SMALL LEARNING COMMUNITIES:

PROGRAM IMPLEMENTATION AND EVALUATION

2006 FINAL REPORT

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School District of Philadelphia

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September, 2006

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EXECUTIVE ABSTRACT

The Small Learning Communities (SLC) program was initially funded by Congress in FY 2000 (Section 10105 of the Elementary and Secondary Act) and was designed to help Local Educational Agencies plan, develop, implement, or expand smaller, more personalized learning communities in large high schools. Over the past four years, the School District of Philadelphia was awarded three SLC implementation grants, each for a specific cohort of schools and each of which were of three years in duration. The focus of this evaluation report is on the high schools comprising the two cohorts that were still receiving federal funds during 2005-06: Cohort II (Bartram, Fels, Furness, Olney, Overbrook, West Philadelphia and William Penn) which was concluding the third and final year of its SLC grant and Cohort III (Bok, Frankford, Lincoln, Northeast, Roxborough, University City and George Washington) which was concluding their second year of the its SLC grant.

Educational Enterprises, LLC, (EE) is serving as the external evaluator of these grants to the School District of Philadelphia. The 2005-2006 evaluation included a systematic assessment of the implementation of various program elements and their relationship to student outcomes. The evaluation findings presented in this report provide a summary of progress to-date and highlight the accomplishments of the SLC program in the two cohorts.

There are some high schools and some "schools-within-schools" career academies in Philadelphia that have more fully embraced the concept of SLCs and have adopted those research-based principles and best practices that have been shown to be effective. In these schools and academies, there seemed to be some common themes that emerged from the evaluation study.

- There was a subdivision of the school into smaller learning communities/career academies with which pupils seem to identify.

- Each of the academies seems to have developed its' own unique personality and culture and provided students with opportunities to pursue avenues of interest beyond the routine academic requirements.

- The academies provided opportunities for all students to succeed regardless of intellectual or academic ability and to generate transferable life skills.

- Strong on-site leadership from academy coordinators was directly related to success; a highly competent roster chair was also a critical component.

- Where they existed, the Board of Governors for each academy linked the school with the real world.

- At schools and academies where the Peer Connections Program had been adopted, this program seemed to be successful in terms providing additional support for students, developing leadership skills, and enhancing school climate.

- Philadelphia Academies, Inc. had provided exceptional support to some of the schools and academies and had enabled these programs to serve students in ways the schools could not have done on their own.

At the same time, there are some schools and academies in which the adoption of SLC concepts and the implementation process had not proceeded as smoothly or as successfully. In these settings, a number of areas of concern were identified.

- One significant issue for some programs was in the sheer size of the school; some staff in these settings felt that the school is just too large to manage well and appeared, at times, to be a bit overwhelmed.

- Another key deficiency in some schools and programs was the lack of common planning time to provide professional interaction opportunities for teachers and academy staff. This is one of the reasons there seemed to be a real lack of teacher collaboration at these academies.

- In some schools, the small learning communities/career academies did not appear to have formal, stated vision and mission statements. Perhaps a clearer vision would have helped address the lack of teacher collaboration at these schools and academies.

- Another key ingredient that seems to be missing at these schools was any coherent professional development related to the career-themed academies.

- The staffs at many of the schools and academies did not appear to be very knowledgeable about the small learning communities grants the schools have received; confusion existed at some sites as to the purpose of the funding and how this plays out with respect to other budgetary issues and what, indeed, the grant funds actually support.

The research related to SLC best practices and principles has identified 17 factors that have been linked to positive student outcomes. The SLC degree of implementation data collected for this evaluation provided an assessment of where each school was on the continuum of low-to-high impact for each practice/principle and served as a descriptive indicator of how likely the school will be in affecting positive student performance and behaviors.

For some schools, principally belonging to Cohort III, the degree of implementation findings were promising. In most of these schools, there was some, if not substantial, evidence that the SLC best practices and principles identified in the research literature had been implemented. To the extent that these research-based practices are indeed

linked to improved student performance, the outlook for these high schools is encouraging. With respect to the relatively higher rated schools, the school leaders seemed to understand and support the best practices and principles described in the degree of implementation assessment instrument. Through their own resourcefulness, ingenuity, and creativity, they have managed to overcome various barriers and obstacles that could have impeded SLC implementation. In these schools, there were many examples of model academies and research-based practices that are likely to support enhanced student outcomes.

For other schools, principally Cohort II, the degree of implementation findings are not encouraging. In most of these schools, there was little evidence that the SLC best practices identified in the research literature had been implemented. To the extent that these research-based practices are indeed indicative of enhanced student outcomes, the prognosis for these high schools is not favorable. In fairness to the schools, school leaders seemed to embrace the best practices described in the degree of implementation assessment instrument and felt that they do embody sound educational principles/practices. However, at the same time there was a fairly strong consensus among these administrators and key staff members that the SLC implementation was being inhibited by a number of factors and variables beyond their control. These factors include financial issues, union contract agreements, District policies and priorities, and a host of intervening variables inherent in large urban districts including high instances of student mobility and staff turnover.

There are several exceptional and model small learning communities and career academies that existed within the cohorts. While some may be cost prohibitive to implement on a wider scale, many nuggets of educational wisdom may be found at these sites.

- The Automotive and Mechanical Engineering Academy at West Philadelphia High School.

- The Horticultural Academy at Abraham Lincoln High School.

- The Space Research Center Program at Northeast High School.

- The Culinary Arts Program at Frankford High School.

- The Petro-Chemicals Program at Bok High School.

Analyses of student data were consistent with EE's assessment of success of schools in implementing their SLC grants. The prevalence of proficient PSSA reading and mathematics scores, and the average daily attendance at Cohort III schools were statistically significantly higher than at Cohort II schools. Moreover, educationally meaningful and significant correlations show that these differences were related to the degree that schools had successfully implemented best practices. One variable, the prevalence of suspensions was neither significantly related to the cohort to which schools

belonged nor to their success in implementing best practices, suggesting that schools had made diverse management decisions about the use of suspensions.

While noting that the SLC grant responsibilities differed somewhat in each cohort, the EE analysis nevertheless concluded that the Cohort III schools have been significantly more successful than the Cohort II schools in implementing their responsibilities of the SLC grant. There are many reasons for these existing differences. In some cases where problems have occurred with implementation, it has been because of pre-existing or ongoing negative situations specific to each school. Whatever the case, EE has made an attempt to cite such weaknesses as well as strengths in the respective detailed narratives that have been developed for each participant school.

In terms of next steps, during the 2006-2007 academic year, Educational Enterprises, LLC (EE) will continue to monitor and work with the seven high schools in their third and final year of the Small Learning Communities (SLC) grant. Those schools are: Bok, Frankford, Lincoln, Northeast, Roxborough, University City, and George Washington. The general goals of evaluation are: (1) continue to monitor compliance with respect to grant responsibilities; (2) update SLC best practices degree of implementation; (3) continue to analyze student outcomes for this set of schools; (4) prepare a final SLC report for the School District of Philadelphia and the United States Department of Education; and (5) continue to provide support and coaching to this cohort of schools.

Small Learning Communities:

Program Implementation and Evaluation Final Report

Introduction

The Small Learning Communities (SLC) program was initially funded by Congress in FY 2000 (Section 10105 of the Elementary and Secondary Act) and was designed to help Local Educational Agencies plan, develop, implement, or expand smaller, more personalized learning communities in large high schools. Over the past several years, the School District of Philadelphia was awarded three SLC implementation grants, each of which was of three years in duration. The first grant, for Cohort I schools, expired at the conclusion of the 2004-05 school year; thus, during the 2005-06 academic year there were two cohorts of federally-funded SLC high schools in Philadelphia. Cohort II was concluding its third and final year of funding and includes the following high schools: Bartram, Fels, Furness, Olney, Overbrook, West Philadelphia, and William Penn. Cohort III, which was concluding its second year of the three-year funding cycle, includes the following high schools: Bok, Frankford, Lincoln, Northeast, Roxborough, University City, and Washington.

The SLC program is seen as an opportunity for high schools to receive assistance in their efforts to improve student outcomes; research has shown that SLCs can enhance student achievement and contribute to a more positive educational experience by providing a safer and more humane high school environment (U.S. Department of Education, 2001). Also, the SLC program is an effort at implementing school reform and "best practices" that have been demonstrated as effective by previous research. It was anticipated that these program and project components and activities would lead to an increase in the academic achievement and sense of belonging of the high school students and improve students' preparation for successful transition to post-secondary education, employment, military services or other life activity and, more globally, a more promising future for the city of Philadelphia as a whole.

More specifically, research on SLCs has shown that small school environments positively affect student outcomes with enhanced performance relative to grades, test scores, attendance, graduation, and behavior measures (Klonsky, 1998). Smaller high schools also seem to have a greater "holding power" as students are more likely to attend and participate in school activities and are less likely to engage in disruptive, disorderly, or violent behavior and, ultimately, less likely to drop-out (Garbarino, 1987). At the School District of Philadelphia, it was felt that SLC principles and practices would better enable the district to address a number of issues including the: (1) educationally/economically disadvantaged transient population of students entering the high school; (2) high number of academic and behavioral problems in the ninth grade; (3) number of students scoring below proficient on measures of student achievement; and (4) need for better post-secondary planning.

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Evaluation Framework

Educational Enterprises, LLC, (EE) is serving as the external evaluator of the federally-funded SLC grants to the School District of Philadelphia. The SLC external evaluation being conducted includes a systematic plan for the implementation of various program elements and the formative evaluation approaches employed are intended to provide timely, objective feedback to district administration about the start-up and operation of the program so that informed decisions can be made about potential program modifications. At the same time, the evaluation findings provide a summary of progress to-date and highlight the accomplishments of the SLC program in the district.

The formative evaluation addresses the "fidelity of implementation" in terms of the program features and elements described in the original proposal, and serves as a measure of compliance. At the same time, the SLC principles related to best practices have been incorporated as part of the formative assessment of implementation. As the SLC program is an effort at implementing school reform and best practices that have been demonstrated as effective by previous research, a review of the SLC literature has been undertaken and the results of those efforts are presented in this report.

The evaluation also addresses summative issues, in two respects. First, student outcome data were obtained and analyzed for each of the Cohort II and Cohort III schools. These data included measures of student achievement, attendance, graduation and promotion rates, and behavior indicators related to suspensions and incidents of violence. The evaluation is also summative in nature as the Cohort II schools have reached the end of their three-year funding cycle, and this document serves as a final report on SLC implementation and outcomes for that set of schools.

An initial meeting was held with all the SLC high school principals, or their designees, in October 2005, at the District office, to review the grant and their responsibilities. At this time, the SLC research base and literature review as well as the evaluation activities and forms to be utilized during the school year were shared with the schools. During November and December, EE staff members visited all SLC high schools and interviewed key staff members, conducted walk-throughs of the school, and began establishing rapport. During February and March, visits were made to some schools to provide support and coaching based on the observations made during the initial visits. In April and May, intensive site visits were completed for all of the SLC high schools. Interviews with administrators, faculty, staff, and students were conducted. At this time, program operations were also observed during walk-throughs of the schools. At the conclusion of each visit, EE staff members completed a program compliance report, a best practices degree of implementation report, and a case study write-up for each school.

Grant Responsibilities and Compliance Issues

Based on the support, involvement and input from all of the school's stakeholders and constituents, there were a number of *structures* and *strategies* that were implemented as

priorities for each cohort that was part of the SLC initiative. These priorities are specified as defined targets for participating schools and are important to keep in mind since these items would be the focus of monitoring progress schools are making in implementing SLC initiatives. They are presented for each cohort in Chart 1 and Chart 2.

Chart 1: Cohort II Schools and Grant Responsibilities

Cohort II Schools	Grant Responsibilities
Bartram, Fels, Furness, Olney, Overbrook, William Penn, West Philadelphia	• Reorganize 9th grades into freshman academies • Create academically-rigorous career themed academies in grades 10-12 • Utilize the Kaplan diagnostic/prescriptive tool to enhance use of student assessment data and to develop more precise, effective and appropriate instructional planning for pupils • Create broad-based advisory committees (business, community, faith-based organization, parent, student and teacher representatives) • Provide opportunities for teachers to work in teams • Enhance SLC professional development at each school via a released time academic coach at each site as well as outside expertise

Chart 2: Cohort III Schools and Grant Responsibilities

Cohort III Schools	Grant Responsibilities
Bok, Frankford, Lincoln, Northeast, Roxborough, University City, George Washington	• Reorganize 9th grades into freshman academies • Create academically-rigorous career themed academies in grades 10-12 • Establish Comprehensive Student Assistance Plans/Teams • Utilize the Princeton Center For Leadership Peer Group Connections program • Create student support mechanisms via Social Workers and Ed to Career Counselors • Enhance professional development at each school via a released time academic coach at each site as well as external expertise • Install Saturday schools with Plato Learning software as the hub • Foster teacher work in teams

Cohort II Schools: Grant Responsibilities and Compliance Issues

Based on site visits made to the Cohort II schools in April and May, the following chart provides a synopsis of the progress the schools have made in terms of implementing the program features described in the grant, where Y = Yes, Implemented and N = Not Implemented. The individual schools are as follows: (1) Bartram, (2) Fels, (3) Furness, (4) Olney, (5) Overbrook, (6) William Penn, and (7) West Philadelphia.

	SCHOOLS						
RESPONSIBILITIES	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
9th Grade Academies	Y	Y	Y	N	Y	Y	Y
Career Academies	N	N	Y	N	Y	Y	Y
Kaplan Planner	N	N	Y	N	N	N	Y
Advisory Committees	N	N	N	N	Y	Y	N
Teacher Teams	N	N	N	N	N	N	N
SLC Prof. Development	N	N	N	N	N	N	N

Cohort II Compliance Findings

For Cohort II schools, of the six grant elements, only two were implemented in more than one-half of the schools. The remaining four grant responsibilities were being implemented in only two of the schools, or not at all.

- Most of the schools (6 of 7) have established a 9th Grade Academy; these academies typically have dedicated space within the building with double doses of English and math and the intensive and strategic interventions for ninth graders most in need.

- In more than one-half of the schools (4 of 7) there are career-themed academies; the degree to which these academies are academically rigorous varies considerably both between schools and among academies within schools.

- In only two of the schools was the Kaplan diagnostic/prescriptive tool being utilized; in general, while some schools were aware of the existence of the Kaplan Planner, there seemed to be a consensus of opinion that this was no longer a district priority.

- Functioning broad-based advisory committees were found in two schools; in some schools, because there are no career oriented SLC's, there was no reason seen to create broad-based community advisory committees.

- There was no evidence at any of the schools that there were opportunities for teachers to work in teams; there does not appear to be any systematic approach to common prep times and planning times in the schools due to rostering, time, and mandated contract issues.

- There is very little school-based professional development related to SLC initiatives occurring in the schools and little attention seems directed towards SLC concerns; in most cases, the professional development taking place in the school is provided by the district or regional offices.

In reviewing the results on a school-by-school basis, there was no school that had implemented more than one-half of the grant responsibilities. Some of the schools (4 of 7) implemented some (3 of 6) of the grant elements. There were two schools that had only implemented one of the grant elements and, at one school, none of the grant responsibilities were found to be in operation.

Cohort II Compliance Summary and Conclusions

In answer to the question as to which specific SLC grant responsibilities have been implemented in the Cohort II schools, it seems fair to conclude that, for the most part, there was little evidence that the majority of the grant elements were implemented by the schools. Even where some of the grant responsibilities were found to be in operation, the manner in which the elements were implemented varied greatly from school-to-school, with the exception of establishing 9th Grade Academies.

