

Archived Information

Interim Evaluation of the Mid-Atlantic Laboratory for Student Success Synthesis Report

Introduction

The purpose of this synthesis document is to provide a broad summary of the findings by the five peer reviewers of the Laboratory for Student Success, a Regional Educational Laboratory in Philadelphia, PA. This synthesis was created by conducting a careful reading of each of the five individual evaluation reports written by the peer reviewers. The reports were coded thematically, one by one, then examined as a whole in light of common themes. The synthesis was constructed by linking the narratives of the five authors around these themes with transitional language provided by this reviewer, thus attempting to create a report that speaks with one voice. Where all five reviewers were in consensus, these themes are discussed below. In instances where I, as chair of the exit interview, felt that the common comments of one or two reviewers still reflected the tone and sentiment of the group, I have included those comments. As a quality control check, the synthesis was reviewed by the peer review panelists before its release to the Lab.

A note on reporting conventions is relevant at this point: The major headings of this synthesis report model that of the individual reports with the exception that the areas for improvement and recommendations for improvement within each major section have been collapsed into one, called “Areas of Organizational Concern,” which is consistent with the agreed-upon terminology of the Panel during the oral exit debriefing held with the Lab staff.

I. Brief Overview of Laboratory

The Laboratory for Student Success (LSS) was established in December of 1995 at

Temple University. Under the umbrella of Temple's Center for Research in Human Development and Education (CRHDE), the LSS operates under contract awarded by the Office of Educational Research and Improvement to operate the Mid-Atlantic Regional Educational Laboratory, serving the states of Delaware, Maryland, New Jersey, Pennsylvania, and the District of Columbia.

The interim review and evaluation visit to LSS took place on the Temple University campus from May 17-21, 1999. The reviewers examined written background materials provided by LSS staff prior to the on-site visit, and additional documentation was provided by the Lab staff during the visit. Interviews were conducted on-site with the Executive Director and senior staff members, as well as with representatives from the Governing Board and the Stakeholder Board. Discussions were also held at Lab headquarters with representatives from regional schools implementing the Lab's Community for Learning (CFL) program—one of the LSS Signature Programs—including teachers, principals, students, parents, and central office staff. Panelists also made a visit to Stetson Middle School, a demonstration site for CFL, and interviews were conducted there with the principal, LSS support staff, students, and teachers. Sufficient documentation and testimony were provided during the site visit to allow panelists to address the key evaluation questions presented by OERI.

II. Implementation and Management

A. To what extent is the REL doing what they were approved to do during their first three contract years?

1. Strengths

Given the data reviewed by the panel and the stakeholders interviewed, it appears that

LSS has executed the program of work outlined in the technical proposal submitted to the U.S. Department of Education. The work, overall, has been done in a timely manner. LSS appears to be meeting or exceeding all contractual obligations. The partnership between the Lab director and the specialty program director contributes to a healthy intellectual energy built on the play between research and practice. The OERI program monitor reports that the Lab is in compliance with its written plan. Lab staff also confirm that all projects proposed in the initial proposal are in place and productive, or in some cases that the plan has been amended and changes indicated in interim reports.

Two departures from the original plan appear to have been made on the basis of experience and are justified. First, the CRESEs have not developed as planned. The two university-based CRESEs have ceased to operate as originally proposed by the Lab. Either the Lab central or Penn Hills has picked up these services, and LSS reports that appropriate levels of service have been maintained. It may be that the initial strategy of basing services in universities was simply ill planned, and subsequent experience has directed the Lab to move in another direction.

Similarly, the Mid-Atlantic Network of Professional Organizations has been replaced by another strategy. Intended initially to be managed by ASCD, because of its reputation and broad reach, this function is now being conducted through state-based organizations and networks. For example, the Lab is now working through state-based professional associations and rural and small schools networks to fill the dissemination/technical assistance functions. This switch appears to be soundly based on the discovery that local organizations are better suited to this function than national organizations, and that universities are poorly suited to carry out such functions.

LSS has been successful in leveraging additional resources to support Lab programs and

activities through its connection with Temple University. In addition to contributing to LSS operations an in-kind contribution in terms of space, fiscal, and administrative supported through the University's grants, accounting, and personnel offices, LSS is also support by Temple in real dollars. Not only does it pay the entire salary and benefit cost of the Executive Director, but Temple only charges 8 percent of indirect costs to the LSS contract. This reduced overhead provides additional spending money for the LSS operations.

