

**Progress Report for *Leading Together: Building Adult Community in Schools*  
2012-2013 Year**

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Effective school leadership plays an essential role in high quality instruction and student achievement (Bryk and Schneider, 2002; Bryk, Sebring, Allensworth, Luppescu, and Easton, 2009). School leaders in the U.S. face new challenges that accompany the introduction of new educational standards and continued high accountability demands. More than ever, principals and teachers need to collaborate and coordinate their efforts to educate students effectively. Such collaboration requires effective communication, a shared sense of purpose, trust in one another, and many other skills and shared beliefs within schools. Developing these skills and beliefs is not a straightforward process. To our knowledge, there is not a single intervention that includes both principals and teachers to help them learn to work together on the thorny issues they face as they strive to teach students.

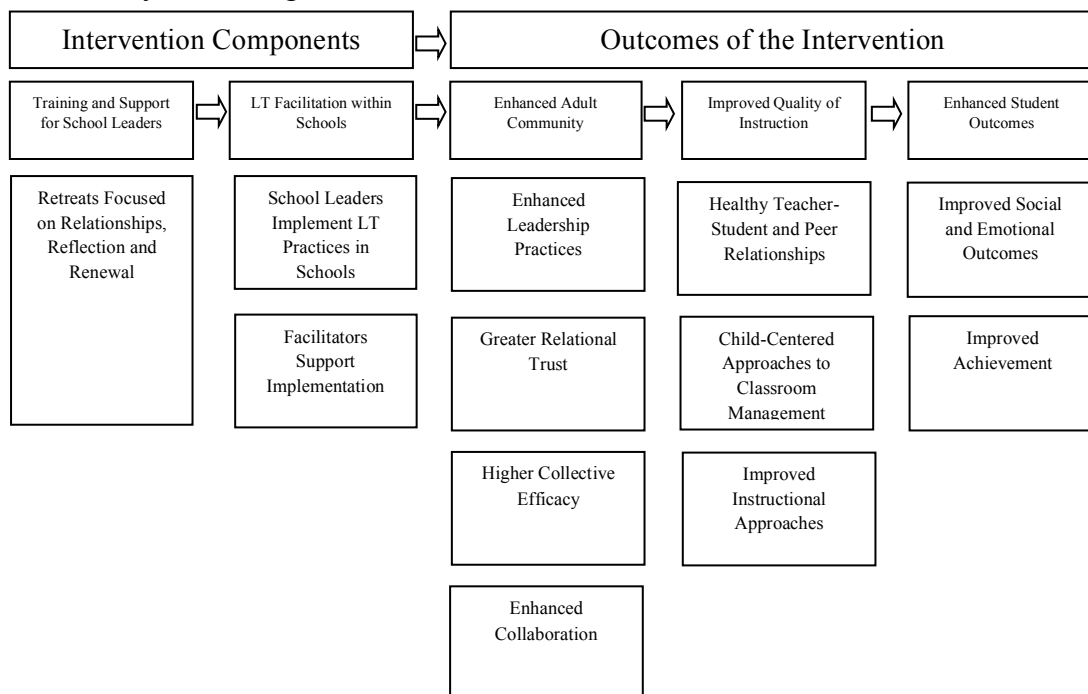
Pamela Seigle and Chip Wood have initiated a process based upon the approach of the Center for Courage & Renewal (<http://www.couragerenewal.org>) to develop such an intervention—an intervention we called *Leading Together* (LT). LT brings together teams of school leaders (comprised of principals and teachers) from several diverse elementary and middle schools to learn strategies and protocols for building and strengthening adult community (Seigle, Wood, Ackerman, & Sankowski, 2012). The school leaders are given the opportunity to increase their capacity and skills for communicating and collaborating effectively, handling conflict, and refreshing their shared commitment to teaching and students. Through reflective and mindfulness practices, the facilitators (Pamela Seigle, Chip Wood) introduce ways to enhance the adult community and renew the spirit and energy of the school learning community. Ultimately, the work led by Seigle and Wood will be manualized so that others can be trained as LT facilitators and so that LT can be made available to other schools seeking support. Further information about LT can be found at the following website: <http://tinyurl.com/courage-and-renewal-lead>

In Summer, 2012, our research team at the University of Virginia joined with Pamela Seigle, Chip Wood, and an initial cohort of school leaders enrolled in LT to engage in an innovative research and development process. The research and development effort has two aims: to evaluate initial signs of efficacy of the LT approach and to inform the development of the LT intervention. The research study has been designed to extend the full length of the LT intervention, from Summer, 2012 to Summer, 2014. Currently, we have early findings to share based upon the first year of data collection.

