice to have an outsized impact by preparing, in Grainger's words, "a small but skilled pool of elite-level talent." An entrepreneurial focus was critical to this leverage. Rather than just equip leaders to competently manage today's schools and districts, Linbeck and Grainger envisioned a program that would attract and nurture innovative educators, introduce them to successful educational entrepreneurs and to like-minded colleagues, and would produce graduates equipped to push forward or initiate transformational change. As Linbeck recalled, "school leadership is the perfect leverage point for Rice. It is small, [so while they] might not train 5,000 teachers a year, they could train 30 or 50 school leaders."

President Leebron agreed, observing, "[Rice is] not equipped to train a massive number of teachers, but this would allow us to train a small number of leaders who could have a lot of impact. It offered high leverage without getting us involved with education school orthodoxy." The plan was also a good fit for local schooling, given the need in local school districts as well as in the local charter community, where the KIPP Academies and YES Prep—two dynamic charter school organizations founded in Houston—were trying to grow, and for a planned influx of TFA corps members to the region.

The proposal that emerged was for a program that would be called the Rice University Education Entrepreneurship Program. Current educators in the Houston area would be enrolled in the MBA for Professionals program at Rice, alongside colleagues in health care, engineering, oil and gas, and other industries.

In 2007, Houston Endowment committed \$7.2 million to launch REEP and fund the first two cohorts of students (it was later stretched to three cohorts). That represented a major investment for the foundation, which devotes about one-quarter of its annual giving to K-12 and higher education. Given that about \$5 million of that is set aside for scholarships, the foundation leaves about \$12-15 million per year to other education investments in the Houston area, making its REEP investment a considerable one.

The funding permitted the program to offer a novel guarantee: graduates who remained in the Houston area as school leaders or as educators seeking to become school leaders would have their Rice tuition forgiven. As of early 2012, this amounted to the cost of two-year tuition for a Rice MBA, \$94,000.

## THE JONES SCHOOL

Central to Linbeck's pitch had been the prestige and significance of a Rice MBA. The Rice MBA for Professionals program is ranked sixth nationally by *BusinessWeek*, and its entrepreneurship program has been named in the top 10 for three years in a row by *The Princeton Review*. The hope was that, in contrast to education leadership programs—which are often seen as a necessary but uninspiring hoop to be jumped through—REEP would attract and inspire educators, especially early-career educators who might otherwise be tempted to leave the sector.

Linbeck envisioned a program with an unapologetically entrepreneurial flavor, one which would eschew the conventional focus on the mechanics of school management and education theory in favor of an emphasis on the broader discipline and skills of leadership. Bill Glick, dean of the Jones School, saw this as consistent with how the business school approaches leadership preparation in any number of sectors. “We don't train technicians—we train leaders. We don't know anything about engineering, drilling or how to save hospital patients. But we do know a lot about management, leadership and entrepreneurship. So we're not going to create teachers, but we can prepare them to lead.”

Not only does the Jones School have a stellar reputation, but Rice University carries enormous sway in the Houston area. Rice and the University of Texas-Austin are widely-regarded as the two premier schools in Texas. One consequence, observed President Leebron, is that while Rice “is a small university in a big city, it gets treated like a large university in a small city.” This outsized influence of Rice made it hugely attractive as the home for REEP.

Another asset that Rice enjoyed, perhaps surprisingly, was its lack of a school of education. Several of those involved in launching REEP remarked that they doubted the idea would have gone forward had Rice had an ed school, as the effort would have entailed turf battles, pressure to house it in the ed school and build it around ed school offerings and faculty, and more difficulty in launching a distinctive program that could trade on the prestige of the MBA. President Leebron observed that traditional education schools like Columbia's Teachers College “won't touch certain issues” surrounding leadership training. In contrast, “REEP is a huge opportunity for us... We don't have an ed school and we don't want one.” Grainger noted, when asked if it would be possible to have housed REEP at a university that boasted an education

school, “If we had tried to do this at, say, the University of Houston, we would have had some pushback.”

REEP's architects believed that ed schools are hampered by the notion that K-12 leadership is a unique field of endeavor. They shared the conviction that key management and leadership skills are broadly universal and would be as valuable for school leaders as for hospital administrators, energy traders, or nonprofit executives. As Grainger noted, “What appealed to us were the aspects of high-end organizational, management and leadership training that is central to what a business school does... The potential game-changer here is that a graduate school of business can look at organizational dynamics regardless of whether it's the private or public sector and teach how to apply these insights in schools.” Glick pointed out that business schools “are more literate in subjects like finance and accounting [and] are more used to looking at metrics of continual improvement. We offer exposure to a view of ‘leadership’ that means taking risks and being held accountable.”

Siva Kumari, associate provost for K-12 affairs at Rice during the creation of REEP, grasped Rice's unique potential to host an education leadership training program by doing it “in a very Rice way”—innovative, playing to the strengths of the highly-ranked Jones School, and “unencumbered” by a traditional education school. Immediately embracing the idea of REEP, Kumari played a critical role in moving the program forward. She proceeded to sit in on meetings between Leebron and the Jones School; worked to keep the program in the Jones School, despite pressure from Rice's School of Continuing Studies to house REEP there; managed internal relationships; helped develop the proposal for state certification; and worked on logistics, such as classroom space and recruiting faculty.

Kumari recalled early conversations between the provost's office and the Jones School. “I think [the Jones School] took it on because the president and the provost were quite hot on the idea, and I was a big champion of this. [But Dean Glick] was concerned about his rankings, and we had to be sure that the rankings were kept up.” Elite business schools are highly sensitive to anything that might adversely impact their national rankings, with the GMAT scores of incoming students an influential factor. Linbeck recalled, “One non-negotiable, and a reason Houston Endowment and Rice signed on so quickly, was the quality of the incoming students. If that meant [only admitting] two students, we're not going to compromise on quality.” Once that point was agreed upon, the Jones School was supportive.



## HOUSTON SCHOOL REFORM CONTEXT

One of the characteristics that made Rice's President Leebron think REEP would work was Houston's unique school reform context. Houston is home to the nation's seventh largest school system, the 200,000-student Houston Independent School District (HISD). For years, most recently under hard-charging superintendent Terry Grier, HISD has been a national leader on accountability and reform. Other area districts, including Aldine ISD, Cypress-Fairbanks ("Cy-Fair") ISD, and Spring Branch ISD, have been recognized for their performance and for their embrace of reforms ranging from performance evaluation to accountability. And Houston boasts the nation's third largest concentration of Teach For America corps members, delivering the community a rich pipeline of educational talent.

Houston is also a hotbed of charter schooling. HISD was the birthplace of KIPP, a nationally-admired network of over 100 charter schools. The first KIPP Academy was founded in Houston in 1994 by Mike Feinberg and David Levin. By 2007, KIPP Houston had mapped a vision for an ambitious new stage of expansion that called for enrolling more than 21,000 students in 42 schools by 2015. The plan presented many logistical hurdles. A crucial one was finding enough talented leaders to run all of these new schools.

KIPP schools have historically drawn their new leaders from the KIPP Fisher Fellowship program, a one-year intensive training program designed to prepare fellows to found and lead new KIPP schools. Fellows complete coursework during a five-week long summer institute at New York University and spend four months in residence at a KIPP or similar high-performing school.

Obtaining enough leaders to lead all the new schools was going to be a challenge. The KIPP Fisher Fellowship program only produced about 12 to 20 fellows each year, so finding enough leaders to fuel KIPP's Houston strategy was going to be a challenge. Leo Linbeck III, who was also the architect of KIPP Houston's expansion plans, recalled, "It became clear that school leadership would be the bottleneck."