There seemed to be a consensus in most of the schools, and with respect to many of the grant responsibilities, that current District policies and priorities are not necessarily consistent with those initiatives described in the grant and that SLC implementation is inhibited by a number of factors and variables beyond their control. These factors include financial issues, union contract agreements, and a host of intervening variables inherent in large urban districts including high instances of student mobility and staff turnover.

Cohort III Schools: Grant Responsibilities and Compliance Issues

Based on site visits made to the Cohort III schools during April and May, the following chart provides a synopsis of the progress the schools have made in terms of implementing the program features and responsibilities described in the grant, where Y = Yes, Implemented and N = Not Implemented. The individual schools are: (1) Bok, (2) Frankford, (3) Lincoln, (4) Northeast, (5) Roxborough, (6) University City, and (7) George Washington.

RESPONSIBILITIES	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
9th Grade Academies	Y	Y	N	N	Y	Y	N
Career Academies	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	N
Student Assistance Plans	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y
Peer Group Connections	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y
Counselors and Support	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y
Professional Development	N	N	Y	N	N	N	N
Plato Learning	Y	Y	Y	Y	N	Y	Y
Teacher Teams	N	N	N	N	N	Y	N

Cohort III Compliance Findings

Of the eight grant responsibilities, three of them were implemented by all of the schools and two additional responsibilities were implemented by most (6 of 7) schools.

- All of the schools utilize the Princeton Center for Leadership Peer Group Connections program; there is unanimous consensus that this is an excellent program that has had a very positive impact on participating students.

- All of the schools have established Comprehensive Student Assistance Plans/Teams; there seems to be a great deal of support and assistance available to students.

- All of the schools have created student support mechanisms via Social Workers and Ed to Career Counselors; however, the number of support staff varies considerably from school to school.

- Most of the schools have implemented the Plato Learning program; however, the program has been established on a very limited basis and has not been utilized on Saturdays as originally anticipated but rather incorporated into the school day or as an after-school program.

- Most of the schools have career-themed academies in grades 10-12; however, the amount of time each has been in existence, and the degree of academic rigor at each, varies from school to school, and from academy to academy within schools.

There were two grant responsibilities that were implemented in only one school apiece for a variety of reasons.

- The professional development at each school via a released time academic coach at each site as well as external expertise did not appear to be enhanced; in fact, there is little professional development occurring at the schools outside of that provided by the district.

- The grant monies did not appear to foster teacher work in teams; indeed, most schools do not have common planning time or SLC teaching teams.

With respect to the schools having reorganized 9th grades into freshman academies, in slightly more than one-half of the schools (4 of 7) there are freshmen academies. In the other schools, the fact that there is no freshman academy is a matter of tradition and school preference.

In viewing the results by school, at no school were all eight of the grant responsibilities implemented. One school did implement 7 of the 8 grant responsibilities and there were three additional schools that implemented 6 of the 8 grant responsibilities.

Cohort III Compliance Summary and Conclusions

In terms of answering the question as to which specific grant responsibilities have been implemented in the schools, it seems fair to conclude that most of responsibilities were implemented by most of the schools. However, *the degree to which* these various initiatives have been implemented is more open to question; it seems clear that with respect to some grant responsibilities, there is a great deal of variability from school to school, and from academy to academy within schools. Finally, for those responsibilities that were not widely implemented, school leaders recognize the lack of school-based professional development and the lack of teacher communication and collaboration as significant barriers to improving their schools and feel that district policies inhibit the adoption of these grant responsibilities.

Best Practices – Research Base and Literature Review

The focus of the literature review centered on the program features described in the original grant proposal and SLC research-based practices and relied heavily on the work of the Northwest Regional Educational Laboratory (NWREL) and two of their books entitled: *Small Learning Communities: Implementing and Deepening Practice* and *New Small Learning Communities: Findings from Recent Literature*. The research discussed in this section relates to the program elements and the principles and associated practices that have been linked to positive student outcomes. The literature review is organized in terms of the specific items included on the form entitled *Small Learning Communities: Assessment of Implementation and Progress*, which may be found in Appendix A.

1. SLC Size and Organization.

In the report *Breaking Ranks: Changing an American Institution*, the National Association of Secondary School Principals suggested that a self-operating unit of no more than 600 students is an appropriate number for an effective high school (NASSP, 1996). Some research suggests that high schools should be no larger than 400-500 students (Cotton, 2001) while other findings indicate that the ideal size for an SLC school is between 200 and 400 students (Cook, 2000). As another key aspect in the equation for determining the ideal size for an SLC, the National Association of Secondary School Principals recommends that teachers instruct no more than 90 students at any one time as a minimal standard for teaching effectively (NASSP, 1996). The National Council of Teachers of English supports an even lower ratio – a maximum of 80 students per teacher at any one time. Finally, research (Ancess, 2003; Meier, 1995) has shown that in the most successful SLCs, teachers only work with students who are members of the SLC.

2. SLC Self-Determination.

SLC research indicates that success is dependent on the self-chosen membership of teachers and students, who share a commitment to the unique focus, mission, and goals of the SLC (Allen, 2001; Meier, 1995). Further, small learning communities profit from developing a distinctive program of study that originates in the vision, interests, and unique characteristics of their members and operate in an autonomous manner as separate and distinct organizational units (Cotton, 2001). And, in successful SLCs, students choose to enter the particular SLC on the basis of their curricular interests and irrespective of their history of achievement (Oxley, 2004). Finally, the most successful SLCs provide members the opportunity to develop their interests with teachers and with peers who share them (Oxley, 2004).

3. SLC Identity.

It is important for SLCs to have a strong identity that is internalized by teachers and students alike. The SLC vision, mission, and thematic components must be clearly articulated and readily apparent if this identity is to be forged (Marzano, 2003). Not unlike any complex organizational structure, a strong identity that is structured around a clearly articulated vision and mission will result in lines of communication and participant actions and behaviors that are more likely to be clear and transparent to all (Bolman & Deal, 2003). In the report, *Small Schools, Big Dreams,* disseminated by the Institute for Research and Reform in Education, the research suggests small learning communities gain their identities from themes. No matter what the theme of the SLC, these schools ensure that all small learning communities offer their students opportunities to achieve the same rigorous academic standards.

4. SLC Curriculum.

One of the hallmarks of small learning communities is how the curriculum has relevance to the outside world and holds personal meaning for the students. Curricular themes, career interests (Legters, et al., 2002, McPartland, et al., 1998), and cross-disciplinary

inquiry (Ancess, 1995; Meier, 1995) create meaningful connections among courses. The SLCs curriculum integrates courses that prepare for both college and career goals. In addition, successful SLCs establish standards for student proficiency that agree with the community's goals and values and at the same time equal or exceed state standards (Ancess, 1995). Lee (2001) cites work that suggests that an integrated program with a structured curriculum, organized around themes with a narrow focus, is more conducive to learning than a comprehensive approach that offers a broad range of courses at many different levels.

5. SLC Scheduling.

SLC scheduling provides flexible structures that allow for innovation in practice throughout a school year and SLC needs drive class scheduling (Oxley, 2004). Flexible scheduling is often used to support SLC and interdisciplinary teaming because it allows the team teachers to change the schedule from week to week or even daily to meet the particular and changing needs of their students (Legters, 1999). Through flexible scheduling, the SLC structure allows teachers to tailor instruction to their student's needs and diversify learning activities (Cotton, 2001).

6. SLC Affiliation.

In successful small learning communities, teachers instruct all (or at least most) of their classes in the SLC (Cook, 2000; Meier, 1995). Teachers need to have their primary commitment be the SLC because if teachers divide time between their SLC classes and classes outside the SLC, it is likely they will not have sufficient time to participate in the collaborative activities required to make the SLC a successful enterprise. According to Ancess (1995), in fully operational SLCs, teachers tend to spend at least five hours per week outside the classroom on SLC related activities such as student advisement, curriculum integration, staff meetings, and common planning. With respect to common planning time, the more classes teachers are responsible for outside of the SLC, the more difficult scheduling time for common planning becomes. Given all of these factors, it would be difficult for teachers to devote this much time to SLC activities unless the SLC was their primary commitment (Cook, 2000).

7. SLC Interdisciplinary Teams.

A central feature of a high functioning SLC is an interdisciplinary team or teams of teachers who work closely with a group of students they share in common for instruction. Teachers share the responsibility for curriculum instruction, evaluation, and often the scheduling and discipline of a group of 100-150 students (Oxley, 1997). This arrangement helps personalize the learning environment by increasing knowledge and communication among teachers, students, and parents, and provides an integrated view of students' progress. In addition, interdisciplinary teams may help students feel that there is a group of concerned adults looking out for them, thus empowering student success. Research has found that SLC teachers enjoy greater interdisciplinary collaboration and

consensus (Oxley, 1997) and instructional leadership, including program coordination (Wasley, et al., 2000), than teachers in traditional schools.

8. SLC Preparation Time.

Common planning time facilitates collaboration among interdisciplinary team members. Research indicates common planning time as a feature of successful teaming and academic programs linked to positive student outcomes (Felner, et al., 1997; McPartland, et al., 1998; Newmann, et al. 2001; Oxley 1997). In addition, among successful SLCs, common planning time comes during shared preparation periods during the school day either on a late start or early release day each week, or a block of time during which students leave school to do community-based service/study (Meier, 1995).

9. SLC Looping.

Research has shown prominent and successful small learning communities are those that extend across at least two years (McPartland, 2002). Teachers in multi-year SLCs can use the knowledge that they have gained about their students from the first year to shape their subsequent learning in the years after (Fine & Somerville,1998). Also, SLCs may help to promote connections between older, more competent peer role models and younger students, which is a factor shown to enhance learning (Bernard, 1990).

10. SLC Community Partners.

In SLCs teachers work with community partners to design curricula grounded in real-world work and service (Ancess, 1995). Community partners enable teachers to extend class work into community contexts related to the topics and problems under study (Allen, 2001).   In addition, collaboration with community partners also presents opportunities to conduct more authentic assessment of student work by including outside experts in the review process (Ancess, 1995). Villani and Atkins (2000) have also researched the importance of community involvement in education and have shown that educational achievement increases with increased levels of community involvement; this involvement exists on a continuum that ranges from community members serving as advisors to schools to community-based learning processes that extend well beyond the cognitive capacity of instruction of the "three Rs."

11. SLC Building Space.

Physical proximity of the SLC interdisciplinary team's classrooms is a requirement for effective small learning community functioning and research repeatedly finds that physical proximity is instrumental to key small learning community functions (Oxley, 2004).   Physical proximity of teachers' classrooms facilitates teacher collaboration (Christman, et al., 1997; Wasley, et al., 2000), promotes interaction among teachers and students (Ancess, 1995; Oxley, 1990), and helps to establish a separate identity and a sense of community among SLC members (Raywid, 1996) that is seen as an essential element of successful SLCs.

12. SLC Assessment of Progress.

Successful SLC teams actively discuss and plan curricular and instructional improvements based on analyses of student progress and achievement data (Darling-Hammond, et al., 2002). Research indicates that SLCs are most successful when teams engage in a continuous process of improvement, where student's work, grades, standardized tests scores are all pieces of data that are helpful in reflecting upon improved practice (Oxley, 2001). As one of the characteristics of successful small schools cited by the Small Schools Project (2001), the use of multiple forms of assessment to gauge actual student achievement and to guide improvement is seen as an essential and core element.

13. SLC Professional Development.

Research has shown professional development should be designed to help teachers strengthen connections among their efforts to develop more engaging and authentic curricula, raise standards for student performance, and build community – in short, it should carry out a coherent vision of SLC practice (Christman & Macpherson, 1996). SLC teachers need to take an active role in their own professional development, by identifying and developing professional development opportunities that help them pursue their mission and specific improvement goals (Christman & Macpherson, 1996; Darling-Hammond, et al., 2002; Wasley, et al., 2000). Effective models of staff development for SLC success are seen to begin with the inception of the SLC initiative (Egelson, et al., 2002). Staff development should focus on altering teaching methods--not only changing what is taught but also how it is taught--to take full advantage of the dynamics of SLCs (Burke County Public Schools, 2000).

14. SLC School Improvement Plan.

A school's improvement goals must be consistent and driven by SLCs best practices and goals. Cohen (1995) found that numerous, unrelated school goals and reforms detract from full and faithful implementation of any one promising reform; typically as a reform is enacted, including those for small learning communities, it does not advance beyond an initial stage of implementation before a new reform emerges and fragments existing reform efforts. SLC school improvement plans that encompass sustained and coherent strategies that are directly tied to the SLC vision and goals are more likely to promote positive student outcomes (Newman, et al., 2001).

15. SLC Peer Connections.

In the more successful SLCs, freshmen transition includes mentoring from older students, or special career exploration classes designed to set the context for high school as a pathway to college and careers. As noted above, the most successful SLCs provide members the opportunity to develop their interests with teachers and with peers who share them (Oxley, 2004). There are many commercial programs to which schools can

subscribe that have been shown to provide well-developed curriculum materials for strengthening peer connections and mentoring relationships among students (see the U.S. Department of Education website for more information on such programs).

16. SLC Career-Themed Academies.

In addition to research specific to the benefits of discrete career themes being interwoven into curriculum (Murnane & Levy, 1996), there is a sizable evidence base suggesting that smaller, more personalized learning communities with a clear focus on careers are an effective strategy for academic success (Smith, 1999). Such approaches are especially successful with students who carry risk factors making them much more susceptible to dropping out of high school (Krei & Rosenbaum, 2005).

17. SLC Networking.

Networking can provide exposure of SLC staff to other schools. Ideally, this networking should be part of a teaming process that allows faculty, staff, and administrators time to share experiences and to learn from them. Effective use of such teams also helps to strengthen SLC identity and can build a sense of community into the school, enabling students to learn more so they can meet higher standards (George & McEwin, 1999; Legters, 1999).

Best Practices – Degree of Implementation

The form entitled *Small Learning Communities: Assessment of Implementation and Progress* may be found in Appendix A. The assessment tool is based on the principles and practices described in the literature review that have been shown to be related to positive student outcomes.   The rating scale for each item provides a range of descriptions for each practice and is suggestive of the direction a school may want to move to increase impact on desirable student outcomes.

The assessment tool serves as a guide in determining the current status and program features associated with the SLC established in the high school. The comments section for each item can be used to identify the factors that may have facilitated the implementation process and/or barriers that may have inhibited the process.

When EE staff visited all of the SLC high schools in November and December 2005, the assessment tool was reviewed with school leadership and it was suggested that schools may wish to use the tool for their own self-assessment and monitoring purposes. On subsequent visits to the schools, EE staff conducted interviews and walk-throughs to collect data to complete an assessment for each school.

Cohort II Best Practices Findings

For the Small Learning Communities (SLC) Grants, there are seven Cohort II high schools: (1) Bartram, (2) Fels, (3) Furness, (4) Olney, (5) Overbrook, (6) William Penn,

and (7) West Philadelphia. The following chart provides the implementation ratings, of a scale of 1 = Low Impact to 5 = High Impact on each of the features described in the implementation assessment tool.

