



The Council of State Governments
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2011 Innovations Awards Application

DEADLINE: MARCH 28, 2011

ID # (assigned by CSG): 2011- _____

Please provide the following information, adding space as necessary:

State: New Jersey

Assign Program Category (applicant): Human Resources / Education (Use list at end of application)

1. Program Name:

Leaders Learning from Leaders Professional Learning Community Network

2. Administering Agency:

New Jersey State Department of Education, Office of Governance and Leadership Development

3. Contact Person (Name and Title):

Elaine P. Davis, Director

4. Address:

New Jersey State Department of Education, 100 River View Plaza, Trenton, New Jersey 08625

5. Telephone Number: (609) 984-5939

6. FAX Number: (609) 777-4538

7. E-mail Address: Elaine.davis@doe.state.nj.us

8. Web site Address: <http://www.state.nj.us/education/dsis/leadership/>

9. Please provide a two-sentence description of the program.

This program creates a mechanism for sharing best-practices among educational leaders to foster higher student achievement, at minimal cost to taxpayers. It maintains a self-sustaining network of professional relationships of stakeholders committed to promoting practical solutions to daily challenges, as well as addressing theoretical and practical approaches to change.

10. How long has this program been operational (month and year)? Note: the program must be between 9 months and 5 years old on March 28, 2011 to be considered.

September 2008

11. Why was the program created? What problem[s] or issue[s] was it designed to address?

Effective governance and leadership skills for administrators are essential to accomplishing the state's core mission of providing all New Jersey students with a "thorough and efficient" education.

National education research shows that improved student learning, especially for the most disadvantaged students, requires both high-quality teaching and high-quality school leadership.

Leadership is second only to teaching among school-related factors that affect student learning. And its impact is greatest in schools with the greatest needs, according to a comprehensive review of evidence on school leadership by researchers at the Universities of Minnesota and Toronto.

Engaging best-practices among school leaders and teachers is the cornerstone of New Jersey's education reform initiative. With 2,485 schools in 591 school districts, New Jersey needed to find a way to encourage dialogue between school principals and administrators. The idea was to provide professional development opportunities by fostering communication and encouraging innovation.

In order to assist administrators in the development of critical leadership skills, in 2008, the Department of Education established the Professional Learning Community Network (PLCN) exclusively for New Jersey's school leaders. To date, the network has more than 3,000 participants.

The program called "Leaders Learning from Leaders" provides a collegial network across the state that can ultimately improve teaching and learning. We encourage practitioners to share their journeys with one another.

By creating a system for opening lines of communications between school principals and administrators statewide, the NJDOE became the catalyst for better governance and leadership at the local school level. The Leaders program helps school officials focus on their collective needs while helping them identify common leadership solutions to critical challenges.

12. Describe the specific activities and operations of the program in chronological order.

- **The NJDOE developed initial strategies for improving communication among school leaders.**
- **NJDOE staff now serve as a sounding board for educational leaders, such as principals and administrators, to help them identify what they need to do their jobs better.**
- **Originally, the NJDOE partnered with universities to provide professional development sessions on best practices for school principals.**
- **The NJDOE, in cooperation with local school leaders, created Regional Advisory Councils to focus on future needs and identify exemplary practices**
- **The program evolved into a statewide network where educational leaders share common solutions to everyday challenges**
- **The NJDOE implements an annual state-wide conference and three regional summer institutes**

- **NJDOE staff developed evaluation forms to gauge effectiveness of profession development events**
- **NJDOE conducts in-school visitations to provide administrators with purposeful feedback**

13. Why is the program a new and creative approach or method?

This initiative is considered innovative because it does not mandate change, nor does it deal with compliance issues. Rather, it provides a forum for practitioners to share best practices and current challenges, and to collaboratively problem-solve.

The Wallace Foundation’s longitudinal reports on school leader effectiveness recognize the pervasive dilemma of leaders working in isolation, and failing to gain critical implementation insights from colleagues.

For the first time the NJ Department of Education has instituted a professional network to address these issues by creating the means to share proven strategies and cooperatively develop innovative approaches at the educational workplace.

14. What were the program’s start-up costs? (Provide details about specific purchases for this program, staffing needs and other financial expenditures, as well as existing materials, technology and staff already in place.)

In year one, Memorandum of Understanding (MOUs) agreements were established with three state universities who were contracted to provide technical assistance and professional development to participants in the network. The cost for these MOUs was approximately \$300,000. After year one, the funding was no longer available, and MOUs were discontinued.

In year two and now in year three, there is no additional cost to the taxpayer. Staff is allocated from the existing New Jersey State Department of Education budget. The network is firmly established and self-sustaining among participants statewide.