In fact, KIPP Houston was planning for dramatic growth at the same time that YES Prep, another successful Houston-based charter management organization—founded by Chris Barbic, a former roommate of Feinberg—was undertaking its own growth initiative. Between them, the two organizations had raised over \$100 million in philanthropic support to fund their growth efforts. And they both needed good leaders.

Meanwhile, Teach For America was planning to grow to 500 corps members in the Houston area, promising to make Houston the nation's second largest (at that time) TFA region. Colleen Dippel, a director of alumni affairs for the TFA-Houston region, noted that this provided an additional impetus for creating REEP. "For us it was a challenge because our best alums were leaving to go to principal programs at well-established schools like Harvard and Stanford, these cornerstone ed programs...So for us, the driver was retaining talent."



## SECURING STATE APPROVAL

As the Jones School was the first business school in the nation to seek the authority to certify aspiring principals, the application for approval to the State Board for Educator Certification (SBEC) demanded more than the usual degree of care and handling. To help ensure that the program met SBEC guidelines and addressed all the necessary Texas principal certification components, REEP contracted with Linda Wurzbach, founder of Resources for Learning, an education consulting firm based in Texas. Wurzbach, who had spent six years at the Texas Education Agency working on teacher credentialing, enlisted Carol McKenzie, a former principal who had previously worked at SBEC, to assist with the application.

McKenzie said that REEP's "thinking as an MBA would help [a candidate] become a good principal. This is true, but there are other aspects of being a principal that are unique to education," including training in school law, special education, curriculum design, school budgeting, and federal and state requirements—in addition to the mandatory six hours spent preparing specifically for the principal licensing exam. The REEP design was shaped to incorporate those elements, with a planned Summer Institute identified as the natural place to have educational leadership authorities provide the requisite instruction. The Summer Institute was intended to provide the bridge between business management instruction and more applied preparation in educational leadership (more on the Summer Institute below).

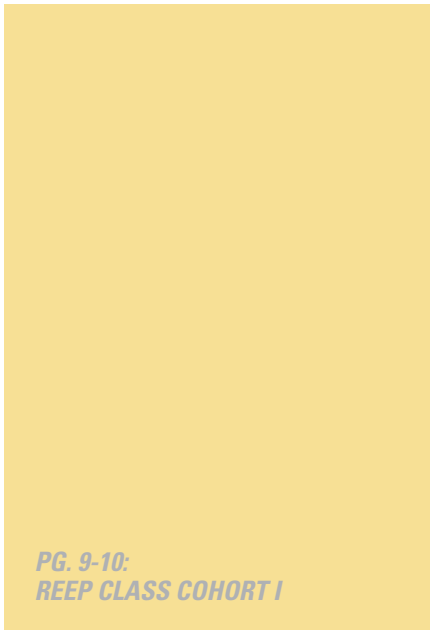
Complicating the approval process were SBEC's fairly broad standards for principal certification, each of which a new program is required to document its ability to address in concrete terms. For example, SBEC mandates that a principal be able to "align

financial, human, and material resources to support the implementation of the campus vision." REEP had planned to have students complete a school development plan as a capstone project. To fully address this standard, Wurzbach and McKenzie suggested also including as part of the project a detailed financial plan. In order to win approval, REEP repeatedly consulted the pair to ensure that the design would comport with SBEC requirements. The process was a quick one. Wurzbach and McKenzie first met with REEP in April 2008, the proposal was sent to the SBEC in October 2008, and approval as an Alternative Certification Program was granted in February 2009.

## GETTING STARTED

REEP launched in fall 2008, even before the program had been officially approved by the SBEC. Despite the novelty of the program, there was little resistance from the faculty because the Jones School already offered a number of similarly themed programs and, in the words of Linbeck, "Business schools are always looking for ways to expand their impact, and this was something that was unique." As Jones School professor Vikas Mittal recounted, "[REEP] would only be worrisome if we were going to change our program to cater to the lowest common denominator. But I taught the [marketing] course the same as I would to any group... The students have the ability to rise up to the occasion... There's a lot of statistical analysis—it's tough for some students without the background and they need to catch up. I'll tutor them, but I won't lower my standards."

The team involved in shaping REEP drew upon an array of local talent. Grainger notes that much of the "brainpower behind REEP



PG. 9-10:  
REEP CLASS COHORT I

came from all the external partners.” The planning team, which morphed into the initial advisory board, included Feinberg, Dippel, Barbic, Linbeck, and Spring Branch ISD superintendent Duncan Klussmann. This diverse partnership was a product of Houston’s dynamic K-12 ecosystem, with cordial relationships among nationally recognized school districts like Aldine and HISD and high-profile charter management organizations like KIPP and YES Prep. While the relationships and networks enjoyed by the advisors were essential to getting REEP launched, they could not protect the program from what Colleen Dippel described as a “messy” launch. The initial director and assistant director, despite sterling credentials, proved to be a poor fit for the program. With limited ties to the local education community and a tendency to focus on Texas Education Agency regulations rather than design objectives (a trait that several advisory board members found at odds with the innovative nature of the program), the initial leadership had a rocky start.

Within six months, by December 2008, the first executive director was out. Amidst the turmoil, Colleen Dippel, serving in an unofficial capacity, helped coordinate the program while Rice searched for a new REEP director. Dippel recalled, “The MBA had already started, we didn’t have the certificate program ready, we hadn’t drafted the REEP competencies, we were still recruiting folks and submitting approval with the SBEC. I just filled in until we had a new hire.” Linbeck described it as the chaos inherent “in a start-up environment. You move fast, you make mistakes, and you have to move more quickly to fix them.”

The search for a new director turned up Andrea Hodge, a Stanford MBA who had spent the past three years working to design a leadership program for Houston-area youth. Hodge reflected that, in contrast to the first director, “I knew several of the people (Siva Kumari, Leo Linbeck III, Mike Feinberg, Ann Best) already and I had launched an entrepreneurial start up with Management Leadership for Tomorrow.” With direct knowledge of the key

players involved with REEP and prior experience running an education start-up, Hodge was well-suited to lead the young program. She formally took the reins in April 2009.

## THE DESIGN OF THE REEP PROGRAM

REEP was designed to employ a “three track” model, though the nature of these three paths has evolved in the program’s first several years. When REEP started in fall 2008, the three tracks were:

- Two-year MBA program;
- 15-month business and education entrepreneurship certificate program for aspiring school principals;
- Six-month business certificate program for current school principals.

Students in the MBA track would learn business and management skills from the Jones School in night classes during the school year, with a Summer Institute established to focus on applying these skills to education. The students in both certificate tracks would participate in Executive Education classes taught by MBA faculty in classes without other industry professionals. While the MBA program has remained largely unchanged since 2008, the two certificate programs have undergone significant changes. They were merged into a single track (today called the “Business Fellowship”) and the focus was shifted towards aspiring, rather than current, school leaders. At the same time, REEP formalized their Summer Institute into a new, third track. The nuts and bolts of this evolution are below.

# REEP'S THREE TRACKS, CIRCA 2012

## TRACK 1: REEP MBA PROGRAM

- What: A two-year MBA for Professionals degree. Students take core classes typical of an MBA program without career interruption—a total of 855 hours of MBA coursework—while also completing the REEP Summer Institute and a practicum that includes mentoring and an innovation project
- How students are admitted: A “two-step” process requiring acceptance from REEP and separate acceptance into the Rice MBA for Professionals program
- Total Cost to Operate: \$125,000 per student
- Tuition\*: \$94,000 for both years. Paid by the student but eligible for partial reimbursement if the student remains in the Houston area
- Total students: 18 graduates, with 17 currently enrolled

## TRACK 2: REEP BUSINESS FELLOWSHIP

- What: A one-year business certificate program. Students meet every three weeks to take core business classes—a total of 100 hours of MBA coursework—while also completing the REEP Summer Institute and practicum
- How students are admitted: Acceptance from REEP
- Total Cost to Operate: \$26,000 per student
- Tuition\*: \$6,000
- Total students: 30 graduates, with 22 enrolled in Cohort 3 and 33 starting Cohort 4 in March 2012

## TRACK 3: REEP SUMMER INSTITUTE

- What: A two-week long program in July for all MBA and fellowship candidates, as well as select external students, focusing on the education component of REEP
- How students are admitted: Acceptance from REEP
- Total Cost to Operate: \$10,000 per student
- Tuition\*: \$6,000 for an external student; these costs are covered by tuition for MBA and fellowship candidates
- Total students: In addition to all MBA and fellowship candidates, 13 external students enrolled in 2011. An estimated 25 will do the same for the 2012 institute.