2. Areas of Organizational Concern

A great deal of the effectiveness of the LSS appears to rest upon the special skills, energy and relationships of the Executive Director. How can LSS institutionalize the many contributions of its Executive Director so that it can continue its success, even if she were to function in a reduced role?

B. To what extent is the REL using a self-monitoring process to plan and adapt activities in response to feedback and customer needs?

1. Strengths

LSS uses a data-driven, quality control system that includes collecting a wide array of data, and the Lab has a self-monitoring process in place to be able to plan and adapt activities in response to feedback and customer needs. LSS's user satisfaction surveys include "event evaluations" (which determine the quality of customer satisfaction with external events sponsored by LSS), "tracer studies" (which assess the quality and utility of the various professional development and dissemination activities conducted by the LSS staff), "product satisfaction surveys" (which assess the extent to which the LSS products and tools are used and found useful by its customers), and "semi-annual needs assessment surveys" (surveys of teachers, principals, superintendents). It allows the Lab to learn from intended users (a) what

their appraisal of the event is some four months down the road, (b) how they have actually *used* the tool or learning, (c) what impact has resulted, and (d) others with whom else the respondent has shared the learning or tool.

Reaction of the peer panel to the evaluation process and related documents indicates that the assessments are taken seriously. That is, satisfaction surveys, technical reviews, and tracer studies are done systematically and in abundance, and Lab staff seem to pay attention to the findings. One has the sense that there is a culture of continuous improvement in the Lab, and that the quality assurance process is an important element of that culture.

Further quality assurance issues are addressed through ongoing procedures involving feedback from the Governing Board, Stakeholder Advisory Board, Technical Review Board, field-based collaborators, LSS clients, and self-assessments of Lab staff.

The Governing Board has the overall responsibility for establishing the programmatic goals of the Lab and for directing and overseeing the quality of the work of LSS to ensure its timely completion in fulfilling the terms and conditions of the contract in operating the Mid-Atlantic Regional Educational Laboratory. The Board also conducts an annual evaluation of the work of the Executive Director and the leadership team of the Lab. The Steering Committee of the Board has the quality assurance responsibility. The Governing Board is full of praise for the reputation and regional credibility established by LSS in just three short years. As one Board member puts it, “The Lab forges a strong link between the research side and the practice side.”

Members of the Stakeholder Board are drawn from a cross section of regional stakeholder groups that fully reflect the various socioeconomic status, ethnic, and cultural backgrounds of the student population in the mid-Atlantic region. Extensive conversations with

several members of the Stakeholder Board during the site visit made it clear to the review team that the board believes LSS is making a significant impact upon schools within the Region.

The Technical Review Board performs several important functions related to quality assurance review to ensure that the work of LSS is not only technically sound, but also relevant and useful for improving policy and practice. Its primary role is to serve as external reviewer of the work of the LSS. LSS senior staff members shared specific examples during the site visit of how the Technical Review Board provides detailed, critical feedback on LSS manuscripts prior to submission for publication as a form of quality control.

2. Areas of Organizational Concern

One concern in this area relates to the type and timing of the feedback data collected by the Lab. Some panelists felt that the relative impacts of critical dimensions of CFL's process are not tracked or studied to their full potential. Hence, the Lab may be missing opportunities to better understand the subsets of the process, the impact of timeliness on adding new processes and opportunities to CFL sites, and limitations of the model that might require revision.

For example, evaluation data for the CFL program was not available in two forms that would be helpful: (1) longitudinal profile data on the Degree of Implementation (DOI) at all CFL schools, and (2) outcomes data on student achievement at sites other than at the DC schools where CFL was in place. Fuller outcome/impact data will hopefully become available as the schools continue to participate in CFL. LSS is encouraged to place a priority on both longitudinal DOI profiling and student achievement outcomes.

III. Quality

To what extent is the REL developing high quality products and services?

1. Strengths

Methods and programs, such as 20/20 data disaggregation method and CFL, assist

schools and districts in user-friendly ways to harness the strength of research in practice. An important strand of LSS field work is based on understanding how to build capacity among school staff in making intelligent choices in strategic reform, in creating more adaptable delivery systems, and to be persistent in maintaining change. Of the broad agenda of work developed by the Lab, the two signature works were commented upon most by the panel on the topic of quality: Invitational Conferences and CFL.