Approximately fifteen Advisory Council members, per region, volunteer their time. Sites for professional development events are cost-free to the state, as participants in the network host events in their districts and schools.

15. What are the program’s annual operational costs?

Yearly operation costs support salaries and benefits of one director, two and one-half regional coordinators and one support staff.

16. How is the program funded?

The program is currently funded through the NJ DOE, with existing state funds by re-allocation of existing staff.

17. Did this program require the passage of legislation, executive order or regulations? If YES, please indicate the citation number.

No.

18. What equipment, technology and software are used to operate and administer this program?

We have a webpage devoted to the Office of Governance and Leadership Development on the New Jersey Department of Education website. A registration database for upcoming events is accessible on the New Jersey Department of Education homepage. No additional technology or software is currently utilized.

19. To the best of your knowledge, did this program originate in your state? If YES, please indicate the innovator's name, present address, telephone number and e-mail address.

The individual responsible for spearheading this initiative is Elaine P. Davis, Director of the Office of Governance and Leadership Development, New Jersey State Department of Education, 100 River View Plaza, Trenton, New Jersey 08625, Elaine.davis@doe.state.nj.us

20. Are you aware of similar programs in other states? If YES, which ones and how does this program differ?

We have no knowledge of similar programs specifically like this. The strength of the network is the capability of New Jersey practitioners to open their schools as the "sites of effective" practice.

The evidence of effective practice must be observable and replicable under the guidance of the presenting practitioner. The sustainability of the network is through the power of the relationships and reality of authentic practice in dealing with current high accountability issues in the improvement of teaching and learning.

21. Has the program been fully implemented? If NO, what actions remain to be taken?

The initiative is in its emergent stage of development. Though we have firmly established the network with a following of approximately 3000 educational leaders throughout the state, it is our intent to broaden its membership.

The network has been designed to meet the needs of educational leaders and to support the educational agenda in New Jersey. As needs arise, and the educational emphasis expands nationally, so too will the network need to develop and expand. Towards that end, we are exploring the possibility of establishing Leadership Academies where highly qualified mentors/coaches will provide on-going professional development and technical assistance to educational leaders throughout New Jersey.

Another goal would be to further develop our partnerships both inter-departmentally at the NJDOE, and externally, with institutes of higher education so that we can improve upon our educational leader preparation programs.

22. Briefly evaluate (pro and con) the program's effectiveness in addressing the defined problem[s] or issue[s]. Provide tangible examples.

This initiative has been met with state-wide approval by its members. We have numerous evaluation forms from our regional and state-wide events that document the worth of the network.

The difficult part of documenting our effectiveness has been the inability to identify a funding source which would enable us to hire an external evaluator to assist us in the process. The guiding research questions we continuously use to inform our practice are the following: 1.) What are the school leaders' perceptions of and experiences with the network/events?; 2.) To what extent are the participants implementing and using strategies or learning presented in the network/events in their schools?; 3.) What is the impact of the professional development sessions and the PLC network on participants' professional practice?; 4.) What feedback do participants offer as to their future professional development needs?

23. How has the program grown and/or changed since its inception?

Membership in the network has grown to approximately 3,000 participants. As membership grows, so does the collective of good ideas and best practices. Practitioners share best practices by presenting sessions among stakeholders. The network provides the structure for participants to collectively problem solve and discuss mutual challenges they face on a daily basis. The strength of the network is a result of the relationships that develop among educational leaders with a common goal of improving teaching and learning.

Once created, the network became self-sustaining, with guidance and coordination by NJDOE staff. Therefore, financial needs are minimal.

24. What limitations or obstacles might other states expect to encounter if they attempt to adopt this program?

While this program can be implemented with minimal or no added expense, by re-allocating existing state staff, the initial start-up challenges could be financial if states do not have existing staff to allocate, or decide to contract for professional development presenters or facilitators to get the program and network started.

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2011 Innovations Awards Application Program Categories and Subcategories

Use these as guidelines to determine the appropriate Program Category for your state's submission and list that program category on page one of this application. Choose only one.

Infrastructure and Economic Development

- Business/Commerce
- Economic Development
- Transportation

Government Operations and Technology

- Administration
- Elections
- Information Systems
- Public Information
- Revenue
- Telecommunications

Health & Human Services

- Aging
- Children & Families
- Health Services
- Housing
- Human Services

Human Resources/Education

- Education
- Labor
- Management
- Personnel
- Training and Development
- Workforce Development

Natural Resources

- Agriculture
- Energy
- Environment
- Environmental Protection
- Natural Resources
- Parks & Recreation
- Water Resources

Public Safety/Corrections

- Corrections
- Courts
- Criminal Justice
- Drugs
- Emergency Management
- Public Safety

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This application is also available at www.csg.org.