\*Note: the difference in operating cost not covered by the student's tuition is paid by Houston Endowment's grants

**BRENT SMITH, ASSOCIATE  
DEAN, EXECUTIVE EDUCATION,  
JONES GRADUATE SCHOOL  
OF BUSINESS**





## REEP MBA PROGRAM

The inaugural REEP MBA Program opened in fall 2008 with a class of seven. The degree is a two-year MBA for Professionals degree, part of a program designed for working professionals who remain in their day jobs while pursuing their degree via evening classes. Would-be REEP MBA candidates, who are all employed in a local Houston-area public school system (both district and charter schools are eligible), apply the same way any aspiring MBA candidate would apply to the Jones School. Eligible applicants must have at least two years of experience in K-12 schooling and a teaching certificate, but more experience is preferred given REEP's ambition of preparing students for leadership roles. Applicants must submit GMAT scores and sit for interviews with both REEP and Jones School administrators.

This "two-step admissions process," in the words of Jones School dean Bill Glick, was designed for quality control on both ends—REEP would be able to screen for promising educational applicants, while the Jones School could ensure applicants met the high standards of the business school. (The Jones School's routine insistence on this score was reinforced by the dismal reputation of educational leadership preparation and recruitment.) Qualifications for admittance for the REEP MBA track are comparable to those for the Jones School. GMAT scores of students in the REEP MBA program have risen over the past three years, from an average score of 574 (the 55th percentile nationally) in REEP's first year to 613 (the 69th percentile) in 2011. The 2011 scores were comparable to the Rice MBA for Professionals average GMAT score of 615. At the same time, the program has become steadily more selective, with the acceptance rate falling from 39 percent for REEP's first cohort to 29 percent for its third.

In their first year, REEP MBA students take core classes including financial accounting, organizational behavior, data analysis, marketing, and operations. In the second year, students can choose among electives such as leadership communications, competitive strategy, and brand management. Students sit

alongside professional MBA students from a variety of fields in these classrooms. REEP students also participate in a practicum that includes a field advisory, speaker series, and a capstone innovation project designed to help them translate their MBA coursework to their school context. For example, one project explored how to boost parental involvement at a charter school; another integrated a Rosetta Stone language training program into courses for ESL students. (More on the practicum shortly.) In between the two years, the REEP MBA candidates participate in the REEP Summer Institute.

In short, the REEP MBA program rests atop the standard MBA curriculum for working professionals—two years, \$94,000 in tuition, and a core set of business classes and electives—while incorporating the REEP Summer Institute and second-year practicum. The commitment in terms of time and resources is larger for the REEP MBA program than for either of the other two tracks. An important piece of the REEP model involves reducing the deterrent posed by the program's big sticker price—\$94,000 for two years of tuition. A substantial portion of Houston Endowment's investment involves the funds set aside to reimburse MBA graduates their tuition costs if they work for five years in a leadership position in a Houston-area school. The reimbursement rate when the program launched was 100 percent; with an eye towards making REEP financially-viable over the long-term, it was reduced to 90 percent for students who started in 2011 and will be 80 percent for those entering in 2012 or later.

The reimbursement policy involves some complexities. Since many applicants obviously lack the funds to cover the cost of tuition, there are issues related to student loans and the reimbursement schedule. Also, since the REEP leadership is aware that a student cannot ultimately control whether or not they land a school leadership position, the program is able to make exceptions for those who remain employed in Houston-area schools. (One graduate, for example, was employed in fall 2011 as a data coach





PG. 13: REEP MBA COHORT III  
PG 14: JONES GRADUATE SCHOOL OF BUSINESS

in a Houston school. He is still eligible for the tuition reimbursement.) The aim of the reimbursement strategy is twofold: to encourage graduates to stay in the Houston area and to induce them to stay in K-12 schooling in leadership roles. Andrea Hodge notes that if the program attracts a terrific MBA candidate but the student leaves K-12 for another field, no matter how well that alum fared, “We wouldn’t regard that as a REEP success.”

With the graduation of the second cohort in May 2011, 18 students have completed the REEP MBA program (seven in the first cohort, 11 the second). Another 17 are currently enrolled (six currently in their second year, 11 starting their first year). As of the end of 2011, 13 of the 18 graduates have been promoted to leadership roles within a school or district. Nine of the 18 entered as teachers; of those, eight have been promoted, either as assistant principals, department heads, instructional coaches at the district level, or to similar positions. Several who entered these first two MBA cohorts as deans of students or instruction have advanced to become principals. One, Matthew Neal, a Business Fellow in Cohort 1, started the program as a dean of instruction at a YES Prep school and since graduating has opened his own YES Prep school. Of the 18, 17 have remained in the Houston area.

“ IN THEIR FIRST YEAR, REEP MBA STUDENTS TAKE CORE CLASSES INCLUDING FINANCIAL ACCOUNTING, ORGANIZATIONAL BEHAVIOR, DATA ANALYSIS, MARKETING, AND OPERATIONS. ”





# WHAT STUDENTS SAY

*What do REEP's students think is distinctive about the REEP model?*

## EXPOSURE TO A DIVERSE POOL OF COLLEAGUES

Eileen Ramirez, a school improvement specialist in Spring Branch ISD currently in MBA cohort four, said, "You get an outsider's perspective from non-educators [such as] problem-solving processes from engineers." Students said this also applied to their opportunity to work with educators from other school systems, both charter and district schools, and those in various roles. HISD administrator Kenyatha Loftis said, "I forged connections with people I would never have met, with different perspectives. In our day jobs, we don't have the chance to really talk and think with teachers, assistant principals, principals, central administrators, and colleagues from charter schools."

## DIFFERENT PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT

Matt Roser, an assistant principal in Humble ISD and current MBA candidate, said, "REEP is different from most professional development. It's a place to reflect, and then apply." Ginger Noyes, an assistant principal in Humble ISD and cohort three fellowship grad, termed REEP's use of business principles and cases from other fields a "refreshing" change from a norm where "these conversations [with other school leaders] are usually just rote."

## A DIFFERENT MINDSET

Dane Roberts, a KIPP teacher currently in the MBA track, said, "There's minutiae about accountability, the long-term pricing of debt, leases, bonds... that's not too directly applicable to school leadership—at least until you're starting a school. But I'm glad for all of that, because it's part of absorbing a whole mindset that's accountable to facts and results. It's a whole way of looking at the world." He elaborated, "There's just a different energy in an MBA program—it's entrepreneurial, accountable." Mike Olson, who graduated from the very first MBA cohort and has worked as an operations manager at both YES Prep and Houston ISD, reflected on "the culture of excellence" stirred by the Jones School. "Regarding personnel management, you learn to reward top talent and move out low-performing talent."

## DISAGREEMENT OVER HOW MUCH BUSINESS-TO-EDUCATION TRANSLATION IS USEFUL

REEP students highlighted areas where the program could improve. Several suggested that the Business Fellowship program did a better job of integrating business and education, while the MBA was more management-heavy and less attuned to helping students apply the principles. However, other students suggested that the shockwave of the MBA was what made it such a powerful experience, and worried that the Business Fellowship didn't push students far enough out of their comfort zone.