Invitational Conferences

The panel tends to agree that the Lab has a strong program of invitational conferences. A systematic process guides the planning and execution of these conferences. LSS calls upon a strong set of expert resources to provide the substantive content of the conferences. Conferences are designed intelligently, with the aim of moving research into practice. Conference agendas emanate from syntheses of research in a manner that is useful to practice and policy audiences, and that fosters interactions among researchers, practitioners, policymakers and other cross-role groups. The conferences culminate with a delineation of “next steps” needed to improve practice, policy and research. Collaborations with “strategic partners” strengthen the quality of the conferences and the quality and results of the dissemination. The Lab leverages its work by systematically identifying cosponsors with large constituencies and the ability to influence practice and policy. The list of cosponsors includes some of the nation’s key foundations, federal programs and agencies, and reform organizations. Conference topics address timely, critical issues in education reform.

Through this series of invitational conferences, the Lab brings in top caliber individuals—both researchers and practitioners—around issues of national, boundary-spanning

importance. Because of its high visibility, the LSS National Invitational Conference Series program is under close scrutiny by its stakeholder groups. The publication of the proceedings in refereed journals and the review processes of their widely respected publishers, such as Laurence Erlbaum Publisher, are additional indicators of the quality of the series. Further quality is evidenced by the request for copies of conference proceedings by LSS stakeholder groups and requests for follow-up activities.

Community for Learning Program

Community for Learning was cited as an exemplary program in the November 1997 Congressional Report on the SCRD legislation. Indeed, high praise for the CFL model was a constant theme during many conversations with representatives from regional schools during the site visit. One principal said that “We used it [CFL] as a framework to build a focused, cohesive school. We monitor student achievement closely and we’ve seen gains.” A school facilitator at a CFL implementation site explained that “For years it was dull and dreary, with no camaraderie. When the new principal came and we decided to use CFL, everything changed. We’re now working with each other and sharing—not so isolated.” A teacher, when asked about problems at her school with staff “buy-in” to the CFL model, had this to say: “I don’t know of any teacher in the building who hasn’t bought into the program.” A veteran principal explained why she has become a CFL supporter: “I’ve seen teachers who have embraced CFL, and it has renewed their teaching in important ways.”

Because CFL is highly data-driven, LSS often ends up working with districts and states both to improve their collection of data and to help analyze the data. This goes well beyond what is actually called for in implementing the CFL model, but it provides an extremely valuable

service for the district or state overall, with benefits that may go well beyond the CFL sites

themselves.

Other Suggestions of Quality

At each professional development event where LSS staff play a role (including State of the Art Seminars, What Works Workshops, Advanced Study Institutes, and Principal Leadership Forums), participants are asked to complete an evaluation of LSS services and programs based on a 5-point scale (1=lowest, 5=highest). Data from years 1 and 2 reveal an average aggregate rating on this scale of 4.4 for all such events in the areas of program content, presenters, materials, and overall evaluation.

In sum, across LSS programs, user representatives characterize the LSS work within the larger constellation of available research and technical assistance as follows:

- The work is non-political, high quality, research-based, and not biased
- LSS fits a niche that the SEA, universities, and national reform innovations can't fill
- LSS is having a direct impact on the classroom

As a member of the Board of Governors pointed out, the Lab is engaged in creating and stimulating a market for comprehensive school reform. That is, the Lab is not simply responding to customer needs; it is engendering customers' appreciation of for a new way to think about schooling and about their expectations for its quality, direction, and output. In this regard, the Lab appears to be successfully creating a new market for comprehensive school reform.

2. Areas of Organizational Concern

A theme of "scaling up" typifies concern among the panel in this area. The current (and approved) approach concentrates essentially on structure, but it neglects some essential content. That is, there is a good strategy in place for creating awareness, for developing understanding,

for bringing role groups together for potential future collaborations, and for reaching large numbers of people. In addition, the Lab has learned a lot about the conditions for scaling up from its experience with CFL sites. But there are some important areas of substance that the Lab may not be attending to in the approaches it is taking. These areas include: (1) the conditions and policies at the state level that enhance or impede going to scale; (2) similar conditions at the district level; (3) collaborations among different actors such as teacher organizations, administrator organizations, state policymakers, and so on in planning for widespread implementation of CSR; and (4) expanded capacity to provide sustained support and technical assistance to schools committed to CSR. Finally, the panelists felt that the CFL model values teachers as instructors and implementers, but seems to lack in valuing their capacity to reflect, articulate and document their experiences.