### Description of the Logic Model

The first step in the research involved the development of a logic model to describe the theory of change for LT. The purpose of the logic model is to explain how LT is designed to work, specifically by describing how resources and activities (funds, time, engagement in retreats) eventually become desired outcomes (i.e., changes in the adult community and increased relational trust in schools). The logic model depicted in Figure 1 specifies that training and support for school leaders in the form of retreats focused on relationships, reflection and renewal will lead to school leaders returning to their school prepared to implement LT practices at their schools. In the presence of successful implementation, we expect to see enhanced adult community (including enhanced leadership practices, greater relational trust, higher collective efficacy, and enhanced collaboration). We expect that the enhanced adult community will contribute to improved quality of instruction (including healthy teacher-student and peer relationships, child-centered approaches to classroom management, and improved instructional approaches). In turn, we expect to see enhanced student outcomes (such as improved social and emotional outcomes and achievement).

Figure 1. Summary of the Logic Model



The logic model helps researchers know what to measure to understand the process of school change. As with all interventions designed to improve schools, change takes time. Studying change over time means identifying early, promising signs of change long before the intervention (and research) is over. Therefore, the UVA research team collected data in 2012-2013 that corresponded to the initial stages of the logic model. Pertaining to the intervention components, the team measured school leaders' interest and engagement in the retreats. The researchers also measured signs that school leaders were effective at facilitating LT practices within their schools. In addition, the research efforts targeted school leaders' perception of the support for implementation that they received from the facilitators. Also in 2012-2013, the research team measured early outcomes to see whether school leaders were using enhanced leadership practices, and to measure the extent to which teachers were experiencing greater relational trust, collective efficacy, and enhanced collaboration. Questions asked in 2012-2013 included: Do school leaders take the first critical steps of learning LT and initiating its implementation in their school? Are there signs of enhanced adult community evidenced by enhanced leadership practices, greater relational trust, higher collective efficacy, and enhanced collaboration?

### **Approach to Research**

Our research team gathered data from the LT facilitators and participants, including program facilitators Chip Wood and Pamela Seigle, school leader participants (principals and teachers who attended retreats and cohort days), and site-based teachers (teachers who were not participants in the LT retreats but taught at the study schools).

**Participants:** The sample of school leaders for 2012-2013 was comprised of 14 administrators and 53 teachers or other school specialists drawn from 10 schools in the Northeast United States. School leaders attended the initial summer training institute. School leader participants ranged in experience from 0 to 38 years (mean = 13.3; standard deviation = 9.7). Site-based teachers (n=28) refer to teachers in the participating schools who did not attend the LT summer training. On average, the site-based teachers (n = 28) had 14.2 years of experience (SD = 6, range = 5 - 29 years).

**Intervention:** The LT intervention activities are scheduled to occur over a two-year period. The first year activities (2012-2013) included: (a) facilitator visits to schools considering joining the new cohort, (b) a *Leading Together Guidebook* for each school leader, (c) a four-day summer institute/cohort gathering, (d) a one-day fall cohort gathering, (e) two on-site consulting and coaching days at each school, and (f) a one-day spring cohort gathering. The second year (2013-2014) is comprised of a one-day summer gathering, a one-day fall cohort gathering, two on-site consulting and coaching days for each school, a one-day spring cohort gathering and a one-day year-end cohort gathering.

**Data Collection Procedures:** In 2012-2013, the UVA research team gathered data (in the form of surveys and interviews) from the various stakeholders involved in the intervention process—the facilitators, administrators, school leaders, and teachers. Surveys of school leaders (n = 67) were conducted in July, 2012 (as baseline) and in June, 2013 for follow-up). One administrator, one school leader, and one site-based teacher from each school (n = 30) were interviewed in August, 2012 and June, 2013. Facilitators were interviewed after the retreat and each cohort day. Further, facilitators wrote notes about each coaching day conducted in the schools. The data

described in this brief report are based on the interviews that were conducted in June 2013, at the end of year one of data collection.

### **Preliminary Results based on Qualitative Findings**

Findings described here are based upon the themes that emerged in the interviews of school leaders and teachers as school leaders made efforts to improve the adult community at their schools. For brevity, we describe several examples of comments organized around the two research goals: early signs of efficacy of the intervention and points raised to contribute to adjustments to the intervention.

#### ***Early Signs of Efficacy***

##### *1) The school leaders appear to support the work of LT and believe in the LT approach.*

“The experience has been wonderful. The retreat days that we had the benefit of attending in Dover... I think that we truly... Our pace day to day is so fast and so quick that having that time to stop and really reflect was so beneficial and rejuvenating in so many ways!” (Participants attended a four-day retreat to begin the program.)

