



*Innovating Together* to Improve the Adult Community in  
Schools: Results from a Two-Year Study of the Initial  
Implementation of Leading Together

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# ***Innovating Together to Improve the Adult Community in Schools: Results from a Two-Year Study of the Initial Implementation of Leading Together***

## **Executive Summary**

Principals and teachers are facing unprecedented levels of stress and strain. Heightened expectations for accountability and demands on teachers to learn curricula to meet Common Core standards have created high burdens on schools. Teachers need social support and collaborative environments to teach effectively. School leaders need enhanced leadership skills to buffer stress and guide teachers as they weigh priorities. Taken together, these challenges create demand for new strategies to improve the adult community in schools. Leading Together (LT) concentrates on this critical, contemporary problem facing U.S. schools.

Leading Together (LT) is designed to address needs in schools by bringing together groups of school leaders, engaging them in reflective practices, and supporting their personal and psychological growth as leaders and as people. LT is a two-year intervention comprised of an initial four-day summer retreat followed up by additional retreat days (called cohort days) and individualized school coaching focused on improving the adult community in schools. Chip Wood and Pamela Seigle, facilitators of the Center for Courage & Renewal (CourageRenewal.org), developed LT and lead the intervention retreats and supports. School leaders (including the principal and several teachers from each participating school) gather at the retreats to reflect and learn approaches for improving the adult community at their schools. Together, they become the LT team. Following each retreat, the LT teams return to their school and apply the new approaches they learned to improve relational trust among teachers, facilitate more effective working relationships, and enhance teachers' personal growth.

A central goal of the LT retreats and cohort days is to slow the pace of daily life and create a space for people to listen to themselves and each other in more effective ways.

- Retreats encourage participants to listen receptively, be kinder to one another, and develop a deeper understanding and appreciation of self and others.
- Retreat facilitators allow time for expansive thinking, listening, reflecting, and responding with honest, open questions.
- Retreats provide space and time for the school leaders to learn new approaches for creating a sense of community.

The LT work is grounded in the Circle of Trust<sup>®</sup> approach (CourageRenewal.org/approach) developed by the Center for Courage & Renewal and the Center's founder, Parker J. Palmer, author of *The Courage to Teach: Exploring the Inner Landscape of a Teacher's Life*. The activities for LT retreats and school meetings are described in an 80-page guidebook, *Leading Together: Building Adult Community in Schools, the Courage & Renewal Guidebook for Courage in Schools Leadership Programs* (Seigle, Wood, Sankowski & Ackerman, 2012). The guidebook describes selected retreat activities including energizing activities designed to unite the group, create a safe, social space, and prepare LT group members for reflective work as well as engaging activities designed to bring the LT team together and build trust (Center for Courage & Renewal, 2014).

## ***Innovating Together: The Center for Courage & Renewal and UVA collaboration***

The facilitators (Wood and Seigle) engaged a research team at the University of Virginia (Sara Rimm-Kaufman, Micela Leis, Carol Paxton) as partners in implementation design. The *Innovating Together* Project had two aims: (a) to inform the development of the LT intervention and (b) to evaluate initial signs of efficacy of the LT approach. The UVA research team gathered data from the stakeholders involved in the intervention process—the facilitators, school leaders, and teachers. The data supported a process of identifying themes that emerged as school leaders made efforts to improve the adult community at their schools.

This mixed-methods study used qualitative data to describe LT implementation and quantitative data to examine three research questions. Qualitative data were used to describe the dynamics of the two year path from early- to full-implementation of LT. Results from the qualitative data were used to distinguish between early- and fully-implementing LT schools. Three research questions were examined using quantitative data in fully-implementing schools:

- To what extent does LT contribute to professional capacity of school leaders?
- To what extent does LT contribute to relational trust between teachers and principals?
- To what extent does LT contribute to academic optimism (i.e., Faculty trust among adults at the school, academic emphasis and collective efficacy)?

### **Logic Model**

The conceptual logic model describes the theory of change. We expect LT training, coaching and support for school leaders to teach school leaders how to bring LT back to their school and facilitate LT activities. In turn, we expect that as schools engage in LT activities and apply LT approaches to their work at the school, school leaders, teachers and other school staff will experience improvements to the adult community (professional capacity). As a result of these changes, we expect to see enhanced collaboration across the school, as evidenced by increased academic optimism and distributed leadership. We expect the enhanced collaboration to contribute to improved quality of instruction (i.e., healthier teacher-student relationships, more child-centered approaches to classroom management and improved instructional quality), and ultimately, better student outcomes (social and emotional skills, achievement).

Variation in LT teams' facilitation of LT practices at their schools was used to differentiate between early- and fully-implementing schools. We expected LT to place schools on a path toward full use and implementation of LT, but that LT implementation would occur as a gradual process that would develop over time. The research team focused on proximal outcomes, such as evidence of improvements in adult community (e.g., leadership practices, relational trust, collective efficacy, and enhanced collaboration), but not distal outcomes (such as quality of instruction or student outcomes).

## **Methods**

### **Participants**

- Eight demographically-diverse schools
- 8 principals (63% male, 88% White)
- 42 school leaders - teachers or other staff from the school who attended the LT retreats (5% male, 93% White)

- 25 site-based teachers - teachers who did not attend LT retreats, but were selected by their principal to participate in data collection (12% male, 96% White)

## Procedures

Training in Leading Together began in July 2012 and extended through May 2014. Data collection efforts initiated in August 2012 (with baseline data collection) and occurred at regular intervals at four time points roughly corresponding to the beginning and end of each school year between August 2012 and June 2014.

**Implementation of LT Training.** LT training was implemented as a 4-day retreat in Summer 2012 followed by five full retreat days, one at each of the following time points November 2012, April 2013, August 2013, November 2013, and April 2014. LT facilitators (Seigle and Wood) visited each study school two times during each school year.

**Approach to Data Collection.** Both qualitative and quantitative data were collected from multiple sources (principals, school leaders, and site-based teachers).

**Qualitative sources.** Research assistants conducted interviews for a subset of participants (one principal, one school leader, and one site-based teacher from each school) in August 2012, June 2013, October 2013, and May 2014. Interviews included specific questions on how LT was being implemented in the school (e.g., If any, what specific LT activities has your school used? Describe how the activities were received by the group and what happened).

**Quantitative Sources.** Web-based surveys were sent to each participant during the spring and fall of each year. The survey measures were used to measure:

- *Professional capacity* - the “combinations of skills, beliefs, dispositions, and work arrangements of teachers at the school” (Bryk et al., 2010, p. 54). This includes the dimensions of: professional disposition to innovation (continual interest in learning), school commitment (loyalty and commitment teachers feel toward their school), and collective responsibility (shared commitment among the faculty to improve the school).
- *Relational trust* - having the confidence that others in a role set (i.e., teacher-teacher, teacher-administrator) will fulfill obligations and expectations relevant to the shared task of educating children. The amount of trust that teachers had in the principal (teacher-principal trust) and in each other (teacher-teacher trust) were measured.
- *Collective Efficacy* - refers to the perceptions of teachers in a school that the efforts of the faculty as a whole will have positive effects on students (Goddard, 2002). Collective efficacy measured group competence (judgments about the capabilities that a faculty brings to a given teaching situation) and task analysis (perceptions of the inherent constraints and opportunities in their school).
- *Academic optimism* - explains collective behavior in terms of cognitive (collective efficacy), affective (trust in clients [parents and students]), and behavioral (academic emphasis) dimensions; has been linked to student achievement in other work (McGuigan & Hoy, 2006).

## Data Analysis

- Qualitative analyses of interview data were used to identify indicators of LT use to describe fidelity of implementation (facilitation).
- The indicators of implementation were used to categorize schools as either early-implementing or fully-implementing.
- Means and effect sizes of the quantitative variables were calculated for the fully-implementing schools to measure the extent to which LT related to change in proximal outcomes in those schools.
- Themes were gathered from the qualitative interview data in an effort to affirm, question, and articulate details in the logic model.

## Results

### Qualitative Stage

There was variation in implementation among the eight schools in relation to three main constructs: implementation quantity (dosage), implementation quality, and teacher responsiveness.

**Implementation Quantity.** Implementation quantity refers to the use of activities and the quantity of the intervention delivered. The design of LT requires the LT team to facilitate guidebook activities at their school regularly. LT implementation encourages the LT team to consistently meet to reflect upon the needs of the adults at the school and to plan LT activities for staff meetings.

- All schools reported use of multiple activities and protocols from the LT guidebook. On average, schools used 16 different LT activities, ranging from 10 to 21 unique activities.
- Schools varied greatly in the amount of time allotted to LT activities. Some schools devoted one staff meeting a month to doing LT work. At other schools, very little time was allocated to LT activities, as the principal chose to focus on other priorities.
- School LT teams varied in the frequency of holding planning meetings. Some LT teams met weekly, some met monthly, and some did not meet outside of the LT retreat day.

**Quality of Implementation.** Quality of implementation refers to the processes used to convey the program material to the participants and, specifically, the degree to which program techniques and activities are implemented as intended by the developers (Berkel et al., 2011; Han & Weiss, 2005). The term “quality” in quality of implementation has a specific technical meaning and refers to adherence to LT approaches, activities, and ways of thinking, as enacted in the initial pilot years. “Quality” is not a value-laden term.

Variation in quality of implementation became evident in the interviews as principals and teachers described the process of bringing LT back to their school. Schools with high-quality

implementation had teams that considered how LT would be perceived before introducing activities to teachers who did not attend the LT retreats; the school teams presented the purpose of participating in LT in relation to the goals or prior work of the school; and school administrators shared ownership for implementing LT within the LT team.