<div align="center">SCHOOLS</div>

PRACTICES	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	Total
Size and Organization	1	1	2	1	1	2	1	9
Self-Determination	1	1	2	1	2	2	2	11
Identity	1	1	2	1	3	2	1	11
Curriculum	1	1	2	1	2	1	1	9
Scheduling	1	1	2	1	1	1	1	8
Affiliation	1	1	2	1	2	2	1	10
Interdisciplinary Teams	2	1	2	1	1	3	1	11
Preparation Time	2	1	2	1	1	2	1	10
Looping	1	1	1	2	1	1	1	8
Community Partners	1	2	2	2	3	3	2	15
Building Space	1	1	2	1	2	3	1	11
Progress Assessment	2	1	3	1	2	3	2	14
Professional Development	1	1	2	1	1	2	1	9
School Improvement Plan	1	1	3	1	1	2	2	11
Peer Connections	1	1	3	1	1	1	1	9
Career Academies	1	1	3	1	1	3	1	11
Networking	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	7
TOTAL	20	18	36	19	26	34	21	

In viewing these results by school, the lowest degree of implementation score a school could have been assigned was a 17 (17 items x 1 = low impact scale score) and the highest degree of implementation score that could have been obtained was 85 (17 items x

5 = high impact scale score). There were two schools that were rated higher, in a relative sense to the other schools, with scores of 36 and 34; however, these scores still reflect a low level of impact (on average, about a rating of 2 on the 5-point scale). Four of the schools were rated near the bottom of the degree of implementation continuum with scores of 18, 19, 20 and 21 respectively. In the majority of the schools, many of the individual items were rated at the lowest impact scale score of 1. In no school was a rating higher than 3 (average impact) recorded on any item on the assessment tool.

In examining the results by the individual items related to SLC practices, the lowest degree of implementation score for a particular item was a 7 (7 schools x 1 = low impact scale score) and the highest degree of implementation score that could have been obtained on a specific item was 35 (7 schools x 5 = high impact scale score). Only two items had a total score that would have equated to an average rating of 2 on the 5-point scale; these items related to the involvement of community partners and the assessment of progress. The other 15 items were rated closer to the bottom of the degree of implementation continuum.

Cohort II Best Practices Summary and Conclusions

The research related to SLC best practices and principles identified 17 factors that have been linked to positive student outcomes. The SLC degree of implementation data provide an assessment as to where a school lies on the continuum of low-to-high impact for each practice/principle and serves as one descriptive indicator of how likely the school will be in affecting positive student performance and behaviors. For the Cohort II SLC high schools, the degree of implementation findings are not encouraging. In most of the schools, there is little evidence that the SLC best practices identified in the research literature have been implemented. To the extent that these research-based practices are indeed indicative of enhanced student outcomes, the prognosis for the Cohort II high schools is not favorable.

In fairness to the schools, school leaders seem to embrace the best practices described in the degree of implementation assessment instrument and feel that they do embody sound educational principles/practices. However, at the same time there is a fairly strong consensus among these administrators and key staff members that the SLC implementation is inhibited by a number of factors and variables beyond their control. These factors include financial issues, union contract agreements, District policies and priorities, and a host of intervening variables inherent in large urban districts including high instances of student mobility and staff turnover.

Cohort III Best Practices Findings

For the Small Learning Communities (SLC) Grants, there are seven Cohort III high schools: (1) Bok, (2) Frankford, (3) Lincoln, (4) Northeast, (5) Roxborough, (6) University City, and (7) George Washington. The following chart provides the implementation ratings, of a scale of 1 = Low Impact to 5 = High Impact on each of the features described in the implementation assessment tool.

	SCHOOLS							
	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	Total
FEATURES								
Size and Organization	2	3	4	4	3	3	2	21
Self-Determination	3	3	4	4	3	4	2	23
Identity	3	3	4	5	4	4	2	25
Curriculum	2	3	4	3	3	3	2	20
Scheduling	2	3	4	3	2	3	2	19
Affiliation	2	3	4	4	3	4	2	22
Interdisciplinary Teams	2	3	4	4	3	3	3	21
Preparation Time	2	2	3	2	2	5	2	18
Looping	2	2	4	2	2	2	1	15
Community Partners	4	3	5	4	3	4	3	26
Building Space	3	3	3	4	3	3	3	22
Progress Assessment	4	3	4	4	4	3	4	26
Professional Development	2	3	4	3	2	2	2	18
School Improvement Plan	3	4	4	4	3	3	3	24
Peer Connections	3	5	4	4	4	4	4	28
Career Academies	3	3	4	4	3	4	3	24
Networking	2	3	4	3	2	2	2	18
TOTAL	44	52	67	61	49	56	42	

When reviewing the results on a school-by-school basis, the lowest degree of implementation score a school could have been assigned was a 17 (17 items x 1 = low impact scale score) and the highest degree of implementation score that could have been obtained was 85 (17 items x 5 = high impact scale score). There were two schools that were rated higher relative to the other schools, with scores of 67 and 61. For these two schools, there was a fairly high degree of implementation of SLC best practices. Two additional schools, with scores of 56 and 52 respectively, were rated above average

(which on the 5-point scale, a 3 would be equivalent to a score of 51) in terms of their degree of implementation score. The remaining three schools are rated, on the total score, somewhere between and 2 and 3 on the 5-point continuum; however, they have implemented many of the best practices described on the assessment tool. In many of the schools there were many items rated a 4 or higher, indicating that a number of best practices/principles are being implemented to a high degree.

In examining the results by the individual items related to SLC practices, the lowest possible degree of implementation score for a particular item was 7 (7 schools x 1 = low impact scale score) and the highest degree of implementation score that could have been obtained on a specific item was 35 (7 schools x 5 = high impact scale score). The majority of the items had scores that would have equated to an above average rating of 3 on the 5-point scale; these items related to the SLC organization, identity, affiliation, self-determination, teaching teams, involvement of community partners, building space, school improvement plans, peer connections, career academies, and the assessment of progress. The remaining items were rated slightly below average on the impact continuum.

Cohort III Best Practices Summary and Conclusions

The research literature focusing on SLC best practices and principles suggests that there are at least 17 factors that are likely to have a positive impact on student performance and behaviors. The SLC degree of implementation assessment tool employed in this evaluation provides an indicator, on the continuum of low-to-high impact for each SLC practice/principle, for each school that, if the research literature is correct, is suggestive of how likely the school will be in affecting positive student outcomes. For the Cohort III SLC high schools, the degree of implementation findings are promising.

In most of the schools, there is some, if not substantial, evidence that the SLC best practices and principles identified in the research literature have been implemented. To the extent that these research-based practices are indeed linked to improved student performance, the outlook for the Cohort III high schools is encouraging. With respect to the relatively higher rated schools, the school leaders seem to understand and support the best practices and principles described in the degree of implementation assessment instrument. Through their own resourcefulness, ingenuity, and creativity, they have managed to overcome various barriers and obstacles that could have impeded SLC implementation. In these schools, there are many examples of model academies and research-based practices that are likely to support enhanced student outcomes.

Case Studies of SLC Program Implementation

During visits made to the SLC high schools in Philadelphia in November and December 2005 and documented in an interim report prepared by Educational Enterprises (EE) for the School District of Philadelphia dated January 31, 2006, it was clear that:

The overall picture of the Small Learning Community initiative in Philadelphia is a positive though disjointed one. It is positive in that the high school administrations adopting the SLCs are excited about providing academically-rigorous career themed academies and extending student support, but there is a disconnect between the services called for in the SLC grants and the actual services provided to the students. To-date, the SLCs have made progress in achieving some of the specified objectives, but more progress is needed.

The purpose of conducting the case studies was to take a closer look at the dynamics of the SLC implementation process and to address the following kinds of dimensions, characteristics and student perceptions: (1) student interest; (2) school leadership; (3) community involvement; (4) school size and facility; (5) access to career-themed courses; (6) teaching team; (7) degree of student self-selection; (8) expansion of student perspectives of their options; (9) development of leadership skills; and (10) expanding student interest in career/community service. At the same time, EE staff examined the relationship between the SLC grant activities and other program initiatives and grants being implemented in the schools and the ways in which these complement one another.

Data were gathered from administrators, teachers, and students through focus groups and interviews. Of particular interest in the student groups were the high school seniors with most exposure to their programs and academies. The individual school findings gleaned from the November and December 2005 visits and the case study visits conducted during April and May 2006 may be found in Appendix B for the Cohort II schools and Appendix C for Cohort III schools.

Cohort II Case Study Findings

For the most part, Cohort II was comprised of schools and academies in which the SLC implementation process has not proceeded as smoothly or as successfully. In these settings, a number of areas of concern were identified.

- One significant issue for some programs is in the sheer size of the school; some staff in these settings felt that the school is just too large to manage well and appear, at times, to be a bit overwhelmed.

- Another key deficiency in some schools and programs is the lack of common planning time to provide professional interaction opportunities for teachers and academy staff. This is one of the reasons there seems to be a real lack of teacher collaboration at these academies.

- In some schools, the small learning communities/career academies do not appear to have formal, stated vision and mission statements. Perhaps a clearer vision would help address the lack of teacher collaboration at the schools and academies.

- Yet another key ingredient that seems to be missing at these schools is any coherent professional development related to the career-themed academies.

- Finally, the staff at the many of the schools and academies do not appear to be very knowledgeable about the SLC grants the schools have received; confusion exists at some sites as to the purpose of the funding and how this plays out with respect to other budgetary issues and what, indeed, the grant funds actually support.

Cohort II Case Study Summary and Conclusions

The Cohort II SLC high schools did not appear to make much progress in terms of implementing the program elements that were identified as grant responsibilities or the best practices and principles fund in the SLC literature. In fairness to the schools, school leaders seem to embrace the best practices described in the degree of implementation assessment instrument and feel that they do embody sound educational principles/practices.

However, at the same time there is a fairly strong consensus among these administrators and key staff members that the SLC implementation is inhibited by a number of factors and variables beyond their control. These factors include financial issues, union contract agreements, District policies and priorities, and a host of intervening variables inherent in large urban districts including high instances of student mobility and staff turnover.

Cohort III Case Study Findings

There are high schools and some "schools-within-schools" career academies in Philadelphia that have embraced the concept of small learning communities and have adopted those research-based principles and best practices that have been shown to be effective. In these schools and academies, there seemed to be some common themes that emerged from the case studies.

- There is a subdivision of the school into smaller learning communities/career academies with which pupils seem to identify.

- Each of the academies seems to have its own unique personality and culture and provides students with opportunities to pursue avenues of interest beyond the routine academic requirements.

- The academies provide opportunities for all students to succeed regardless of intellectual or academic ability and to generate transferable life skills.

- Strong on-site leadership from academy coordinators is directly related to success; a highly competent roster chair is also a critical component.

- Where they exist, the Board of Governors for each academy links the school and the real world.

- At schools and academies where the Peer Connections Program has been adopted, this program seems to be successful in terms providing additional support for students, developing leadership skills, and enhancing school climate.

- Philadelphia Academies, Inc. has provided exceptional support to some of the schools and academies and has enabled these programs to serve students in ways the schools could not have done on their own.

Cohort III Case Study Summary and Conclusions

The staff members from the schools which have successfully implemented small learning communities/career academies were focused and knowledgeable. Their ideas and perceptions should be sought and utilized by the School District of Philadelphia in planning for the future.

Where Philadelphia high schools have more fully embraced the principles of small learning communities, there seem be many success stories. For this reason, schools might want to consider adopting small learning communities/career academies as a way of expanding student options, enhancing school climate, and promoting positive student outcomes.

In the successful small learning community/career academy schools, students are actively engaged in meaningful activities. Other schools ought to consider visiting these programs to generate additional ideas for expanding opportunities for their own students.

One program some Philadelphia high schools might want to consider adopting to create additional support for students is the Peer Connections Program. This program seems to be successful in terms providing additional support for students, developing leadership skills, and enhancing school climate.

Another affiliation some high schools might want to explore is with Philadelphia Academies, Inc. which has provided exceptional support to the schools and academies and is seen by school staff as providing valuable resources to facilitate the operation of successful SLCs.

Finally, several exceptional and model small learning communities and career academies exist within the district. While some may be cost prohibitive to implement on a wider scale, many nuggets of educational wisdom may be found at these sites.

Exceptional and Model Academies

The Automotive and Mechanical Engineering Academy at West Philadelphia High School is truly a model small learning community/career academy school. The academy is distinguished by its separate albeit proximate location to the main high school complex. As such, this academy is totally self-contained as a grade 9-12 small learning community of nearly 150 students. The result is that this academy is highly personalized in a

separate building that offers an attractive career avenue for pupils. This academy benefits from the resources and expertise of its affiliated partnership with Philadelphia Academies, Inc. A Board of Governors, with representatives from business and industry, contributes ideas and suggestions for this program on an ongoing basis. The Board is also extremely helpful in terms of providing internships, developing job-ready skills, and providing greater insight into career options and opportunities.

There is a strong vision and a culture that is embraced by all of the constituents of the school. Students are actively engaged in meaningful activities and seem to be actually having fun. Part of this may be explained by the fact that students and faculty choose to be part of the school; that is, all of the constituents really want to be there. The bonding between staff and students is clearly evident and there is a strong sense of teamwork as the school strives toward the bringing together of academics and work-world reality. There has been a considerable body of research conducted on small learning communities and what principles and best practices are likely to lead to successful outcomes. The Automotive and Mechanical Engineering Academy at West Philadelphia embodies most all of those principles and practices and should be a model to anyone interested to seeing how a true small learning community can be implemented. The School District of Philadelphia, and in particular the Office of Secondary Education, is to be commended on the support for this program.

The Horticultural Academy at Abraham Lincoln High School is another exceptional small learning community/career academy. This academy is a four-year program that provides specialized instruction and field experiences in all aspects of the horticulture industry. The program is also affiliated with Philadelphia Academies, Inc. and receives financial support and technical assistance from the Horticultural Board of Governors, which is comprised of business and industry leaders.

The students are actively engaged in many projects, including a retail flower shop at the school, nursery production areas, and landscape opportunities. The faculty work with students at the school and also spend time supervising community service projects. By providing these types of field experience activities, the program has been successful developing the skills needed for post-high school employment as well as higher education; in this sense, the program bridges the gap between theory and practice. Finally, as testament to the quality of work produced by the students and staff, the academy has won many awards at the annual Philadelphia Flower Show.

The Magnet Academy and Space Research Center Program at Northeast High School attracts students from all parts of city-wide student population and promotes science, technology, engineering, and mathematics in academically talented students. There are about 550 students currently enrolled in the ninth through twelfth grade program and about 85 of those students participate in the Space Research Center Project. Approximately 160 new freshmen are accepted into the program each year; last year the total applicant pool exceeded 1,300 students.

The program offers AP courses as well as other accelerated courses and most of these courses are tied directly to the mission of the program. It is anticipated that all graduating seniors this year will attend college, most on full or partial scholarships. In talking with the students, the most frequently used word was pride, in their accomplishments and in being part of a special program. There is a high set of standards and students strive to compete at a very high level. Both students and staff feel there is a greater focus and emphasis on academics than in other programs they have seen or know about.

The Culinary Arts Program at Frankford High School is extraordinary. This SLC coursework is challenging and demands continuously rigorous efforts from students. Students, having passed through the "boot camp" initiation to the program, have been extremely successful by any criteria. The students have won numerous awards in various competitions and have won scholarships totaling hundreds of thousands of dollars. Students feel that the experience had prepared them for life and have the attitude that if "they survived this program, they can survive anything." The key to the success of the program is the single teacher and dynamic leader, who has set a high bar in terms of expectations for excellence, and her focus, determination, and commitment have produced numerous post secondary scholarships for pupils and many awards for the school in culinary competitions.

The Petro-Chemicals course of study at Bok High School is just completing its first cycle of students to have gone through the program. School leaders and staff will be closely monitoring the impacts of this rigorous and academically-challenging program on graduates. This SLC has been and continues to be strongly supported by Sun Oil, which supplies resources and external expertise. While the program was initiated with much fanfare, it is perhaps too early in the implementation process to determine the impact on students and overall program success.