“... a lot of my staff were kind of hitting a mid-point in their careers. So they weren't brand new, they weren't young anymore, they were moving towards more veteran staff, I think their lives, for the most part, were unrolling. Their families had been started so I think we're at a point, in their career—I experienced this myself, as a teacher, where you really had to roll up your sleeves and decide, how are we going to stay positive and move forward with all of these initiatives, all the things that are our education in 2012 and 13. So I think it helped, I knew, I had to do some work with staff to keep them positive, to keep them moving forward, just in terms of their career. Almost like a mid-life crisis we experience as adults, some of them were experiencing it as educators. So I think the LT partnership really came at a great time. This whole idea of building adult relationships and relational trust was the perfect segue for what we needed to do as an adult staff.”

##### *2) School leaders showed evidence of the belief that LT leads to increased collaboration and trust, which will in turn benefit the students.*

“I think if [we] are able to have these conversations as an adult community, it is obviously going to benefit the kids' community, the student population. Even just being able to bring up an approach to discipline in the school and expectations and rules—that's big for us. Kids see adults happy to be where they are and talking with each other, then they are more apt to be happy and talking with each other. Working starts here with us too.”

“I think the first thing that I learned, and I think I've always known this, but I never really correlated it so specifically was that the better the adult community communicates and works together, the better the results are for the children.”

“I think if the teachers feel that they are acknowledged and can trust the administration, then it trickles down to the students and you have a much more cohesive in the school. So I think [LT] definitely helped us.”

“I would say, as teachers are getting along more, trusting each other more, collaborating more, it is going to increase the quality of the instruction which will affect the academic learning.”

3) *School leaders identified ways that LT enhanced the adult community in their schools.*

a) Early findings show changes in the emotional and relational tone of the building.

“One of the things that Pamela said, that really resonated with me, is that we teach who we are, and we really do, along with all the content, and all of the standards, and all of the things that we have to pay attention to, so the more that we can remember who we are and what we bring to the table, the better we are as educators. And I think some of the team members have been able to do this with their teams, a couple of them have put reflective practices into their weekly team meetings with staff, so it’s not like ‘stop the presses we’re going to meditate,’ just little activities here and there, I think it kind of shifted the tone in the building, it’s somewhat intangible, so it’s hard to describe, particularly, but it’s kind of a feeling that you can slow down, take a deep breath.”

“We’ve done a lot of work with trying to listen, to be better listeners, because we all have a lot to say, and I found that that’s really one of the skills that we need to work on as adults, listening to each other. So we’ve done a lot of those, you know you get to listen for a minute and a half and not say anything, relative to whatever the topic or idea on the table is. So we’ve pressed that point a lot too. So I think the staff would say they’ve found me to be a little calmer, and a little slower, and I think they feel that.”

“I think as a group, we started out with a goal of making sure that every voice was heard. I think our goal now is more... it’s broader than that—it’s trying to bring everyone into the circle of leadership. Not just making sure that everyone has a voice, but that every person feels validated and part of the decision making and leadership in the school community.”

b) Early findings show enhanced collaboration among faculty members.

“I think a lot of it was how to facilitate conversations in a community and to promote trust in a group. It always amazes me how we were a group of strangers, but we were quickly able to come together as a group and bare our souls about things that are happening within our schools and talk about and problem-solve together as a group.”

c) Early findings show stronger levels of trust emerging.

“People began to trust one another more, to see and appreciate different sides of one another. To see and appreciate each other’s skills and contributions. They also began to learn how to listen better to opposing or different points of view. I think all of those things really helped shift some of the relationships within the team.”

“I learned a lot in terms of taking the time to build a community where people trust each other. It takes a lot of work, it’s not just something that happens, it’s something you have to work at.”

d) Early findings show increased collective efficacy.

“I think that [LT] has worked out very nicely this year, where people are taking the initiative and running with it, and we’re trusting them with it and always thanking them for, it’s very important that I always acknowledge their help, and I appreciate it and I always let them know that I do because I couldn’t do it all by myself.”

“We are in an innovation school so the teachers know we build our own curriculum, and we don’t really follow any specific curriculum. So giving the teachers our trust, like you are a professional and we trust that you together as a team will develop a curriculum that will help the students move forward, that helped them out. And we’ve seen the results in the different tests they have to take in which we’ve seen a lot of growth across the board in all grade levels. So I think the teachers working hard and knowing that we trust their thinking and how they’re planning lessons and that is important and it is in part thanks to LT. Because we always have that in mind, as we plan around meetings, and agendas for the teachers, it’s always like ‘ok remember it’s a community of trust,’ and we always say it as we’re planning and we kind of chuckle and are like ‘ok keep it in mind’ and possibly, possibly, possibly move forward. But it definitely has helped.”