**Teacher Responsiveness.** Teacher responsiveness refers to the participation and level of enthusiasm for the intervention by teachers who were not part of the original LT team. At schools with positive participant responsiveness, the teachers reported seeing the value of the specific LT activities in relation to their personal growth.

**School Profiles.** Profiles were created for all eight schools, categorizing each as “early-implementing” or “fully-implementing” based on the variability found in quantity of implementation, quality of implementation, and teacher responsiveness to implementation.

### **School Categorization**

- Four schools were identified as early-implementing. The most common indicator of early-implementing schools was use of some of the practices and protocols described in the guidebook.
- Four schools were identified as fully-implementing LT schools. These four schools showed numerous indications that they made LT a priority in their school and changed day-to-day practices to incorporate LT.

### **Quantitative Results**

Matched paired t-tests and effect sizes were computed to examine changes in professional capacity, relational trust, and academic optimism between baseline (August, 2012) and two years later, at the end of LT implementation (June, 2014). Effect sizes were calculated and interpreted rather than using *p*- values due to the small sample size.

- School leaders and site teachers showed positive changes in professional capacity, relational trust, and academic optimism during the LT study (from July, 2012 to May, 2014).
- Effect size increases were the largest for professional capacity, ranging from one-fifth to one-third of a standard deviation increases for professional disposition to innovation, school commitment and collective responsibility. Effect size gains were also apparent for relational trust (with a one-fifth standard deviation increase in teacher-teacher trust) and for academic optimism.

### **Emerging Themes from Qualitative Data**

- *LT appeared to be linked to the theme of personal growth and change.* Many of the teachers described an increase in empathy and in their ability to listen to one another in a way that was open and receptive.
- *LT showed expansion to the district level from two of the four fully-implementing schools.* District-level personnel were impressed with the LT work to such an extent that they requested help from Seigle and Wood to expand LT implementation in their district.

- *LT showed noticeable shifts between year 1 and 2.* The amount of schools that fit the profile for fully-implementing doubled between the end of year 1 and the end of year 2. Building relationships and adult community appeared to be gradual and take time.
- *LT supported schools even in high-need conditions.* Two of the four fully-implementing schools were working with high percentages of low-income and minority students living in urban areas.

### **Conclusions and Recommendations**

LT training initiates change in school teams while simultaneously providing support for introducing and integrating LT program components into the adult community of a school. As evidence, all eight schools that completed this initial two-year intervention showed LT uptake. In addition, four of the eight schools became fully-implementing LT schools, as evidenced by high quantity and quality of implementation and teacher responsiveness to LT. The fact that half of the LT schools showed full uptake represents impressive success of LT, given that the facilitators were implementing LT with the first cohort of LT participants and that the study spanned only two years. Fully-implementing schools showed increases in all indicators (professional capacity, relational trust, and academic optimism). It is important to note that academic optimism has been shown to boost achievement (McGuigan & Hoy, 2006), thus signaling very promising signs for successful distal, as well as proximal, outcomes for schools implementing LT.

The collaborative effort between the research team and the program developers achieved the two aims of Innovating Together: to inform the development of the LT intervention and to evaluate initial signs of efficacy of the LT approach.

**Aim 1: Development** - Conversations between the research team and developers led to modifications and changes from 2012-2014. For example, early discussions about the challenges that schools were having in explaining the purpose of LT to school staff led to facilitator development of approaches for supporting LT teams in this work.

**Aim 2: Evidence for LT Efficacy** - The data show that all teams trained in LT were capable of bringing protocol elements back to their schools for use. The evidence of intervention uptake should be interpreted as a promising sign that LT is, and will become, a critically important intervention for schools. Themes emerged from the qualitative work that showed improvements in the adult community, including increased empathy and the ability to listen more fully. Studying the fully-implementing schools revealed insights into the extent to which use of LT can produce change in principals and teachers. Facilitation of LT practices related to improved adult community and enhanced collaboration, consistent with the logic model. Further, results in the fully-implementing schools showed increases in relational trust, particularly teacher-teacher relational trust.

### **Overview and Recommendations for Next Steps**

The Innovating Together project produced a successful dialogue between LT developers and researchers and used data to inform next steps in the development of LT. The collaborative work produced recommendations for next steps:

- Schools may need some differentiation in the ways that LT facilitators teach and coach LT. Some LT teams needed to receive very direct information that was very specific and concrete (e.g., implement three practices per month) whereas others would have found this level of specificity constraining and limiting to their adherence to LT. There appears to be a



need to help each principal and/or LT team to find an authentic and individualized way of communicating LT to their school

- Intervention development is an iterative process; future work is needed to design and implement an expanded version of Leading Together that incorporates recommendations from Innovating Together, includes new, well-honed measures of LT implementation and efficacy, and expands to a new school cohort.
- Papers and conference presentations need to be produced to disseminate the new knowledge gained from the Leading Together pilot study.

Innovating Together calls attention to the importance of LT in the fields of school leadership and social and emotional learning. Effective school leadership, positive adult relationships in schools, and relational trust have all been identified as critical features of effective schools. Yet, LT is the only existing intervention that brings principals, teachers, and other school staff together to pause, reflect, learn skills, and then, return to their school to produce change. LT has all the critical features needed to become a model for school change. Teachers, principals, and researchers in the field agree on the need for LT to improve the culture and success of schools.

***Innovating Together to Improve the Adult Community in Schools:  
Results from a Two-Year Study of the Initial Implementation of Leading Together  
Full Report***

Leading Together (LT) concentrates on a critical, contemporary problem facing U.S. schools. At present, principals and teachers are facing unprecedented levels of stress and strain. Heightened expectations for accountability and the demands on teachers to learn curricula to meet Common Core standards have created new challenges for schools. These challenges can be viewed from two points of view: the first considers the social experiences and psychological needs of teachers who are experiencing high levels of pressure and may need social support from their leaders and peers more than ever before (Jennings & Greenberg, 2009; Rimm-Kaufman & Hamre, 2010); and the second takes into account the importance of high quality school leadership to support teachers as they balance priorities and take on new challenges (Bryk, Sebring, Allensworth, Luppescu, & Easton, 2009; Leithwood, Louis, Anderson & Wahlstrom, 2004). Both points of view call attention to the need for intervention efforts that enhance the adult community in schools.

LT is designed to enhance school leadership and help school leaders meet the psychological and social needs of teachers and their students. Teaching elementary and middle school-aged students is an intensely psychological process. Teachers need to be emotionally available to their students while also supporting students' academic growth and development. Maintaining high quality relationships with students is critical and challenging. Too often, teachers can depersonalize their students and experience burnout, resulting in a less healthy environment for teachers and their students (Jennings & Greenberg, 2009). The newly-developed LT program is designed to offset these issues. To our knowledge, there are no existing interventions that bring together principals and teachers in an effort to improve the adult community, meet the social and

psychological needs of teachers, and foster relational trust. LT is truly unique in its goals and approach.

Leading Together (LT) is designed to address needs in school leadership by bringing together groups of school leaders, engaging them in reflective practices, and supporting their personal and psychological growth as leaders and as people. LT is a two-year intervention comprised of an initial four-day summer retreat followed up by additional retreat days (called cohort days) and individualized school coaching focused on improving the adult community in schools. Chip Wood and Pamela Seigle, facilitators of the Center for Courage & Renewal ([CourageRenewal.org](http://CourageRenewal.org)), developed and lead the intervention retreats and supports. School leaders (including the principal and several teachers from each participating school) attend the retreats to reflect and learn approaches for improving the adult community at their schools. Together, they become the LT team. Following each retreat, the LT teams return to their schools implement new approaches to improve relational trust among teachers, facilitate more effective working relationships, and enhance teachers' personal growth.

The LT teams come to the retreats and cohort days to increase their capacity and skills to facilitate dealing with conflict, to enhance their ability to communicate and collaborate and to experience one another's shared commitment to teaching. Through reflective practices of Courage & Renewal, as well as other contemplative and mindfulness practices, retreat facilitators introduce ways to enhance the adult community of a school and renew the spirit and energy of the school learning community.

A central goal of the LT retreats and cohort days is to slow the pace of daily life and create a space for people to listen to themselves and each other in a new and different way. LT participants are encouraged to listen receptively, and by doing so, each person has an opportunity

to be kinder to, and develop a deeper understanding and appreciation of him or herself, and others. Retreat facilitators allow time for expansive thinking, listening, reflecting, and responding with honest, open questions. Unlike typical conversations among principals and other school staff during the school year, the retreat time is not used for problem solving or routine decision making. Instead, retreats provide space and time for the school leaders to learn new ways of creating a sense of community, to appreciate qualities about themselves and others, to strengthen relationships with other adults at their schools, and to open channels for communication within the adult community. As stated by its developers, Seigle and Wood, “Our purpose in LT is to renew and sustain educators’ vocational commitment, individually and in community, so they are better positioned to nurture the hearts and minds of students. We do this by providing them with a deeper understanding of relational trust, by developing broader leadership capacity across the school, and by teaching new skills and practices that enhance relationships, reflection, and renewal.”