Student Outcomes

The goal of this section is to examine the average values of schools on four student outcome variables related to the research of Klonsky (1998) and Garbarino (1987): 11th grade PSSA reading scores, 11th grade PSSA mathematics scores, attendance, and the prevalence of suspensions. [Two additional student outcomes, promotion from 9th to 10th grade and on-time graduation, will be assessed when the data become available].

As the 'Best Practices Degree of Implementation' assessments presented earlier in this report showed that the current status and program features of schools differed substantially, the associations between the degree-of-implementation values of the schools and their outcome variable values will be examined through graphic displays with best-fit linear trend lines, t-tests and correlations. As the direction of the desired outcomes is always known, one-tail significances will be reported.

This section ends with a table displaying the average values of schools on each of the variables that were examined. They can be used by school staffs to assess the strengths and weaknesses of their school, and develop appropriate strategies.

PSSA Reading

Figure 1 is a scatter-plot graph showing the percentages of students who attained proficient and advanced PSSA reading scores (i.e. were 'proficient readers') at each of the schools, and the relationship of the percentages to the schools' Best Practices degree of implementation values. As the figure suggests, the mean of Cohort III schools, which was 29.45% proficient readers, was statistically significantly higher than the mean prevalence of proficient readers at Cohort II schools, which was 14.57% (t=3.97, df=12, p<.001). The correlation between the prevalence of proficient readers at schools and the Best Practices implementation values was significant, and reflected a fairly strong trend for the proficient reader percentages to be higher at schools where the program was better implemented (r=.61, df=12, p<.01), a finding that is consistent with previous SLC research.

Figure 1. Relationship Between Best Practices Degree of Implementation and PSSA Percent Proficient and Advanced in Reading
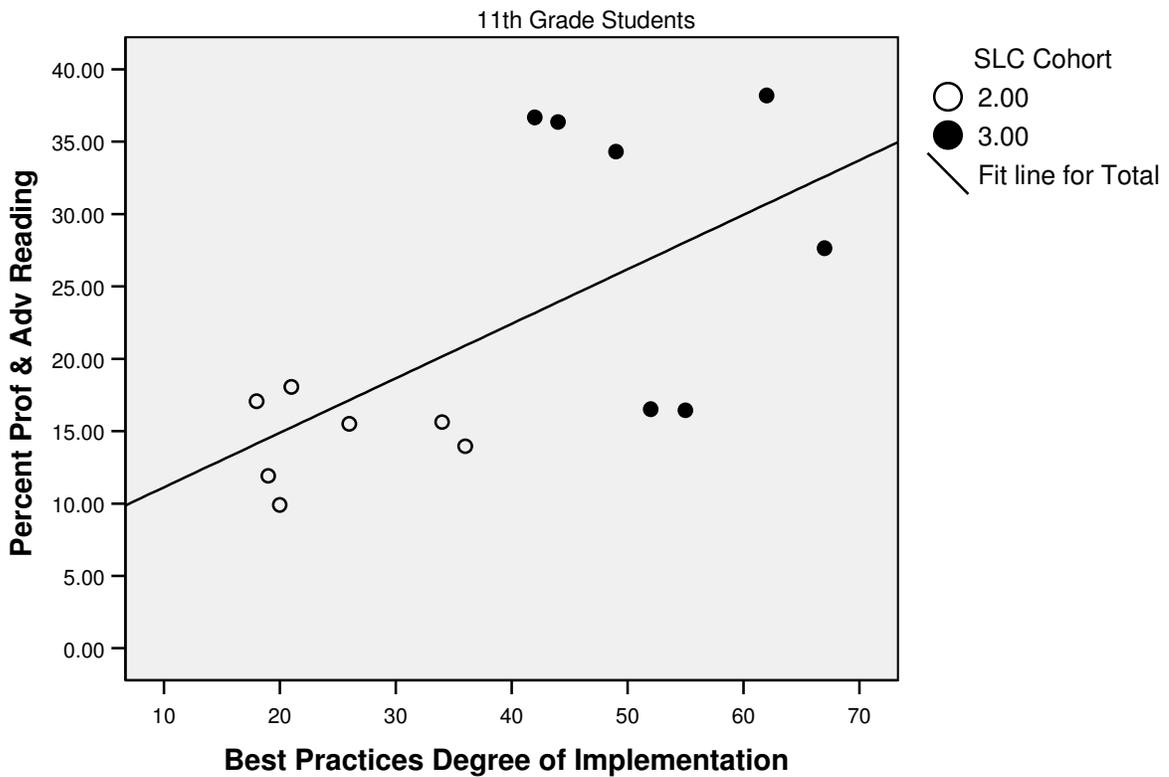
PSSA Mathematics

Figure 2 is a scatter-plot graph showing the percentages of students who attained proficient and advanced PSSA mathematics scores (i.e. were 'proficient mathematicians') at each of the schools, and the relationship of the percentages to the schools' Best Practices degree of implementation values. As the figure suggests, the mean of Cohort III schools, which was 22.36% proficient mathematicians, was statistically significantly higher than the mean prevalence of proficient mathematicians at Cohort II schools, which was 9.56% (t=3.14, df=12, p<.005). The correlation between the prevalence of proficient mathematicians at schools and the Best Practices implementation values was significant, and reflected a fairly strong trend for the proficient-mathematician percentages to be higher at schools where the program was better implemented (r=.63, df=12, p<.01), a finding that is consistent with previous SLC research.

Figure 2. Relationship Between Best Practices Degree of Implementation and PSSA Percent Proficient and Advanced in Mathematics
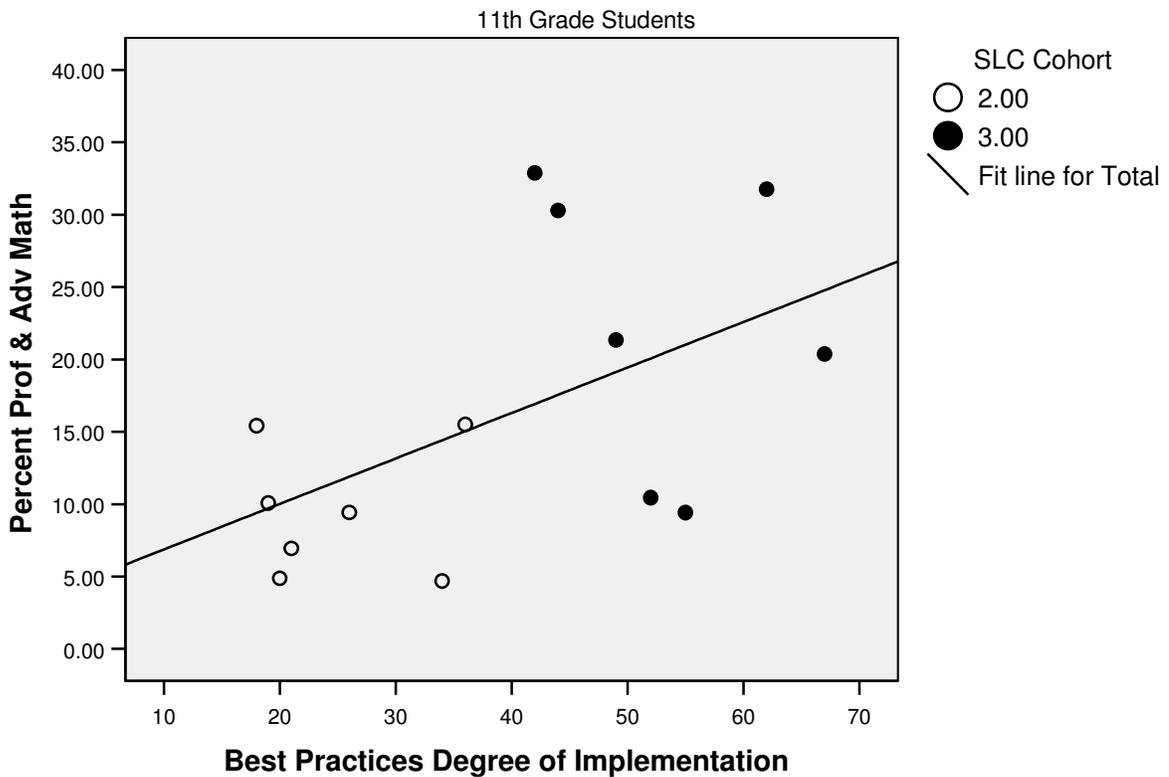
Average Daily Attendance

Figure 3 is a scatter-plot graph showing the average daily attendance (ADA) values of each of the schools and their relationship to the schools' Best Practices degree of

implementation values. As the figure suggests, the mean ADA of schools in Cohort III, which was .82, was statistically significantly higher than the mean ADA of Cohort II, which was .71 (t=2.19, df=12, p<.05). The correlation between ADA and the Best Practices implementation values was significant, because there was a moderate trend for ADA to be higher in schools where the program was better implemented (r=.39, df=12, p<.05), as predicted by previous SLC research.

Figure 3. Relationship Between Best Practices Degree of Implementation and Average Daily Attendance
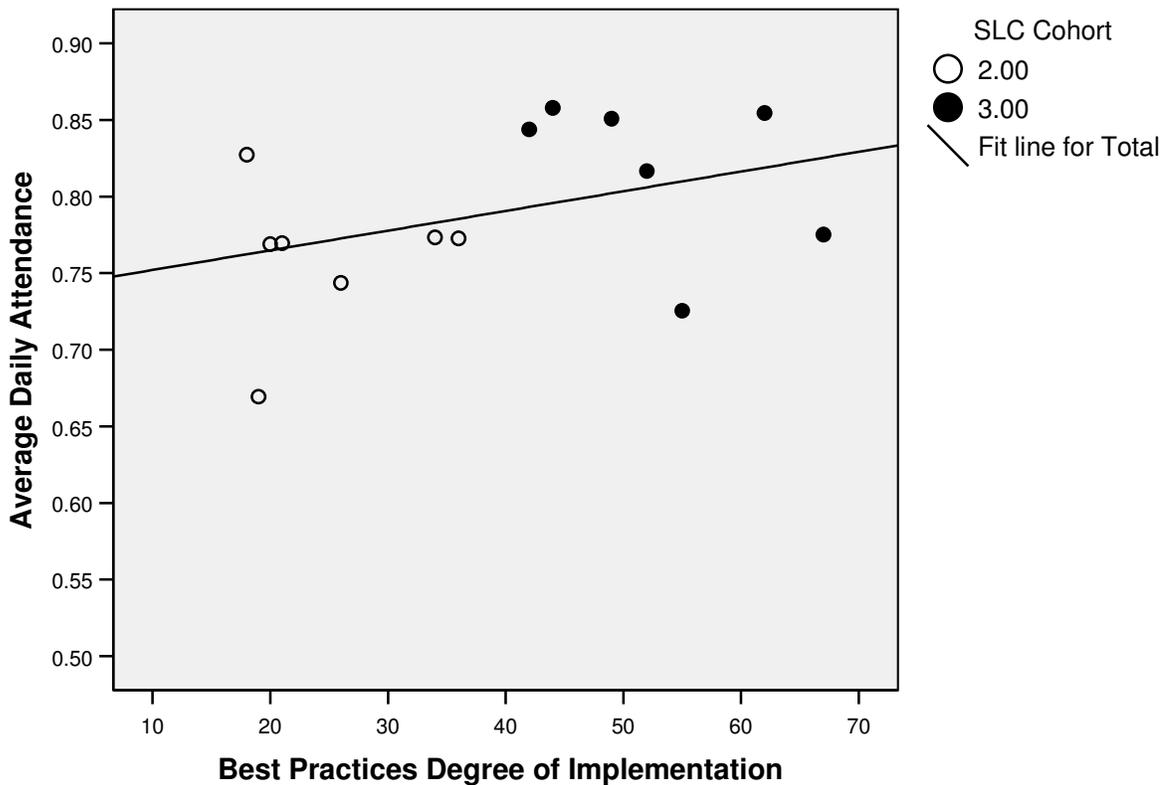
Suspension Prevalence

Figure 4 is a scatter-plot graph showing the prevalence of suspensions at each of the schools and its relationship to the schools' Best Practices degree of implementation values. As the figure suggests, the mean rates of suspensions at schools in Cohort II and SLC Cohort III were virtually the same: .69 suspensions per student in the older cohort and .64 suspensions per student in the one that was begun more recently (t=0.28, df=12, N.S.) Likewise, the correlation between schools' suspension rates and their Best Practices implementation values was not significant (r=.003, df=12, N.S.).

Unlike the previous results presented above that supported the published research findings related to the implementation of SLC Best Practices, these findings are not consistent with previous research about the benefits of SLC programs to students. The very large differences among schools within the two cohorts imply that school management policies unrelated to the use of SLCs determined the rates that students were suspended.

Figure 4. Relationship Between Best Practices Degree of Implementation and Suspension Rate
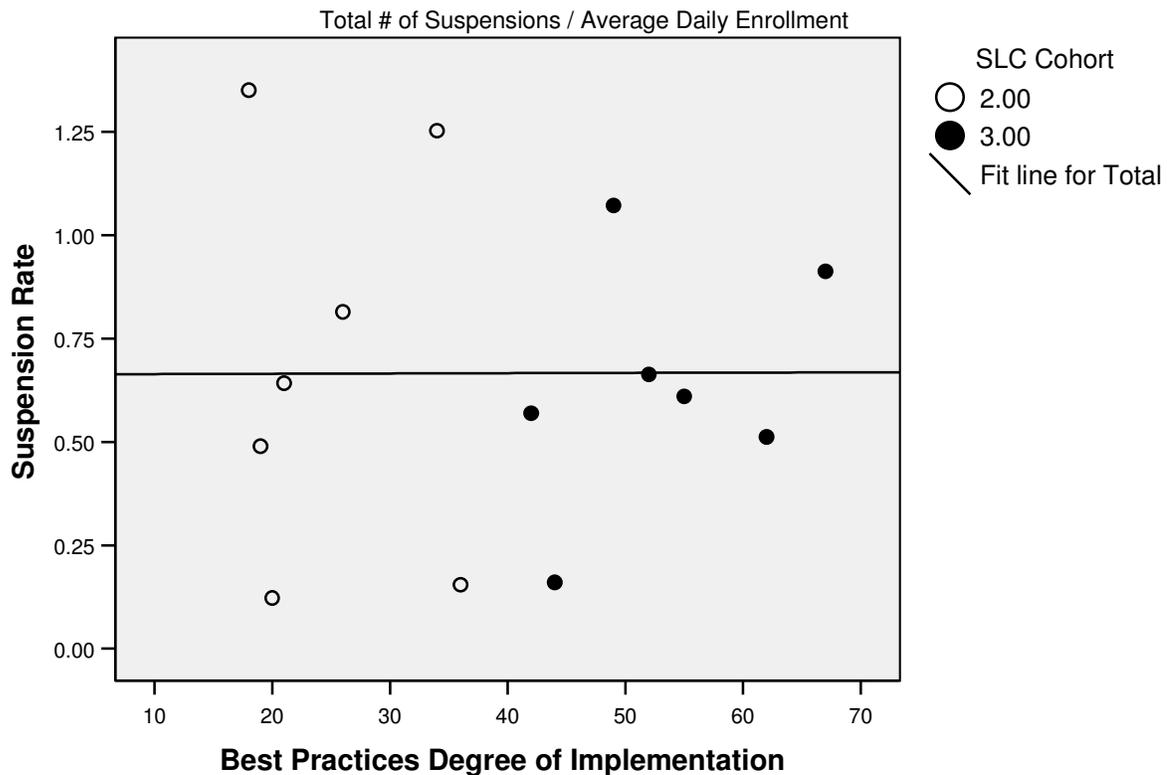
School Data Used in the Preceding Analyses

The following table lists all the SLC schools in the two cohorts that were evaluated during 2005-06. Within each cohort, the schools are in ranked order of Degree of Best Practices Rating. For example, for Cohort II, Furness had the highest Best Practices Rating of the 36, and the rest of the schools in that cohort are listed in descending order based on their Best Practices degree of implementation score. Likewise, for Cohort III, Lincoln was the highest rated school with a Best Practices score of 67 and the rest of the schools in that cohort are also listed in descending order based on their implementation score.

