

LSS Laboratory for Student Success Field Notes

Capturing Conversations of Procedural Knowledge

**LSS Field Notes document experiences
in context in education, capturing
conversations of procedural knowledge.**

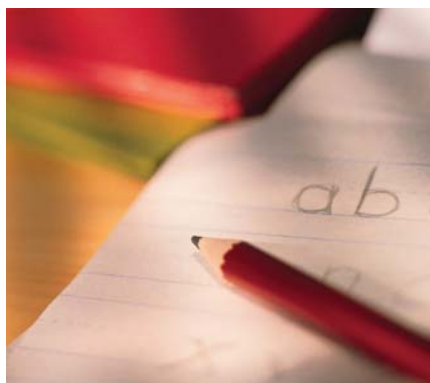
Improving Governance, Leadership, and Learning in New Jersey State Action for Education Leadership Project (SAELP) Forum January 28–29, 2003

New Jersey is one of fifteen states selected by the Wallace-Reader's Digest Fund to receive a planning and implementation grant for setting a reform agenda for a series of state policies that are designed to improve educational leadership and student learning. Under this grant, the State Action for Education Leadership Project (SAELP) Consortium—a group that represents the governor's office, the state legislature, education associations, the New Jersey Department of Education, higher education, business, the public, and parents—has been meeting for the past 2 years to engage in careful analysis of current educational research, state policies, and thoughtful deliberation that will lead to effective policy recommendations. Educators throughout the country will find the following account of the New Jersey SAELP Consortium's approach to addressing the educational governance issue helpful as (a) a guide to approaching governance in their own states and (b) evidence illustrating that voices of educators and stakeholders can effect change.

The New Jersey SAELP Consortium held a 2-day forum in January 2003, entitled, "Improving Governance, Leadership, and Learning in New Jersey." The forum was attended by members of the New Jersey Department of Education, the New Jersey Principals and Supervisors Association, the New Jersey Association of School Administrators, the New Jersey School Board Association, key participants in the Kentucky and Massachusetts school

systems reform programs, and New Jersey administrators, teachers, and school board members. The purposes and goals of the forum were as follows:

- To explore and increase understanding of issues related to local governance and authority structures that adversely impact conditions for leadership practice at district and school levels and thereby impede efficient and effective management, operations, and implementation of instructional programs and services that support high achievement for all students.
- To establish a common knowledge base for participants by providing information and opportunities for them to examine governance issues and trends from a national and state perspective.
- To explore the connections between state statutes, policies, regulations, and actual conditions for practice at district and school levels to determine areas of common ground where policy changes may be proposed to address identified issues and impediments.
- To link explicitly the impact of governance and authority structures to conditions for leadership practice and to teaching and learning.
- To develop a comprehensive list of these governance issues, concerns, and potential solutions for deliberation and consideration by the SAELP Governance Task Force as recommendations for improving local governance and conditions of practice.



systems reform programs, and New Jersey administrators, teachers, and school board members. The purposes and goals of the forum were as follows:

The following forum topics concerning

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at

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improving governance and conditions for practice were framed so that realistic recommendations could be made while focusing on issues at both the district and school levels:

- A. Local Governance and District Leadership Practices
 - Strengthening district leadership to improve schools, teaching, and learning
 - Continuity of leadership
 - Superintendent/board of education roles and relationships
- B. Governance and Authority Structures
 - Decentralization
 - Decision-making processes
 - Accountabilities
- C. District/School Roles and Relationships
 - Strengthening school leadership
 - District support for schools
 - Coordinating efforts to improve schools, teaching, and learning

This framework was used as a guide for beginning a dialogue and helping participants to remain focused on the issues that affect New Jersey's goal of improving student learning and achievement. The following is a summary of this dialogue and the forum's proceedings.

Keynote Speaker

Michael Usdan, Senior Fellow
Institute for Educational Leadership

SAELP was conceived at a time of optimism, when leadership was the forefront issue. This has changed rapidly and dramatically. Three fundamental changes have reshaped the context in which SAELP is taking place:

1. a fiscal crisis,
2. changes in leadership, and
3. No Child Left Behind legislation.