The LT work is grounded in the principles and practices of the Circle of Trust<sup>®</sup> approach ([CourageRenewal.org/approach](http://CourageRenewal.org/approach)) developed by the Center for Courage & Renewal and the Center’s founder, Parker J. Palmer, author of *The Courage to Teach: Exploring the Inner Landscape of a Teacher’s Life*. LT also draws on the fields of social emotional learning and contemplative practice. Seigle and Wood are both seasoned school professionals and developers of well-known social and emotional learning interventions. They have been facilitators of circles of trust for sixteen years. In addition to developing LT, Seigle and Wood acted as the LT program facilitators during the pilot study. In next steps, the work led by Seigle and Wood will be documented in a program facilitation manual. The manual will be used to support the training of other school and Courage & Renewal professionals enabling broader dissemination and use of LT.

The activities for LT retreats and school meetings are described in an 80-page guidebook,

*Leading Together: Building Adult Community in Schools (The Courage & Renewal Guidebook for Courage in Schools Leadership Programs)* (Seigle, Wood, Sankowski & Ackerman, 2012), which is currently being revised for a second edition. The guidebook describes selected retreat activities designed to unite the group, create a safe, social space, and prepare LT group members for reflective work. It introduces listening practices, the asking of honest, open questions, shared silence, and a variety of other contemplative practices as resources in their relationships with each other and in their teaching. The guidebook also includes engaging activities designed to bring the LT team together and build trust, as well. One of the activities, *Touchstones*, helps participants create an environment in which people can safely explore important questions and challenges they face in their lives and work. *Touchstones* are central to engaging all participants during retreats and cohort days, and the experience of using them is a springboard for school teams to create their own adult community guidelines. Further, the guidebook describes reflective activities to provide insight into the work that participants do as educators, including protocols that guide the LT teams to reflect upon why they teach, consider what brought them to the work they do, and deepen their understanding of their own gifts and limitations. The reflective practices range from those focused on understanding others to understanding oneself; for instance, some activities support the development of gratitude and appreciation toward others as a starting point for building community (Center for Courage & Renewal, 2014).

The retreats are designed to teach LT teams new practices designed to renew their energy for teaching and school leadership and to build trust and understanding within their team. The LT team, then, leads efforts to explain LT to their school staff and facilitate practices to encourage trust and collaboration among the adult community. The program facilitators (Seigle, Wood) conduct two, day-long school visits a year to coach LT team members in program implementation.

Facilitators are also available for phone consultations if a difficulty arises in the teams' facilitation of LT at their school.

### ***Innovating Together: The Center for Courage & Renewal and UVA collaboration***

The facilitators (Wood and Seigle) engaged a research team at the University of Virginia (Sara Rimm-Kaufman, Micela Leis, Carol Paxton) as partners in implementation design. The research team gathered and synthesized data during the first implementation of LT from 2012-2014. The Innovating Together research had two aims: (a) to inform the development of the LT intervention and (b) to evaluate initial signs of efficacy of the LT approach. The UVA research team gathered data from the stakeholders involved in the intervention process—the facilitators, school leaders, and teachers. The data supported a process of identifying themes that emerged as school leaders made efforts to improve the adult community at their schools. The goal of the collaboration was to implement, deepen and develop a model for school change that, in time, will be used widely. The decision to bring on a research team was forward-thinking and risk-taking; most developers of interventions are not willing to shine a bright, inquiring light on progress during such early stages of intervention development. The development team took this risk to enrich opportunities for reflection and improvement of LT.

The research work draws from a new contemporary trend in educational research. The design of the LT research focuses on the iterative process of program development following principles of *design-based implementation research* (Penuel, Fishman, Haugan Cheng, & Sabelli, 2011) rather than traditional program evaluation. Design-based implementation research offers additional advantages over traditional program evaluation research because of the way in which it uses data to influence the development of the intervention itself. Throughout the research process, the data collected has been used to modify the logic model and enhance the implementation and

potential efficacy of the intervention. Specifically, the work has involved a process of “empirical tinkering—the repeated small tests of small changes required to refine and adapt a treatment to work effectively in multiple settings” (Morris & Hiebert, 2011, p. 6). The research and program development teams met in person or by phone every two months to discuss patterns in the data and the implications of those patterns for intervention design. Those conversations led to program adaptation and improvements informed by themes that emanated from the data.

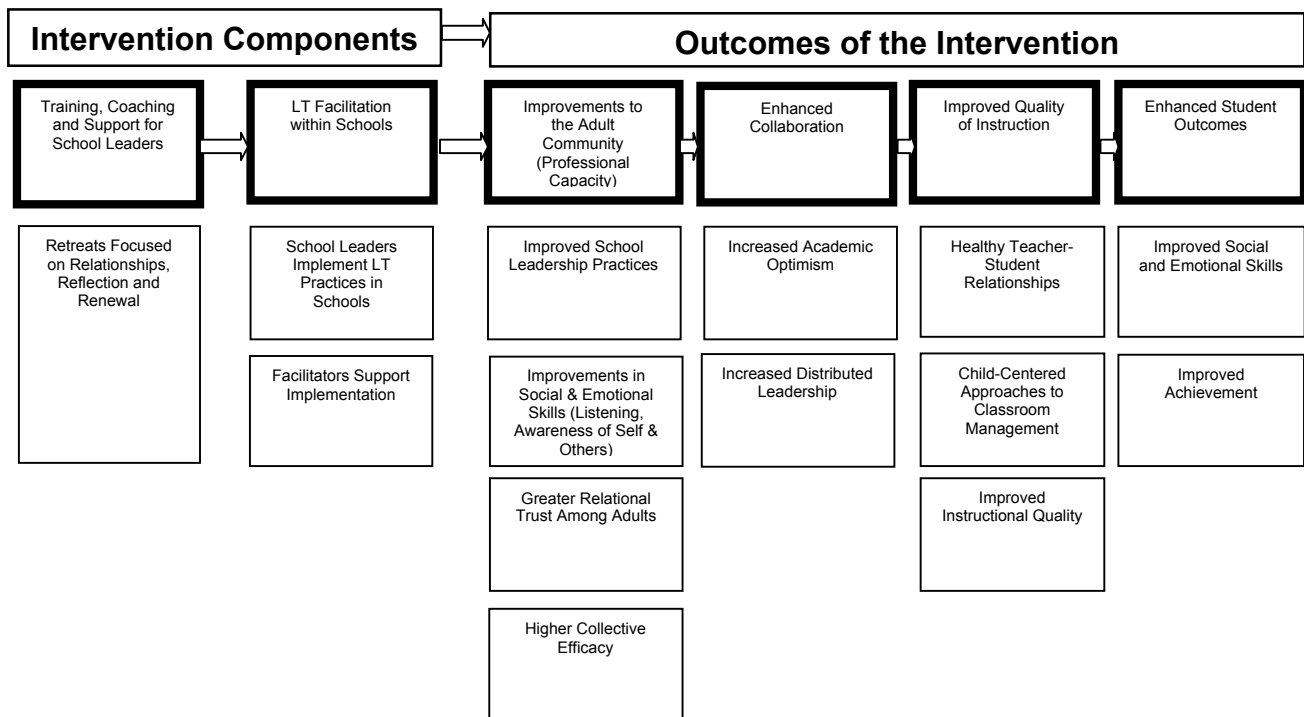
The second aim of the study has been to examine initial signs of efficacy of LT. Although LT is early in its development, the LT and research teams expected to see some signs of school improvement. To address this aim, one qualitative and three quantitative research questions were addressed. Qualitative data were used to describe the dynamics of the two year path from early- to full-implementation of LT. Results from the qualitative data were used to distinguish between early- and fully-implementing LT schools. For those schools that had reached full implementation of LT, three research questions were examined: (a) To what extent does LT contribute to professional capacity of school leaders? (b) To what extent does LT contribute to relational trust between teachers and principals? and (c) To what extent does LT contribute to academic optimism (i.e., faculty trust in adult, academic emphasis and collective efficacy)? The majority of this report focuses on this second aim.

### **Logic Model**

The conceptual logic model describes the theory of change and lays out hypotheses for how intervention components contribute to proximal and distal outcomes. The two columns on the far left of Figure 1 show the components of the intervention. The four columns on the right of Figure 1 show hypothesized proximal and distal outcomes of LT. In theory, we expect LT training, coaching and support for school leaders to enhance the capacity of school leaders to bring LT back

to their school and facilitate LT activities. In turn, we expect that as schools engage in LT activities and apply LT approaches to their work at the school, school leaders, teachers and other school staff will experience improvements to the adult community. For instance, we expect principals and teacher leaders to show improved leadership practices; adults at the school to show improved social and emotional skills (self- and social-awareness, relationship skills); and principals, teachers, and other school staff to show greater relational trust and higher collective efficacy. As a result of these changes, we expect to see enhanced collaboration across the school, as evidenced by increased academic optimism and distributed leadership. We expect the enhanced collaboration to contribute to improved quality of instruction (i.e., healthier teacher-student relationships, more child-centered approaches to classroom management and improved instructional quality), and ultimately, better student outcomes (social and emotional skills and achievement).

Figure 1. Brief Summary of the Logic Model for Leading Together





LT is designed as a multi-year intervention with schools adopting LT and experiencing its resulting effects over a three to five year time period. The present pilot study was conducted during the first implementation of the newly developed LT intervention. As a result, the research focused attention on the intervention components and proximal outcomes of the intervention. Specifically, the study was designed such that training, coaching and support were equivalently high quality for all eight schools. Further, the study design acknowledged that the LT teams' facilitation of LT in schools would be likely to vary and thus, required careful measurement. The extent to which LT was facilitated within schools indicated fidelity of implementation (defined as the extent to which an intervention is implemented as designed, [O'Donnell, 2008]). Variation in LT facilitation was used to differentiate between early- and fully-implementing schools with the idea that adoption of LT places schools on a path toward full use and implementation of LT, but that LT implementation is a gradual process that develops over time.

