

Archived Information

Interim Evaluation of the Mid-Atlantic Laboratory for Student Success

I. Brief Overview of Laboratory

The Mid-Atlantic Regional Educational Laboratory, or Laboratory for Student Success, is located in the Temple University Center for Research in Human Development and Education. The Laboratory is in the fourth year of a five year grant from the Office of Educational Research and Improvement (OERI) in the U.S. Department of Education. The Laboratory's mission is to increase the regional capacity for systemic education reform. The Laboratory establishes strategic partnerships and co-development relationships through which the results of research and development are translated into field services and products to promote comprehensive school reform.

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

The Lab proposed a comprehensive program of research, development, and field services and it has followed through with its commitments. A robust research program is extending several lines of earlier research quite productively. The CFL model, as well as its various components that can be used independently, is in place in many schools and districts. The programs of professional development and public awareness (e.g., principals networks, the Mid-Atlantic Forum of Deans and Superintendents, the national conference series, etc.) are all in

place and appear to be productive. Most processes outlined in the approved proposal are also in place (e.g., quality assurance plan, competent leadership).

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 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 to be justified. The CRESEs have not panned out as planned. The two university-based services have folded. Either the Lab central or Penn Hills has picked up these services and LSS reports that levels of service have been maintained. It appears that the initial strategy of basing services in universities was simply poorly conceived, and subsequent experience has directed the Lab to move in another direction. Although the Lab's explanation could be simply putting a good face on things, I am persuaded that this is a good example of the Lab's flexibility and intent to learn from experience.

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 a 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.

Work is progressing essentially according to schedule.

LSS receives ample support from the Center for Education and Human Development.

Margaret Wang's time is donated in-kind.

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. I cannot identify any important client group that the Lab does not have a relationship with.

LSS takes its commitment to the development of “procedural knowledge” seriously. The concept expresses in other terms what Chris Argyris calls “actionable knowledge” needed to foster effective utilization of theory and research. Argyris notes that such actionable knowledge is rare in many domains of action, and education is chief among them. Thus, the notion of developing such knowledge is conceptually important. It appears moreover that the Lab has effectively aligned its programs, field development and dissemination to support this concept. One has the impression that the linkage of research and improvement in this Lab is actually contributing to the development of actionable findings and programs.

Reviewers have examined the two “signature works”—the Communities for Learning and National Invitational Conferences—in detail and the Urban Education Reform “specialty area” somewhat less intensively. This reviewer believes that these significant components of the Lab's work are in compliance with the contract and making good progress.

The Labs are asked to accomplish a difficult mission. They must (1) develop high quality, useful products and services, (2) establish strong, trusting working relationships with several clients, and (3) achieve real change in comprehensive school reform. This mission is made especially challenging by the conceptual and operational murkiness of the “field” of CSR and by the context in which it must be introduced, where politics, impatience, and distrust are common orientations and organizational fragmentation and decentralization are the norms.

It takes time to make progress on such a mission, and it appears that LSS has made excellent progress. Although this Lab is in some sense a repackaging of the former center on education in the inner cities, LSS still had to bring in new staff, reformat its operations, and add new components. It has managed to do this in the past three years and to make actual substantive progress on its mission.

2. Areas of needed improvement

I see no major areas in need of improvement. I do suggest immediately below an issue for the Lab's and OERI's further consideration.

3. Recommendations for improvement

This reviewer has been somewhat skeptical about the amount of research—fairly basic and applied as opposed to developmental research—the Lab is doing. Extensive questioning and discussion of this issue reveal that the other reviewers do not share this concern, and all users and partners queried also report satisfaction with the proportional allocation of resources to research and other activities. Moreover, some of these individuals as well as the Director of ORAD express strong support for the amount of research at LSS. It is clear that the research program has lots of credibility. These supporters say they would be unwilling to lose this productive research unit.

This reviewer is not persuaded. The question is not whether the research should proceed, but whether it should be subsidized by the OERI Laboratory program. It does not seem likely that the university would let this nationally respected research program languish. It is unlikely that the base of research will diminish if the Lab program discontinues support for this program. On the other hand, reviewers have heard much about the unmet demand for LSS services and need for more service to the field. This reviewer recommends that OERI weigh carefully the

relative benefits of its investment in LSS's research versus developmental and field service activity.