EE is providing these figures to allow readers to relate student outcomes to the schools that produced them, and to the compliance and exceptional practices findings discussed earlier. From these relationships, EE anticipates that schools will able to explore ways of better using SLC approaches. As noted above, these data can be used by school staffs to assess the strengths and weaknesses of their school, and develop appropriate strategies.

SLC Best Practices Degree of Implementation and Student Outcomes

School	Cohort	Degree of Best Practices Rating	Percent Proficient and Advanced		Average Daily Attend-ance	Suspen-sion Rate
			Reading	Mathe-matics		
Furness	2	36	13.95	15.50	0.77	0.15
Penn, William	2	34	15.63	4.69	0.77	1.25
Overbrook	2	26	15.50	9.42	0.74	0.81
West Philadelphia	2	21	18.06	6.94	0.77	0.64
Bartram	2	20	9.90	4.88	0.77	0.12
Olney East and West	2	19	11.91	10.08	0.67	0.49
Fels, Samuel S.	2	18	17.06	15.42	0.83	1.35
Lincoln	3	67	27.64	20.37	0.78	0.91
Northeast	3	62	38.19	31.76	0.85	0.51
University City	3	55	16.44	9.42	0.73	0.61
Frankford	3	52	16.51	10.44	0.82	0.66
Roxborough	3	49	34.31	21.34	0.85	1.07
Bok, Edward (AVT)	3	44	36.36	30.29	0.86	0.16
Washington, George	3	42	36.67	32.88	0.84	0.57

Next Steps

During the 2006-2007 academic year, Educational Enterprises, LLC (EE) will continue to monitor and work with the seven high schools in their third and final year of the Small Learning Communities (SLC) grant. Those schools are: Bok, Frankford, Lincoln, Northeast, Roxborough, University City, and George Washington. The general goals of evaluation are: (1) continue to monitor compliance with respect to grant responsibilities; (2) update SLC best practices degree of implementation; (3) continue to analyze student outcomes for this set of schools; (4) prepare a final SLC report for the School District of Philadelphia and the United States Department of Education; and (5) continue to provide support and coaching to this cohort of schools.

For the fall of 2006, EE staff will visit each of the schools in this cohort; the agenda will be as follows:

1. To review the results of the formal evaluation of each school's SLC grant implementation from last spring;

2. To focus each school on the SLC grant requirements;

3. To reiterate SLC best practices;

4. To conduct in-depth analyses of any exemplary and/or high functioning SLC's within these schools; and,

5. To obtain feedback from site leaders at each school regarding SLC strengths and weaknesses at their site.

In the spring of 2007, EE staff will conduct another formal evaluation of SLC grant compliance at each of the participating schools and will also complete an assessment tool based on SLC research-based principles and best practices.

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APPENDIX A

SMALL LEARNING COMMUNITIES:

ASSESSMENT OF IMPLEMENTATION AND PROGRESS

SMALL LEARNING COMMUNITIES:

ASSESSMENT OF IMPLEMENTATION AND PROGRESS

Introduction. This assessment tool is based on the principles and associated practices that have been demonstrated through research to be linked to positive student outcomes. The rating scale for each item provides a range of descriptions for each practice and is suggestive of the direction a school may want to move to increase impact on desirable student outcomes. It is anticipated that the assessment will be completed by the external evaluators in consultation with the SLC Coordinator and other key constituents of the SLC. For each item, the evaluators will attempt to identify factors that may have facilitated or inhibited the process.

School: _____ **SLC Coordinator:** _____

1. SLC Size and Organization.

SLC classes contain students who are not part   Low Impact = 1
of the SLC; faculty works with > 120 students

2

3

4

SLC is comprised of interdisciplinary teams
that work exclusively with < 90 SLC students   High Impact = 5
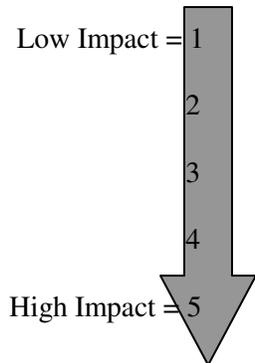
Comments: _____

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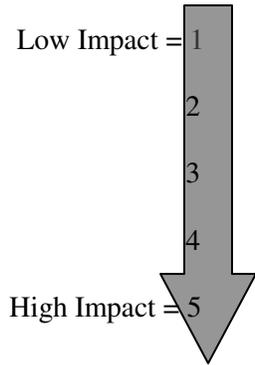
2. SLC Self-Determination.

Teachers and students participate in a program that does <u>not</u>   Low Impact = 1
appear to be autonomous, separate or distinctive from the
conventional H.S.

2

3

4

Self-chosen teachers and students participate in a program that
is autonomous, separate and distinctive from conventional H.S.   High Impact = 5
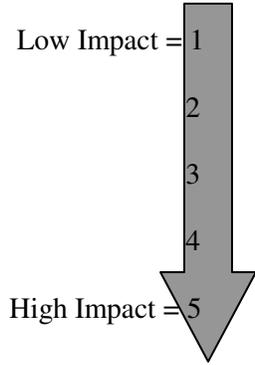
Comments: _____

_____

3. SLC Identity.

The vision, mission, and thematic focus of the SLC are apparent in name only and not taken seriously by the SLC constituents

Low Impact = 1

2

3

4

The SLC has a clear vision, mission, and thematic focus that drive the program and can be personalized by all constituents
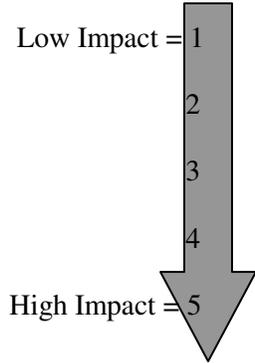
High Impact = 5

Comments: _____

_____

4. SLC Curriculum.

Students get exposure to SLC themes/topics in their regular classroom/core curriculum

Low Impact = 1

2

3

4

Students participate in an integrated program with structured curriculum organized by SLC themes/topics
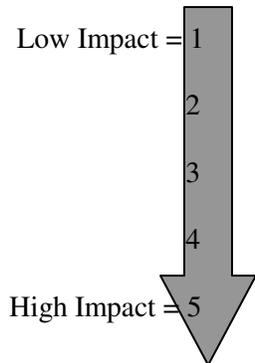
High Impact = 5

Comments: _____

_____

5. SCL Scheduling.

SLC class schedules are the same as schoolwide; unvarying periods of time for subjects

Low Impact = 1

2

3

4

Flexible schedules allow for pursuing/creating learning opportunities and providing individualized student assistance
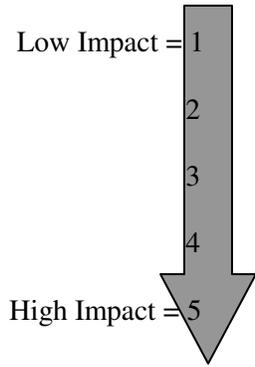
High Impact = 5

Comments: _____

_____

6. SLC Affiliation.

       Teachers instruct < ½ of their classes in SLC and have
       multiple commitments

Low Impact = 1

2

3

4

       Teachers instruct all their classes in SLC and their
       primary identification is with the SLC

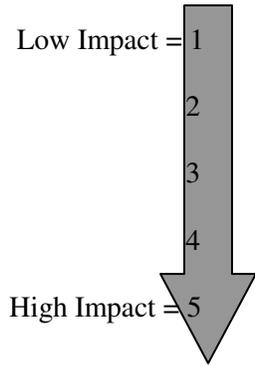High Impact = 5

       Comments: _____

       _____

7. SLC Interdisciplinary Teams.

       Students work with counselors, social workers, etc., to
       address special needs independent from the SLC

Low Impact = 1

2

3

4

       Teams include Ed to Career counselors, instructional coaches,
       teacher specialists, social workers, and academy coordinators
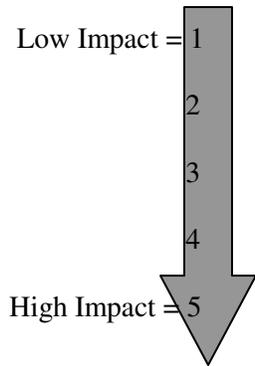
High Impact = 5

       Comments: _____

       _____

8. SLC Preparation Time.

       Some SLC teachers share a common preparation period
       each week

Low Impact = 1

2

3

4

       All team members share common preparation periods
       for extended blocks of time

High Impact = 5

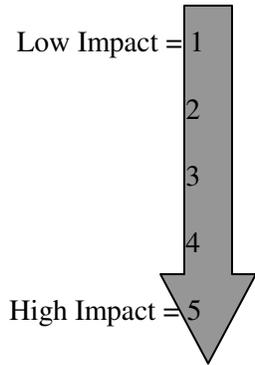   Comments: _____

       _____

9. SLC Looping.

Students remain with their teachers for only one year
and in the SLC for < 4 years

Low Impact = 1

2

3

4

Students remain with their teachers for at least 2 years
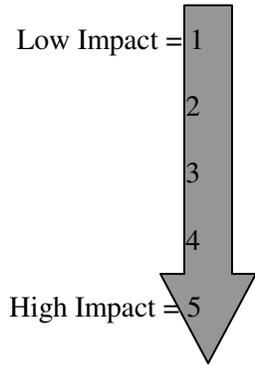and in the SLC for 4 years

High Impact = 5

Comments: _____

_____

10. SLC Community Partners.

There is little or no contact with community partners
and no community representation on Advisory Council

Low Impact = 1

2

3

4

Community partners serve on the Advisory Council are
are integral to teams by helping plan and lead activities
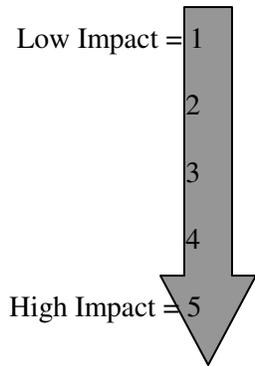
High Impact = 5

Comments: _____

_____

11. SLC Building Space.

Teachers do not have adjacent classrooms as a "home
base"

Low Impact = 1

2

3

4

All team members have contiguous classrooms and
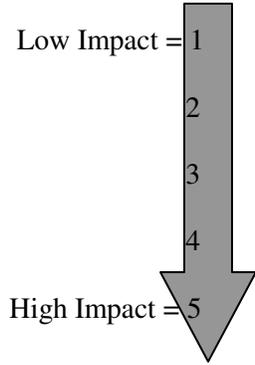office/meeting space for SLC functions

High Impact = 5

Comments: _____

_____

12. SLC Assessment of Progress.

Teams use schoolwide student achievement data to reflect on practice at the end of the year

Low Impact = 1

2

3

4

Teams regularly analyze student work and various measures of outcomes to improve their practice

High Impact = 5
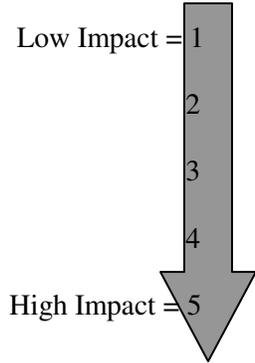
Comments: _____

_____

13. SLC Professional Development.

Teams attend district/school professional development sessions

Low Impact = 1

2

3

4

Teams formulate and implement high quality and sustained professional development activities to meet SLC needs

High Impact = 5
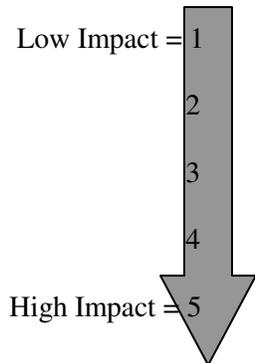
Comments: _____

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14. SLC School Improvement Plan.

School improvement plan includes SLC goals and needs

Low Impact = 1

2

3

4

Buildingwide improvement plan is driven by SLC vision and goals
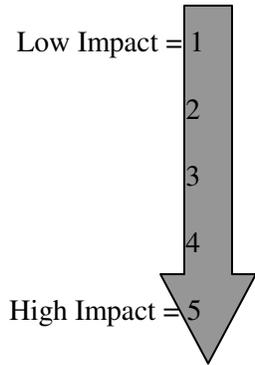
High Impact = 5

Comments: _____

_____

15. SLC Peer Connectionss.

Little or no time is provided for peer connections and the opportunity to share and develop interests

Low Impact = 1

2

3

4

There are ample opportunities for students to develop their interests with peers who share them

High Impact = 5

Comments: _____

_____

16. SLC Career-Themed Academies.

Introduction to career awareness and direction provided through elective courses during grades 11-12

Low Impact = 1

2

3

4

Career academies span grades 9-12 and develop career awareness and direction relative to discrete themes

High Impact = 5

Comments: _____

_____
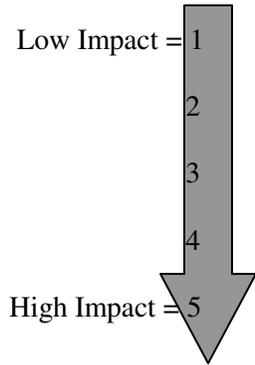
17. SLC Networking.

Exposure to other SLC schools, and staff from those schools, is non-existent

Low Impact = 1

2

3

4

Faculty, staff, and administrators have ample time to share their experiences with, as well as visit, other SLC schools

High Impact = 5

Comments: _____

_____

APPENDIX B

SMALL LEARNING COMMUNITIES:

COHORT II CASE STUDIES

Bartram High School

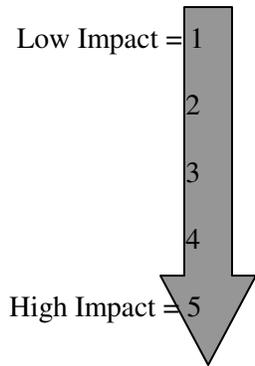In terms of Small Learning Communities (SLCs), John Bartram High School does have a self-contained 9th Grade Academy; it is "isolated" on the third floor of the building and the students receive double doses of English and math. However, its upper grades are organized vertically into tenth, eleventh and twelfth grades, respectively, so there are no "academically rigorous career themes academies" as prescribed by the SLC grant. Because there are no career oriented SLC's, there are no broad based community advisory committees as well. There is a small Junior ROTC (US Air Force) program in existence with about 30 student members and next year the school is planning on starting a career academy in Fine Arts.

With regard to other SLC grant components, the Kaplan diagnostic/prescriptive tool is not in operation at the school. School leaders claim to know next to nothing about the Kaplan Planner; they seem to recall that it was introduced about three years ago by the district but haven't heard anything about it since then.

Professional development is an "ongoing" issue at the school. There have been two professional development sessions held this school year and the bulk of the funds available to support professional development activities were used to purchase two books on instructional strategies for the teachers. There is the professional development provided by the district, particularly with respect to the support provided for new teachers, but there is no other outside expertise available. School leaders feel that the district needs to confront the teachers union on insisting that teachers engage in professional development activities. In seems fair to conclude that professional development was not enhanced during the past year.

Common planning time does not generally exist in the upper grades and there is little opportunity for teachers to work in teams; this is a function of the number of budgeted teachers by the school district. There is some common planning time built into the ninth grade faculty schedules. Released time academic coaching has not been instituted but a School Growth Teacher will be added to the faculty next fall to supply coaching, modeling and instructional professional development.