The research team chose to measure proximal outcomes, such as evidence of improvements in adult community (e.g., leadership practices, social and emotional skills, relational trust, collective efficacy, and enhanced collaboration), but not distal outcomes (such as quality of instruction or student outcomes). Some proximal outcomes (i.e., relational trust, collective efficacy) were measured using quantitative measures, whereas other proximal outcomes were studied based on qualitative sources (interviews, observations); this approach was taken to manage the scope of the study and allow for potential serendipitous results. Information was gathered from various perspectives. Feedback from principals, responses from teachers who were part of the LT team and responses from teachers who were not part of the LT team were gathered to reflect the variety of experiences with LT. Measurable changes to proximal outcomes are the most that can be

expected in this early phase of LT development. Assessing distal outcomes of LT is beyond the scope of this study and should be the subject of future work.

## **Methods**

### **Participants**

Principals of schools in New England were invited by Seigle and Wood to participate in the first cohort of LT. Most of the principals were familiar with work by Seigle and Wood or had attended Center for Courage & Renewal retreats previously. Two schools left the LT cohort during the first year because of competing priorities, resulting in a final sample of eight schools. The schools were demographically diverse, as represented by student free/reduced (FRPL) lunch status (Range = 4% - 98% FRPL,  $M = 30\%$  FRPL) and minority student composition (Range 7% - 94% racial minority,  $M = 36\%$  racial minority).

Three types of participants were enrolled in the study from each school: a) the school principal, b) school leaders (defined as teachers or other staff from the school who attended the LT retreats) and c) site-based teachers (defined as three teachers who were selected by principals to participate in data collection but had not attended LT retreats). The resulting participant pool included 8 principals (63% male, 88% White), 42 school leaders (5% male, 93% White) and 25 site-based teachers (12% male, 96% White).

### **Procedures**

Training in Leading Together began in July 2012 and extended through May 2014. Data collection efforts initiated in August 2012 (with baseline data collection) and occurred at regular intervals at four time points roughly corresponding to the beginning and end of each school year between August 2012 and June 2014.

**Implementation of LT Training.** LT training was implemented as a 4-day retreat in

Summer 2012 followed by five full retreat days, one at each of the following time points: November 2012, April 2013, August 2013, November 2013, and April 2014. LT facilitators (Seigle and Wood) visited each school two times during each school year, at which point they observed a faculty meeting, led the school staff in guided LT protocols, and met with the LT teams to discuss any difficulties with implementation or any areas in which assistance was desired.

**Approach to Data Collection.** Both qualitative and quantitative data were collected from multiple sources (principals, school leaders, site-based teachers).

**Qualitative sources.** Research assistants conducted interviews for a subset of participants (one principal, one school leader, and one site-based teacher from each school) in August 2012, June 2013, October 2013, and May 2014. Interviews included specific questions on how LT was being implemented in the school (e.g., If any, what specific LT activities has your school used? Please describe how the activities were received by the group and what happened), questions about the receptiveness of the staff to LT activities (e.g., How were the LT activities received by the group), and questions about the changes in the adult community (e.g., Have you experienced changes in your relationship with other members of the adult community at your school? If so, please describe these changes.) All interviews were audio-recorded and then transcribed.

**Quantitative Sources.** Web-based surveys were sent to each participant during the spring and fall of each year. The survey measures that had been validated elsewhere and corresponded with elements of the logic model were used to measure professional capacity, relational trust, and academic optimism.

**Professional capacity.** Professional capacity of the school refers to the “combinations of skills, beliefs, dispositions, and work arrangements of teachers at the school” (Bryk et al., 2010, p.

54). Three dimensions of professional capacity were measured through self-report: professional disposition to innovation, school commitment, and collective responsibility.

*Professional disposition to innovation* was measured to assess the extent to which faculty have a continual interest in learning and seeking new ideas, having a "can do" attitude, and feeling encouraged to change. Disposition to innovation was measured through a 3-item questionnaire (Nagaoka, 1997). A sample item is "Teachers are continually learning and seeking new ideas. Teachers rated each item on either a 4-point scale (1 = strongly disagree; 4 = strongly agree) or a 5-point scale (1 = none; 5 = nearly all). A high score means a strong orientation to improve among the faculty, indicating their willingness to try new things for the sake of their students and to be part of an active learning organization themselves. The three items were averaged to create an aggregate score for each teacher ( $\alpha = 0.82$ ).

*School commitment* gauges the extent to which teachers feel loyal and dedicated to their school. On a 4-item measure (Nagaoka, 1997), teachers reported whether they look forward to working in the school (e.g., "I usually look forward to each working day at this school"), would rather work somewhere else (e.g., "I wouldn't want to work in any other school"), and would recommend the school to other parents (e.g., "I would recommend this school to parents seeking a place for their child"). Items were scored on a 4-point Likert-type scale (1 = strongly disagree; 4 = strongly agree). A high score means teachers are deeply committed to their school. The four items were averaged to create an aggregate score for each teacher ( $\alpha = 0.86$ ).

*Collective responsibility* focuses on the extent of a shared commitment among the faculty to improve the schools so that all students learn. In this 9-item questionnaire (Nagaoka, 1997), teachers were asked how many colleagues feel responsible for students' academic and social development, set high standards of professional practice, and take responsibility for school

improvement. Teachers rated each item on either a 4-point scale (1 = strongly disagree; 4 = strongly agree) or a 5-point scale (1 = none; 5 = nearly all). A high score means a strong sense of shared responsibility among the faculty who help each other reach high standards. The nine items were averaged to create an aggregate score for each teacher ( $\alpha = 0.92$ ).

*Relational trust.* Relational trust is defined as having the confidence that others in a role set (i.e., teacher-teacher, teacher-administrator, teacher-students) will fulfill obligations and expectations relevant to the shared task of educating children. Relational trust is based on expectations of social respect, personal regard, discernments of role competence, and perceptions of personal integrity (Bryk et al., 2010). Two dimensions of relational trust were measured through self-report: teacher-principal trust and teacher-teacher trust.

*Teacher-principal trust* measures the extent to which teachers feel their principal respects and supports them using a 6-item scale (CCSR, 2011). Teachers were asked if their principal looks out for the welfare of teachers and has confidence in their expertise (e.g., “The principal has confidence in the expertise of the teachers”) and if they respect the principal as an educator (e.g., “I trust the principal at his or her word”). Teachers rated each item on one of two four-point scales (1 =strongly disagree; 4 = strongly agree or 1 = not at all; 4 = to a great extent). The six items were averaged to create an aggregate score for each teacher ( $\alpha = 0.92$ ).

*Teacher-teacher trust* was assessed using a 4-item scale (CCSR, 2011) assessing the extent to which teachers in a school have open communication with, and respect for, each other. Items focus on whether teachers in the school respect each other (e.g., “Teachers respect other teachers who take the lead in school improvement efforts”). Teachers and administrators rated each item on a four-point scale (1 =strongly disagree; 4 = strongly agree). The four items were averaged to create an aggregate score for each teacher ( $\alpha = 0.90$ ).

*Collective Efficacy.* Collective efficacy refers to the perceptions of teachers in a school that the efforts of the faculty as a whole will have positive effects on students (Goddard, 2002). Collective efficacy was measured in a 12-item scale that consists of six items that measure group competence, and six that measure task analysis. Group-competence refers to judgments about the capabilities that a faculty brings to a given teaching situation (e.g., “Teachers in this school are able to get through to difficult students”). Task analysis refers to perceptions of the constraints and opportunities inherent in the task at hand (e.g. “Home life provides so many advantages the students here are bound to learn”). Teachers rated each item on a 6-point scale (1 = strongly disagree; 6 = strongly agree). The 12 items were averaged to create an aggregate score for each teacher ( $\alpha = .81$ ).

*Academic optimism.* Academic optimism explains collective behavior in terms of cognitive (collective efficacy), affective (trust in clients [parents and students]), and behavioral (academic emphasis) dimensions. Academic optimism has emerged as a school factor that is highly correlated with improved student outcomes, even after controlling for socioeconomic factors. Academic optimism refers to a shared belief among faculty that academic achievement is important, that the faculty can help students achieve, and that the faculty can trust students and parents to cooperate with trying to achieve (McGuigan & Hoy, 2006). All three dimensions of academic optimism were measured in the survey: Faculty trust in clients, academic emphasis, and collective efficacy.

*Faculty trust in clients* assesses the extent to which teachers trust their students (e.g. “I believe my students are competent learners”) and the extent to which they trust the parents of their students (e.g. “I think that most of my students’ parents do a good job raising their children”). Faculty trust in clients was measured using a 6-item scale (Hoy & Tschannen-Moran, 2003). Items are rated on a six-point scale (1 = strongly disagree; 6 = strongly agree). The six items were

averaged to create an aggregate score for each teacher ( $\alpha = 0.87$ ).

*Academic emphasis* indicates the degree to which a school sets high but achievable academic standards and goals, the degree to which students persist at academic tasks and are respected by both students and teachers for their academic success. In this 8-item questionnaire (Hoy, Smith, & Sweetland, 2002), teachers were asked about the academic emphasis of the school (e.g. “Students respect others who get good grades”). Teachers rated each item on a 6-point scale (1 = strongly disagree; 6 = strongly agree). A high score means that parents, teachers, and the principal all exert pressure for high standards and school improvement. The eight items were averaged to create an aggregate score for each teacher ( $\alpha = 0.85$ ).