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 follows a well thought through quality assurance plan. The Lab has developed an overall LSS Evaluation Plan. This plan provides a comprehensive framework for assessing the quality and utility of the Lab's products and services. Two major approaches to quality assurance within this plan comprise the three advisory boards and a range of user satisfaction surveys.

LSS's user satisfaction surveys include "event evaluations", "tracer studies", "product satisfaction surveys", and semi-annual needs assessment surveys. The addition to the tracer studies to this line-up is a thoughtful step. 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) who else the respondent has shared the learning or tool with. The weakest point in quality assessment is usually lack of measurement at some time following the event, rather than right away. Immediate feedback tends to be corrupted by a halo effect. Satisfaction, use, impact, and diffusion remain unknown. The tracer studies go a long way to remedying this customary defect.

Review of evaluation 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. The Director of Program Evaluation reports that the staff are committed to the process, that it is administered evenly across the Lab, and that Lab activities and products are indeed changed in response to assessment feedback. He mentioned one example: when principals attending a key professional development activity in Elizabeth, NJ, provided their assessment, they said the right people were not at the table. They needed to bring teams from their schools. Subsequent sessions were modified accordingly.

LSS has done a citation survey to measure the impact of its published research on the field. This search indicates that the research is widely cited. Citations are done by a wide range of authors and support publications in a large range of sound professional journals. By this measure of research impact, the LSS research program has a considerable impact on the broad field of research on children at risk and education reform.

LSS solicits a large amount of advice on utility and quality from its Stakeholder Board, Board of Governors, and Technical Review Board. These groups meet at regular intervals. Minutes of the meetings indicate that members are active and take their responsibilities seriously. The boards have apparently become familiar with the Lab and with the Lab's customers. Meetings often produce sound advice for the Lab. The board's meetings have been increased from semi-annually to quarterly because of the value gained from meeting.

Members of the Stakeholder Board report that the Lab is "totally responsive" to its advice. The Board urged LSS to do more to inform the region of its existence and services, to establish more of an identity in the region. The Board feels the Lab has responded to this challenge. The Board reports that the Lab developed its "tracer studies" because of questions the Board asked.

The Board of Governors also appears to be committed to its task. Members the review

panel interviewed were knowledgeable and enthusiastic about the Lab. They cited numerous instances of the Lab's effectiveness, quality, and utility. Information the board provided was often reiterated or confirmed from another perspective by other sources the panel heard from during the review week. (Specific examples of board comments are cited under the sections below on "quality" and "utility".

The Technical Review Board (TRB) has met several times and minutes of the meetings confirm that it has provided LSS with advice about quality and direction. The review panel did not meet with any member of the TRB. Documentation available on site indicates that this group too has played a useful quality assurance function.

2. Areas of needed improvement

Evaluation data for the CFL program was not available in two forms that this reviewer would find helpful: (1) longitudinal data on the profile of DOI at all CFL schools, and (2) outcomes data on student achievement other than at the DC sites. Although Lab staff offered to pull together the DOI data, it seemed that they were not aware of the actual pattern of data over time (i.e., beyond two years) as I would expect them to be. Fuller outcome/impact data will evidently become available as the schools are longer in operation. I believe the Lab needs to place a priority on both DOI profiling and achievement outcomes.

One significant lack in the Lab's quality assurance plan is the absence of formal program evaluation of the CFL. The current collection of "DOI" profiles and student achievement data does not constitute a true program evaluation. One has the sense that the CFL model is no longer under development but that it is set. Yet there is not adequate evaluation data to arrive at this position yet.

3. Recommendations for improvement

A systematic program evaluation should be conducted, or evaluations over time should be conducted. Data as noted above should be developed.

III. Quality

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

1. Strengths

Information available through the various elements of the Lab's quality assurance plan indicates that overall the Lab's services and products are of high quality and meet the needs of customers.

The Lab has been extremely productive in research and development output. A large range of books, What Works, Spotlights, and other materials has been produced. These products meet one test of quality in that they have been selected for commercial publication or they have appeared in refereed journals or in reputable, selective publications like ED WEEK. Members of the Board of Governors and the Stakeholder Board praise the quality of these products.