## REEP BUSINESS FELLOWSHIP

The REEP Business Fellowship, a one-year business certificate program, is not a full-fledged MBA program. Rather, it provides a chance for educators to gain expertise in the world of management with an eye towards advancing into a school leadership role. Students complete a total of 100 hours of business coursework with Jones School faculty. Titled the Rice Advanced Management Program (RAMP), the course of studies covers topics like accounting, finance and marketing, while also featuring a host of lessons on school leadership and “leading change” within schools. Andrea Hodge terms the curriculum “a broad scan” of business and management, one that by design is not as intense as the MBA program. Instruction is delivered in concentrated, three-day units to classrooms that include only RAMP students—unlike their MBA counterparts, RAMP students do not attend classes alongside students from outside K-12. Courses meet every three to four weeks during the academic year, with instruction starting Thursday evening and running all day Friday and Saturday. Like REEP MBA students, RAMP students also take part in the REEP Summer Institute and practicum.

The RAMP track has undergone the most significant changes since the first cohort started in spring 2009. The initial REEP design envisioned two separate programs—one for aspiring principals who required principal certification and the other for sitting principals. In the first cohort, there were five sitting principals in the “advanced” cohort and eight educators in the “aspiring” cohort.

It turned out, however, that there were substantial difficulties in trying to simultaneously serve current and aspiring principals. Each group had different needs and interests; it also became clear during the first Summer Institute in 2009 that the six-week commitment was, particularly for sitting principals, as Andrea Hodge recalls, “just too long...given their work over the summer.” The result was an overhaul of the “advanced” and “aspiring” tracks. The two tracks were merged into a single “Business Certificate” program, with an ostensible focus on aspiring principals. However, Hodge has noted that, as the REEP staff has grown and the program has matured, the program is continuing to serve a mix of both sitting and aspiring leaders.

In 2011, the Business Certificate was rebranded “the Business Fellowship.” Hodge explains that “there is a certain connotation with a ‘certificate program’—it can denote something as minimal as a one-day training exercise—and we wanted to reflect the gravitas of our program.” All told, the first cohort included 13 teachers, assistant principals, and other school leaders. Cohort two, starting in 2010, numbered 17. The third cohort, which started in spring 2011, includes 22 students; and the fourth cohort,

starting in spring 2012, is currently slated to number 33. Of the 30 graduates of the first two Business Fellowship cohorts, 16 have been promoted to greater leadership roles.

The per student cost of the Business Fellowship is \$26,000. Of this, the Houston Endowment pays for \$20,000 per pupil. This means that the actual cost to students is \$6,000. In many cases, fellowship participants pay nothing, with their district, charter school, or another sponsor paying the cost. Of the 22 current students, Hodge said that third parties are paying the \$6,000 for over half.

Both the MBA and the Business Fellowship offer preparation courses for Texas principal certification for students seeking a principal’s certification. However, Hodge said that REEP has de-emphasized this aspect of the program. “While [an aspiring principal] does need certification to serve in the districts, [they] might not if they work in a charter school. Typically, while our MBA candidates have come in and needed the certification, the level of conversation that we want to have in REEP is so far beyond what TEA requires” that the preparation courses strike candidates as belittling and seem a poor use of limited time. Hodge reflected that, “After exploring numerous ‘out of the box’ possibilities, REEP students seeking state certification have to be effectively ‘retrained’ to match the mindset of the principal exam.” So far, 100 percent of REEP students seeking certification passed the exam on their first attempt. Hodge also indicated that focusing on certification undersold the value of what REEP could offer, prompting “current principals to come to us and say, ‘I already have my certificate, what am I going to get out of REEP?’”

## REEP SUMMER INSTITUTE

Initially, the REEP Summer Institute was only offered as a component of the first two tracks. The institute was designed to help students translate the business school instruction to the world of K-12 schooling, to deepen their thinking about the nature of educational entrepreneurship, to deliver school-specific leadership instruction that they would not otherwise receive, and to provide a bonding opportunity for students in the different tracks. However, starting in 2011, Andrea Hodge found there to be both value and interest in offering the Summer Institute as a stand-alone third track for select external students not already enrolled in the MBA or Business Fellowship tracks. As a result, the Summer Institute is now offered as a separate leadership development exercise, in addition to being required for students in the other two tracks.

## REEP SUMMER INSTITUTE 2011

The Summer Institute has now been offered three times, starting in summer 2009. While the inaugural institute started as a six-week program, the upcoming summer 2012 institute, representing the fourth iteration, has been condensed to a more intensive but much briefer two-week course. The earliest vision of REEP actually envisioned an eight-week long summer session, though that was quickly trimmed to six weeks—with students actually in class for just over four hours a day. Enrolling all the MBA students, as well as the current and aspiring principals, the first summer program included 132 hours of instruction (22 hours per week for six weeks) taught by a combination of local leaders and a “national faculty.”

The national faculty was recruited with the assistance of Frederick Hess, director of education policy studies at the American Enterprise Institute and a scholar who had focused on both educational leadership and educational entrepreneurship. Hess (a coauthor of this report) was recruited by Linbeck and Feinberg in fall 2008 to help design the Summer Institute and then recruit instructors. Appointed to the Jones School as an adjunct professor, Hess helped identify a team of national faculty that included Tom Loveless of the Brookings Institution, Stacey Childress of the Harvard Business School, Monica Higgins of the Harvard Graduate School of Education, Jim Spillane of Northwestern University, and Doug Harris of the University of Wisconsin. These instructors typically taught about 20 hours over two or three days, with their instruction addressing topics like “Educational Entrepreneurship: A Historical Framework,” “Creating a Strong Organizational Culture,” and “Separating Real Education Expertise from Faddisms and Jargon.”

That first summer proved too demanding for many students—especially sitting principals—given their summer obligations and the fact that many had young families. Consequently, for summer 2010, Hodge cut the program down to three weeks, while shifting from a half-day to a full-day model. The result meant that there was almost as much instructional time in the course of three weeks as there had been the previous summer in the course of six. In the revised model, the first week was devoted to exploring the education leadership landscape and the promise of educational entrepreneurship. The second week focused on building organizations and the duties of a principal. Instructors included Jon Schnur, founder of New Leaders for New Schools; Mike Grojean, a leadership professor at the Jones School; and consultants and experts who addressed coaching, human resources, instructional leadership, and community engagement. The third week emphasized performance and execution, with special attention to topics like budgeting, using data, and teacher evaluation.



For summer 2011, additional changes cut back on the amount of lecturing in favor of giving students more time to work in teams and on cases. It was this summer that Hodge also “rebranded” the Summer Institute as the “third track” in REEP, alongside the Rice MBA and the Business Fellowship. Part of the effort was to boost the visibility of the Summer Institute nationwide and offer it as a development experience to outside attendees, from Houston or elsewhere. Tuition for external attendees was \$5,000 in 2011, and will be \$10,000 in 2012. In 2011, 13 summer-only participants (primarily principals or other current school leaders) from local districts took advantage of the opportunity to participate in the shortened Summer Institute. Hodge estimates that number will grow to upwards of two dozen for summer 2012.

In summer 2012, the Summer Institute will be reduced to two intense weeks—totaling almost 100 hours of instruction. Hodge expects that the summer will remain in that new configuration going forward. The first week will discuss leadership, team building, and problem solving. The second week will focus on change management—applying organizational and financial management skills to transformative leadership.