## **Implementation Challenges**

The greatest challenge with LT occurred when school leaders tried to bring LT back to their schools and implement LT practices. Multiple school leaders cited issues such as lack of time, overwhelming demands from the state, and/or teacher resistance, as blocks to implementing LT.

“I think overall it has been a challenging year, because a lot of things going on due to state-mandated interventions. New evaluation model, new bully-prevention model. A lot of things on people’s plates. Of all years when trying to build trust, this has been one of the most challenging, and I’ve been here for 9 years, because of the stress that people are under. We’re all overwhelmed with everything else that is going on, between evaluations and common core standards and our curriculum, so we’ve done a lot of different work this year.”

We found that there were fewer difficulties with implementation when school leaders were able to explain LT to their staff in terms of prior school goals:

“We have a professional development day in August before the kids come back, with the whole staff, everybody. And the whole day was spent on LT activities, we did poetry, we did goal setting, we did a lot of the activating and energizing activities, just to get the staff on board. I also put together a power point that outlined for them why we were doing this; always tying it back to, it isn’t just about making ourselves feel good, although that is certainly part of it, and

kind of connecting with that inner teacher in all of us, but reminding them of the impact this can have on student learning, which is always what we're trying to get better at."

### ***Recommended Adjustments to LT***

The main challenge faced in 2012-2013 was school leaders' implementation of the LT practices in their schools. Thus, development efforts in this next year will concentrate on how to improve supports for school leaders trying to implement the LT practices. The research team synthesized themes from interviews of school leaders, teachers, and facilitators into three main recommendations, as described below.

#### *1. Make the purpose of LT clear to participants.*

a. School leaders and site-based teachers raised questions about the purpose of LT. Thus, participants wrestled with several questions: Is the main goal of LT to improve teacher capacity for SEL work, or is it to build distributed leadership? Is LT meant to increase the trust relationships within the adult community, or it is to renew the spirit of the participants to prepare them for the work of teaching?

b. Participants suggested the need to communicate with principals prior to the first summer retreat as it may influence whether the principals choose to be involved and whom the principals choose to accompany them.

#### *2. Be certain that each school leader has deep knowledge and understanding of why LT is important for their school and how they will implement LT.*

a. The style of the school principal appears to be an important factor in the implementation process. Some differentiation in LT might be necessary, as some principals need more help to implement than others.

b. Findings from year 1 lead to the recommendation to *widen the circle* of leadership. Principals have a very large number of responsibilities already. Future development will work toward having school leaders beside the principal take charge of implementing the LT practices. School leaders will size up and determine how to allocate the responsibility of implementation of LT among themselves.

#### *3. Select school leaders to attend LT retreats in a way that will contribute to the success of LT.*

a. The selection of school leaders appeared to influence the way and extent to which LT was implemented. Further, the explanation to the rest of the school of how the LT team was selected is important. Without a good explanation, schools can experience a divide between the LT team and the rest of the staff. These issues will be addressed in the upcoming year.

### **Summary Statement and Next Steps**

To date, early findings signal a single message: LT appears to be a promising intervention worthy of future program development and research efforts. When school leaders

implement LT successfully and as intended, the data show the emergence of positive outcomes for school leaders and teachers. Results pertaining to LT program development suggest points to hone, develop, and improve. The UVA team has communicated those findings to Pamela Seigle and Chip Wood to generate next steps in program development.

The collaborative work to generate these findings rests on the dedication of a very impressive and committed group of school leaders, principals, and teachers. The school leader participants of LT deserve remarkable credit for their involvement and willingness to take risks to improve their schools. The UVA team thanks the school leaders for trying out new ways of communication and shared approaches to improve their adult school community. Specifically, the research team at UVA thanks the participants for their involvement and willingness to reflect on their growth as school leaders. The surveys and interviews provide essential insights into how LT is developing and what changes can be recommended so that LT produces change to the fullest extent possible.

The UVA team is continuing data collection. The team will present results based on the quantitative and qualitative data at the American Education Research Association in April, 2014. Further, the team will engage in continued data collection in 2013-2014 with the goal of generating an evaluation report in Fall, 2014 that summarizes the efficacy of LT in the first cohort of participants and outlines clear recommendations for next steps in development.



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