Regarding money and the fiscal crisis, the National Conference of State Legislatures projected a shortfall of approximately \$67 billion in state budgets throughout the country in 2003. New Jersey anticipated a \$1.3 billion shortfall in fiscal year 2002, and a \$5 billion shortfall was projected for fiscal year 2003. The economy stalled and the stock market plummeted; the fiscal pain was ubiquitous throughout the country, and states are still feeling the impact.

The impact of changes in leadership on an organization like SAELP can be dramatic, and New Jersey, one of two states that elect governors in odd years, experienced a leadership turnover last year. The SAELP's infrastructure and the leadership issue managed to survive that change, which was a fascinating test and uncommon example of a new project being able to survive a gubernatorial transition.

The political support for programs and organizations like SAELP is constantly subject to change because of the political parity in the United States today. Of the 8,500 legislators in state governments, 49.6% are Republicans and 49.4% are Democrats. Democrats control 16 legislatures, Republicans 21; 13 legislatures are split, and one is unicameral.

These circumstances—the shaky status of the economy and the political parity—as well as the volatile international situation can change at any moment. This context is important because the work of SAELP—trying to sustain and even advance the leadership agenda to improve American education—is taking place in a time of both domestic and international crisis. Implementation efforts to keep leadership and education issues in the forefront will be exceedingly difficult, depending on what happens both domestically and internationally.

The third fundamental change, the enactment of the No Child Left Behind (NCLB) legislation, is already dramatically changing the political and the ideological landscape of American education. The federal government still is paying 7% of the total bill for elementary and secondary education. Yet, NCLB will require 100% state accountability if the legislation is fully implemented. The great question to be answered is whether or not states will have the capacity to handle this responsibility. The cost of federally mandated testing is already being felt by states.

There will be “a shaking-out and a shaking-down” of this legislation as it works its way through a very complicated state and federal system, and as federal, state, and local governments determine their respective responsibilities. As NCLB is implemented, educational leaders should avoid being too critical; they need to keep sight of its lofty and admirable purpose—all children learning—and the promise that the accompanying need to disaggregate data holds for achieving that purpose. In light of the country's rapidly changing demographics—which continue to reshape public education dramatically—such measures will help educators respond to the changing needs of their students and their communities, as Kentucky has done in establishing family resource centers within its schools.

Leadership in education has so many different dimensions and definitional issues that it's very elusive, and has become more complicated since the involvement of business and political communities. It now has three major dimensions:

- managerial,
- instructional, and
- political.

Principals had for a long time served as managers of schools, but in the last 10 or 15 years there's been a sea change in their responsibilities. Now, at long last, the focus is on instructional leadership. But the problem facing princi-

pals is that their preparatory institutions did not offer courses in curriculum programs until the mid-1980s, and many principals are not prepared for this new role; they need crash programs in instructional leadership. They now also are being asked to make contacts with community leaders and even in some cases state legislators to garner support for schools and programs.

It is impossible for principals, as well as superintendents, to handle adequately the managerial, instructional, and political dimensions of the job. It is not surprising that these multiple demands are creating a shortage of educational leaders. It now takes 8–14 months to fill superintendency positions, as opposed to 3–5 months in decades past; and 85% of principals are scheduled to retire within a decade.

So what do we do? We have to find new kinds of team approaches to the job. We need to rethink the role and rethink who is best equipped to provide certain kinds of leadership. This is what SAELP can potentially do.

It is important to remember that while change occurs from the top down—business and political leaders are pushing change—it also has to come from the bottom up. Unless the teachers, principals, and frontline people “buy in,” not very much will happen. So one of the challenges is to build connecting mechanisms from top to bottom. Leadership will span these boundaries.

Kentucky Panelists

David Hornbeck, Board of Directors Chair
Public Education Network

Kentucky needed to restructure its educational curriculum, governance, and finance. A restructuring committee recommended that a curriculum first be determined in order that the state might know how and what it was to govern and fund because these three aspects of the educational system are thoroughly interrelated. In short, what Kentucky’s educational system needed was both horizontal and vertical coherence—horizontal within the school and among people delivering education and vertical throughout the system’s hierarchy.

