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The National LEADership Network

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In January 1988, the Institute for Educational Leadership joined in a unique partnership—with an agency of the federal government, the U.S. Department of Education, and with a major corporation, Kraft, Inc.—to develop and support a network among the federally funded LEAD Centers. Previous articles in this issue have conveyed the common mission of the LEAD Centers and underscored that each program is tailored to meet the problems and needs of the state. In this article, I will chronicle the development of The National LEADership Network (hereafter, the Network) which serves the heterogeneous collection of LEAD Centers, provide information about current activities, and offer a few thoughts on the Network's value and potential for impact.

The Network, officially launched in April 1988, moved quickly to become recognized as a useful resource which would provide community-building and dissemination services on behalf of the LEAD Centers and their many partners, and others engaged in leadership development. A tentative working agenda, focused on common and persistent leadership development issues and themes, was designed in support of the following goals:

- To promote the exchange of information across LEAD Centers, and between the Centers and other sponsors and users of leadership training;
- To increase awareness of available technical assistance and expertise which could help to ensure a high level of performance of each LEAD Center;

IEL is a Washington D.C.-based nonprofit organization dedicated to collaborative problem-solving strategies for education. IEL works at the national, state, and local levels to bring together resources and people from all sectors of society in a new coalition in support of essential change in schools. Betty runs IEL's leadership program. She has served as a public school teacher, and worked in policy and program positions with Project Head Start, the University of Maryland, and the State of Illinois. Betty holds an Ed.M. from the Harvard Graduate School of Education, and a M.P.A. from the John F. Kennedy School of Government, Harvard University.

- To strengthen organizational capacity to develop school leaders by working on and identifying needed training tools, materials, and techniques;
- To help states and communities adopt model programs, curricula, and policies for improving school leadership;
- To serve as a clearinghouse of information about LEAD Center programs and make the lessons learned available nationwide; and
- To promote greater awareness of the importance of training for school leaders.

Stories abound about new and exciting partnerships and networks that fell short of achieving their promise, did not achieve expected results and went out of business, or simply fell apart for a variety of other reasons. These constant reminders of failure, combined with information derived from more formal evaluation literature about establishing and running collaborative network programs, prompted the development of a short dos and don'ts list to guide the Network in its early stages: Participation in the Network would be voluntary; constituents would give the Network direction; the Network would meet the needs of the constituents; and the Network would make small amounts of resources available to enable members to focus on issues of specific concern. Thus, one of our major tasks was to work with the LEAD Centers to develop a Network agenda which focused on issues of common and persistent concerns across all of the Centers, yet simultaneously squared with the needs of individual Centers.

The resulting programs and activities of the Network are as diverse as the LEAD Centers. The Network sponsors opportunities for face-to-face contact for all members, supports small group gatherings where members convene to discuss particular topics of interests, connects with the agenda of other organizations and associations, keeps its members aware of current educational reform issues and related social policy issues; publishes collective information about LEAD Center programs; supports and strengthens the work of individual network members and disseminates that work through the Network; keeps an eye on the future by experimenting with other communication technologies; and uses its base in Washington, D.C., to stay abreast of education policy trends and issues and their implications for school leaders and leadership.

The initial message to the LEAD Centers underscored what the Network would try to accomplish and that involvement in any or all activities would be an individual Center decision, based on the perceived value of the service. But, to encourage one hundred percent involvement, the Network had to offer services which met the stated needs of the members/constituents. The ongoing relationship between the Department of Education LEAD Project Officers and the LEAD Centers gave the Network ready access to information about each Center program. These data were augmented with information from an informal survey which obtained Network members' perceptions of the most critical issues facing LEAD Centers at the conclusion of the first year of programming. The yield was a rich lode of information which led to the development of a Network agenda focused on the real needs of the LEAD Centers.

Five of the issues that emerged from the field survey are the focus of special Network study groups. These groups, assembled on the basis of interest in the topic, have participants from among the 57 LEAD Centers which ensures multiple perspectives on and approaches to the issue(s). The work plans developed by the study teams will result in products which will be useful to Network members and to the larger world of leadership development.