### **Data Analysis**

The main data analysis occurred in stages involving a qualitative stage followed by a quantitative stage. Then, the research team gathered themes based on communication exchanges between the developers and research team to enrich the interpretation of the main data analysis. Qualitative analyses on interview data were used to identify indicators of use of LT as means to describe fidelity of implementation of LT. Specifically, the data collected corresponded to “LT facilitation within schools” in the logic model in Figure 1. Subsequently, the indicators of implementation were then used to differentiate between early-implementing and fully-implementing schools. After categorizing schools, the fully-implementing schools were then selected to measure the extent to which LT was producing change in proximal outcomes in those schools in keeping with the notion that becoming a fully-implementing LT schools is a developmental process that occurs in sequence over a period of time (Han & Weiss, 2005).

The qualitative data (interviews) were analyzed systematically. Developing the interview codes was an iterative process, involving generating emergent codes and then dividing these codes

into themes around implementation (Miles & Huberman, 1994). Dedoose software (Sociocultural Research Consultants, 2011) was used to organize data and keep track of codes. The consistency of themes was examined through triangulation of interviews from multiple people at the same time point (Creswell, 2008). The research team discussed the implementation codes with each other and with LT developers to arrive at a consensus of the important themes and to define the developmental progression toward full implementation. Using these codes, schools were each examined holistically and classified as belonging to one, or another, stage of implementation: early- or fully-implementing. Case studies were written for two of the fully-implementing schools, renamed Juniper School and Lilac School. Quantitative data were analyzed for principals and teachers at fully-implementing schools to provide some early indication of whether LT relates to improved proximal outcomes.

A final stage of data analysis involved gathering themes from the qualitative data beyond the scope of the original research questions in an effort to question and articulate details in the logic model and enhance interpretation of results. Thus, after conducting the qualitative and quantitative analysis, the research team reflected upon conversations with the developers and examined existing data for nascent themes. Some of these themes will be explored further in the empirical papers to be produced in 2014-2015.

## **Results**

### **Qualitative Stage**

Use of LT varied among the eight schools. We discuss variation in implementation in relation to three main constructs: implementation quantity (dosage), implementation quality, and teacher responsiveness. Each construct had subconstructs. The implementation quantity construct considers the use of multiple activities and protocols, time allocation to LT activities, and



frequency of meetings of LT teams at each school. Quality of implementation pertains to successful conveyance of the usefulness of LT to staff and expansion of LT beyond just the LT team to include other adults. Teacher responsiveness considers participation and enthusiasm for LT among those school staff members who were not part of the original LT team.

**Implementation Quantity.** Implementation quantity refers to the presence of use of activities and the quantity of the intervention delivered. By definition, implementation quantity reflects dosage of the intervention that is implemented by school leaders and received by the adults in the school (Berkel, et al., 2011). The design of LT requires the LT team to facilitate guidebook activities at their school regularly. LT implementation encourages the LT team to meet consistently to reflect upon the needs of the adults at the school and to plan LT activities for staff meetings. The guidebook is not prescriptive about the frequency of meetings (e.g., once a week, once a month).

Qualitative data showed that all schools reported use of multiple activities and protocols from the LT guidebook. Findings also indicated little variation in the amount of protocol-based activities reported or in the types of LT activities and protocols that were used. Activities such as ‘Council’ (a protocol that focuses on listening), developing adult community guidelines, and poetry were used by the majority of the schools. Additionally, many schools used shared silence or journaling at every staff meeting. On average, schools used 16 different LT activities, ranging from 10 to 21 unique activities.

Schools varied greatly in the amount of time allotted to LT activities. Some schools devoted one staff meeting a month to doing LT work. At other schools, very little time was allocated to LT activities, as the principal chose to focus on other priorities. Sufficient implementation quantity is characterized by the frequent meeting of LT teams to plan for

implementing program activities in schools. The eight schools varied in the frequency of holding LT meetings. Some LT teams met weekly, some met monthly, and some did not meet at all outside of the LT retreat day. A few schools had overlap between their leadership team and their LT team, with some members of the LT team also being on the leadership team. In these schools, LT activities and protocols were used within the leadership team, in addition to being used at staff meetings.

Frequency of use of LT activities, amount of time allocated to LT activities, and frequency of LT team meetings all varied across the eight schools and thus represented important indicators of fidelity of implementation

**Quality of Implementation.** Quality of implementation refers to the processes used to convey the program material to the participants and, specifically, the degree to which program techniques and activities are implemented as intended by the developers (Berkel et al., 2011; Han & Weiss, 2005). The term “quality” in quality of implementation has a specific technical meaning and refers to adherence to LT approaches, activities, and ways of thinking, as enacted in the initial pilot years. “Quality” is not a value-laden term, but simply indicates adherence to the intent and design of LT.

One component of quality of implementation of LT refers to how well the LT team is able to convey the meaning and usefulness of LT to their staff, introduce the protocols and LT activities, and implement LT activities with the staff. Variation in quality of implementation became visible in the interviews in the way in which principals and teachers described the process of bringing LT back to their school. At some schools, LT teams discussed implementation, considered the potential results of LT on the adult community at their school and discussed how LT would be perceived from the perspective of the teachers at their school who did not attend the

retreat. Attention to such details indicated high quality of implementation. As one example, one LT participant said:

I think that it really helped me to remember that everybody's style of communication is different and everybody's comfort level is different. And one of the things that's really important is to take the time to understand that and to be patient through the process. Often times when we start a program like this we want to see huge results quickly, and sometimes in our rush to get further and further ahead, we don't always stop to think about the progress we have made and what is working and how that progress can be a huge step for some people, even if we think it's not as big a step (LT Team Member Interview, June 2013).

As another example of quality implementation of LT, one LT team prepared a presentation about LT and what it meant to them as a school to engage in LT work, in relation to the prior work that the school had been doing:

When I brought [LT] back this year to my staff, I reminded them that every year we set goals for school. A couple of years ago we were really working on our standards, our curriculum, making sure that the standards, the state standards and now the common core standards, were aligned in our curriculum, so we've done a lot of work on curriculum building for a couple of years, and we did a lot of PD with it. Then two years ago we decided that we really needed to work on students' connections. Trying to find very concrete ways to make sure every child had a trusted adult in the building that they could connect with, who knew more than their basic story. So next, [we added] this third piece focused on [enhancing the community among] the adults in the building. [We decided we needed to strengthen three elements of our school] – the curriculum, the student

connections, and the adult community. [LT created] a chance to finally focus on the adults in the building –the missing piece (LT Team Member Interview, June 2013).

Another LT team introduced LT to the staff by explaining that it would impact student learning:

I think [LT] was received well. My team, and myself, when to the LT retreat last summer, and I think they did a pretty good job of explaining what LT was all about. Why we went to LT and that we were going to specifically pay attention to the adult community and focus on building relational trust and so forth. And we did some reading about the work in Chicago in the 90s and how the schools with more relational trust got further with the kids and that it all basically comes down to the kids and how can we be more effective educators (LT Team Member Interview, June 2013).

In schools where the LT team does not clearly explain why the school is involved with doing LT work, there is confusion among the staff about the purpose of LT: “I think this goes back to how things are presented. I think people, still up to this point, have a lot of misconceptions about Leading Together because it wasn’t presented clearly to begin with, and then a lot of this year has been to re-educate” (LT Team Member Interview, June 2013).

Quality of implementation also involves expansion of the LT circle to include more staff members and share ownership of LT, with the goal of leading to distributive leadership. Expansion of the LT team to include additional staff varied across schools. Though all schools expanded the LT team past the initial group that attended the LT training in August, 2012, some schools brought new teachers to the LT retreats, while other schools just expanded the LT team within their school. As a teacher leader described:

We had the leadership group who attended the meetings at the center remain the same, but

we did have two other people, who were part of our protocol training earlier in the year, join the group... That was actually really good because we had some different grade level representatives. We had a kindergarten teacher and a three/four teacher, so we actually had pretty much everyone involved. And one of the things that we had decided—this kind of a little more extended group decided at one of our last meetings—was that we wanted to extend the group even more and to include some of the specialists (LT Team Member Interview, June 2013).

The schools varied in the extent to which they showed signs of shared ownership of LT among school team members. At schools utilizing shared ownership, the principal worked together with the leadership team to decide how LT activities would be used with the staff. As one LT school leader stated:

I think our leadership team is very strong. We do set a time, a weekly meeting, where we do various things, but we've incorporated some of what we learned during Leading Together. We've worked on how we plan our staff meetings, and we've referred to the Leading Together binder and what other activities we wanted to do. The leadership team works together, spends time together, about once a week. We would talk about how we can incorporate what've learned with the staff (LT Team Member Interview, June 2013).

At schools with less shared ownership, leadership in presenting specific LT activities is shared, but the principal does not share decision-making power with the other LT team members.

**Teacher Responsiveness to LT.** Teacher responsiveness to LT refers to the participation and level of enthusiasm for the intervention by teachers who were not part of the original LT team. At schools with positive participant responsiveness, the teachers reported seeing the value of the specific LT activities in relation to their personal growth. As one site-based teacher described:

There was one in particular that always sticks in my mind. The idea when we talk, there's an activity where we mixed up partners, we randomly drew a poker chip, I think it was, and we were given a question, and were told to speak for 2-3 minutes, and the other person was not allowed to say a single thing, we were allowed to nod our heads and that was about it, so you were forced to really listen and think about how you were listening to them and really concentrate on not going "Oh yeah, I had that too" which interrupts them. I think that was a really meaningful exercise for me because, as I said we were learning to listen to each other instead of already thinking ahead about what we wanted to say, but really take a moment to hear them (Site Teacher Interview, June 2013).