In sum, there are a total of 48 students who have graduated from the first two REEP MBA and Business Fellowship cohorts, 32 of which have been certified through REEP for the Texas Principal Certificate. All but two have remained in the Houston area, and a majority have advanced to leadership positions. There are currently six students in the third cohort of the MBA program and 22 in the third cohort of the Business Fellowship. In the fourth cohort, there are 11 MBA candidates who started in August 2011, and a record 33 who will enter the Business Fellowship in 2012. Additionally, 13 school leaders who were not in REEP completed the 2011 Summer Institute. REEP is currently accepting applications for the 2012 Summer Institute (which will make the 2012 Institute the largest to date). This means by the end of the 2012 Summer Institute, REEP will have graduated or be in the process of educating, via one of the three tracks, over 133 school leaders for the Houston area.

# THE REEP OPERATION

Making REEP operational posed particular challenges when it came to recruitment, finances, content, and the practicum. REEP is administered by a five-person team that includes executive director Andrea Hodge, assistant director for operations Candelario Cervantez, associate director of recruiting and marketing Erika Medrado, associate director of programs and talent development Kim Huseman, and administrative assistant Shea George. Hodge is responsible for overseeing REEP and managing external relations. Huseman is in charge of the program itself, including recruiting faculty, coordinating the practicum, finding field advisors for the students, and developing the competency model REEP uses. Medrado runs recruiting, including meeting with key district leaders, and conducts all interviews for the MBA and Business Fellowship candidates. Cervantez and George provide logistical support for the operation. The annual cost for this operational team is about \$400,000 per year.

## STUDENT RECRUITMENT

Recruiting educators to fill the initial cohorts was a daunting task. When the program began, it was largely driven by the advisory board—including Mike Feinberg, Chris Barbic, Leo Linbeck III, and Duncan Klussmann—all of whom had other full-time commitments. That said, they helped an unknown and unproven REEP stitch together its first cohort or two by flagging likely candidates, steering select employees into it, and working their personal networks. Colleen Dippel recalls filling that first class with “low-hanging fruit”—primarily Teach For America alumni and standouts from YES Prep. Of the seven students in the first MBA cohort, five were with YES Prep, another was with KIPP, and the final was from Houston ISD (after joining the district via TFA).

It wasn't until January 2011, when REEP hired Erika Medrado, that the recruitment effort started to become systematic. Until that point, Hodge recalls, REEP relied upon “a shotgun approach” and personal relationships to surface candidates. Medrado had a background in advertising and communications, including working at the Four Seasons Hotel managing their HR and recruiting. Hodge commented that, “Having someone with deep knowledge of selection is critical for launching a program like this.” Medrado approached REEP recruiting with a simple question: “What kind of candidate do we need?” She emphasized a set of background experiences and traits that reflected the kind of leaders REEP intended to prepare: they would demonstrate perseverance, be able to articulate a vision, and be willing to set lofty goals. Medrado shifted the interviews to behavior-based interviewing, asking candidates questions that focused on their past behaviors. Medrado conducts between 100 and 200 interviews each year for all MBA and Business Fellowship candidates.

In fall 2011 alone, she conducted 45 interviews in a five-week window (an annual rate of about 450 interviews), a figure which Medrado characterizes as the absolute maximum she can effectively conduct.

Medrado noted that REEP has sought to replace its “shotgun” recruitment with a more disciplined approach. She emphasizes the importance of networks for recruitment. REEP in 2011 hosted information sessions in seven local districts and worked to “build multiple champions” in each district who are familiar with REEP, know top prospects, and have the ability to navigate district bureaucracy. The key, Medrado said, is building a “talent bank” from referrals—this is “ten million times more effective” than info sessions or generic outreach. Another tool Medrado initiated to support outreach and enhanced alumni engagement was a REEP blog. Launched in July 2011, by December 2011 the blog had been viewed by more than 3,500 unique visitors in over 80 countries.

REEP also relies on a host of close relationships with districts, charters, and other organizations to help candidates pay their tuition. A number of districts have used the program as an elite development tool, identifying promising educators and committing to pay their way if they clear the REEP admissions process. Duncan Klussmann, superintendent of Spring Branch ISD, was an early REEP advisor and ally. Convinced of what the program had to offer, he aggressively pushed to enroll selected employees. Prior to REEP's emergence, Spring Branch had been running an internal principal training program. Klussmann quickly decided it made more sense to “outsource” that work to REEP. He reasoned that REEP could offer an elite business and national faculty which would likely trump anything Spring Branch could assemble on its own. To encourage his principals to enroll in the Summer Institute, Klussmann offers to pay their tuition and an additional \$5,000 to \$7,000 stipend (he notes that the stipend is necessary because his best people, the very individuals he would want to enroll in REEP, would otherwise earn that much by working summer school). Klussmann observed, regarding his own experiences in education leadership roles and his undergraduate degree in business, “I used a lot of this stuff—accounting, organizational design—that's just not talked about in the ed schools.”

REEP continues to build new relationships. In a significant development, the influential nonprofit Raise Your Hand Texas elected in 2011 to pay the \$6,000 tuition for districts to enroll 20 Houston-area principals in the Business Fellowship cohort starting in March 2012. Raise Your Hand Texas CEO David Anthony, former superintendent of Cy-Fair ISD, said the organization had sent 500 Texas school leaders to the week-long Harvard Institute for School Leadership over the past four years, at a total price of about \$4 million (a cost of roughly \$8,000 per participant). Having been favorably impressed by REEP, and with the opportunity to



*TING SHA, REEP COHORT III –SUMMER INSTITUTE*

**“ REEP ALSO RELIES ON A HOST OF CLOSE RELATIONSHIPS WITH DISTRICTS, CHARTERS, AND OTHER ORGANIZATIONS TO HELP CANDIDATES PAY THEIR TUITION... ”**

### **PROGRAM COST**

provide a year’s worth of in-state training (including the two-week Summer Institute) for roughly the per head cost of the Harvard program, Anthony opted to boost his REEP ties. He explained, “We got a warm feeling from sending folks to Harvard, but we have to evaluate the impact. So we sent folks this past summer to REEP and are evaluating it... Rice is in Texas, it’s a great university and a great program, so let’s try it out.” Indeed, Anthony was prepared to enroll 40 candidates, but Hodge elected to limit the number to 25 in order to avoid overloading REEP with candidates from any one source.

Drawing on the largesse of Houston Endowment, the initial REEP design included full tuition reimbursement to MBA candidates who stayed in a Houston-area public school for five years after graduation. While students have to pay the upfront cost of tuition—a cost that can be prohibitive, especially for MBA candidates eyeing \$94,000 over two years—students indicate that guarantee made a giant impression.

However, Houston Endowment had concerns that the model was not sustainable in the long-term with the existing cost structure. Even though the foundation has a track record of being a patient



funder, program officer George Grainger noted that “we need to see a mixed-revenue model for sustainability over time so it’s not so tied to philanthropic support.” Given how marketable a Jones School degree is, he said, “It’s reasonable for a student to pay some of the costs. The question is, ‘What’s an equitable split?’” For the fourth cohort, REEP reduced tuition reimbursement to 90 percent, and that will decline to 80 percent starting in 2012.

REEP operates on an annual budget of \$2 million. Roughly half of this support is spent on the MBA program, primarily tuition reimbursement. The rest of the outlays are divided between faculty for the Business Fellowship and Summer Institute (a cost of about \$400,000), salaries and benefits for REEP staff (\$400,000, as noted above), costs associated with the practicum (\$100,000), and other program expenses like those for marketing and materials (\$100,000).

