

Transforming Leadership: Puerto Rico's Professional Development Academy for Management, Leadership and Professionalism

The Beginning

In 2018, the auxiliary secretariate of the Institute of Professional Development and University Relations (IDPRU) at the Puerto Rico Department of Education (PRDE) enlisted the support of the Regional Comprehensive Center — currently the Region 3 Comprehensive Center (R3CC) — to create an innovative and rigorous academy for educational leaders. This project was based on needs assessment data that highlighted the necessity to support school principals and regional leadership to build their management capacity and develop a solid culture of leadership.

Working together, IDPRU and R3CC created the Professional Development Academy for Management, Leadership and Professionalism (EDUGESPRO). Since then, EDUGESPRO has impacted more than 500 school and regional leaders in Puerto Rico. Indeed, EDUGESPRO has become PRDE's signature leadership academy program.



Regional team receiving EDUGESPRO certificate on graduation day, May 2022.

The Program

EDUGESPRO is an international, collaborative program that certifies educational leaders in leadership and advanced organizational management, enabling them to develop and deepen skills in areas such as strategic planning, administration, and instructional planning, operations and monitoring.

The program empowers school principals to be transformational leaders through 10 rigorous seminars and 13 workshops for a total of 154 hours. Participants who are part of the regional leadership program receive an additional 30 hours of training in academic coaching, for a total of 184 hours.

EDUGESPRO is based on the 10 pillars of transformational leadership. Additionally, participants have organically created their own Community of Practice — establishing a collaborative leadership network which allows them to share and celebrate victories, learn from challenges and provide support across the island. One participant noted that their program colleagues transformed as human beings, see leadership in a different way and are committed to lifelong learning.

Overcoming Challenges

Despite challenges and interruptions to daily life and educational processes due to earthquakes, the COVID-19 pandemic, access to technology, financial struggles and the devastation of hurricane Maria, EDUGESPRO did not sacrifice content, quality or outcomes.

As a result, the participants of Cohorts I and II completed the program to standards higher than anticipated, exceeding completion estimates and experiencing personal and professional transformational growth.