The issues of authority and accountability need to be addressed by schools seeking to restructure, and school-based decision making is Kentucky’s approach to school

reform. To be successful, school-based decision making too must be characterized by coherence in its authority structure and accountability system. Kentucky’s success results from its accountability structure. Accountability can be broken down into three necessary types:

1. educator accountability,
2. student accountability, and
3. citizen accountability.

Citizen accountability facilitates the accountability of educators and students. And authority for change must include students, must focus on them as vehicles for change, not just objects of change. Educators and parents need to acknowledge that students have a role in change and should even be on the board for school-based decision making.

Establishing coherence is the key to leadership throughout an educational structure; it creates a system of checks and balances, with the community and state united in working towards a common goal: the students’ academic success. All the vision in the world won’t lead to much without coherence. Furthermore, before restructuring can begin, educators must be keenly aware of two principles: Cooperation and collaboration are necessary

because they are key to establishing coherence in an educational system; and all students can learn at higher levels.

Finally, schools need to focus on beliefs, standards, assessment, and accountability and have a *system of change*, incorporating in a coherent way all of these factors that are valued. After all, in the end, successful education systems are about values. Schools just need the courage to move and lead.

Charles Edwards, Director for Leadership Development

Kentucky Department of Education

Thanks to David Hornbeck’s involvement and work, the Kentucky Education Reform Act of 1990 is working and improving student performance. Kentucky began with the premise that “all children can learn.” We believe it and expect schools to operate according to this belief.

Education reform now involves high-stakes accountability. If schools are asked to have accountability to this degree, then the schools should be in charge. School accountability involves schools having the power to

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—Michael Usdan

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implement their own policies, which means school-based decision making. In Kentucky, this is accomplished through a school council: two parents, three teachers, and the principal. Each has an equal voice in policymaking decisions. As a result, the members of Kentucky's entire educational structure have evolved into supportive partners, which is key. As the years have progressed, every single general assembly session has granted more power and authority to school councils, not less, validating the success of school-based decision making.

In accordance with the Kentucky Educational Reform Act, a school's council chooses which principal to hire based on recommendations of the superintendent. Out of approximately 1250 schools in the state, less than 100 are lead by principals who held that position before the 1990 reform. In Kentucky, school council policies do not have to be consistent with the local board of education. The school council has the authority to decide the use of school space and instructional practices (i.e., disciplines, extracurricular programs, participation policies, etc.) and conveys its decision to the school board not for approval, but for review.

Disaggregated data from Kentucky reveal achievement gaps, and the schools have until 2014 to close the gaps. If Kentucky fails to achieve this, the state will slowly take power back from the schools. So the message to all schools is to "close that gap." To help address this requirement, Kentucky has procedures for ensuring that school councils have elected minority representation.

Is there research to prove that school-based decision making improves student performance? No, only because school-based decision making is not the only component involved. But all who are involved like it. In Kentucky, 1250 schools practice it and do a good job: 700 to 800 are at the performance level required by the state. Only 30 schools in Kentucky don't have school-based decision making, and they're exempt because they were already high-performing schools.

Massachusetts Panelists

S. Paul Reville, Executive Director

Center on Education Research and Policy at Mass, Inc.

The reform plan in Massachusetts applies specifically to issues of leadership in its call for "high performance and accountability in exchange for refinancing." Unlike the time when the reform began, about 10 years ago, state education goals are now in place, and Massachusetts has at least achieved adequacy

and equity. The promise of funding was kept, and over \$10 billion was allocated to the Massachusetts education system.

Massachusetts' Education Reform Act focuses on accountability in leadership. There are three principle areas of the reform:

1. standards assessment and accountability,
2. variety of systemic reform, and
3. resources that help to establish:
 - adequacy for every child, no matter what his or her geographic locale,
 - equity for students and taxpayers, and
 - stability in the system.

The reform also now emphasizes school-based management, and school boards now hire only the superintendent and deputy superintendent. But most importantly, Massachusetts makes sure that all actions are based on a fundamental premise: Every child is a winner.

Often, educators find that reform is being done to the field, rather than with the field. In successful reform, quality teaching, aligned curriculum, and regular assessment all need to be instituted; and educational systems need to build the capacity to do that.

Instead of inspecting school facilities or instructing superintendents and principals on how to perform their duties, boards of education need to focus on student achievement.

