



## Urban Schools Human Capital Academy End-of-Program Evaluation Report

### Executive Summary

#### Context

The Urban Schools Human Capital Academy develops, supports and networks Human Capital leaders in urban school districts to drive measurable improvement in Teacher and Principal quality. Working with partner districts over a three-year period, it seeks to support each Human Resources/Human Capital (HR/HC) division's efforts to become a more highly strategic, fully integrated, and functional component of its school system. The USHCA was established in response to the many unique and critical issues facing urban school districts, such as recruitment, hiring, retention, and performance management, that can be effectively addressed by more strategic and integrated HR/HC support. The USHCA believes that strategic HR/HC teams will be better able to support districts' efforts to focus on teacher and principal quality, and that HR/HC teams where all staff members understand how their roles support every aspect of the urban reform movement are essential to addressing these challenges in ways that will provide sustainable and lasting change.

With support from the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation for the first cohort of participants, the USHCA launched in April 2012 with an initial cohort of ten urban school districts. Districts participating in the first cohort included: Atlanta Public Schools, Baltimore City Public Schools, Denver Public Schools, Hillsborough County (FL) Public Schools, Houston Independent School District, Los Angeles Unified School District, Shelby County/Memphis City Public Schools, Pittsburgh Public Schools, Prince George's County Public Schools, and Tulsa Public Schools.

Early in the first year of program implementation the USHCA launched a program evaluation with the support of a research consultant. The purpose of the evaluation was two-fold:

1. To provide USHCA leaders with interim reporting of program implementation and effectiveness that can guide further development and revision of the model.
2. To provide formative and summative data describing what participants learned, the strategies that were implemented in their district HR departments as a result of participation, and the program's strengths and areas for improvement.

## Methodology

The program evaluation consisted of multiple data collection and analysis activities and was a collaboration between USHCA staff and the research consultant. The evaluation was carried out over the course of three years and included surveys of participants administered after each Academy session, collection and analysis of data related to USHCA metrics by staff members as part of the ongoing programmatic activities, multiple site visits to districts conducted by USHCA leaders, and one-on-one interviews of district HR/HC leaders and USHCA Partners and Fellows. Over the course of the evaluation, data were analyzed and reviewed by USHCA staff and the research consultant to gather formative feedback on the model's implementation and effectiveness and guide ongoing development and refinement of the model.

## Key Findings

Data collected for the end-of-program report point to several high-level findings about the model's strengths, impact, and areas for consideration regarding potential improvements or enhancements. Specific summary findings are presented within three broad categories: USHCA Content, Impact of USHCA participation, and USHCA Implementation.

### USHCA Content

1. Overall, the USHCA model is viewed as very high quality and impactful on driving the positive transformation of HR/HC departments broadly and on the development of specific practices and processes.
2. USHCA Academy sessions were consistently rated as high-quality learning experiences in terms of their content and structure.
3. The on-the-ground support provided by USHCA Partners and Fellows was also seen as highly impactful and very high quality, particularly in the combination of strategic and tactical support provided.

Representative data that support findings about USHCA Content include:

- Nearly all (9 out of 10) districts improved their data availability on key HR/HC metrics identified in the USHCA Teacher ABC Tool, with seven realizing double digit gains in the percent of metrics with readily available data.
- In three-quarters of the knowledge areas presented at Academy sessions across the three-year program, more than half of attendees reported their knowledge increased "a lot" as a result of attending the session.
- Eighty-five percent or more of Academy attendees rated each content area as moderately to very valuable for their professional learning, and similarly nearly all areas were rated as important to attendees' ability to successfully transform their Human Resources department by 85% or more of respondents.

### Impact of Participation in USHCA

1. District HR/HC transformation efforts most commonly focused in the areas of talent management, supporting schools and principals, incorporating data into HR/HC work,

restructuring the HR/HC department, and improving and/or reframing the role of HR/HC within the district.

2. Districts undertook a wide variety of activities and implemented a range of new systems and structures within these focal areas, leading to significant self-reported improvements.
3. HR/HC leaders credited USHCA with playing a significant role in driving these actions and improvements, either via direct content and/or consultation provided through the Academy curriculum or on-the-ground work of the Partner or Fellow, or through the shared learnings about specific strategies and/or tools provided by other USHCA partner districts.
4. HR/HC Leaders also saw great improvements in beliefs, capacity, and relationships, including an increased understanding overall of the HR/HC department's functionality and needed improvements, increased HR/HC capacity and knowledge, the development of shared beliefs in the strategic role of HR/HC and connection to student achievement goals, and stronger relationships with other departments.

### Implementation of USHCA Model

1. Conditions supporting district implementation of new HR/HC strategies and practices included stability and reform-mindedness of district leadership, shared views of HR/HC's role in driving strategic work, and strong partnerships with Academic leaders.
2. Sustainability of improvements was seen as probable, though largely dependent on the turnover of district staff given the risk of knowledge loss and/or change in leadership direction.
3. Factors supported the work of the USHCA Partners and Fellows included a dedicated on-the-ground partner to shepherd the work, a regular rhythm of touchpoints between the district and USHCA teams, and a clear vision for the district's HR/HC work including focal areas and metrics.

### Key Recommendations

As the USHCA launches work with a second cohort of 11 districts, several learnings from the Cohort 1 program evaluation should be considered, including focusing on differentiation of content and support based on district context; deep support for the planning and implementation of academy learning on the ground; and ways to utilize the USHCA staff support strategically. Specific recommendations for the USHCA to consider regarding potential improvements or enhancements to the model to further support district implementation and HR/HC transformation efforts include:

1. Customize the curriculum, sequence, and content based on district context.
2. Create a transparent scope and sequence for the three-year engagement, including milestones and learning goals by year.
3. Ensure action plans developed at the Academy are detailed, actionable, and realistic.
4. Clarify the role of district Academic leaders in the Academy curriculum and overall model.
5. Institute a process resulting in the co-creation of a district-specific USHCA implementation plan, including the development of focal areas via a district diagnostic

process completed early in the partnership, and associated metrics, benchmarks, and potential strategies and barriers.

6. Provide more specific and sustained support to districts around on-the-ground implementation of new strategies.
7. Implement a process to facilitate regular sharing and collaboration among USHCA Partners and Fellows.

## Conclusion

Program evaluation data collected across the three years of the USHCA's initial cohort revealed the model overall was viewed by district leaders and other participants as a powerful and impactful professional learning experience for urban school districts in the area of Human Capital improvement. One district leader expressed the views shared by many others by saying, "I would categorically say the support, information, and modules that we received from Urban Schools is invaluable. If I had my choice I would make it a specific requirement for every HR department in any school system. It is that valuable."