The Lab's work is based on a documented research base to a great extent.

The methodology for applied research appears appropriate with the exception of the lack of formal evaluation in the continued development of the CFL.

The overall program is both substantive and operationally comprehensive and coherent.

Customers Comment on LSS Activities

The Lab has conducted a large range of services that users and members of the Board of Governors and Stakeholder Board say they find to be of high quality and useful. Indeed, praise from users at the Lab review was exceptionally glowing. This Lab activity has been directed to

state level policymakers, superintendents and principals, teachers, and the general public.

Specifically:

- The Secretary of Education for the state of Delaware stated that the Lab played an effective role in the region that no other organization could play. The Lab helped the state analyze school data to feed into the state's school improvement planning.
- The Deputy State Superintendent for Maryland stated that the Lab does its work for his state "very well". The Lab has "helped focus what MD is doing in CSR." The Lab "has lifted some heavy weight" with CSR in Maryland.
- New Jersey officials state that the Lab has provided valuable help to the "Abbott Districts", 26 LEAs that have been identified under Court order to receive special comprehensive reform services. The Lab helped the districts to learn about and decide which CSR models to adopt and has since helped them with implementation of the model.
- New Jersey officials also praised the help LSS gave teams from Trenton and other LEAs that permitted these teams to return and train others in the district.
- Conducted an executive seminar on teacher certification, licensure, and recruitment across the region that helped top officials begin to develop a coordinated regional response to problems of teacher recruitment.
- Deans and Superintendents Forums the Camden superintendent has attended have gone very well.
- New Jersey officials state that CFL is a more effective way of responding to the needs of learners with lots of problem students.

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 union reform innovations can't fill
- LSS is having a direct impact on the classroom

Community for Learning

This appears to be a program of high quality. Evaluation data are still rather thin,

although what there is is persuasive. Conceptually, the program includes the major elements shown by research to be necessary for high-performance schools, especially when dealing with concentrations of low-income and minority students. “Degrees of Implementation” data show that intermediate variables concerning teacher behavior and school climate improve under CFL. The evaluation of five schools in DC shows that student performance scores increase and that teacher behavior and school environment factors improve. These data also indicate that good progress can be made within 18 months. This is impressive inasmuch as many programs require a three-year implementation cycle, during which time the district leadership may turn over and shift to some other “silver bullet”. DCPS officials report being extremely satisfied with the progress made in these schools, which were among the very lowest performing in the District. The superintendent of Camden (NJ) Public Schools states that he finds the program especially helpful in addressing the needs of districts with large concentrations of problem learners. When given a choice of CSR models, 24 of the 50 schools in the “first wave” of New Jersey Abbott Districts elected to work with LSS on CFL.

Two aspects of LSS work with CFL stand out beyond the quality and evident effectiveness of CFL in and of itself.

First, because the program is highly data-driven, LSS often ends up working with districts and states both to improve its 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.

Second, when LSS provides implementation support for CFL sites, it does so in a way that adds value to the district processes and capacity overall. For example, the training and

processes needed to support CFL schools are provided in a manner that is sufficiently generic to build district capacity to support other kinds of CSR models as well. This is significant because most districts do not adopt one master model. There can be several models in operation in any district, and it is not likely, or perhaps even desirable, for there to be district uniformity in this area. Thus, a model developer's capacity to provide training and technical assistance that enhances district capacity overall, and not just with respect to individual CFL schools, is a great advantage. LSS reports that its support enhances districts' capacity to support all schools in such areas as data-based decision-making, professional development, report card format/content, and restructuring use of time.

The Lab has adopted a policy that it will no longer work with a district on CFL unless more than one school is involved. This policy will help create more of a critical mass in the districts and should enhance the prospects for going to scale.

LSS Invitational Conferences

The Lab has a strong program of invitational conferences. A systematic process guides the planning and conduct of the 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. Conferences are designed around synthesis of research in a manner that is useful to practice and policy audiences, interactions among researchers/practitioners/policymakers or other cross-role groups, and delineation of "next steps" needed to improve practice, policy and research. Collaborations with "strategic partners" strengthens the quality of the conferences and the quality and results of the dissemination. The Lab seeks leverage by systematically identifying cosponsors with large constituencies and 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.