IV. Utility

A. To what extent are the products and services provided by the Laboratory useful to and used by customers?

1. Strengths

An important part of the Lab's usefulness for schools within the Region has been its growing visibility. As a member of the Stakeholder Board stated during the site visit, "They've done a good job of making schools aware they're here and that services are available." According to several sources interviewed on-site, the previous Lab was "not particularly responsive: you had to come to them—they wouldn't come to you."

LSS products and services are evidently of great value to the Lab's customers. One reviewer took great care to point out how the products and services provided by the Laboratory

are useful to and used by customers (points broadly agreed upon by the peer review panel):

- The Philadelphia representative to the Stakeholder Board, who is the Coordinator of Educational Affairs for the AFT in Philadelphia, stated that the Lab does a “superb job” of providing information on its operations. She noted that when the CSR competition was launched, there was a lot of confusion about the available models. LSS gave invaluable help on the models to the Philadelphia schools. She feels that as a result, many schools applied and won many grants.
- This same official noted that the Lab did a good job in translating the TIMMS data in a way that made the findings usable to the field.
- One member of the Stakeholder Board stated that the legislators in his/her state wanted information on effective strategies for improving urban schools, and that LSS responded effectively.
- The Lab brings appropriate and quality resources to the job. For example, LSS brought Fenwick English, as a consultant, into Delaware, where they have aligned curriculum with standards, for assistance with fuller implementation. This use of expert resources is all the more telling inasmuch as the OERI clarification questions wondered whether it was appropriate for LSS to be connected with so many resources outside the geographical region.
- The New Jersey urban superintendents asked the Lab to meet with them on issues related to urban education. As a result of that meeting, 4 or 5 superintendents decided to adopt CFL and are implementing it now.
- On separate occasions, the superintendent and the associate superintendent of the Camden (NJ) schools noted that LSS had helped greatly with their schools. They report changes in school climate and professionalism, although they believe it is too soon to see improvement in student performance. Furthermore, the superintendent believes that several other districts are making improvements based on what they have seen in Camden and that LSS has provided valuable help throughout the state. The Lab is also instrumental in giving help to Camden’s School-Based Management Teams.
- Initially the review panel has had some concern about the extent to which the Lab is providing all the information or assistance on CSR that users might find helpful or just pushing its own CFL model. However, on several occasions, users spoke to the panel about the times LSS had provided information about all the models. For example, one user noted that the Philadelphia schools are using Reading Recovery and Core Knowledge models as a result of exposure to research-based programs provided by LSS.
- One measure of the perceived quality and utility of LSS services and products is the fact that users report that the demand for them is far greater than LSS can meet.

- One member of the Stakeholder Board stated that LSS is far more responsive to users' needs than its predecessor Lab.
- The coordinator of the LSS CFL work in District of Columbia Public Schools states that DCPS involvement with LSS is "just invaluable". With LSS support she has established a Facilitators Institute to train facilitators to guide reform at middle and junior high schools in DC. "I would never be able to function at the level I have without the assistance of LSS," she reports. She notes also the value of the Lab's emphasis on data-driven decision making and instruction.
- There is ample evidence that the effective use of strategic partnerships enhances the utility quality, and impact of the LSS work. For example, LSS's partnership with the Michigan Education Association, National Education Association, Center for Revitalization of Urban Schools, College Board, Council for Basic Education, U.S. Department of Education, and Council of Chief State School Officers have expressed their belief that LSS services and products have been of great value to their members and their initiatives.

2. Areas of Organizational Concern

One panelist felt strongly that LSS research publications are not written in a user-friendly style or readily accessible to practitioners. This was an area of concern that was discussed during the exit interview. This reviewer felt that greater effort could be made to involve teachers as an important part of the intended audience for research publications without "dumbing down" the content through a reductionistic translation process. LSS is encouraged to explore the extent to it may now be over-translating research to practitioners, providing over-simplified interpretations of the literature in the form of checklists or user-friendly "to-do" processes without supplying the conceptual framework that undergirds the work. In other words, how might the tidy "do this" interpretations of the literature be delivered within context of the theoretical and empirical underpinnings that could allow consumers to use the work more thoughtfully, contextually, and insightfully?

B. To what extent is the REL focused on customer needs?

1. Strengths

Still another aspect of LSS’s responsiveness to customer needs is grounded in its ability to help schools build their own on-site capacity to improve teaching and learning, and to help them avoid dependence on outside support as the primary engine for school improvement. As the Associate Director put it, “From the moment we’re walking into a building, we’re walking out.” [i.e., we help them build their own capacity for change and leave critical support structures in place].