Bartram's support services for students include: two social workers, a social worker intern and two guidance counselors. The school has a Comprehensive Student Assistance Plan and school leaders feel that it is most useful for ninth graders. There are no active or authentic partnerships with any outside entities or organizations. According to school leaders, there is not much connection with parents. There is no peer connections program of any type in the school. School leaders feel that even the seniors are too immature to participate in any kind of meaningful program. Some school leaders saw the presentation by the Princeton Leadership Group on their Peer Group Connections Program but they can not afford the expense of adopting the program.

Much of the work of school leadership during the past few years has been to restore structure and discipline in the school climate. The school is making some inroads in

terms of enhancing school climate but the high turnover rate (there are currently 21 teacher vacancies at the school) is seen as an inhibiting factor. The school is aware of many opportunities that exist to improve the school but they need additional financial support to make any of those ideas a reality.

Fels High School

Samuel Fels High School, a comprehensive high school serving 1,500 pupils in the northeast section of Philadelphia, has struggled with the implementation of effective Small Learning Community (SLC) initiatives. A revolving door of leadership changes in recent years has hampered the creation of necessary faculty consensus and commitment to educational continuity. The faculty, an inexperienced, relatively young staff without the benefit of academic coaches, has not been able to establish a clear sense of direction (mission) at this school. The School District of Philadelphia's core curricula dominates the instructional agenda.

At Fels High School, the 1,500 students are in a facility originally designed to house about 750 students. The size and overcrowding at the school make it difficult, if not impossible, to begin to implement SLC principles and practices. The school does have a 9th Grade Academy in operation, with the double dose of math and language arts. Beyond that academy, the other career-themed academies, Creative and Performing Arts and Business, seem to exist in name only and each of these falls far short of an independent functioning academy. The Business strand does have an affiliation with Philadelphia Academies, Inc., which has provided it with resources (field trips, mock interviews, supplies, etc.) for students and external expertise regarding the program. However, neither career area has taken advantage of having a community and/or business advisory committee.

The failure of the school to implement SLCs extends beyond the obvious limitations of size and space. First, the current principal is the fourth principal to serve in that role in the last three years, so continuity with respect to SLC initiatives has been a problem. It also seems that the current principal may have philosophical differences with the notion of SLCs (they are too restrictive, cost prohibitive, students need more options, need more liberal arts, etc.); he sees his mission as being one of getting the school under control and improving school climate.

In addition, the students at the school do not have many options. With the number of students receiving failing grades and the need to repeat these courses, as well as disruptive students returning from other placements, the notion of rostering, grouping students as they should be, and electives is very problematic. There are also issues related to the staffing of the school; about 25% of the teachers are not certified and many classrooms are staffed on a regular basis by substitutes.

There are other substantive issues at the school as well. The administration seems disappointed in the quality of instruction being offered and the fact that there are not enough teachers/staff to support a quality instructional program. There is no common

planning time and there is a distinct lack of collaboration among teachers due to financial and logistical constraints. There is no coaching or mentoring taking place in the school and there is no professional development available, other than that provided by the district.

No one at the school seemed to be knowledgeable about the SLC grant or some of the things attached to the grant, such as the Kaplan Planner, that the funds were to support. In terms of the money, all of the budgets seem to be merged in some sort of way so that, for example, when one item is cut by the district, the SLC money plugs that hole in the budget.

In summary, the interim principal, out of necessity, has focused his attention on improving school climate and has succeeded to some degree. This focus was a necessity for this school. Fels is undersized for its pupil population and a new school is under construction; with strong leadership, the transition to a new school building would provide an opportunity to effectively frame a future instructional plan for Fels' diverse student body.

Furness High School

Furness High School currently serves about 900 students. There is a 9th Grade Academy, with dedicated space within the building; there are double doses of English and math and the intensive and strategic interventions for ninth graders most in need. There are three career-themed academies operating in the school: Information Technology, Law and Public Safety, and Urban Education. The Law SLC is in transition away from support from Philadelphia Academies, Inc. and is seeking better fit its course offerings in this area to the needs of its student body and real world career opportunities for its pupils.

Students choose the academy they want to enter at the conclusion of the ninth grade based on their interests; however, due to rostering issues and the fact that the school attempts to keep an even number of students enrolled in each academy, some students may not enroll in an academy that was necessarily their first choice. According to school leaders, the SLCs have good identity among the student body and continue to exist to various degrees, each with their own strengths and shortcomings.

Each SLC has an academy leader with released time to facilitate academy affairs. The coordinators are experienced faculty members and they seem have substantial faculty support. School leaders see the academy coordinators as the key to success and feel they are doing a good job in their roles. Furness has no real common planning time for each SLC; while there are common lunch and prep times, teachers do not take advantage of those times to work in collaborative teams. The principal notes that some provision for grade group meetings (which do not now exist) would be a much more preferable avenue to build teacher sharing and mutual objectives. There are no SLC teaching teams in the school due to rostering and mandated contract issues. School leaders feel that promoting meaningful teacher collaboration is a very expensive proposition.

According to the principal, scripted professional development from the central office has been relaxed somewhat this year allowing for more staff learning and training addressed to specific school needs. Professional development is a 50-50 situation; about ½ is provided by the District offices and about ½ is school-based. The school-based professional development time is about one hour every other week and there is little attention directed towards SLC concerns. There are no "on site" academic coaches. The only coaching taking place in the school is provided by the Regional office, and those efforts are directed toward new teachers in the system. School leaders feel that the new teachers are being provided with adequate support.

Furness has a good system of student support mechanisms. They have two guidance counselors and a social worker. A great deal of effort this year has been concentrated on maximizing the effectiveness of the Comprehensive Student Assistance Program. There is also a Pride Program that is seen a source of support for students as well as a peer mediation program, Keys to Success, where older students provide mentoring and counseling to younger students.

There are a few external partners that provide additional support for the school. Philadelphia Academies, Inc. provides support and an advisory council for the Law and Justice program and the Urban Education program has ties with other schools to provide sites for internships. However, school leaders would like to see more and better connections with respect to career-related internships for its pupils to foster motivation and expanded horizons.

Some teachers are still using the Kaplan Planner; essentially this diagnostic/prescriptive tool has been made available to faculty but is used randomly rather than on a mandatory basis. Most of the usage is occurring in mathematics, where some teachers feel it is a good resource for differentiated instruction. However, school leaders do not feel it is as popular or being used as much as in the past, before the core curriculum was introduced.

In summary, the academic agenda at Furness High School conforms to the requirements of the core curricula of the School District of Philadelphia and a centralized emphasis on standardized test score improvement. The SLC's at Furness must fit their program offerings into that framework.

Olney High School(s)

There are two high schools operating within the old Olney High School building, designated as sites 704 and 705; the sites combined serve approximately 2,200 students. The school has battled all year with the reorganization and they admit they are facing a steep learning curve. As there were no real apparent differences between the two sites in terms of SLC implementation, the general description that follows applies to both sites, unless otherwise noted.

There is no 9th Grade Academy per se but students do receive the double doses of English and math and the intensive and strategic interventions for ninth graders most in need.

Their career-themed academies, Construction Technology, Business and Finance, Medical Technology, Creative and Performing Arts, and Law and Justice, for the most part function in name only and these academic strands are far from being true small learning communities. The Medical Technology academy has some characteristics of a functioning SLC, with some contacts outside of the school, but the rest are very loose configurations of an operational SLC and there are no broad-based SLC advisory councils.

Students are given information in eighth grade about the career academies and can choose an academy but, as the academies function more on an "elective" type basis, this is a moot point. Given the rostering situation, once the students reach tenth grade, there does not appear to be an option for changing the career academy and, despite the infusion of electives at the school, there is little choice of possible electives available for the students. That is because the academic program is primarily driven by the core curricula of the School District of Philadelphia, which severely limits options to build multiple elective courses in each SLC area course of study. At the same time, Olney needs to do much more to translate these elective opportunities for students into true small learning communities.

Teachers are not grouped by academy and are not specifically part of an SLC. There are no SLC coordinators; rather the emphasis is on departments and core subjects. Teachers and students work together in ninth grade and there is some loping between ninth and tenth grades. Teachers do not meet in teams or even departments due to time constraints. Additionally, fiscal constraints do not permit interdisciplinary teaching nor common planning time for teachers. According to school leaders, the school would need to expand the academic day or the academic year to accommodate common planning time. Clearly, the Core Curriculum and Planning and Scheduling Timeliness dominate the agenda at Olney.

Professional development is restricted to that provided by the district and, although there are some isolated instances where support is provided on an individual basis, there does not seem to be a systematic approach to professional development. According to school leaders, the scripted professional development from the central office restricts opportunities for the school to concentrate on significant staff learning or training in the specific SLC areas. A released time academic coach does not exist; the only academic coaching taking place at the school is provided by the Regional office. There is no SLC specific coaching being provided at the school. The Kaplan Planner was nowhere to be found in the school; there is some question on the part of school leaders about the utility of this as a useful tool or resource, particularly in the absence of any professional development for teachers to enable them to gain any mastery of the tool.

In terms of student support, the school has four counselors but no social worker. There is a peer group program and although it is "unofficial" it is happening; in some cases, older students are "paired" with younger ones to provide additional support. The school just established a Home and School Committee and they hope to begin building linkages with

the neighborhood. They are also beginning to explore an arrangement with the Community College of Philadelphia.

At present, the academic program at Olney-704 is dominated by the requirements of the core curricula of the School District of Philadelphia and a centralized emphasis on standardized test score improvement. The school is in a renewal process of accenting a climate of respect and academic priorities for the student body and collaboratively redefining its mission for the faculty. Ideally, one or more new SLC programs should be added as soon as possible. And there is a clear deficiency of multiple elective course options within each SLC area course of study. While ninth graders are not part of any SLC, there remains a need for more personalization and small group camaraderie and socialization. Olney-704 is at a crossroad. To continue to move forward, the school needs to enhance and build upon its SLC programs as well as provide more involvement opportunities for pupils.

At Olney-705, the current school administration is focused on creating stability and order and establishing a culture of values for its student body and its faculty. In all fairness, the school has had 10 principals in the last 11 years. On a brighter note, Olney-705 now has a leader (new principal) with a sense of vision and a commitment to positive change. He needs resources and support from the district level. The school has several linkages (partnerships) with related SLC businesses and external institutions and would like to build more of these. The principal recognizes a need to establish more elective subjects within each SLC area and he is also hoping to upgrade the technological capabilities across the school. Finally, the school needs to foster more collaboration among the faculty and staff so that everyone is on the same page.

Overbrook High School

Overbrook High School is organized into Small Learning Communities (SLC). There is a ninth grade success center which seeks to provide structure and academic intensity for the school's newest students. There is a 9th Grade Academy with double doses of English and math as well as the strategic and intensive interventions for ninth graders in need. One focus at the 9th Grade Academy is the Read 180 Program and the SLC grant has provided for a partial released time teacher to oversee the Read 180 effort with students in need.

There are career-themed academies at the school. In the upper grades, there are four options for students: Health, Urban Education, Finance, and Scholars. There is annual SLC fair for ninth graders at which upper grade student present the school's SLC options; subsequently, pupils are able to express their SLC preference. Not all students get their first choice of an SLC. Pupils in grades 10-12 generally seem to have a strong identity with their SLC.

Philadelphia Academies, Inc. provides a governing board as well as resources for the Health and Urban Education SLC's. The Finance SLC has a relationship with the National Association of Finance. These external partners are invaluable in establishing

student internships, career fairs, networking and connections to business and industry, and shadowing opportunities for pupils. In the college prep area, there is much excitement about the Scholars SLC affiliating with the Cambridge International Program beginning in September; key staff have received training regarding the initiative and will be sharing it with the faculty. The principal is giving high priority to building the pupil enrollment and quality of this academic SLC.

Rostering problems prohibit any meaningful common planning time and professional development although most of the ninth grade teachers have a half-hour common lunch period. Teachers are not purely in any one SLC. Common planning time and opportunities for teachers to work in teams are non-existent in the upper grade SLCs. This is a rostering issue that in order to be implemented would require substantially more money for more teachers. There is a monthly after school opportunity provided to teachers via professional development stipends. School leaders indicate that they simply need more teachers to run a successful SLC program.

The Kaplan diagnostic/prescriptive tool as prescribed by the grant is not in evidence at the school. The Kaplan Planner was, according to school leaders, "pushed aside by the district" and they are now using School.Net. It was mentioned that the Kaplan Planner is a good example of the district policy of "running from one vendor to the next" with little follow-though.

Overbrook has a solid support staff for its student body – four guidance counselors, a social worker for ninth grade, a psychologist two days weekly, and an Ed to Career counselor. They also have the "mandatory" Comprehensive Student Assistance Plan. There is no peer mediation program in the school. The addition of a third assistant principal in September will be an asset to the school's management.

The implementation of this grant appears to have been hampered by inadequate communication from the school district level regarding the goals and specific directions of the SLC grant. The District should consider allowing the site leaders from the seven schools in each SLC cohort to meet periodically for collegial sharing and networking regarding this initiative.

William Penn High School

William Penn High School has a 9th Grade Academy that is self-contained on a separate floor in the building with dedicated teachers. Students receive double doses of language arts and mathematics. An Assistant Principal serves as the academy coordinator. There are four SLCs: Arts, Business, Communications, and Health; each academy has a released time coordinator. At the conclusion of ninth grade, the school conducts extensive informational programs to help the students make informed choices of an upper grade SLC. They then apply to the academy of their choice and about 99% of them are admitted to that academy.

Each SLC has affiliations with business and industry and is able to offer internships and various other "real world" contacts for its pupils. Each SLC has its own unique space within the school and upper grade students generally identify with an SLC. Philadelphia Academies, Inc. provides a governing board and valuable resources for the business and health SLC's. In general, the school feels that they receive a great deal of support from outside entities.

There are SLC teaching teams at the school and, despite rostering problems, they try to meet as best they can; however, there does not appear to be any systematic approach to common prep times and planning times. Major deficiencies at William Penn include a general lack of common planning time for teachers and the need for more specific professional development geared to the SLC's. To the extent possible, given there is no time in the schedule for professional development, William Penn attempts to be creative in providing some professional development and opportunities for teachers to meet on issues of specific need/concern to the school, such as the Comprehensive Student Assistance Center. For the most part however, professional development consists of what is prescribed by the district.

In terms of teacher support, on-site academic coaches do exist at the school. These coaches are supported from a grant from the Annenberg Foundation and provide for teacher leaders in literacy, math, and science. For student support, the Comprehensive Student Assistance Center is in operation. Also, three well equipped computer labs and a television studio provide technical educational opportunities for pupils.

At the present time, there does not appear to be any implementation of the computerized Kaplan diagnostic/prescriptive tool by teachers. School leadership in fact did not express any awareness for this program. The core curriculum is a "must" for the school and this takes precedence over all other considerations.

Much emphasis at William Penn is on delivery of the School District of Philadelphia's core curricula and PSSA test preparation. The removal of the block schedule is viewed by school leadership as having been detrimental to delivery of the academic program and student flexibility in meeting required graduation credits. For example, with block scheduling, there was an opportunity for students to obtain a total of 32 credits over four years; under the current system, students can obtain only 24 credits in that timeframe, which obviously limits the available options.