—Ronald Capasso

Peter Sack

Massachusetts Secondary School Principals Association

The plight of the principal, who no longer has tenure, began soon after the Massachusetts reform began in 1993. Here are three noteworthy indications of the problem:

1. Between 1995 and 1998, 46% of principalships changed hands. A position that was once stable is now unstable.
2. Responding to a survey, 50% of assistant principals indicated they no longer wanted to be principals given what they were seeing.
3. Superintendents are seeing a significant decline in principal applicants.

Stability in the schoolhouse is critical, and the principal is the agent for change—but in that comes no security. Yet, the principal is charged to rally teachers, who have total security and who have little reason to attend to the vision of a person who holds a tenuous appointment. Massachusetts principals are finding that the illusion of power is worse than no power at all. This is a crisis.

Massachusetts students are assessed with the Massachusetts Comprehensive Assessment System (MCAS). But the MCAS tells educators what they already

know: Wealthy communities perform better than blue-collar ones. Massachusetts' Education Reform Act calls for multiple assessments, but currently there's just one that is "one-size-fits-all." There's little need for school reform but a tremendous need for societal reform. Unfortunately, this need is pinned on schools in a one-size-fits-all solution.

Glenn Koocher, Executive Director

Massachusetts Association of School Committees

Successful school reform necessitates an ingenious interweaving of responsibility, accountability, and authority. But, regrettably, in Massachusetts, the focus has shifted from the outcome of the interweaving—better student achievement—to the process itself. Massachusetts has, as a consequence of its reform effort, evolved the following educational structure: (a) school committees which set goals and hire attorneys, (b) attorneys who have school boards as clients, and (c) the superintendents who act as CEOs, CFOs, and the HR officer. And the crisis has been exacerbated by school administrators retiring early. Clearly, Massachusetts needs to foster interagency collaboration.

Further, the debate continues over the use of high-stakes testing. For many people, reform has come to mean merely the MCAS, and arts education has suffered. The data derived from the test is taken out of context more often than not. But without high-stakes testing, no one pays attention.

To achieve successful reform, Massachusetts needs to think about how to deal with the camouflaged student identifiers in the MCAS, special education, collective bargaining laws, and principals being excluded from collective bargaining agreements.

Keynote Speaker: Day 2

Ronald Capasso, Chair

Department of Educational Leadership, Rowan University

I did great things as superintendent, but the same problems that existed before I accepted the position continued during my superintendency and after I left. Some of the problems are identified in two reports, NJASA's Impact Study on Non-tenure Contracting and the Superintendency and NJPSA's Organizational Health/Job Satisfaction Study. Data from these studies indicated that there was a serious concern about how superintendents and principals viewed their relationships with their board of education members.

During my appointment as superintendent, I conducted, with the help of NJPSA, NJASA, and NJSBA, a study over 2.5 years in which I surveyed and interviewed other superintendents, principals, and members of boards of education. The objectives of the study were to identify and describe

actions and practices described as intrusive behavior and provide an analysis.

Intrusive behavior is a board member's act of interfering with a school administrator's assigned operational task(s) that exceeds the board of education's delegated responsibility. I have anecdotes from literally hundreds of people about intrusive behavior. And the truth is, even a little bit of intrusive behavior is unacceptable; a small amount can get out of control. Intrusive behavior can substantially hinder consistency in leadership, which is extremely important to organizational health.

The problem with such intrusive behavior is that people in the educational framework become confused and wonder, "Who's the boss?" and "Who do I listen to?" resulting in a monumental problem with role conflict and role ambiguity. This confusion wastes valuable time that could be spent on matters related to educating children. Instead of inspecting school facilities or instructing superintendents and principals on how to perform their duties, boards of education need to focus on student achievement.

Too often, board members do not have a clear understanding of their role and how they are to enact it unless they are specifically educated about that role. In short, the training of board of education members before they sit on a board should be mandated, and they should be contractually educated, not just taught. The time spent on training should be measured not in hours per year, but in numbers of issues covered in the training.