One of the Lab's strategic partners commented that the conference design provides the kind of mix of participants that generates social connections and interactions essential for school change. Moreover, in her opinion, no other organization links the resources of a university with users as effectively as does LSS.

The co-sponsor of a conference on education improvement in empowerment zones/enterprise communities states that the conference was a key lever in improving and expanding the place of education in the EZ/EC design and influenced the content of federal legislation to carve out a bigger role for education in that policy initiative.

Written endorsements from such partners as the College Board, Council for Basic Education, U.S. Department of Education, Council of Chief State School Officers, the Johnson Foundation, confirm the high quality of conferences in such areas as "Supplementary Education", "Development and Learning of Children and Youth in Urban America", "Implementation of the Title I Program: Implications for Improving Our Capacity for Achieving Student Success", "Improving Results for Children and Families by Connecting Collaborative Services with School Reform Efforts", "Education in Cities: What Works and What Doesn't", "Moving from Standards to Accountability", and "Teachers and the Reform Agenda".

The Lab's experience with these conferences underscores one of its real strengths. LSS has terrific access to top quality researchers and scholars and to high-level, influential practitioners and policymakers. This access is evidently based on the Lab's current work and on the long traditions of high quality work of the core Lab team. This is a real plus for the effectiveness of this Lab.

Meta-Strategic Effects

In making an assessment of the Lab, it is important to think more broadly than in terms of specific products and services, or even in terms of the coherent program these products and service constitute. 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 a new way to think about schooling and their expectations for its quality, direction, and output. In this regard, the Lab appears to be successfully creating a new market for CSR.

In addition, LSS is filling a gap, or deficiency in the system for organizing and managing change. The system capacity is at present inadequate. LSS is helping to organize resources, think innovatively, and target resources on change. It is clear from many of the individuals the review panel interviewed that the Lab is playing this role well. Where else, they tell us, would we go?

Because of the quality and utility of its work, the Lab has earned a national reputation for excellence in research and service.

2. Areas of needed improvement

Scaling Up

Some improvement is needed in the Lab's approach to "scaling up". The current (and approved) approach concentrates essentially on structure, but it neglects some essential content. That is, there is a good strategy 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 I do not see the

Lab 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, (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. (On this latter point, it need not be the Lab that provides such help. That would clearly be beyond their resources under the most optimistic conditions. But some other capacity must be developed, or the new sites will most likely fail.)

I believe the Lab staff would agree with these conditions, but they would probably also assert that they are attending to them. My response would be that the Lab is providing these groups with important but insufficient information. For example, I have asked about the implications of CSR for state policies on personnel, staff development, use of time in the school, allocation of resources, and so forth. I do not see much acknowledgement of these conditions as affecting successful CSR. Yet the experience of the New American Schools models shows just that—that fiscal, personnel, and other policies at the state level need to be modified for widespread implementation to occur.

Here is an example of the kinds of information that would help on this topic. The Lab now develops a “degree of implementation” profile on a school as it puts CFL in place. What if LSS developed an analysis of a state’s policies and conditions for going to scale with CSR? A set of indicators could be developed to profile the state’s readiness and progress. The profile would show what needed to be done in that state in order to go to scale. It is this additional layer or level of analysis, this kind of “procedural” information appropriate to each actor, that is needed to get to scale.

3. Recommendations for improvement

One user representative recommended that LSS focus its program and services more narrowly. She would like to see the Lab focus exclusively on schools that are failing. Although such a focus may not be in line with the OERI requirements, it might be desirable for the Lab to focus more strategically on such schools, as it is already doing in DC and with the Abbott Districts.

IV. Utility

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

1. Strengths

The Lab's products and services are marked by their sustained, cumulative progress, comprehensiveness and integration, and depth and focus. Such programs as CFL, the urban initiative, and the invitational conferences exemplify these qualities.

The Lab's sustained, close interactions with a wide range of users is an exceptionally strong aspect of its work.

