

Boston-Harvard Leadership Development Initiative (LDI)

Year Five Evaluation

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The Boston-Harvard Leadership Development Initiative (LDI) is a five year program designed to build the leadership capacity of educators in the Boston Public Schools in order to enhance overall academic achievement for students. Begun in 1997, the LDI is a partnership of the Harvard Graduate School of Education (HGSE) and the Boston Public Schools, with funding and support from FleetBoston Financial Foundation and Harvard University. The LDI entered its fifth year of FleetBoston Foundation funding during the 2001-02 academic year.

ROCKMAN *ET AL*, an independent research firm, conducted a final, Year 5 evaluation to help the project staff and partnering organizations identify program elements that are most important to preserve or modify in future rounds of the program. Information was gathered through interviews with key school participants and surveys with graduate students of the Harvard Graduate School of Education who served as LDI school consultants.

School participants and HGSE doctoral students serving as LDI consultants identified a core set of LDI program characteristics that enabled schools to take on the important and complex challenge of building the leadership capacity of educators in the Boston Public Schools. Through its summer institutes, workshops and seminars, and LDI consultants and faculty, the LDI program provided school professionals with a diverse range of program components and services aligned to the Six Essentials of the BPS Whole School Improvement Plan deemed highly valuable and worthwhile. The specific elements and benefits that participants identified were:

- Research-based “grounding” and real-life exemplars of whole school change and instructional leadership: The LDI summer institutes, seminars and workshops provided school participants with valuable information about educational reform initiatives being emphasized in the Boston Public Schools that are “grounded” in research, or informed by educational theory. Armed with research-based evidence, coupled with visits to exemplary schools demonstrating the effectiveness of certain methods in raising student achievement for all students, educators described how the LDI gave them a useful, alternative perspective that strengthened their understanding of, and conviction behind, the importance of current educational reform efforts.

- Knowledgeable, Personalized “Outsider’s Perspective”: Through the LDI project director, graduate student and faculty consultants, school participants received information, support and advice from knowledgeable individuals outside the Boston Public School, yet ones highly familiar with their specific school and district contexts in

which they worked. Participants viewed the support offered as relevant, credible, trustworthy and well informed. A major focus of the efforts centered around the analysis of student data and test scores, to enable schools to become increasingly “data-driven” in their instructional decisions.

- Practical Skills and Techniques: The LDI workshops and seminars offered practical real-world skills that participants could apply day-to-day in their work in schools. Seen as particularly valuable were the critical people-oriented skills necessary for being a successful educator working with others. Learning how to conduct difficult conversations with colleagues, to run effective meetings, and to build teams were seen as essential when trying to move forward an agenda of instructional leadership in their schools.

- Opportunity to Think, Reflect and Act Upon Issues of School Improvement: The LDI afforded school professionals the opportunity to have the time, space, and opportunity to reflect on their professional lives, and share their insights, concerns, challenges, hopes, and plans for their schools. Individuals spoke about the importance of treating the school participants as true professionals: offering them choices, rather than directives, to select professional development opportunities that best match their needs and interests, and to allow them to identify the particular issues and objectives they wished to focus on each year in their LDI teams.

- Social Structures for Supporting Instructional Leadership: The LDI School Community: The LDI enabled educators to get together and be part of a close, yet broader community to share problems and solutions, setbacks and successes. The collegiality built over the multi-year program was clearly evident in LDI sessions, where educators animatedly discussed with each other what was occurring at their schools. It offered a rare opportunity for open, honest exchange with other educators within the Boston system, in an atmosphere of trust.

School participants suggested a number of program recommendations for future rounds of the LDI. Recommendations included the use of a shorter, 3-year period for school involvement, greater specification of goals, outcomes, and secured commitment from both school administration and teams for LDI participation and use of the LDI consultant; a yearly process of reflection and assessment of LDI team progress; continued utilization of both the regular “weekly” model and paired expertise model of LDI consultant support, and increased support from the district administration, such as greater commitment and resources from the district.

Individuals expressed some of what they experienced as the challenges confronting the LDI program participants, including the challenges of establishing shared leadership teams, the difficulty in sustaining whole school change initiatives when faced with the multitude of teaching and administrative duties and priorities back in their schools, the significant turn-over of administrative heads and staff in their schools, and the need for greater involvement, understanding, and support from district administration.

Based on the findings from the final Year 5 evaluation, coupled with our Year 4 evaluation, the evaluation team strongly recommends that the LDI's comprehensive, multi-year model of professional development and support around instructional leadership continue. The LDI provides an integral system of support that serves to sustain schools' progress in building school-site leadership in the Boston Public Schools and enhances academic achievement of all students.