- **Restructuring Schools Group** will become knowledgeable about the actual approaches to restructuring schools that are being applied around the nation (Miami-Dade; Rochester, etc.) and to the related training needs of administrators. A final goal is to develop a framework for a training program and materials for use in preparing school administrators for the actual leadership role in restructured schools.
- **School Improvement Group** will collect information and share knowledge about how to develop the capacity of school leaders—district level and building level—to foster and support systematic school improvement. The focus will be on identifying what special knowledge and capacity leaders need for this endeavor, and how the training needs can be met. The group will also identify training materials and methods that are currently available for these purposes.
- **Women and Minorities Group** will help to develop strategies to improve the access of women and minorities to school leadership positions. The initial goal will be to identify and analyze the current LEAD effort and disseminate the most successful practices in use around the country. The group's most important contribution will come from its work fashioning bold new strategies which will help LEAD Centers and others who prepare school leaders to ensure that the future school leadership cohort is representative of the nation's pluralistic society.
- **Business Education Partnerships Group** will identify the most promising practices currently in use and make this information available throughout the Network. The group will look for best practices available with regard to traditional school-business partnerships, as well as models of effective and innovative business collaborations with leadership development organizations such as LEAD Centers.
- **State and Local Policy Group** will develop strategies to help LEAD Centers best serve the information and analysis needs of state policy makers. Much of the improvement in the quality of school leadership and in the programs for preparing and developing school leaders is a matter of state policies related to these issues. The group will also identify opportunities for LEAD Centers to support other efforts designed to improve state policy making attendant to school leadership issues, such as the forthcoming report and recommendations of The National Policy Board for Education Administration.

The Network takes seriously the admonition of the World Futures Society to "Think Globally, Act Locally." Specific programs have been designed to nurture change by supporting the LEAD Centers, working solo or in collaboration with other Centers or regional educational improvement laboratories. This strategy ensures that the Network can capitalize on naturally occurring opportunities. Several projects illustrate the importance the Network places on supporting creative ideas generated by the constituents to address significant issues.

- **Targets for Trainers: Toward More Productive Training.** The Kentucky LEAD Center, in collaboration with the Appalachian Educational Laboratory, will develop the competence and confidence of trainers to work with adult learners—the primary LEAD audience. A training manual will be developed and disseminated across the country.
- **The Professional Development Resource Book for Principals.** Effective principals are developed over an extended period of time. In recognition of the need for

career-long learning, The Maryland LEAD Center will complete its work on a resource book for principals which can be used by principals in schools across the country.

- **Mentoring for the Induction Year.** Beginning principals leave their teacher network and are required to develop a new collegial support group. The Ohio LEAD Center's SAGES Program, Senior Administrators Giving Educational Support, gives beginning principals an instant support group (and retired principals a method for sharing professional lessons with the next generation of school leaders). The project will extend the SAGES Program to principals in middle schools and high schools in Ohio and, of equal importance, develop a program manual for use by others who are interested in developing similar support strategies for beginning principals.
- **Improving Statewide Influence and Commitment to Leadership Development.** The Northwest Regional Educational Laboratory, on behalf of LEAD Centers in Alaska, Hawaii, Idaho, Montana, Oregon, and Washington, will work to develop strategies that strengthen and institutionalize the LEAD Centers' role as agents for change and improvement in the process of developing educational leaders. These "Northwest" strategies will be documented and made available across the Network.
- **Strategies for Effective LEADership Collaboration.** The LEAD Centers in the Northeast (Vermont, Massachusetts, New Hampshire, Maine, Rhode Island, Connecticut, New York) will meet with other state-based providers of leadership development to question what is involved in developing effective leadership collaborations. The group's goal is to determine how best to foster statewide leadership development coalitions, a necessary ingredient in continuing the work of LEAD Centers beyond the period of federal support.

Networking is often described as a process of close and direct connections between and among people. While generally an accurate description, many factors with the Network (geographic spread, array of organizational arrangements, time) made it impossible to use this one strategy as the primary program component. Thankfully, there are a plethora of ways to stay on top of an issue, continue to link others engaged in similar pursuits, or to build a community around common themes and interests. Thus, the Network works on its agenda and with its members in many ways.