LSS products and services are evidently of great value to the Lab's customers. Almost all the information provided above could be used to document the Lab's success in providing services and products that customers find useful and use. More specific comments that add to those above include the following:

- 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 CSRD competition was launched, there was a lot of confusion about the 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 LSS responded effectively.
- The Lab brings appropriate and quality resources to the job. For example, LSS brought Fenwick English 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 urban education. As a result of the 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. The Lab is also instrumental in giving help to Camden's School-Based Management Teams.
- This same superintendent noted several issues on which LSS has provided valuable help throughout the state.
- The review panel has had some question 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. On several occasions, users spoke to the panel about the times LSS had provided information about all the models. One user noted that Philadelphia schools are using Reading Recovery and Core Knowledge 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 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 RBS.
- The coordinator of the LSS CFL work in District of Columbia Public Schools states that DCPS involvement with LSS is "just invaluable". 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 decisionmaking and instruction.

- There is ample evidence that the use of strategic partnerships enhances the utility, quality, and impact of the LSS work. For example, the partnership of 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.

The review panel often heard users praise the Lab for its responsiveness. There are innumerable testimonial statements that speak to the Labs’ reliability, responsiveness, accessibility, and willingness to go the extra mile for the customer. Some specific examples:

- The Philadelphia AFT official praised the Lab’s “quick response to our needs” during the CSRD competition. She also commented favorably on the Lab’s assistance to help schools write grant applications.
- The coordinator of DCPS CFL work says that LSS “comes when you need them”

2. Areas of needed improvement

None.

3. Recommendations for improvement

This recommendation is not based on a weakness. It responds instead to a comment made by the Delaware Stakeholder Board member to the effect that the Lab’s effectiveness is limited in his state by the state’s emphasis on standards and assessments and his principals’ reluctance to get into anything they don’t see as a “quick fix” that will help them meet the standards. The Lab may want to consider developing materials and strategies for presenting CSR in general and the CFL model in particular as highly productive vehicles for meeting state standards. The Lab could cite evidence from the DC schools and the general correlation with CSR principles with research on effective schools. In any event, if there is reluctance to engage with CSR because principals think it’s off track, the Lab needs to find ways to counteract this

view.

This person stated that if LSS could work with only two schools in DE and demonstrate success at raising test scores, the rest of the schools in the state would fall in line and go for the model. LSS should consider such a strategic effort to turn the state around through successful implementation in a few demonstration schools.

The Pennsylvania representative on the Stakeholder Board noted that PA was unable to take advantage of CFL fully because the state was not far enough along in its standards and testing program to have data needed for state analysis preceding adoption of CFL. This was said as a statement of fact about conditions in PA and not as a criticism of LSS or CFL. Is there any way to get around this perceived limitation?

One state representative noted that there is a great need for curriculum materials schools and teachers could use to bridge the gap between standards and classroom instruction. The review panel debated whether there is or is not sufficient material of that sort available. In any event, such substance is by design not a part of the CFL. The Lab should (1) look into the availability nationally of curriculum materials that implement standards, and (2) develop a database of such materials for regional users. (The New Standards project and some of the OERI curriculum frameworks and content standards projects may have good material to start with.)

One Stakeholder Board member recommended that (1) the Lab do more to encourage schools to document their “best practice” so that information can be shared with other schools, and (2) provide more parent training.

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

1. Strengths

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' priority needs. How it determines what are priorities, and what work to do and to leave undone, is not so clear.

Most of the information provided under "quality" and "utility" above could be cited here as evidence for meeting customer needs. Listed below are additional comments the panel heard from customers in support of the Lab's customer focus and value added:

- LSS has worked extensively with City of Baltimore schools. LSS has linked these schools up with the CFL sites in DC. The CFL model is important because of its short gain time.
- LSS was one of three resources (along with CRESPAR and an organization in New York) to which the Baltimore schools turned for help in developing their "after school" programs.
- After New Jersey Governor Whitman's office called OERI to request copies of "Helping Your Child" for a training in NJ, LSS sent a team to videotape the training. That tape will now be made available to approximately 150 urban communities.
- Delaware sees the prospect of even greater utility from LSS and CFL now that the state accountability system is in place. The state will be able to draw greater benefit from the kinds of data analysis LSS supports. And this means the state will be able to make even greater use of such Lab tools as 20/20 and CFL.
- The Maryland Deputy Superintendent says that LSS understands what Maryland is doing, where the state is going. (This was in context of a larger statement that the Lab's work makes a difference.)
- The LSS conference among Boards of Education, State Board members, Commissioner of Education, private sector participants, legislators, and deans of education on teacher quality, preparation, and recruitment helped to address an immediate need for more coherence and cooperation among the states in the region on the critical issue of teacher recruitment.