The Lab meets all indicators of focusing on customer needs, with the exception of its prioritization in accordance with customer needs. LSS certainly meets the customer’ needs. How it determines what are priorities, and what work to do and to leave undone, is not so clear.

V. Outcomes and Impact

A. To what extent is the REL’s work contributing to improved student success, particularly in intensive implementation sites?

1. Strengths

One of the first steps in determining whether or not the Lab’s work is contributing to student success is putting a sound model for measurement in place. In sites where CFL is in place, the Lab monitors changes in teacher behavior related to the degree of implementation of the CFL model and examines the target district’s data to measure student achievement progress. The degree of each teacher’s program implementation is measured twice a year in relation to twelve comprehensive measures (comprised of over 200 subdomains) covering areas such as arranging space/facilities, creating and maintaining instructional materials, and other measures

deemed by research to be important to making instructional gains. While not designed as a personnel evaluation tool, this assessment is used to determine what the teacher needs to work on next in terms of curriculum and instruction. Teachers are given an in-depth feedback sheet on how they are doing in those critical dimensions, with indication of for areas of needed support. As a school, the report gives a total picture of the degree of implementation, and these reports can be combined across sites to create a total district report.

Using 20/20 data disaggregation method as a replicable, clear process, LSS focuses attention on both ends of the achievement continuum as a conceptual lens for better understanding the whole. By looking at students having the greatest difficulty in conjunction with those having the greatest success, and by tracking changes over time, the Lab has developed an elegant process for field-based understanding.

Student success is reported by more traditional means as well. Schools in some of the nation's most impoverished inner city areas have achieved positive results following CFL implementation. A study of the first year of implementation of five CFL schools in the District of Columbia which have been identified as among the lowest performing in the District found that teachers were making significant changes in classroom practice. The study also examined changes in student reading scores on the Stanford 9 and found that scores improved at all five schools, that program schools improved more than other elementary schools in the district, and that the districtwide ranking of program schools climbed considerably (one school jumped from 119th to 46th, for example). In terms of student achievement gains between fall and spring testing for the 1997-98 academic year for reading and math, all the CFL demonstration schools exceeded the District's improvement standard of a 10 percent achievement gain. Another noteworthy finding in the pattern of progress in student achievement in math and reading is the

gains made by students who scored at the top 20 percent across all D.C. CFL demonstration schools, which is reflective of the design focus of the CFL program. Although most efforts to increase student achievement in urban schools like those implementing CFL in Washington, D.C. tend to focus on the lower levels of student achievement, a key design principle of CFL is the ability of staff to adaptively respond to the diverse learning needs of all students, including those at both the bottom and the top range of the achievement distribution.

At a middle school in inner city Philadelphia (the one visited by the Review Panelists during their site visit) where 78 percent of students are Latino and 93 percent live below the poverty line, students have shown significantly higher academic progress than students at a control school. A follow-up study of students who had attended this middle school reported that they had a significantly lower dropout rate than their high school peers (19 percent vs. 60 percent) and that 48 percent of them were performing at grade level in the eleventh grade compared to 26 percent of their peers. A similarly situated elementary school in Houston also witnessed improvements in student achievement, along with positive changes in students' and teachers' attitudes about their school.

2. Areas of Organizational Concern

Most interviewees involved in school reform efforts talked about a wide variety of positive changes in teacher, student, and parental behaviors within their schools that are not as easily measurable or quantifiable as student scores on achievement tests, yet they are no lesser indicators of school improvement and student "success," broadly conceived. LSS can make an important contribution to the school change literature and to the "procedural knowledge base" by attending to those "other successes" and by learning how to document and give credibility to them. For example, developing ways to carefully document the evolution of school/community

partnerships, the move toward more positive attitudes about school on the part of everyone involved, or the difficult transition experienced by teachers who are attempting to change their practice would provide other schools with the tools they need to convince their communities of the benefits of continuing with comprehensive reform efforts even if dramatic increases in student test scores are not able to be sustained. There are a multitude of other good reasons besides raising test scores for schools to begin the change process, and LSS can contribute to this larger understanding of what a “good school” is.

B. To what extent does the Laboratory assist states and localities to implement comprehensive school improvement strategies?

1. Strengths

LSS is dedicated to serving its Region. Its Executive Director, professional staff, and oversight boards are highly qualified, hard-working, and clearly focused on serving the needs of the Region.