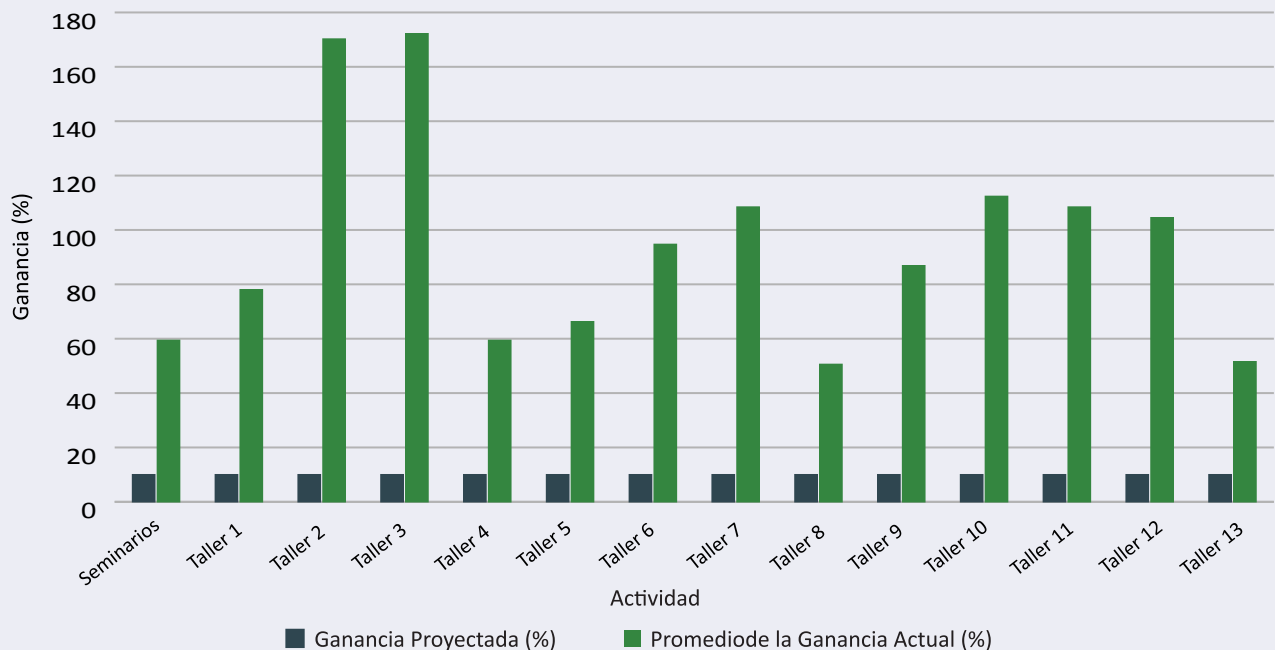
The Data

- Schools with principals in Cohort 1 (Treatment) scored significantly higher on overall management and leadership practices than the other schools (Control). This improvement represents closing 23% of the gap between school management scores in Puerto Rico and the continental United States (at baseline).
- Across the board improvements in management practices among Cohort I schools, especially in the areas of operations, monitoring, target-setting and personnel management.
- Improvements represent a closing of 17% to 75% of the gap between management scores in Puerto Rico and the continental United States (at baseline).

10 TRANSFORMATIONAL PILLARS

- Observation, Monitoring and Feedback to the Teacher
- Instructional Planning
- School Culture – High Expectations
- Strategic Direction (Planning)
- Data Driven Decision-making Culture
- Talent Management and Development
- Administration – Operations
- Monitoring
- Work Environment
- Leadership

GANANCIA EN EL DOMINIO DE LOS TEMAS ABORDADOS



For a total of 13 workshops among the cohorts, outcomes exceeded expectations in concept knowledge by using the Digital Workforce Management System Survey.

“Muy agradecida el tiempo, el esfuerzo y el profesionalismo que les caracteriza, pero lo mejor de todo la empatía y el gran interés que nos demuestran para poder lograr las metas trazadas, no tan solo con el departamento de educación, si no con nosotros, para que podamos demostrar el liderazgo que representamos no tan solo con nuestro ambiente escolar, también con nuestro país ...”

-Translation-

“Very grateful for the time and professionalism that distinguishes your team so much, especially the empathy and the genuine interest in helping us achieve our goals not only for the Department of Education, but also for our Island ...”

The Collaboration

The success of EDUGESPRO was a truly collaborative effort. R3CC’s role in the development of EDUGESPRO entailed conceptualizing the framework, identifying strategic local partners and sustainable funding sources (including ESSER), supporting alignment with the IDPRU and PRDE Strategic Plans, providing intensive technical assistance on developing workplans and Requests for Proposals, and providing logistics support when the program had to pivot from in-person to virtual delivery and, finally, planning the keynote speakers for graduation — the esteemed Dr. Michael Fullan and his colleague Dr. Santiago Rincon Gallardo.

This initiative leverages partnerships with the University of Toronto, the Abdul Latif Jameel Poverty Action Lab (J-Pal) out of Massachusetts Institute of Technology (MIT) and the island of Puerto Rico to transform and build leadership capacity at PRDE. The roles of international partners included curriculum design, foundational and theoretical pillars, identifying outcomes and program design and evaluation.

The Lessons Learned

EDUGESPRO, through intensive technical assistance and collaboration, was able to move away from traditional relationships with providers (such as vendors and consultants). This move was an essential one so that participants could evolve from a passive culture (relying on providers), to one of empowerment and ownership of a leader’s role and responsibility through capacity building.

Also, breaking the program participants into cohorts allowed the initiative to succeed because it provided a more intensive dedication to all participants’ needs and created a better understanding of each region’s educational state of affairs and goals.

The Path Forward

Given the success of EDUGESPRO and the challenges that were successfully navigated, IDPRU requested additional support from R3CC in conceptualizing the next iteration. Now that there are two cohorts of leaders in the pipeline, one of the ways R3CC is providing support is by identifying roles for these graduates. One idea is to extend EDUGESPRO to include an induction component so that recent graduates will serve as mentors and coaches to current academy cohort participants. This allows recent graduates to gain hands-on experience in applying skills learned in a customized school-based manner and provides current candidates with a support system both within the academy and within the academic leadership community.

In conceptualizing EDUGESPRO’s future, international partners will also be included in identifying criteria for coaches and mentors, future academy participants and establishing longitudinal tracking tools. With the momentum established, collaborators secured and research-based practices embedded, the future of EDUGESPRO is bright and will continue to build leadership capacity across Puerto Rico for years to come.