## PROGRAM CONTENT

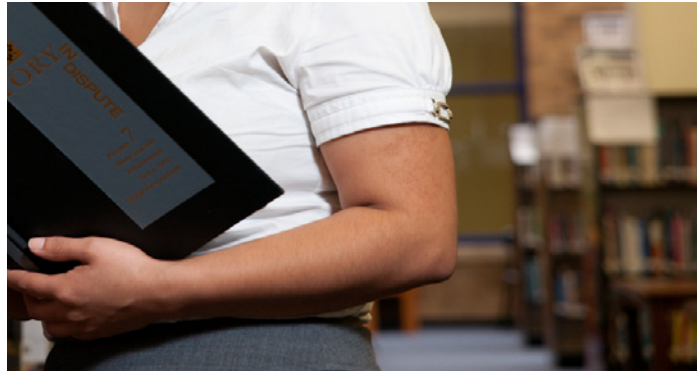
Generally speaking, there are eight core areas of instruction central to business and management preparation. These are: finance, marketing, accounting, organizational behavior, strategy, operations management, data analysis, and principals of economics. Whereas almost all of the nation’s educational leadership programs dismiss most of these competencies in favor of a vocational approach presumably geared to the “unique” challenges of K-12 leadership, the REEP model explicitly presumes that the tenets of strong leadership and management in K-12 are broadly similar to those in a variety of other fields. Thus, in lieu of a particular “educational leadership” canon, the curriculum is geared to the Jones School’s established leadership and management training.

As discussed earlier, MBA and Business Fellowship students enroll in business courses taught by Jones School faculty. For the MBA track, these courses are traditional MBA classes. For example, Financial Accounting, a first-year accounting course, addresses cash flow, accounts payable and receivable, accounting for fixed assets, bonds, and similar topics. Leadership Communication teaches students to communicate based on “sound strategic thinking” and to “provide meaningful peer feedback.” The Great Ice Cream Game is a two-day course in which students work as part of a team to determine how to spend a fixed budget on production and advertising for an ice cream shop, employing concepts learned in their data analysis, strategy, and organizational behavior courses.

In the Business Fellowship, students study similar topics but in a more compressed and applied context with classes meeting just every three weeks. As opposed to a whole course on Financial Accounting, students take a single day of “Accounting,” a day of “Finance,” and a day on “Simple Regression.” Other sessions include “Communications,” “Negotiations and Decision Making,” and “Implementing Strategy/Change Management.” Again, unlike a full MBA-style course, these classes intend to paint a broad overview of basic business/leadership concepts.

Jones School faculty recognize that some in K-12 may be resistant to what they see as “business-oriented” instruction, but note that at Jones, as at business schools across the nation, course instruction is routinely geared to preparing students for leadership roles in a broad swath of public and private enterprises. As Vikas Mittal explained, “If you’re trying to teach someone to write well, to write grammatically and clearly, there’s no difference if you’re teaching that to a doctor, a lawyer, or a nurse. There’s no special good grammar for doctors that’s any different for lawyers or nurses or anyone. It’s the same with marketing and cash flows...





**PG. 21: KIM HUSEMAN, REEP ASSOCIATE DIRECTOR, PROGRAM AND TALENT DEVELOPMENT**  
**PG. 22: BERNADETTE BLANCO, REEP COHORT I – BUSINESS FELLOWSHIP**

[they] are all the same no matter who you teach it to.” Kim Kehoe, a Jones School senior lecturer in management who has taught in both the Business Fellowship and Summer Institute, recalled, “Once [REEP students] understood this framework for understanding organizations, they embraced it and applied it quickly to their own situations.”

## REEP PRACTICUM

MBA and Business Fellowship students are required to complete a practicum, which is aimed at bridging the gap between the formal instruction and practice. Kim Huseman, associate director of programs and talent development for REEP, characterized the challenge of the practicum by asking, “How do we tie the business skills they learned into what they’re actually doing...How do we make it immediately applicable to their world?”

The practicum, which MBA students complete in their second year and Business Fellowship students the second six months of their one-year program, contains several elements. One is a mentoring component. REEP allows students to choose their own mentor for a mandated 40 hours of mentoring time. This role is informal and uncompensated. Given its informality and limitations, Huseman has found these mentors to be hit-or-miss in utility.

There is also a “field advisory” in which REEP staff select advisors for each student. The advisors are accomplished school or district administrators, REEP alumni, or retired leaders. Thus, an aspiring principal in Houston ISD might be paired with an HISD School Improvement Officer. Field advisors are paid \$450 per student per year. They are required to attend about 10 hours of REEP training and to meet with their mentee for at least six hours per

semester. Each works with one or two REEP students. The initial field advisory, consisting of three veteran or retired superintendents, ultimately disappointed, as Hodge found that their sensibilities were a poor match for REEP. She explained, “They weren’t a great fit for the program because they think the same way ed schools approach the issue...[and] we really wanted people who could leverage expertise and add value.”

The practicum also includes personal coaching from Huseman, a former service-learning developer and grant manager at Humble ISD with intimate knowledge of district operations, and forum groups where the REEP students meet for a total of 20 hours over the course of the year to process content and discuss applications. Students say the forums are a valuable opportunity for networking and relationship-building, but would prefer more opportunities to meet with their groups and to sustain them after graduation. REEP also requires a capstone “innovation project,” in which students connect their studies with a practical challenge they face in their schools. Projects have ranged from exploring YES Prep’s disciplinary system to developing a teacher recruitment system for a local district. Ericka Lawson, a graduate of the third Business Fellowship cohort and a 10-year veteran teacher currently in Houston ISD, designed an “early college” charter school in which students would receive their high school diploma as well as a certificate through a local community college that would prepare them to be career-ready. The school would be the first “early college” high school in the Houston area. With the assistance of REEP colleagues, and drawing upon expertise and relationships forged at REEP, Lawson’s application will go to the state in 2012 and she hopes to open the new school in 2013.

# WHY REEP MATTERS

REEP is one intriguing piece of a broader effort to break the iron-grip that education schools have long held on K-12 leadership preparation. Alongside efforts like New Leaders for New Schools, the KIPP Fisher Fellowship program, and the Broad Superintendents Academy, REEP offers an opportunity to select and cultivate a distinctive cohort of aspiring leaders in a new setting, and with a new set of premises regarding what and how they should be taught. What makes Rice distinctive, even among this handful of nontraditional programs, however, is its unapologetic embrace of the management canon, its emphasis on serving a single geographic community, its explicit embrace of entrepreneurship, and its integration into the existing programs of a prestigious business school. All of this means that we can draw some invaluable insights into the advantages, challenges, and lessons learned from REEP's unique model.

## ADVANTAGES TO THE REEP MODEL

Launching REEP at a business school, and doing so at a university that had no education school, provided several unique opportunities.

### FRESH OPPORTUNITY TO BUILD AN INNOVATIVE PROGRAM

Unlike most ed school-business school partnerships, which inevitably draw upon the faculty and programs already in place, Rice was able to build a unique education leadership training program from scratch. In one sense, this was an obvious disadvantage. But, the opportunity to start fresh was also central to the program's vision and its embrace of the entrepreneurial possibilities of "greenfield schooling."<sup>22</sup> It meant that REEP could use the expertise of the Jones School without worrying about stepping on the toes of an ed school or having to use education faculty. Rice president David Leebron explained, "REEP is a huge opportunity for us... [traditional education schools] won't touch certain issues." For instance, charter schooling is a subject of fierce debate at many ed schools, while such questions are a non-issue in REEP courses where charter and district educators learn side by side. Leebron said that, at Rice, "We don't have an ed school and we don't want one."