New Jersey Panelists

Cynthia Jahn, General Counsel and Assistant Director

New Jersey School Board Association

The intrusive behavior that Ronald Capasso mentioned is, in New Jersey, grounds for removal of school board members. The School Ethics Act of New Jersey, or the New Jersey code of conduct, could further address some of the issues he raises.

There are two types of districts in New Jersey's legal structure:

- Type I: Either 5 members are appointed for 5 years, or 9 members are appointed for 3 years; or
- Type II: 9 members are elected for 3 years.

Of the 600–611 school districts in New Jersey, 534–550 are Type II districts. Certainly school board members should receive training. There are two types of board training available in New Jersey: a certificate program and a master's program. Currently, there are 109 certified boards of education in New Jersey, meaning that every member on these boards has had certificate training.

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In addition to the problem of training, NJSBA is currently engaged in discussions concerning administrative transition problems, particularly those that arise in the hiatus between superintendents going and coming. It is hoped that these problems will be addressed by legislation.

Maria Lepore, Chief Counsel

New Jersey Association of School Administrators

New Jersey needs to clarify the roles of its boards of education and its superintendents. Superintendents do have the right of due process. Many do not realize that they do have tenure for the term of their contract, if not for life. Superintendents need to be aware that they are supposed to be given a Rice Notice that informs them if their employment is going to be discussed in a public forum.

District officials need to act according to these stipulations so that resources are not wasted on lengthy and expensive legal proceedings.

Debra Bradley, Government Relations Director

New Jersey Principals and Supervisors Association

In a 1997 survey, superintendents indicated principal shortages in all types of districts; there were simply not many applicants for the positions available. Reasons cited for this principal shortage included the following:

- Compensation is not enough.
- Too much time is required.
- Board interference makes the job too stressful.

Since the 1970s, the principal's role has changed dramatically. Now, the scope of the principal's role is exploding, and principals are expected to take on many new responsibilities. Principals have been taught to be managers rather than instructional leaders, but they are now being asked to fulfill that duty as well—along with increased involvement in litigation, in special education, and in preventing school violence.

In New Jersey, principals are certified and maintain tenure and collective bargaining rights, while superintendents do not need to be certified and do not hold indefinite tenure or collective bargaining rights. And principals are caught between boards of education and superintendents. With each new administrative transition—at least 60 superinten-

dents retire each year—school districts lose ground.

Breakout Sessions

On Day 2, participants broke into groups to discuss leadership, school-based management, roles and relationships, capacity building, the compensation system, professional development, and model-based reforms. A summary of observations and recommendations made by participants during the group breakout sessions follows.

Leadership

- Leadership should be empowered at the school level, where staffing decisions should be made. Most good principals are already collaborating with their staff. Preservice training can address the issue of principals who do not collaborate effectively.

- Distributed leadership is a very good strategy. It should be encouraged and facilitated, but it should not be imposed or mandated.

- Continuity must be addressed when leadership changes. When administrators leave, district-initiated endeavors come to a halt in anticipation of new leadership taking a new direction. There is no continuity.

- Issues that affect leadership include lack of funding, voting on budgets (especially on caps), and special education funding. All are problems in New Jersey.

- Leaders should cultivate new administrators from the local talent pool.

Continuity must be addressed when leadership changes. When administrators leave, district-initiated endeavors come to a halt in anticipation of new leadership taking a new direction. There is no continuity.

—Debra Bradley

School-Based Management

- The school-based decision making process in Kentucky has a great deal of promise, but there are certain aspects of the process which merit further investigation.

- The efficacy of fully implemented school-based decision making is still a matter of debate.

- There should be a broader range of participants in the decision making.

- State and district administrators should tailor policies and programs so that schools have choices rather than one stipulated model to follow.

- The recruitment of teachers can be initiated at higher administrative levels, but interviewing and hiring should be conducted at the school level.

Roles and Relationships

- Stakeholders need to discuss further the roles and responsibilities of superintendents and boards of education, and they need to address the assignment of accountability.
- The process of dealing with personnel issues needs to be reviewed. Some stakeholders feel personnel questions should remain the responsibility of superintendents and principals. Others propose that school-based committees, involving parents and teachers, should be active in making personnel decisions. Parents would be elected to these committees by the PTA, and teachers recommended by their professional associations. After receiving input from the committee, principals should make the final selections and recommendations to the superintendent.
- In recognition of principals' tremendous responsibility on the one hand but their lack of authority on the other, some balance needs to be achieved.
- People are satisfied by the nature of their work in education; they are dissatisfied by the problems that exist in the educational structure.