West Philadelphia High School

West Philadelphia High School, a comprehensive high school serving more than 1,400 pupils in the western section of Philadelphia, offers three career oriented academies for its upper grade students in the following areas: Business/Technology, Communications, and Automotive and Mechanical Engineering. There is also a self-contained 9th Grade Academy that focuses on helping pupils to make a successful transition to high school; there are daily advisory periods and double doses of academics in math and language arts for most of these ninth grade students; also, there is an accelerated freshman program that

provides enrichment and enhancement. Additionally, there is a separate opportunities academy which isolates and seeks to intervene with pupils exhibiting behavior problems and/or a lack of academic motivation until they can better adjust to mainstream learning. Responsibility for supervising the freshman academy and career academies lies with two assistant principals and each academy has an instructional leader. School leaders indicate that strong on-site teacher coordinators are vital to academy success.

West Philadelphia High School has experienced great turmoil in recent years with leadership changes and staff turnover. After having 10 different principals in the past 15 years, the school has now had one principal in place for the past three years. This has been an important factor in producing many positive changes in this school culture. The school's hallways are quiet and orderly. Student work and achievement is obvious in classrooms and in hall displays. Academic offerings for pupils have improved and motivation, discipline, and school pride among the general student body are gradually improving. An extra-curricular offering in Junior ROTC has nearly 100 student participants.

School leaders indicate that the 9th Grade Academy has been and continues to be a valuable resource in helping to positively transition students into high school. Students can select either the Business/Technology academy or Communications academy course of study at the conclusion of ninth grade; however, it appears that students are given limited information about their options and choices. The selection process for the Automotive and Mechanical Engineering academy is made by pupils at the conclusion of eighth grade back in the feeder schools (this academy is discussed in greater detail below). Most of the students at West Philadelphia High School have been rostered into their first choice of an academy. Each of the academies is structured to offer progressive elective courses in its field that are blended within the mandated core curricula prescribed by the School District of Philadelphia.

According to school administrators, the Business/E-Tech Academy is running in an efficient manner and they attribute this to the on-site leadership of that academy. Students are exposed to business leaders and provided with connections to other sources of information. In this academy, staff feel that students become more interested in career options as they grow older and begin to realize the kinds of skills they will need to succeed in business. All teachers at West Philadelphia have computer access to the Kaplan diagnostic/prescriptive tool which helps to develop more precise, effective, and appropriate instructional planning and lessons. School leaders feel that it is very helpful, particularly when teachers do not have lesson plans prepared. This system allows teachers to access the website and pick a comprehensive plan with measurable objectives, materials, etc. The use of this program by teachers is encouraged by school leaders and is growing.

West Philadelphia High School provides a wide array of services for pupils in need including supportive counseling via a Comprehensive Student Assistance Program. The school operates a Student Success Center that, according to school leaders, helps to assist students with college, continuing education, and career decisions. However, the focus

seems to be primarily on information about potential colleges; there did not seem to be a corresponding program or informational sources for students pursuing vocational careers. One program the school might want to consider adopting to provide additional support for students is the Peer Connections Program; this program is in operation at many other high schools in Philadelphia and would be worth exploring as another avenue for supporting students, developing leadership skills, and enhancing school climate.

In the science and math departments there is a connection with the University of Pennsylvania, with Penn providing equipment, computers, and part-time tutors. However, other than that connection, there seemed to be no other really tangible community involvement. And, parent involvement seems to be so limited that it is essentially non-existent.

One key deficiency at West Philadelphia High School lies in the lack of common planning time to provide professional interaction opportunities for teachers in each academy; this appears to be a fiscal issue (the number of staff would have to be greatly increased to improve this situation) beyond the school's control but rather rooted in the School District of Philadelphia's limited financial resources. As common planning time happens on only very rare occasions, it is extremely difficult to operate a successful and efficient SLC. This is one of the reasons there seems to be a real lack of teacher collaboration at the school.

Another issue relates to the vision and mission of the school. There seems to be an informal vision for the school – to develop a love for learning and exploring. Perhaps a clearer vision would help address the lack of teacher collaboration at the school. Finally, yet another key ingredient that seems to be missing at West Philadelphia is any coherent professional development related to the career-themed academies.

A lack of common planning for teachers is the school's major deficiency but it is beyond its control. Adding this feature could only enrich and improve the programs offered by each academy. Additionally, the business/technology academy and communications academy should consider establishing Board of Governors advisory committees (similar to that of the automotive and mechanical engineering academy) to become partners with each academy in the pursuit of excellence. The school might also want to consider adding at least one more academy in the main building to expand student options. In this regard, visits to other programs would be useful and provide the staff of West Philadelphia with additional ideas for expanding opportunities for their students.

APPENDIX C

SMALL LEARNING COMMUNITIES:

COHORT III CASE STUDIES

Bok High School

Situated in South Philadelphia, Bok High School serves a diverse population of about 950 students. There is a 9th Grade Academy and students receive the double doses of English and math and the intensive and strategic interventions for ninth graders most in need. In this high school, the ninth graders are on one floor of the building and are segregated from the rest of the student population and, in this sense, it is a "pure" academy. There are career-themed academies in Petro-Chemicals, JRTC, and Culinary Arts; while these SLCs offer courses to students via a career oriented series of electives, this is far from pupils identifying with an autonomous SLC. School leaders indicate that there is no strong identity with the SLCs on the part of students or faculty.

For the students loosely attached to the career academies, there are several issues that inhibit them from realizing a "true" academy experience. First, students apply to the academy they want to enter at the conclusion of the 9th grade based on their interests; however, due to rostering issues, too many some students do not enroll in the academy that was their first choice. Second, students use electives to make course selections that are related to their interests but, with limited electives available, their exposure to the SLC is limited.

Professional development is an issue at the school. Most all of professional development activities are provided by the School District of Philadelphia at the every-other-Friday mandated meetings. While some support is provided to faculty on an individual basis, SLC professional development is not provided in a systematic, formal manner. According to school leaders, the lack of school-based professional development is one of their biggest needs, but financial and contract issues are factors which hinder the implementation of a more comprehensive professional development effort.

Each SLC has a released time teacher coordinator. However, the school does not have common planning time or SLC teaching teams. School leaders cite the lack of teacher communication and collaboration as significant barriers to improving the school. Again, school leaders point to financial and contract issues as inhibiting factors. No on-site academic coaching is in place. The only coaching or mentoring provided is through the Regional and District offices and that focus is directed toward new teachers.

There is a great deal of support and assistance available to students. There are three counselors, a social worker, and an Ed to Career counselor. School leaders say this team of professionals is deeply involved with the students and working on their academic and social needs. There is a Comprehensive Student Assistance Program that is being expanded as well as a Catch Program for students needing addition support.

The Peer Connections Program is finally off the drawing board and into operation. The program seems working well and some school leaders feel that it is an outstanding addition to the school. There are currently 15 seniors providing support to about 80 casually selected freshmen. Staff have attended the training offered in Princeton and the school leaders feel that all of the program elements have been implemented and that the

program is having a huge impact on seniors in terms of giving them an opportunity to do something different and in enhancing leadership and communication skills.

The Plato Learning Program has been established at the school and is functioning within the school day rather than as a Saturday or after-school program; the school was not successful in trying to implement the program at those times. There were start-up issues, involving technology and hardware issues that have been resolved. There are two ninth grade classes using the program and school leaders are thinking about expanding this initiative.

Among its SLCs, the *Petro-Chemicals* course of study is just completing its first cycle of students to have gone through the program. School leaders and staff will be closely monitoring the impacts of this rigorous and academically-challenging program on graduates. This SLC has been and continues to be strongly supported by Sun Oil, which supplies resources and external expertise. While the program was initiated with much fanfare, it is perhaps too early in the implementation process to determine the impact on students and overall program success.

Bok High School has relatively new leadership and has experienced some significant staff turnover. This school is in transition and hopes to redefine itself in the best interests of its students. With a relatively new staff, they are still in the process of evaluating status, personnel, and programs. They freely admit that thee are not where they want to be as this point and need to do a better job in some areas.

The school is focusing on enhancing and improving its SLC offerings to pupils. For example, Bok hopes to breathe "state of the art" life into its culinary arts program with an additional faculty member and new ideas. It has also phased out cosmetology from an SLC into an after-school offering. The academic agenda at Bok High School is largely regulated by the requirements of the core curricula of the School District of Philadelphia and a centralized emphasis on standardized test score improvement. SLCs must be fitted into that priority agenda of the school system.

Frankford High School

Frankford High School serves a diverse population of about 2,300 students. There is a 9th Grade Academy that is self-contained with dedicated staff and the focus is on double doses of English and math and the intensive and strategic interventions for ninth graders most in need. Frankford concentrates a great deal of effort on its 9th Grade Academy. The principal cites a dedicated staff who work closely with these freshmen students and try to set a tone for their future success as one of the strengths of the school.

The courses of study at Frankford High School are dominated by the requirements of the core curricula of the School District of Philadelphia and a centralized emphasis on standardized test score improvement. There are career-themed academies in Business, Culinary Arts, Technical and Vocational Education, and Performing Arts. There are mission (values/themes) statements for each SLC area and the school leadership is

focused on ongoing improvements in each program area. However, the SLCs seem to exist in some cases more in name rather than function and school leaders feel they no longer have "schools within schools" as they used to. In the same vein, school staff stated that the academies were no longer autonomous and that with changes at the District level and the emphasis on NCLB, there is a declining role for SLCs on the agenda as they are not seen as being academically oriented.

So while the SLC's continue to exist to various degrees, there is a limited SLC emphasis at the school. The movement away from SLCs is seen as a detriment to the school by school leaders. Also, the graduation requirements and the reliance on electives to deliver the SLC programs make it difficult to have true academies. The school now has modular scheduling and school leaders feel that block scheduling would provide more opportunities for students to more activity participate in the academies as they would have more electives available after satisfying graduation requirements.

There are SLC coordinators for each academy and their role is to deal with rostering, discipline, field placements, guest lectures, and parent inquiries. The degree of academy functioning seems to be in proportion to the energy and other qualitative inputs of each respective "released time" SLC teacher coordinator. For the 9th Grade Academy, there is joint planning time at lunch. There is no common planning time for the career-themed academies. School leaders indicate that fiscal constraints do not permit interdisciplinary teaching or common planning time for teachers in the SLC areas.

Professional development at the school focuses on the District agenda and is primarily a core curricula viewpoint. There is no SLC professional development but rather a lot of NCLB related professional development. Unfortunately, according to school leaders, the scripted professional development from the central office limits opportunities for the school to concentrate any significant staff learning or training in the specific SLC areas. Coaching is a "sometimes" thing with various individuals being contracted to provide supplemental support to the coaching being offered through the District and Regional efforts.

In terms of student support, there are four counselors, a social worker (as well as social work interns from the University of Pennsylvania), and mental health consultants available. There is a Student Success Center that is well organized and focused on both colleges and careers. Frankford has strong "student support" assets provided from its team of specialists.

Frankford High School was the flagship in the city of Philadelphia in terms of adopting the Peer Group Connections Program. The school is very proud of the program and feels that it is extremely successful. Currently there are 20 seniors who meet on a daily basis and meet with 100 to 150 students in the 9th Grade Academy on a weekly basis.

Frankford makes good use of external partnerships to link the school to the real world, but specific advisory groups for each SLC do not exist. For the Culinary Arts Academy, there is a great deal of outside support, including the Culinary Institute of America, and

there is a connection between the Business Academy and PNC Bank. As with the whole notion of academies, advisory committees used to exist but they are not what they used to be.

The Plato Learning Program is in place and finally functioning after numerous problems with computer hardware. There is currently one teacher working with groups of ninth grade students within the school day. School leaders are contemplating the expansion of the Plato Program next year.

The Culinary Arts Program at Frankford High School is extraordinary. This SLC coursework is challenging and demands continuously rigorous efforts from students. Students, having passed through the "boot camp" initiation to the program, have been extremely successful by any criteria. The students have won numerous awards in various competitions and have won scholarships totaling hundreds of thousands of dollars. Students feel that the experience had prepared them for life and have the attitude that if "they survived this program, they can survive anything." The key to the success of the program is the single teacher and dynamic leader, who has set a high bar in terms of expectations for excellence, and her focus, determination, and commitment have produced numerous post secondary scholarships for pupils and many awards for the school in culinary competitions.

In summary, Frankford is a relatively large high school (2,300 students) whose facility is at capacity. This logistical aspect along with relatively large class sizes works against more flexibility and innovation within the SLC areas. This school's veteran leadership seems to have a solid grasp on the SLC concept and is determined to grow and become better in its delivery to students.

Lincoln High School

Abraham Lincoln High School, a comprehensive high school serving more than 2,000 pupils in the Northeast section of Philadelphia, is divided into seven well-subscribed academies for students in the following areas: Business, Environmental Technology, Fine and Performing Arts, Health, Horticulture, Information Technology, and Law, Criminal Justice and Public Administration. The individual academies vary in size and have between approximately 100 to 300 students enrolled. To the extent possible, there are designated areas for each academy. Lincoln's school leadership exhibits a clear understanding of the academy concept and a commitment to academic rigor for all students.

Lincoln is an all-academy school and there is a high degree of student interest in the career-themed academies; this student identity is evident when walking through the school where students (and staff) wear shirts, etc., with the logos of their particular programs. It seems apparent that each program has its own identity and personality. Lincoln High School is partnered with a non-profit organization, Philadelphia Academies, Inc., that provides external expertise, support and resources. Each academy is led by a site-based teacher coordinator and has its own Board of Governors, a group of

business and industry partners, which helps to maintain "state of the art" curricular offerings in the respective fields of study. All staff interviewed at the school indicated that the greatest strength of the academies, and the reason for their success, is based on the collaborative efforts involving the Board of Governors and the academy coordinators. Indeed, the three coordinators interviewed at Lincoln were impressive in their vision, task orientation, curricular focus, and student-centered priorities.

There is no 9th Grade Academy at Lincoln; rather, eighth grade students apply for entrance to the academy of their choice and start with their real academies when they enter the school as ninth graders. Unlike most schools with Smaller Learning Communities, the fact that there is no 9th Grade Academy at Lincoln High School is a matter of tradition and school preference. Students select their academy of choice prior to arrival at the school and academies are filled on a first-come, first-served basis; approximately 70-80% of the pupil population is estimated to have been rostered into their first choice for an academy. As the School District of Philadelphia core curriculum dominates the academic agenda for pupils, academy related content is for the most part delivered in progressive elective courses.

Each academy offers its pupils theory, hands-on experience and field trip opportunities in its field of study and Lincoln has established articulation agreements with a number of higher and continuing education institutions. By providing the opportunities for students to be come involved in projects within the academies as well as at other sites, the school is expanding student perspectives of various career options and the skills they will need for employment.

Lincoln provides a wide array of services for pupils in need including supportive counseling via a Comprehensive Student Assistance Program. In addition, Lincoln has initiated the Peer Connections Program from the Princeton Center for Leadership this year. School leaders are impressed with the effectiveness of the program to date in which exemplary twelfth graders have been mentoring and motivating small groups of ninth graders (about 100). The school is hoping to expand this program in the future and this would be a wonderful idea as the program seems to be tremendously helpful in terms of developing leadership skills and enhancing school climate.

There are a number of issues that are important to mention in terms of the operations of the school. One significant issue in the size of the school; some staff feel that it is just too large to manage well. Another key deficiency in the qualitative aspect of the academies is the lack of common planning time to provide professional interaction opportunities for teachers and academy related off-site group activities for students; correcting this problem would require adding many more faculty positions which from the school district view is not fiscally possible. While a lack of common planning for teachers is a major deficiency, unfortunately it is beyond the control of the school. Adding this feature could only enrich and improve the programs offered by each academy.