### ABILITY TO LEVERAGE MANAGEMENT EXPERTISE

The initial REEP proposal explicitly argued that running schools and school systems has much in common with running a business. All told, there are 15 independent school districts in greater Houston, managing a total of over 700,000 students with a \$4 billion annual budget. The proposal concluded:

*"The leadership challenge for education in the Houston area is on the same scale as the management and leadership requirements for corporations such as ExxonMobil and GE... Major corporations have a ready supply of MBA candidates, specifically trained for business leadership, to recruit from as they build their management ranks. In education... there are joint degree and dual-degree programs in business and education, but no program is geared towards providing education professionals with the same kind of management and leadership skills of a potential senior leader at GE or ExxonMobil."*

### EXPLICIT FOCUS ON PREPARING BOTH DISTRICT AND CHARTER LEADERS

Even in Houston, a city widely recognized as a hotbed of charter schooling, the relationship between charter and district educators has often been characterized by wariness and misunderstanding. One reason is that, despite gradually growing ties, there is still limited interaction between the two sectors. REEP explicitly set forth to be a program that would recruit from and prepare leaders for roles in both sectors, seeking also to deepen ties and share learning across the divide. On this score, REEP has already been quite successful, as alumni as well as local charter and district leaders offer a raft of examples of REEP ties sparking them to question practices, share strategies, explore hybrid initiatives, and recruit from the other side of the charter-district divide. For example, Cendie Stanford, a graduate of the second Business Fellowship cohort, went through REEP as an educator from Spring Branch ISD. She proceeded to take a leadership role at a YES Prep school and is preparing to return to Spring Branch to help start a YES Prep school there.

### A CHANCE TO CULTIVATE THE LOCAL TALENT POOL

Unlike education leadership programs with a more national focus, REEP was designed to cultivate the talent pool in one community. A key factor in explaining the success of any dynamic state or region is the prevalence of human capital and of institutions and networks that create social capital and attract more talent.<sup>23</sup> REEP's design is intended to offer an alluring new path to potential leaders, to keep those talented leaders in the local ecosystem, to forge new ties across districts and across the district and charter sectors, and to infuse local leadership with thinking and networks that stretch beyond the narrow world of K-12. REEP does this by offering a nearly free MBA to graduates who serve as Houston-area school leaders for five years after graduation, through its practicum, and by seeking to cultivate a strong alumni network.

## OPPORTUNITY TO CHERRY-PICK A NATIONAL FACULTY

One of the advantages of the REEP Summer Institute is that it offers an alternative to an expensive faculty recruitment arms race. Rather than trying to build a respected program by recruiting elite faculty away from Harvard University, Stanford University, or the University of Wisconsin, REEP's stripped-down approach permits it to draw upon leading thinkers at those institutions, pay them well for a limited period of adjunct instruction, and thereby avoid the costs and obligations of trying to build an entire education faculty. The reliance on elite adjuncts means that the Summer Institute doesn't "own" faculty who are writing articles or bringing in research grants, but it renders them highly flexible, making it easy to substantially modify instructional faculty or the mix of courses.

## CHALLENGES

REEP's unique model has surfaced a number of issues that shed light on some of the challenges bedeviling K-12 leadership today and that offer useful cautions and suggestions for those interested in emulating the model.

## SQUEEZING A DIFFERENT APPROACH INTO A SELF-ASSURED FIELD

A key tension for programs like REEP is the attempt to pioneer a new direction in leadership training while having to comply with state-level guidelines that presuppose a particular approach to training school leaders. Carol McKenzie, who helped REEP win state approval, noted that, in order to win state approval, "REEP [had to get] the requirements of principal certification in their program...you can teach your MBA program just as you'd like it, but you need to have add-ons" to comply with the state requirements.

# THE PERSPECTIVE OF REEP FACULTY

Jones School faculty members speak quite positively about having the REEP students incorporated into their courses. They also offered some thoughts on the advantages and challenges of the REEP model.

## EDUCATORS BRING HEALTHY DIVERSITY

Several faculty noted that stirring educators into the Jones School brought a healthy new element to the student mix. Faculty member Leo Linbeck III, who played a key role in launching REEP, said, "Faculty find that there's a dimension to REEP which they really cherish. Having a fourth energy trader in a class doesn't add much to the three who are already in there. But adding an inner-city teacher is a real value-add from a professor's perspective."

## HOW "MARKETING" MATTERS FOR SCHOOL LEADERSHIP

Marketing professor Vikas Mittal argues that marketing is a critical skill for education leaders. He explained, "Marketing is about problem-solving, not brochures or gimmicks;" it's about "understanding the needs of one's clients and finding ways to reach out to them." Mittal discussed one case in which local schools were struggling with declining enrollments. "At one campus, the principal was wasting money on fancy brochures and new programs, thinking this would attract enrollments. All wrong." The school had a more fundamental problem: it was far removed from city bus lines, and physically

inaccessible. This is where Mittal encouraged the school to focus its attention and resources accordingly. "What we focus on is understanding the needs of the parents and students and finding ways to better serve them. That's what marketing is about. The school made some very small, relatively cheap, changes, and now enrollments are shooting up."

## NO COMPROMISING OF QUALITY

Mittal indicates that, despite the dismal reputation of educational leadership, Jones faculty were not nervous that REEP would somehow compromise the quality of the Jones School. Expressing the skepticism that Jones School faculty had towards educational leadership, he said, "You can't relax your standards. There's lots of baloney built into education courses that don't have any substances. Our classes have substance. It's not a fly by the seat of your pants exercise." As such, Mittal and leadership professor Kim Kehoe indicated they taught their classes the same as they would for any other MBA class.

## NO MAGIC FORMULAS

Kehoe also pointed out the basics of making a program like REEP work. "To me [REEP] is well-thought out, it attracts people who are really committed, it's the real deal content-wise, [and] it creates this network of alumni. There's really no magic formula to it all."

The bigger challenge wasn't the add-ons, but the fact that the "correct" approaches to K-12 leadership imply certainty on questions that most non-K-12 authorities in management and leadership regard as uncertain. McKenzie said, "In the education world, there is a huge emphasis on collaboration and cooperation," while business school training often emphasizes competition. For instance, she pointed that the correct answer to a question on the principal licensure exam indicated that a principal would implement changes in their school "by working with all stakeholders to come to an agreement"—whereas the faith that stakeholders could find agreement or that this was always the optimal approach would be a contested proposition in the Jones School.

## STRUCTURAL AND LOGISTICAL CHALLENGES

Getting REEP started entailed a number of logistical challenges. These included recruiting students, generating faculty interest in the Jones School, building a faculty for the Summer Institute, and negotiating relationships with Rice, districts, and other key players. Colleen Dippel recalls the difficulty of preparing marketing materials for the first cohort, "[A university] is just not an entrepreneurial environment. They are a big brand, a big company. Anything to get approved and done had to go through a sea of middle managers."

## FINANCIAL SUSTAINABILITY

The program requires a hefty philanthropic subsidy to work as it is currently formulated. Grainger noted Rice's interest in protecting its traditional donors for its own priorities, and the high cost of the program, means that the current giving stream is not diversified and that its continuation is dependent on a substantial Houston Endowment investment. Still, Grainger said, "I think Houston Endowment is willing to stay with this for awhile, if it's showing results and the employers step up." Unless they design a different financial model, would-be imitators must look for a similarly deep-pocketed and patient investor. Still, given that a principal may impact 5,000 or more students over their careers, the investment, if successful, is quite low on a per-student basis—less than \$20 per student.

## SERVING BOTH ASPIRING LEADERS AND SEATED PRINCIPALS

Students, staff and alumni all point to the difficulties of designing instruction so that it meets the needs of both potential leaders and sitting principals. They have different needs and reference points and are equipped to make sense of different content. Andrea Hodge reflected, "Some seated principals didn't want the full MBA, but they did want differentiated instruction [from the aspiring principals.] It's just a different dynamic."