Another site teacher explained the value of LT for teachers at their school:

I did like [LT] - the idea that there was a purpose to activities that we were introduced to. There was an ultimate goal in helping morale and having teachers have a resource, understanding how to work together. I think a lot of people aren't taught to work in a group or work as a whole unit, as a system, and I think Leading Together kind of helps that and enforces that. So I think that it is a valuable learning experience.

Important to the understanding of LT, the eight schools varied in the extent to which participant responsiveness was observed. As a result, participant responsiveness served as a metric of the extent to which LT was implemented with fidelity.

**Definition of early-implementing and fully-implementing schools.** School profiles were described in relation to quantity of implementation, quality of implementation, and teacher responsiveness for all eight schools. Two members of the research team reviewed the school profiles independently and confirmed the schools' classifications. These classifications indicated the location of schools on a developmental progression from the early to later stages of LT

implementation.

Four schools were identified as early-implementing. The most common indicator of early-implementing schools was use of some of the practices and protocols described in the guidebook.

A teacher at an early-implementing school explained:

We've actually tried a number of ... activities, ... like we've used the poems, we've done world café, we've done some reflective activities and journals, we created touchstones, stepping stones and why I teach, we did our own version, we've done milling, hope and dreams, and seeing how those were going. On the other hand, I think we shied away from some of the meatier activities that get beneath the surface. So, we've stayed on the surface, done a lot of things. I think it has improved the quality of our faculty meetings. There's some increase in participation, lots of thoughtful responses. But again, we don't necessarily connect the meetings in a really strong way and in a deep and thoughtful and meaningful way with our everyday practice necessarily. So, you know, there's a lot of room for growth there.

Other signs that were more subtle also emerged at early-implementing schools. For instance, at one school, a school leader explained that she believed there were some initial signs of change: "We did change our staff meeting, the formats of staff meetings, as well as our school wide assembly, that format changed. Some committees were created where we have a cross-section discussing a lot of different issues".

Four schools were identified as fully-implementing LT schools. These four schools showed numerous indicators that they made LT a priority in their school and changed day-to-day practices to incorporate LT. In these schools, the LT team met regularly (approximately once or twice a month) to plan activities that they implemented about once a month in staff meetings. The

members of the LT team typically shared ownership for LT. The LT team expanded to include other teachers, as well. The LT team adjusted the timing of LT activities so that they work within their school. At times, the schools used LT approaches and practices to implement initiatives within the school (for instance, a new teacher evaluation system that had been introduced). Perhaps most importantly, interviews of site teachers showed evidence that they understood the purpose of participating in LT, as it has been explained in relation to the values or goals of the school. In addition, at fully-implementing schools, the majority of the site-based teachers interviewed demonstrated responsiveness to LT.

Early signs of intervention efficacy are best understood when the intervention is being fully implemented. Therefore, quantitative analyses examine only the four fully-implementing schools.

### **Quantitative Results**

The quantitative analyses were conducted on a sample of 14 school leader and site-based teacher respondents. Matched paired t-tests and effect sizes were computed to examine changes in professional capacity, relational trust, and academic optimism between baseline (August 2012) and two years later, at the end of LT implementation (June 2014) for the four high-implementing schools. Effect size values were interpreted (instead of using traditional p-values) due to the small sample size. Note that the research design employed allows statements of association between LT and proximal outcomes, but not statements of causation.

The results in Table 1 illustrate how school leaders and site teachers showed increases in professional capacity, relational trust, and academic optimism during the period of the LT study (from July 2012 to May 2014). All changes in the adult community occurred in the positive direction indicating improvement in proximal outcomes over the course of LT, as initially



predicted. The effect size gains were the largest for professional capacity. Gains over two years ranged from one-fifth to one-third of a standard deviation gain in professional disposition to innovation, school commitment, and collective responsibility.

Effect size gains were computed to assess changes to relational trust. The results showed an increase in teacher-teacher trust (corresponding to roughly one-fifth of a standard deviation) and very small gains in teacher-principal trust (less than one-tenth of a standard deviation). The school leaders and teachers showed gains in all facets of academic optimism over the two year period during LT. These effect sizes corresponded to between one-tenth and one-fifth of a standard deviation.

Table 1

Change Over Time in the Four Fully-Implementing Schools

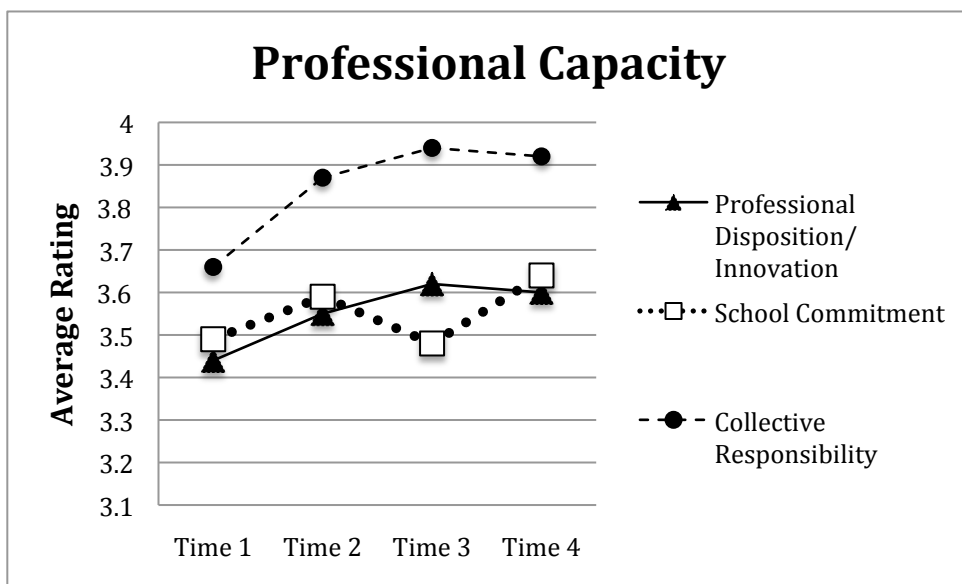
	<b><u>August 2012</u></b>	<b><u>May 2014</u></b>	<b>Effect Size Change</b>
	Mean (SD)	Mean (SD)	
<b><i>Professional Capacity</i></b>			
Professional Disposition to Innovation	3.44 (.79)	3.60 (.83)	<b>.20</b>
School Commitment	3.49 (.63)	3.64 (.49)	<b>.24</b>
Collective Responsibility	3.66 (.76)	3.92 (.62)	<b>.34</b>
<b><i>Relational Trust</i></b>			
Teacher-Principal Trust	3.43 (.72)	3.49 (.69)	<b>.08</b>
Teacher-Teacher Trust	2.97 (.65)	3.11 (.67)	<b>.22</b>
<b><i>Academic Optimism</i></b>			
Faculty Trust in Clients	4.59 (.81)	4.67 (.73)	<b>.10</b>
Academic Emphasis	4.31 (1.23)	4.48 (1.11)	<b>.14</b>
Collective Efficacy	4.60 (1.19)	4.76 (1.20)	<b>.14</b>

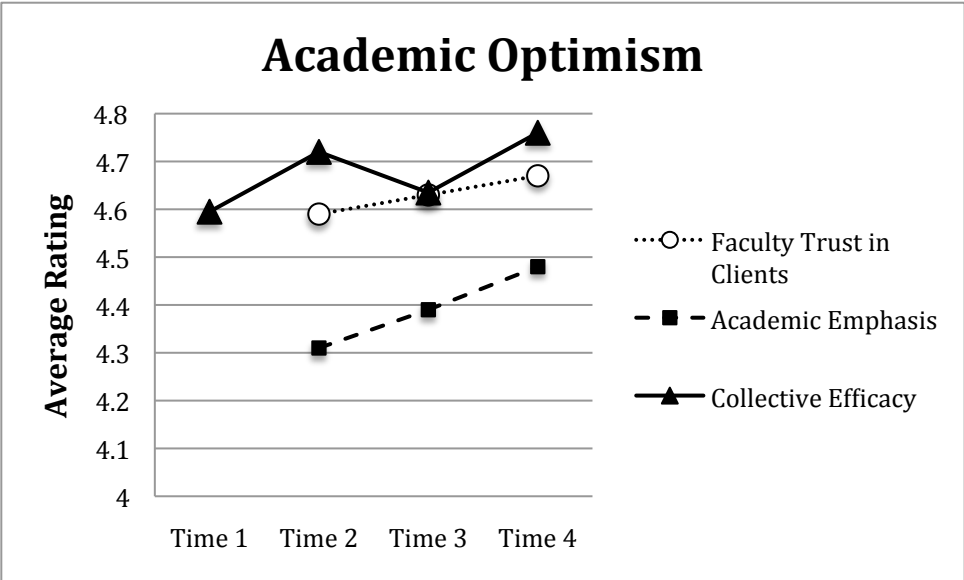
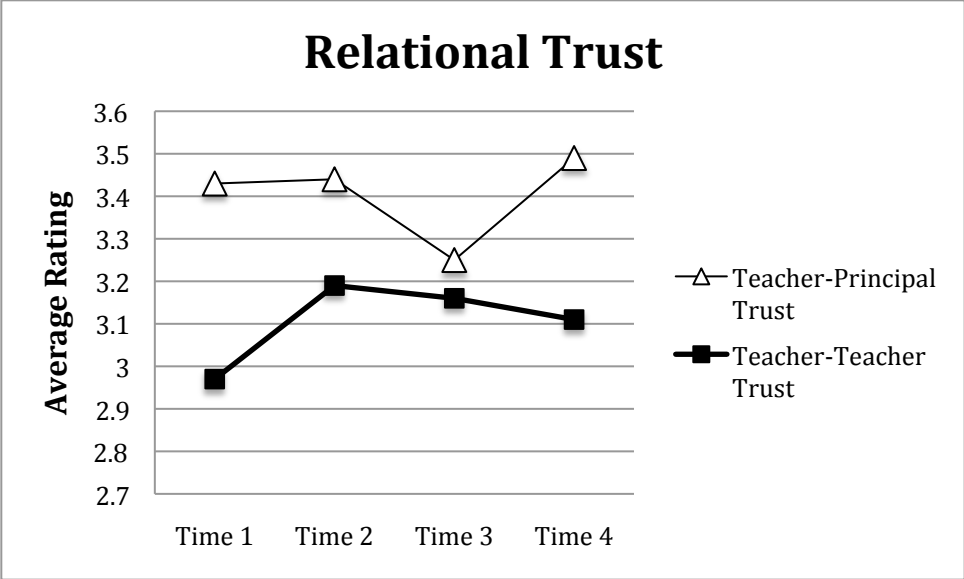
Note. n = 14.