2. Areas of needed improvement

None.

3. Recommendations for improvement

One key state policymaker expressed a preference for less research and more implementation assistance from the Lab. This view was not shared by other state officials. Nevertheless it seems appropriate to this reviewer to shift the Lab's portfolio to a greater emphasis on implementation service to schools. The job is simply too big and resources clearly too meager not to commit more effort to school service. It is especially important to create a critical mass or tipping point to school reform, after which time the effort may continue of its own momentum. (This issue is discussed at greater length under section II.A.3.)

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

The Lab's work under the CFL clearly contributes to increased student achievement, although the data on improved achievement is limited.

One of the great strengths of LSS is the extent to which it contributes to greater understanding of a wide range of educational problems, issues, and improvement strategies.

The overall program addresses issues of substantial national interest. There is no part of the program that does not address significant issues.

There is some limited information that shows positive impact of the Community for Learning program. Five DCPS schools using CFL—schools at the very bottom of performance in the district--have moved substantially higher in their performance on standardized tests

administered by DCPS. Moreover, this change has occurred in a short period of time. Each of these schools has met the school improvement goals established by the district.

2. Areas of needed improvement

None.

3. Recommendations for improvement

The experience of the Philadelphia school district as reported by the AFT representative on the Stakeholder Board might be informative. She had identified this issue: how can all the “great LSS materials” fulfill their promise for impacting the classroom without just piling them up on the principal’s desk? Her answer was to send AFT teacher reps to DC for training in the AFT teacher-researcher-linker program, so they can move these resources into the classroom in a “bottoms-up” manner.

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

1. Strengths

LSS is providing a large amount of quality assistance to help states implement comprehensive school reform strategies. This assistance comes in many forms, as described below:

--The chair of the Board of Governors stated that he sees clear signs of the impact of the Lab. The quality of applications his foundation receives from area schools is higher. He believes the Lab’s work has produced better informed school leaders with more effective leadership styles for comprehensive school reform.

--The Maryland Deputy Superintendent says that the Lab has helped shape what the state does in CSR. In particular, LSS has helped with analysis of state data, providing a national context for interpreting data, developing recommendations for “thoughtful, meaningful programs”, and then helping to “download” the programs in schools.

--Maryland is working with the Lab on about a half dozen initiatives. The work has a *systemic* focus. LSS is contributing to development of a framework for intervention

with kids at risk of staying back, in connection with the state’s work with Pew on social promotion and with ETS on assessments.

--NJ Department of Education has “used Lab extensively”, reports a knowledgeable state official

The range of strategies that includes networking, invitational conferences, service to SEAs, trainings, and model co-development is geared to create the conditions for successful scaling-up.

2. Areas of needed improvement

None.

3. Recommendations for improvement

None.

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

1. Strengths

The Lab has made substantial progress in establishing a regional and national reputation. The Stakeholder Board and Board of Governors have made it a priority that the Lab make itself better known and more visible in the region, and LSS has responded effectively.

Demand for the Lab’s services and products in and beyond the region is evidently great.

Dissemination of work under the Lab’s specialty area is significant.

The Lab publications list is long and publications are cited in a wide variety of major national journals.

2. Areas of needed improvement

None.

3. Recommendations for improvement

None.

VI. Overall Evaluation of Total Laboratory Programs, Products and Services

The Lab is overall doing work of high quality that meets customer needs. The degree of the Lab's responsiveness to its customers is exceptional. The Lab appears to have become operational and well-established in the relatively short period of its existence as a Lab. The breadth and coherence of the LSS program are impressive.

VII. Broad Summary of Strengths, Areas for Improvement, and Strategies for Improvement

The Lab has numerous strengths: solid research, extensive publications and products, focus on and responsiveness to customer needs, strong and productive partner relationships, and national reputation.

More rigorous program evaluation is needed. Further thought should be given to the relative emphasis given to research and service to the field.