Capacity Building

- School-day structuring, including class-size reduction, needs to be addressed.
- Technology, such as E-learning and distance learning, should be enhanced in order to develop more partnerships with businesses, 2- and 4-year colleges and universities, and professional development schools.
- Community partnerships and community learning centers are very important in building capacity.
- Districts—not just schools—should have established goals.

Compensation

- Tenure must be either extended to all personnel or eliminated to achieve parity.
- Terms of superintendents' contracts should be 5 years. To attract and retain superintendents, their salaries should be increased.
- The compensation system needs to be restructured to attract the highly qualified candidates. Beginning principals should have higher salaries than highly qualified teachers, thus encouraging teachers to pursue administrative positions. Master teachers, board-certified teachers, nationally certified, and gifted teachers should have compensation commensurate with their abilities.

- Basing statewide salaries on regional averages and local cost of living differences would greatly expedite the hiring process and eliminate salary bargaining.
- Boards and superintendents should be able to negotiate their own contracts without statutory limitations.
- There should be a fair and orderly exit plan for superintendents; contract buyouts present problems.
- Retaining superintendents is more difficult than recruiting them, but the opposite is true of principals: Recruiting them is more difficult than retaining them. Because the recruitment and retention of superintendents and principals must overcome different sets of problems, different solutions are required to address those problems.

RESOURCES

All proceedings of this forum are available on video. Contact the New Jersey Department of Education, SAELP Project Manager, at 609-633-3800 to order your copy.

See also the LSS website for *Field Notes, Summer 2003: Transforming Schools Into High-Performing Learning Communities—Principals Speak about negotiating the barriers to successful implementation of school reform models:* <http://www.temple.edu/lss>

Professional Development

- Professional growth must be continuous.
- Money should be provided for new-vision learning professional development. This allocation will reduce resistance to change.
- Laws, not regulations, should guide professional development. Professional development should be provided even in times of budgetary crises, and distance learning and corporate partnerships present opportunities for reducing the cost of programs.
- School districts should provide enhanced professional development for principals.

Model-Based Reform

- No two schools operate in the same way. Regarding reform, educators need to ask, "Are we meeting the needs of the students?" If the answer is "yes," then no reform is needed. If the answer is "no," then change is necessary.
- In order to develop and adopt a reform model, administrators need to determine precisely the responsibilities for each of the stakeholders.
- Models need time to grow, time to get significant input.
- The New Jersey Abbot districts deserve careful examination to determine what they are doing and how effective they have been.
- Massachusetts panelists did not talk about students; they talked about structure. Kentucky panelists talked about students.
- The Kentucky model is a good example for New Jersey to follow. The internalized belief that "all students can learn" and quality teaching are the foundations of successful reform. Energy should be focused primarily on educating students.

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Update—After the Forum

Recommendations made at the forum were reviewed by SAELP in March and April of 2003. The review led to a position paper and specific recommendations to improve governance and conditions of leadership practice in New Jersey. The following recommendations were presented to the New Jersey Commissioner of Education in the fall of 2003:

1. Superintendents should have 5-year contracts.
2. Sitting boards of education should be permitted to fill superintendent vacancies.
3. Local school-board members should have 5-year terms.
4. The local board of education should have the authority to hire the superintendent and all others who report directly to the board; the superintendent should have the authority to hire the central office staff and district principals; and the principal should make all school-level hiring decisions.
5. The roles and responsibilities for school boards, superintendents, and principals should be redefined and revised in New Jersey statutes and regulations.
6. Boards of education, superintendents, and senior-level staff leadership should receive cross-training that focuses on their roles and responsibilities and on collaborative teamwork. There should be an exemption to the Open Public Meetings Act to allow for a work session for board members and superintendents for self-assessment and team evaluation.
7. There should be no vote by the electorate if a local school district budget is at or below the Comprehensive Educational Improvement Funding Act cap.
8. A statewide pilot project should be launched to explore models of distributed leadership.

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