An annual meeting, wherein the leadership development and renewal of those who provide leadership development is the major focus, ensures that all members of the Network have a chance to get away from the daily press of constituent service to discuss new and old leadership issues and ideas; current education reform initiatives and issues which have an impact on the kind of school leaders needed and attendant training requirements; meet with current leadership 'gurus'; and reestablish connections with others in the Network. The meeting is planned by a committee of the whole and held in Washington, D.C., to make it possible for Network members to interact with members from the U.S. Department of Education. As it moves into its second year of operation, the Network will offer additional opportunities for direct contact among members by connecting with the regularly scheduled meetings of professional associations and/or by cosponsoring seminars/conferences with other related organizations. In June, the Network will cosponsor a seminar with Center for the Study of School Leadership, University of Illinois/University of Mich-

igan. This seminar is viewed as the inaugural event of a proposed five-year activity designed to bring researchers and practitioners together on an equal footing to talk about school leadership development issues and an attendant research agenda. In March, the Network conducted a pre-session at AASA focused on the institutionalization of LEAD Centers (life beyond federal funding). While these are the Network's first official connections with other organizations and professional associations, it is expected that these expansion programs will become a part of the Network's ongoing agenda.

Several Network documents help to keep the Network together on a substantive basis. A *Catalog* of the initial 51 LEAD Center programs was produced in December 1988 and provided specific information about Center programs. The catalog, indexed on 25 commonly used descriptors of school leadership development efforts (skill assessment centers, tools and processes; school improvement, mentoring, peer coaching) provided easy access to the wealth of program undertakings. A special section entitled, *What Experience Has Taught Us*, featured candid perspectives on the major lessons learned during the first year of LEAD Center operation. This useful information was included to prevent members from "reinventing the wheel." A companion document, abstracts of all Center programs, provided an overall, yet admittedly brief, picture of ongoing programs and activities and their focus. These two resources represent a composite of the LEAD Centers and their current activities; they are valuable Networking tools.

Future products on the Network's agenda include the development of a source book on school leadership which will collect the best available about leadership development efforts in the public and the private sector, and the production of a national newsletter to keep members updated on what their peers are doing but, more importantly, keep them aware of others' efforts on behalf of leadership development.

While the Network uses tried and true strategies to ensure that its work is useful and that it serves an important, nay, a leadership function, it keeps an eye on the future by experimenting with new communication technologies. Through the Southwest Educational Development Laboratory, the Network is supporting a pilot electronic networking effort among the LEAD Centers in Arkansas, Louisiana, New Mexico, Oklahoma, and Texas. The results of this experiment will help the Network determine the feasibility of applying this technology to the total Network. A second experiment that is smaller in scope and shorter in duration is focused on the Network's Restructuring Schools Group. The work of the group is bolstered by an electronic conferencing capability which is being closely monitored to assess the extra value of this added feature. The combined data from these two experiments will give the Net-

work a better sense of how feasible it is to think about strategies which require new technologies for successful implementation.

While much remains to be done, it is fair to say that the various activities of the Network position it to make a lasting contribution to the development of effective school leaders. There is a striking similarity between Moorman's recapitulation of LEAD Centers' outcomes and the areas where the Network is now poised to make program and policy contributions: creating alternative curricula and training programs; putting new training methods and approaches into place; creating new opportunities for women and minorities in the field; and taking a higher and newer road in developing collaborative and consortial arrangements.

Since they are state-based organizations and arrangements, LEAD Centers are better positioned to have a state or perhaps a regional impact. The challenge before the Network is to harness these state impacts and outcomes, cull the best from the programs, the strategies, the bright ideas, the new coalitions, and make these lessons and this information available across the country—to other LEAD Centers, to colleges and universities that prepare school leaders, and to others in the field of leadership development. The Network's study groups and special projects are a first step in this direction. As the knowledge and practice for improving school leaders expands by dint of the diverse and disparate efforts of the 57 LEAD Centers and their many direct and indirect partners, the Network will connect these isolated outcomes to the large world of educational policy and leadership development. These Network actions will help to ensure that LEAD, the most recent federal education policy initiative on behalf of school leadership, achieves its potential.

Harlan Cleveland, author, *The Knowledge Executive*, tells us that in our information society, consultation and networking is the mandatory mode for getting things done. He illustrates this assertion with the following anecdote:

On a visit to Israel he (Cleveland) was told of an Israeli battalion commander who performed a drill in honor of a visiting dignitary. In a quiet, conversational voice, the commander gave the order: "Battalion march." The visitor, a senior general, was surprised and leaned over to give the young leader a word of advice. "You have to shout the order so they all start together." The young commander smiled tolerantly at this relic of the era of vertical administration. "Don't worry, General," he said. "The word will get around."

The National LEADership Network—the newest leadership development infrastructure—is committed to connecting practice with best practice and, to paraphrase Cleveland, is working in a number of different ways to strengthen the word and to ensure that it gets around.