The Laboratory has established a wide range of relationships with other organizations. Some relationships are designed as “strategic partnerships.” Others are less formal but serve to connect the Lab with key constituencies in the Region. Panel members were in agreement that the Lab has taken steps to establish relationships with all important client groups.

Much of what has been described already in this report suggests that LSS is able to work well with localities to implement comprehensive school improvement strategies. One example of the Lab’s ability to assist stakeholders at the state level involved its work in bringing together state level policymakers for a conference on the issue of teacher recruitment. As one governing board member, who also happened to be a high ranking state education officer, noted:

It was good that the Lab was the Ombudsman in this area, and looked at ways in which we should work together on this scarce resource [teachers]—not only on

how to recruit teachers, but what skills they should have, and what should universities be doing in certification and licensure preparation. Now I don't know how you measure in dollars what that conference did, but the value-added process of the Lab called together people who would go their separate ways and eventually bump heads, thus making separate state systems. We can now begin to look at collaborative recruitment efforts, using an developing electronic database for recruitment. The Lab's approach was thoughtful, research based, and we got something out of it. When you leave a meeting and you have an action plan and you can do something, that's a success.

2. Areas of Organizational Concern

This Lab, like educational systems across the nation, is struggling valiantly with issues of scale. The focus at this point of the LSS journey is on the "scalability" of processes and products, as is appropriate and in line with their contract. A critical unknown in the scalability potential is the impact of strong support from top-flight researchers and practitioners. The concern is twofold. First, what will happen to work in progress at existing sites, if the Lab become less available or be unavailable? Can a sufficient capacity for change be created on-site to allow significant improvement efforts to continue when the outside support is no longer there? Second, what is the minimum level of external support essential for successful implementation and school change? As one member of the Stakeholder Board commented on the support issue, "It's like a baby you have to wean. Because they [the Lab] has done such a supportive job, people wanted the same level of involvement."

LSS should begin to strategize now within the CFL network about the sustainability issue. How can a strong network of CFL schools support each other and continue to provide the capacity for ongoing implementation even if LSS personnel no longer have a direct relationship with the schools?

C. To what extent has the REL made progress in establishing a regional and national reputation in its specialty area?

1. Strengths

There is overwhelming evidence from all sources examined that LSS has indeed established a regional and national reputation in its specialty area of urban education, and continues to build on this reputation. Contributing to its regional and national reputation is the fact that the Lab is a prolific publishing house, and many of its staff have published work in well-respected outlets. These include, since the Lab's inception, 44 articles and 50 book chapters, 10 books a year, 70 conference papers, and 30 articles in journals or magazines. In addition to these traditional academic outlets, the Lab distributes videos, planning guides, and manuals as well. Lab staff estimate that they have made presentations at 150 sites in the last two years.

VI. Broad Summary of Strengths and Concerns

1. Summary of Strengths for LSS

- The Lab meets or exceeds its contract expectations.
- A strong leadership team is in place.
- Staff completes its work in a timely manner.
- The Lab effectively leverages resources provided through its relationship with Temple University.
- Appropriate QA processes are in place.
- Self-assessment methods are being used (via governing boards, tracer studies, customer satisfaction surveys, and independent external critiques).
- Client testimonials suggest products and services are of high quality.

- A research base is in place for product and service development.
- National regional, and state recognition is received for products and services.
- Work is made available in a variety of media.
- Developed products and services are useful to and used by customers.
- Customers are identified and products are tailored to their needs.
- Feedback is used to customize services.
- Evidence exists that CFL and other Lab programs contribute to improved school conditions and have positive student impact.
- The Lab has a large presence in the Region, and progress is being made toward a national reputation.
- The Lab provides a strong mentoring environment for minority researchers and values diversity in staffing.
- The overall culture of the organization is a strength, especially its responsiveness, quality of programs, and collegiality.

2. Summary of Organizational Concerns

- A great deal of the effectiveness of the LSS appears to rest upon the special skills, energy and relationships of the Executive Director. How can LSS institutionalize the many contributions of its Executive Director so that it can continue its success, even if she were to function in a reduced role?
- The CFL model values teachers as instructors and implementers, but seems to lack in valuing their capacity to reflect, articulate and document their experiences.
- A lack of systematic program evaluation for some of the implemented programs was noted.
- Some published material needs to be more user-friendly while still maintaining the subtleties of the research findings.
- There is a need for more rigorous approaches to collecting a broader range of school improvement measures beyond student achievement data.
- In the absence of technical assistance from LSS, how will schools sustain programs currently in place?