The figures below provide line graphs indicating changes over time in these three facets of the adult school community.

Figure 2.

Quantitative Results for Fully-Implementing Schools: Figures showing change in professional capacity, relational trust and academic optimism based on 14 school leader and site-based teacher respondents.





**Case Studies**

The following case studies describe two of fully-implementing schools as examples of the ways in which LT becomes implemented and produces changes in schools. School names are changed to ensure confidentiality.

## **Juniper School**

“[On an airplane] you listen to the safety regulations and you put the oxygen mask on yourself first before you help the kids and the infants, and that is what [LT] is. It’s like we’re putting the mask on ourselves so that we can be better educators for our students because they have so many needs.” – Juniper Principal

The principal at Juniper decided to participate in Leading Together based on prior work that she had done with Pamela Seigle and the Center for Courage & Renewal. In recent years, educational staff at Juniper had worked on curriculum building and building connections with students as part of their overarching goal to build a strong school environment. They believed this to be the “secret to all success in schools”. LT gave the principal and Juniper staff a chance to focus on the final aspect of building a strong school environment: strengthening the adult community. Through LT, Juniper staff gained a better understanding of the importance of adult relationships and trust in the adult community, as well as its impact on student learning.

Having attended the introductory summer LT training workshop, the principal at Juniper was certain that participating in LT was the perfect next step in professional development and revised her plans for beginning the school year. She decided to change the usual goal-setting activity that her leadership team had always done. Instead of working on curriculum, the team focused on ways to strengthen the adult community and relational trust among the adults in the school. The principal and other faculty members who had also attended the LT training then organized “different kinds of activities to help people get their feet wet around this idea of how we work with each other and how we build our adult community”.

Prior to their introduction to LT, teachers at Juniper were unable to use each other as resources as much as they would have liked because they were so consumed with individual work.

Some distrust among teachers also divided staff, who felt like their actions were constantly being reported to administration. However, during the two-year implementation of LT, this has changed. Teachers report that the trust among teachers has noticeably strengthened. One teacher reported that adult community relationships have definitely improved, especially throughout the second year of LT implementation. In interviews with this teacher, the terms *trust*, *integrity* and *honesty* were used repeatedly to describe her feelings about interactions with her colleagues. The teacher also explained that she felt less isolated from other teachers in the building. She noticed how faculty members demonstrate greater respect for each other and feel more comfortable being honest with one another. Other teachers mentioned that they also had seen distinct improvement in the amount of trusting relationships in the adult community. One teacher stated “I’ve also seen a noticeable shift in our principal’s interpersonal approach over the last two years. She has been more thoughtful and careful about others’ feelings and seems to be focusing more on building / strengthening relationships with staff”.

The faculty at Juniper reported that these shifts in the adult community occurred because of a consistent focus of providing time for LT activities and protocols. The teachers explain that LT activities have been woven into every staff meeting, and that “these practices (guided relaxation, poetry, Tai Chi) are filtering down to the classrooms and becoming the norm in our school”. One teacher explained how the faculty meetings incorporate the tenets of LT:

“We always start our meetings out with sharing positive things and working on some of our own skills as a community, such as listening skills, communicating skills, and sometimes we read articles about some things like paying attention and how do you really pay attention and how do you really listen to each other, how do you really show that you care for each other.”

The teachers also attribute the increase in trust to the listening activities that are a central part of LT:

“There is a lot of listening. We’ve actually worked on exercises about listening and what listening really looks like, trying not to interrupt each other or bring out connections to our own experiences when somebody is talking – waiting until the end and finishing. So I think that that was a big part of our change with the leading and learning together, really working on listening to each other so that we can hear exactly what concerns are before jumping in and giving suggestions or jumping in and saying “oh, I feel the same way because I did this, this, and this.” Instead of turning it on us, we’re trying to really absorb what they’re saying, what the other person is saying. So you see a lot of people really getting their opinions heard a little bit better.”

The teachers at Juniper understood the purpose of participating in LT:

“There was an ultimate goal in helping morale and having teachers have a resource, understanding how to work together. I think a lot of people aren’t taught to work in a group or work as a whole unit, as a system, and I think Leading Together kind of helps that and enforces that. So I think that it is a valuable learning experience.”

In addition to enhancing trust and adult relationships at Juniper, LT was helpful in relieving some of the stress brought on by Common Core, the new teacher evaluation system, and the increased focus on standardized testing. The principal led reflective and mindfulness activities at the beginning of every faculty meeting in order to allow teachers to unwind. As one faculty member explained “I think that the LT initiative, at this point, is very essential for our staff because, you know, so many of the activities are meant to bring that stress level down... it’s a valuable initiative for our school”. Another faculty member described the preventative effects of

LT: “I think [LT] has been a real shot in the arm. It has been very positive. You know, I describe it to people as cutting edge – this is the stuff that, you know, a lot of schools should be doing I think down the road, and it’s nice to think that we’re a bit of a forerunner in it.” The administrative staff at Juniper have also used LT protocols and activities at meetings with administrators from other schools in the district, thus encouraging the LT work to begin to spread to other schools in the district.

Throughout the implementation of Leading Together, Juniper School staff have clearly understood that the work done to improve their adult community benefits students. Teachers have been happy to share their opportunities for growth with their classes. Independently, many teachers have adapted LT activities for their own classrooms, often sharing poetry and icebreakers to build relationships among their students. Participating in LT has also inspired school counselors to offer a stress-reduction group for students one morning a week. In addition, teachers and students alike recently took part in Tai Chi training from an instructor that was recommended by one of the LT facilitators. Support for the wellbeing of teachers has been seen as naturally supporting the entire school community. The principal summarized by saying: “So I think all that translates into a better feeling among the adults, and the kids pick up on that stuff, they do, they’re pretty sharp. And I think when they feel like we like and we respect each other, it helps them feel respected, and they know that we’re a team. We’re all in it together.”

### **Lilac School**

“I think that as a school we have many more structures in place that help us to listen to each other and build trust. These structures were learned in LT and they are really helping us change, but this is an ongoing process and never-ending.”

– Lilac teacher

At Lilac School, the principal and the Leading Together team embarked on the LT work with high expectations. Lilac School had grown in size over the previous few years, and the number of faculty members increased, as well. The influx of staff brought with them new viewpoints. These viewpoints sometimes conflicted with established beliefs held by veteran staff members regarding the goals and philosophical underpinnings of the school. This resulted in fewer staff members collaborating together as tension increased among the faculty. The principal chose to participate in LT because he wanted the Lilac School staff to work together more productively. The LT team from Lilac left the initial LT training workshop with high hopes. They felt rejuvenated and renewed, hoping that focusing on listening activities and building relationships would be instrumental in transforming the adult relationships within their school.

However, the LT team was discouraged after introducing the program to the other teachers at Lilac School. The team expected to see immediate positive change among staff members, but the initial response to LT was mixed, at best. One of the teachers who attended the LT training explained that she felt like there had been big changes in the relationships between LT team members, but she was not seeing the same results in the larger staff community. The Lilac School LT team saw the faculty having a hard time understanding the purpose of LT and buying into the program. They believed that perhaps this was because not everyone had been able to share the experience at the opening summer retreat training. In spite of this bumpy start, the LT team did not give up. As the principal explained: “This year we decided to make [relational trust] a priority. We talked about it and we decided that we wanted to improve relational trust because we think that influences everything.” In accordance with this belief, the principal and LT team devoted one full staff meeting a month to LT guidebook activities that were designed to support relationship building.



Faculty attitudes about LT began to slowly change over the course of the school year. Over time the LT team witnessed more staff members participating in LT activities, corresponding with a general increase in appreciation for the program. Lilac School staff created six guidelines for working together, and this was viewed as a big step forward toward encouraging collaboration. Visiting specialists who worked at multiple schools also positively commented on how the adults at Lilac School focused so much on collaboration and building trust. For the LT team and school faculty, these comments created deeper appreciation for the decision to implement the LT program and a greater understanding of the importance of their work. At the end of the first year of participating in LT, teachers at Lilac felt like there had been a general increase in trust among the faculty. However, there was more work that needed to be done. The LT team realized that they needed to change their expected schedule for implementing the program, as it takes time to solidly build relationships and to build trust.