## CONCERNS IN BUSINESS SCHOOL ABOUT STUDENT QUALIFICATIONS

Jones faculty had predictable concerns about whether applicants would be suitable. Like any other dean at an elite business school, Glick was concerned about the Jones School's rankings. He was sensitive to anything that might adversely impact their national rankings, and that included incoming students who might drag down average GMAT scores. Part of the deal with both Houston Endowment and Rice was the agreement that there would be no compromising on student quality. Once that was resolved, faculty enjoyed the perspective the REEP students offered.

## STRUCTURAL IMPEDIMENTS TO RECRUITING

The Jones School's Dean Glick noted that it had proved more difficult to recruit students than Rice had initially expected. At first, the expectation had been that an MBA for school leaders would attract applicants from across the land. However, Glick said, "We underestimated how hard it would be to convince teachers that an MBA would be a good degree to have." Another challenge was that no one at Jones realized how much of a problem the state-to-state transfer of teachers and licensure really was in schooling, or the impact that would have on recruitment outside of Texas. Also, once REEP launched, Glick said they learned that teachers with five to seven years of experience—those roughly in REEP's sweet spot—"have already started working on their master's degree and don't want to throw those credits away even for a new, more challenging program."

## NEED TO LIMIT K-12 COHORT SIZE TO AVOID OCCUPATION OVERLOAD

Dean Glick noted that, since the MBA for Professionals program was limited to only 100 to 120 students per class, the Jones School had to take care that the REEP cohort didn't overwhelm the rest of the program with a flood of new students from one profession. Practically speaking, this means that there's a "ceiling," in Glick's estimate, of about 10 to 15 students per year in the REEP MBA program. This limits the number of students any one business school will be able to prepare through its MBA for Professionals program. This may suggest the value of a number of business schools to emulate the small-scale REEP approach in their own community.

## CAN LEADERS USE WHAT THEY'RE LEARNING?

Business schools often operate under the assumption that leaders have a substantial ability to reallocate time, staff and dollars and to remake routines. However, in K-12, leaders often operate in highly constrained environments. Is REEP doing enough to help its alumni translate the big, bold approaches to change management

they're learning into the more hidebound world of schooling? One tension is determining the degree to which education is similar to other constrained sectors, like health care, for which Jones trains students, or the degree to which it is uniquely constrained by rules, regulations, and culture. If the problem with much education leadership training is that it is too attuned to realities of today's schools and does not do enough to push leaders to imagine a new reality, the big challenge for REEP may be figuring out how to not just prepare aspiring leaders to lead creatively and dynamically, but how to translate these skills in the world of schooling.

## LESSONS LEARNED

In the end, what are the key takeaways? What would it take for funders, colleges or universities, or education reformers elsewhere to pioneer similar models?

### A PLACE LIKE RICE HAS TO BE WILLING TO TAKE A RISK

A number of key players in REEP's founding emphasized the importance of Rice University being willing to sign on to a new, bold idea, highlighting the commitment made by Rice. Linbeck noted, "Having a branded university partner is important... The folks who run district and charter schools are going to have to be extraordinary talents, and there's not an option for mediocrity."

### THE NEED FOR A FUNDER THAT CAN SIGNIFICANTLY UNDERWRITE EXPENSES AND TAKE THE LONG VIEW

Training a small number of entrepreneurial school leaders to have a high-leverage impact is an inherently risky and long-term bet. Unlike Teach For America, whose corps members have an immediate impact, waiting for educators to become school leaders and then start to exert their influence may take several years. Houston Endowment was willing to make a big bet on REEP, and seems inclined to stay with the program for a good long while. Other communities will require that kind of investor to step up.

### INFLUENTIALS COMMITTED TO THE EFFORT

Inside and outside of Rice, REEP enjoyed advocates who helped it clear logistical hurdles, secure funds, develop local relationships, and recruit students and a national faculty. Dippel said of Rice President Leebron: "You need a champion within the academic institution who has some clout and the ability to move things... [REEP] survived because David Leebron really got it." Equally critical was support from Jones School Dean Glick and Siva Kumari in Rice's provost office. On the outside, REEP's advisory board included key contacts in leadership roles in local school districts, in high-profile charter management organizations, and at Teach For America. This helped with visibility, coordination and recruitment.



*WILLIAM GLICK, DEAN, JONES GRADUATE SCHOOL OF BUSINESS*





*DAVID LEEBRON, PRESIDENT,  
RICE UNIVERSITY*

## IMPORTANCE OF THE JONES SCHOOL BRAND

Housing REEP in the Jones School was deemed essential by all of the effort's champions. Siva Kumari explained, "You're a CEO of a small company, and your business is educating students, and you're managing adults who are in the business of educating students. [REEP students] minds are being unclogged a bit. It has such rigor attached to it by going to an MBA." Linbeck spoke for many when he argued, "Having [REEP] at a business school is critical, because it communicates different expectations." The Jones School affiliation also brought clout and opportunities for graduates, which would help attract a particular kind of applicant. Dippel said, "The business school offered two things: a portable degree...and an MBA from Rice, a great school....Both the portability and the cache of the business degree would be appealing" to ambitious future school leaders, hopefully helping convince them to stay in K-12 and in Houston.

## DOUBTS ABOUT WHETHER REEP COULD BE LAUNCHED AT AN INSTITUTION WITH AN EDUCATION SCHOOL

Those involved in launching REEP repeatedly expressed skepticism that they could have built it at Rice if an education school had been in place. Those who had dealt with other local schools of education spoke of the frustrations of having to negotiate ways to ensure that new programs didn't step on the toes of established programs or faculty members. Rethinking the assumptions of how to train school leaders was thought to be possible only when working on a fresh slate.

## CONTEXT MATTERS

In the end, the cordial relations in Houston between school districts and charter schools, and the respected position of Rice and Houston Endowment, meant that REEP was able to draw upon the efforts of diverse talent and to answer the needs of an array of clients. REEP benefited from a confluence of developments. K-12 education reform was a product of Rice's strategic vision under Leebron (who also serves on KIPP's national board), REEP could serve both local districts and to help meet the needs of the rapidly growing KIPP Houston and YES Prep schools, there was a sense that more had to be done to keep TFA alums in Houston, and a major local foundation was ready to invest in leadership. Kumari remembers that, for all the obstacles and headaches, "It seems almost impossible in hindsight, [but] we just kept on course. [We said] this is going to happen, come hell or high water.

**“ HAVING [REEP] AT A BUSINESS SCHOOL IS CRITICAL, BECAUSE IT COMMUNICATES DIFFERENT EXPECTATIONS. ”**

## THE SUMMER INSTITUTE AND BUSINESS FELLOW TRACKS ARE EXPANDABLE

While there is a hard ceiling on the number of REEP MBA students that Jones can produce, the constraints on the Summer Institute and the Business Fellows tracks are much less certain. Indeed, in 2012 and beyond, Andrea Hodge is exploring the possibility of leveraging the Summer Institute to offer REEP-caliber instruction to a growing population of leaders—including some beyond Houston. Jones Dean Glick noted that REEP cannot grow to accommodate more MBA students, but that other universities could certainly launch their own MBA for Education Professionals degree, and then tap into the REEP Summer Institute rather than build their own from scratch.

## WHAT NOW?

REEP is not the solution to America's need for tens of thousands of terrific educational leaders. It's too early yet to really say even whether the REEP model "works" in any meaningful sense, or whether its graduates are effective. However, what is most important about REEP is that it is a pioneering attempt to approach educational leadership in a smart, distinctive fashion. It has the potential to bring new models of thinking into educational leadership, to attract and retain talent that would previously have departed the sector, and to provide a hub for far-reaching change leadership in the Houston community. Whatever the eventual outcome, REEP itself is an example of the kind of boundary-smashing entrepreneurship that may carry school reform past the confines of narrow convention and into a new era of possibility.

*RICE UNIVERSITY CAMPUS*





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