Also, a Twilight Academy to address the needs of over-age students and/or chronic underachievers has unfortunately been discontinued for financial reasons; these pupils are now left to function in the mainstream. And, parent involvement is seen as a school-wide proposition of perhaps limited effectiveness, although some of the academy coordinators seem to attempt to reach out to some parents. Finally, Plato Learning, a research-based software intervention for students in need, is about to be initiated as an after-school program. There was some misunderstanding initially that this program could only be delivered on Saturday, which created logistical problems that have since been resolved.

In general, the administrative team has deep roots in the school and this is seen as a very positive factor. The administrative team provides a continuity that enables the school to deal, fairly effectively, with a vast array of district issues including the core curriculum, professional development, staffing, and rostering that impose difficulties in helping students meet the curriculum requirements of the individual academies and to participate in associated activities.

In summary, Lincoln High School's academy structure has many strong points. It offers its student body the opportunity to pursue an avenue of interest beyond the routine academic requirements. It subdivides the school into smaller learning communities with which pupils seem to identify. The academies provide opportunities for all students to succeed regardless of intellectual or academic ability and to generate transferable life skills such as curiosity, initiative, planning and organization, and public presentations.

Each of the academies seems to have its own unique personality and this fosters a sense that "the school is the academies and the academies are the school." Strong on-site leadership from academy coordinators is directly related to success. The respective Board of Governors for each academy links the school and the real world. The Lincoln staff members interviewed were focused and knowledgeable. Their ideas and perceptions should be sought and utilized by the School District of Philadelphia in planning for the future.

Northeast High School

There are currently 3,600 students enrolled in Northeast High School, a facility that was designed for approximately 2,500. It is divided academically into eight well-subscribed small learning communities for students in the following areas: High Tech, Liberal Arts, Business, Communications, Health and Medicine, Arts and Education, Environmental Ccience, and an academic magnet. Students do in fact identify with a specific small learning community at this school. The size and overcrowding at the school make it difficult to physically isolate the students within academies, but this school has done a remarkable job in overcoming this barrier to establish a successful career-themed academy structure.

By design there is no 9th Grade Academy; students enter the career-themed academy structure in ninth grade. In general, pupils are able to choose one of the seven small learning community career options in eighth grade. However, the rigorous academic

magnet (with an aerospace/engineering focus) is open to student applications from all across the city and entrance is very competitive. A great deal of information about the academies is provided to eighth grade students at the feeder schools and orientation sessions are provided at the high school. During the ninth and tenth grades, students can transfer between academies. There is significant looping of teachers with groups of ninth graders in transitioning into and through tenth grade.

The academies are seen as the core or hub of the school. Each is career oriented and has its unique program and philosophy. There seems be a fairly strong identification with the academies by the students.   The small learning community concept is built into Northeast's educational culture and its organizational philosophy.   Beyond the prescriptive requirements of the core curricula of the School District of Philadelphia, each career small learning community offers its pupils progressive elective courses, hands-on experience, mock interviews where possible, and field trip opportunities in its field of study. In a perfect world, the school would like to expand the number and richness of career related choices of courses for pupils in each small learning community but this does not appear to be logistically possible at this time.

The small learning communities have been in place at the school for about 20 years, and one of the keys to the successful implementation of the academies is the longevity and continuity of the programs, as well as key staff and administrators. Northeast has had stable leadership in place for several years; it is characterized by a clear vision that defines the mission of faculty.

According to school administrators, culture is one key ingredient to having successful academies. They feel they are fortunate to have a staff that has the same mentality, has respect for one another, and accepts and appreciates diversity. School leaders also view strong on-site teacher coordinators is a second key ingredient to academy success. And, the roster chair is a critical position in terms of small learning community scheduling.

Using the resources provided by the small learning communities grant, Northeast has initiated the Peer Connections Program from the Princeton Center for Leadership this year. School leaders are impressed with the effectiveness of the program to date in which exemplary twelfth graders have been mentoring and motivating targeted small groups of ninth graders.   In this sense, the Peer Connections Program was locally adapted to identify the students needing the most support, rather than the more "random" assignment found in others schools has been successful. The Plato Learning Program, a research-based software intervention for students in need, is also being utilized during the school day.

Northeast High School has a strong and effective alumni association that provides support for the school. Parents support the philosophy of the school and seem to play a more significant role at this school than was observed at most other SLC high schools in the city. Also, the school has a number of community partners who have provided internships for students; in addition, the school has a connection with the University of Pennsylvania that enables students to obtain dual credits.   Northeast does not have

governing boards in place for its small learning communities, but it does utilize an array of external partnerships with business and community institutions. The school provides a wide array of services for pupils in need including supportive counseling via a Comprehensive Student Assistance Program.

One key deficiency in the qualitative aspect of the small learning communities at Northeast is the lack of common planning time that would create professional interactions and specific staff development opportunities for teachers. While there is no common prep time, some teachers communicate and collaborate with one another during lunches. Ideally, the administration recognizes that more frequent meeting and planning time would be very beneficial for the school; the reality given the size of the school and cost constraints is that the ideal will not be achieved in the near future as correcting this problem would require adding many more faculty positions which from the school district view is not fiscally possible.

In summary, Northeast High School's small learning community structure is solid. It offers its student body a variety of opportunities to pursue an avenue of interest beyond the routine academic requirements. It subdivides the school into smaller learning communities which allow all students to succeed regardless of intellectual or academic ability and to generate transferable life skills such as curiosity, initiative, planning and organization, and public presentations. Northeast's academic magnet small learning community is impressive in its high level academic nature and its rigorous demands for pupils.

The quality of on-site leadership from small learning community coordinators is directly related to the success of each small learning community at Northeast. A lack of common planning for teachers is the school's major deficiency but it is beyond its control and lies at the District level. Adding this feature would serve to enrich and improve the programs offered by each academy. Northeast's small learning community emphasis is far from perfect, yet it represents a success story that is worth emulating across the School District of Philadelphia.

Roxborough High School

Roxborough High School has a 9th Grade Academy that is self-contained with a dedicated staff of teachers. Students receive double doses of language arts and mathematics. There are career-themed academies in grades 10-12 in the areas of Business, Communication, Info-Tech, Liberal Arts, and ROTC. Students are provided information about the academies while in ninth grade and can choose an academy to enter as tenth graders; it is estimated that about 80% of the students enroll in the academy that was their first choice. According to school leaders, the students identify with the academies and there is teacher support for the academies. The academies provide a perspective on potential careers, although the intensity of the experience appears to vary from academy to academy.

Each of the academies has a coordinator with released time to manage the SLC. However, these are not "pure" academies in the sense that teachers are totally committed

to a specific academy. Teachers used to be associated with a particular academy but rostering issues, resources, and the number of teachers make that impossible to accomplish at this point in time. When teachers were associated with academies, there were opportunities for common prep times; currently, there is no common planning time and no teaching teams.

Philadelphia Academies, Inc. provides a Governing Board and valuable resources for the Business and Communications SLCs and each these SLCs has career days, speaker days and sponsors student field trips to the extent possible. While the Business and Communications academies are associated with Philadelphia Academies, Inc. and through that connection has a Governing Board, the other SLCs do not have boards in place. Likewise, some SLC specific professional development is provided for teachers in the Business academy but for the most part there is no professional development offered in the school outside of that provided by the District. Two department heads are provided minimal released time to serve as academic coaches in literacy and math.

The Peer Connections Program is up and running. The school has received training from, and is following the curriculum provided by the developers of the program. Currently, 17 seniors are providing counseling and serving as role models for about 110 freshmen; both groups of students were selected for participation in the program and the idea was to get a "good mix of kids" involved. School leaders feel that it is an excellent program that has had an incredible impact on the students and that there are "excellent" benefits for the ninth grade as well as the senior participants. The school is anxious to "fine tune" and continue this program next year.

There are two counselors at the school as well as a social work intern and an Ed to Career counselor. There is a Comprehensive Student Assistance Program, but school leaders do not feel that it is functioning as well as it might because there is no coordinator for the program and it is not centrally located. A Student Success Center is on the drawing board.

The Plato Learning Program is not in operation at the school. School leaders are under the impression that this program was discontinued by the district. The school has received no training or technology support with respect to the program. After being informed that the program is in operation at other high schools, school leaders are expected to explore the possibilities of this program in the near future and hopefully specific training will be scheduled. With the Plato Learning Program as a prime example, school leaders admit that the spirit of the grant has not been followed at the school. The feel that there is a disconnect with the District in terms of support for the initiatives in the grant and that District policies clash with the priorities of the grant.

Some school leaders question the "prescriptive nature" of the educational practices being followed at the district level and the quality/quantity of information being provided from "downtown." They feel that the school would benefit from higher quality professional development geared to the goals and needs of the SLCs, common planning time and more cohesive teaching teams. Roxborough's leadership and staff might want to consider

networking with other District SLC schools regarding their successes and obstacles to date. A professional visit by key staff to a successfully operating SLC program in another high school would be a very worthwhile goal.

University City High School

University City High School currently serves about 1,600 students and, of that number, approximately 330 are enrolled as freshmen. A charismatic 9th Grade Academy coordinator has built solid camaraderie and commitment among the teachers of this group of 330 students. There is a clear focus at the school on the 9th Grade Academy, with dedicated space within the building and dedicated staff; there are double doses of English and math and the intensive and strategic interventions for ninth graders most in need. In this high school, the ninth graders are segregated from the rest of the student population and there is a "pure" academy.

Since 1995, there have been four career-themed academies operating in the school: Info-Tech, Health, Law, and Science/Engineering/Math. Students choose the academy they want to enter at the conclusion of the ninth grade; the school attempts to keep an even number of students enrolled in each academy. The course of study at University City High School is dominated by the requirements of the core curricula of the School District of Philadelphia and a centralized emphasis on standardized test score improvement. Nevertheless, this school's SLCs have good ownership (identity) among the student body and continue to exist to various degrees and succeed in proportion to the energy and other qualitative inputs of each respective "released time" SLC teacher coordinator.

Each SLC has an academy leader with released time to facilitate academy affairs. School leaders report a high level of student identity with the career academies as well as substantial faculty support. School leaders see the academy coordinators as the key to success and encourage these faculty members to exert their leadership skills effectively.

Remarkably, University City has been able to "roster in" common planning time for each SLC, including the 9th Grade Academy. The SLC teams meet once a week and are clearly functioning as a unit. This has been a tremendous asset to building and maintaining a unified faculty commitment and allowing for collegial focus on instructional needs. The school faculty is in strong support of the SLC concept.

Professional development is handed down from the District office. While there is some support for individual needs and some teachers get support on their own, there is no formal, systematic professional development related to the SLCs. According to school leaders, scripted professional development from the central office limits opportunities for the school to concentrate any significant staff learning or training in the specific SLC areas.

University City has strong "student support" assets provided from its four guidance counselors, two social workers, psychologist, an Ed to Career counselor, and several community interventions specialists. Much work this year has been concentrated on

maximizing the effectiveness of the Comprehensive Student Assistance Program. There is also a Student Success Center that is seen a source of support for both college bound and career oriented students.

There are external partners that provide additional support for the school. These include the University of Pennsylvania, Drexel University, and the Children's Hospital of the University of Pennsylvania. University City makes good use of career-related internships for its pupils and external visitors to link the school to the real world, but specific advisory groups for each SLC do not exist.

The Peer Group Connections Program is in operation at the school. A total of 16 seniors were provided training in the program and they work with 60 randomly selected ninth graders to help them make good decisions and to help with transition issues. The older students mentor the ninth graders once a week and the program is seen as a positive addition to the school, and one that has been very successful in promoting leadership skills and in offering students social and academic enhancement opportunities in a personalized environment.

The Plato Learning Program is finally operational. There were many hardware problems associated with the implementation of the program but, in partnership with the University of Pennsylvania, those barriers have been overcome, training has been provided, computer capacity has been enhanced at the school, and the program is up and running. The program is currently being offered after school and is serving 30 ninth grade students.

The school has had an "interim" principal during 2005-2006 and is awaiting a new principal to be named for the next school year. The ability of this newcomer to comprehend and build upon the school's strengths will directly impact upon the future success of University City.

George Washington High School

George Washington High School serves more than 2,200 students; the diverse student population represents 55 different countries. There is no 9th Grade Academy but students do receive the double doses of English and math and the intensive and strategic interventions for ninth graders most in need. There are career-themed academies in Business, Aviation, Hotel/Restaurant Management, Travel and Tourism, Culinary Arts, International Baccalaureate, and Liberal Arts; while these SLCs offer courses to students a career oriented series of electives, this is far from pupils identifying with and gaining a thorough immersion in a SLC. About one-third of the students are associated with the academies. The remaining two-thirds of the student body are essentially enrolled in a college-prep program; thus, the majority of the student body is not affiliated with an SLC.

For the students loosely attached to the career academies, there are several barriers they need to deal with in attempting to carve out a "true" academy experience. First, many of the academies seem "mixed together" in the sense that there is no real identity with some

of the academies; rather, students use electives to make course selections that are related to their interests and this results in a somewhat haphazard approach to a personalized SLC environment. Also, given the focus of the school on the majority of students in college prep and rostering issues, the career academy concept seems to be pushed to the background. The modified block schedule is also seen as a limiting factor in student choice. Finally, as one school leader noted, in the absence of contract modifications at the District level, there is really no place to put the academies.

Professional development is an issue at the school. While school leaders have offered many alternatives for faculty and staff, they feel they "can't make people stay" and the result is that most professional development activities are provided by the District at the every-other-Friday mandated meetings. While some support is provided to faculty on an individual basis, SLC professional development is not provided in a systematic, formal manner. According to school leaders, scripted professional development from the central office restricts opportunities for the school to concentrate and significant staff learning or training in the specific SLC areas.

George Washington High School is organized by academic departments not by SLCs. There are department head teacher leaders, there are no SLC coordinators in place. The only coaching or mentoring provided in through the Regional and District offices. There is no common planning time; fiscal constraints do not permit interdisciplinary teaching or common planning time for teachers in the SLC areas and school leaders identified this as the biggest obstacle facing the school. This is a factor of the size of the school (2,400 students) and the limitations of the number of staff that have been budgeted. Class sizes are large and the average student load per teacher is way beyond the ideal. George Washington has done some SLC staff networking with a neighboring high school. More of this should be continued if at all possible.

There seems to be a great deal of support and assistance available to students. There are six counselors, a social worker, a school psychologist, and a Community Intervention Specialist Intern. There is also a "Welcome Center" that addresses the needs of new students entering the school. This high school has maximized the assets provided from these specialists as support mechanisms for pupils.

The Peer Connections Program is working well and some school leaders feel that it is an outstanding addition to the school. There are currently 21 seniors, being guided by two teachers, who provide support on a weekly basis to about 100 freshmen. Staff have attended the training offered in Princeton and the school leaders feel that all of the program elements have been implemented. There seems to be a consensus among all involved with the program that the growth has been phenomenal and that the program has been extremely successful in promoting leadership skills of the seniors and school leaders have rated this program as "outstanding" in terms of the positive social and mentoring effects for the designated freshman.

The Plato Learning Program has been implemented at the school and is functioning within the school day rather than as a Saturday or after-school program. There were

start-up issues, involving technology and hardware issues as well as the timing (Saturday/after-school setting) but these seem to have been resolved. There are about 10 teachers who have completed the necessary training and are using the strategic English and math courses with seeming good results. School leaders are cautiously optimistic about this initiative.

In summary, the course of study at the school is dominated by the requirements of the core curricula of the School District of Philadelphia and a centralized emphasis on standardized test score improvement. George Washington High School has benefited from the strong leadership of its principal who will retire in June of 2006. The school district should treat its search for a solid replacement with the utmost priority.