The faculty at Lilac School continued to make progress during the second year of participating in Leading Together. The LT team first focused on making sure that the staff truly understood why their school was participating in LT. They did this in two ways. First, LT facilitator Pamela Seigle came to a staff meeting and explained “the purpose of Leading Together and what some of the research was showing, explaining again about the idea of relational trust and the impact that it has on student learning”. Since this meeting, the LT team has made sure to touch on the relationship between the LT activities and relational trust. Secondly, they expanded their LT team to include teachers who had not previously attended the LT training retreats. One of the original LT team members explained why this was so helpful to their school:

“What has happened is that [the LT team expansion] causes us to really stop and think about what we’re doing and how we’re approaching it and how other people are perceiving

it. So I think that has been really valuable for us to see what we've been doing from another perspective. These are people who are really interested and want to understand it, but because they haven't had the same experiences as the smaller team, they maybe don't understand it. So I think that really helps us in planning the [faculty] meetings because it really lets us know if we're moving too quickly or we're being unclear and also where we kind of need to stop and make changes that work best for our staff."

Having the faculty fully understand the purpose of LT has impacted teacher buy-in. The principal explained that he feels like there has been a shift in receptivity by the staff, and he feels that the majority of the staff is now on board with the LT work. He also believes that LT has become an important aspect of the school:

"Last year, most of our staff meetings where we did this work in some ways felt isolated from the whole work of the school – but I feel like this year, we have more of an effort in bringing the Leading Together work and having it integrating into what we are doing, so it's not like it's an entirely separate thing.... It is integrated more into what we do, so there is usually some aspect of Leading Together in all of our staff meetings, and there are some aspects of it in our Child Study team, protocols that we've developed that apply to the concepts. So, it has become much more in the fabric of what we do."

At the end of the second year of participating in Leading Together, the teachers reported that LT was providing tools for the staff to have difficult conversations about their core purpose as a school. LT has also increased the level of trust and degree of collaboration between faculty members. One teacher explained the importance of positive adult relationships for student outcomes:

“I don’t think that kids can have academic learning unless they feel supported emotionally, and I think it’s really difficult for teachers to work together if they’re not in a good place emotionally. So I think if there’s a lot of stress and disagreements amongst the staff, that’s going to filter out eventually, to the students. I think if people can learn to really listen to each other and trust each other and try to understand others perspectives, that it can only open us up to new ideas and just a better way of working together, and that can only help our students.”

### **Gathering Themes**

The final stage of data analysis involved organizing themes from the qualitative data and conversations with developers to affirm, question, and articulate details in the logic model and improve understanding of how LT produces change. Thus, after conducting the qualitative and quantitative analysis, the research team examined the data for nascent themes. These themes are described here.

#### ***Personal Growth and Change.***

The theme of personal growth and change emerged from the qualitative data. For instance, many of the teachers described an increase in their ability to listen to one another and listen in way that was open and receptive, not listening to fix a problem. Emergence of empathy for one another was another emergent theme. For instance, one school described the positive changes in the adult community:

I think part of the big change is that we have felt like we’re kind of all in this together and realized that we’re in the same boat with the new initiatives that are happening in our district and with our state. So, we’re kind of feeling the stress together, which kind of gives us something to talk about more and work together with, so that has kind of fostered more

of an “alright let’s change our mindset to trust and help each other”. Whereas a couple years ago, it was “I don’t know if I can say the same things to these people because are they going to go run to the administration and say, ‘oh this person said that?’” So I think it has changed in that we are now having some of the same conversations and the same feelings and the administration even feels some of the same feelings and they are less likely to judge anybody – there is a lot less tension in the building in fear that somebody is going to be like, you know, pointing fingers at each other...that has changed.

### ***Expansion of LT to the District Level.***

In two of the four fully-implementing schools, district-level personnel were impressed with the LT work to such an extent that they have requested Seigle and Wood’s help in furthering this work in their district. One superintendent asked for the facilitators to work with her and the administrative team for the district next year on an ongoing basis. At another fully-implementing school, the administrative team has shared the LT work with other administrators in the district.

### ***Noticeable Shifts Between Year 1 and 2.***

At the end of the first year of implementation, only two of the schools fit the profile of fully-implementing. Building relationships and adult community takes time, and because this effort represented the first implementation of LT, some aspects of LT had not yet been tested and there were some questions about what was needed during the training days to ensure implementation within the school. At the end of year 1, the research team and facilitators discussed that some LT teams needed more explicit instruction about how to convey the purpose of LT to teachers at their schools. The first workshop of the second year of LT included a specific focus on describing the purpose of LT to teachers at the school who had not been to LT retreats. This effort may partially

explain the deeper understanding of LT in schools during the second year of implementation and the progress of all eight schools toward full implementation.

In year two, the research team observed positive shifts in the adult community at the early-implementing schools, but also signs that it would take more time for implementation to be fully realized. The two schools that reached full implementation at the end of year 1 progressed even further with the work during the second year, integrating LT more fully into their work. As one school leader explained: “I think [the second] year what we’ve discovered is some of the Leading Together work in our school has become more integrated into who we are and less sort of this separate entity.”

### ***LT Supporting Schools Even in High Need Conditions.***

One initial concern with LT was that schools could only develop full LT implementation under school conditions characterized with fewer stressors. Two of the four fully-implementing schools were urban schools working with high percentages of low-income and minority students. A school leader at one of the high-poverty schools explained how she felt that LT was impacting teacher attrition and student outcomes:

[LT] definitely has a positive impact, just because it helps keep adults in a good space mentally. If you’re happy where you work, then you will produce, you will have better results. When you start getting up in the morning and saying, “I don’t want to go to work. I hate the place that I work,” then you’re not going to produce and you’re not going to be invested in the students. And I think that our teachers are invested and they like being part of this community, and they don’t want to go anywhere else. And I see that with the turnovers. I see less turnover than in previous years. So I think definitely it does enhance how well the students perform. And we see it in the data, as well. Our students are

performing better now, because their teachers are willing to learn and they're willing to plug away with, with learning best practices and mastering those. So [the teachers] truly believe in the mission of our school, I feel.

### **Conclusions and Recommendations**

Findings will be described in relation to the two aims of Innovating Together: to inform the development of the LT intervention and evaluate initial signs of efficacy of the LT approach. From the start, the full project team used a design-based implementation research approach to conduct the study (Penuel et al., 2011). In doing so, the developers and research team joined together to work on persistent challenges that schools face—increasing demands on time and attention, a quickening of the pace of schools, and an inattention to the social experiences and emotional needs of the adults in schools. Further, the development work on LT did not focus exclusively on the contents of the intervention itself (e.g., LT practices and protocols), but also considered the developmental process that schools experience as they implement LT (e.g., LT teams bring LT practices back to their schools). The work exemplifies design-based implementation research in the way that the team regards the development of LT as an ongoing collaborative and iterative process that has been informed by data with the period from 2012-2014 representing the very first full training and implementation of LT in its current form.

### **Findings to Inform LT Development**

Findings revealed that the LT training, coaching and support have all of the critical ingredients to produce change in LT teams and enable LT teams to introduce LT to their school and integrate LT into their adult community. As evidence, all eight schools that completed this initial two-year intervention showed LT uptake and four of the eight schools became fully-implementing LT schools as evidenced by high quantity and quality of implementation and teacher

responsiveness to LT. The fact that half of the LT schools showed full uptake represents impressive success of LT given that the study spanned only two years and that the facilitators were implementing LT with the first cohort of LT participants.

Over the course of the two years, the research team and developers held a series of conversations to convey feedback about LT to recommend modifications and changes. Early on, the conversation focused on whom the principals selected to be part of the LT team and how to help guide that decision-making in future cohorts. Also, the early conversations focused on the challenges that almost all schools encountered in explaining the purpose of LT to their school staff. Discussion led to strategies and approaches for supporting LT teams in this work. Yet another conversation occurred about the use of the *Touchstones* both in the retreat settings and back in the schools. Further, the research team and developers had a series of conversations about trust-building as a dynamic process and the ways in which attending to the adult relationships in schools often brings about disequilibrium and discomfort before producing positive change.

### **Evidence for LT Efficacy**

The results revealed very promising evidence that coaching and training in LT produced actual facilitation of LT practices in schools. The data show that all LT teams trained in LT were capable of bringing protocol elements back to their schools for use. Use of the community-building activities and exercises represented signs of LT uptake. At times, LT exposed problems in the adult community that had been hidden but were revealed through the LT retreats and then addressed in subsequent LT work. The evidence for intervention uptake should be interpreted as a promising sign that LT is, and will become, a critically important intervention for schools. Intervention uptake demonstrated that the schools perceived the need to attend to the adult community and were willing to take risks and exert effort toward improving relationships among adults in schools. Signs

of intervention uptake are remarkable, especially amidst the striking level of turbulence present in virtually all schools in the sample. The data showed that school leaders and teachers faced tremendous stress and strain over the two years. Even in only two years, we observed intensive fluctuations in personnel and high levels of principal and teacher attrition. These fluctuations are systemic in the U.S., not specific to our sample of schools. Yet, they presented another challenge to full implementation of LT (or any intervention) and also, reminded the project team of the importance of LT for facilitating ease in an otherwise difficult atmosphere.

Themes emerged from the qualitative work that showed improvements in adult social and emotional skills. The data revealed examples of teachers showing greater empathy for their principals in their leadership roles and situations in which teachers and other school staff were better at fully listening and being receptive to one another's ideas and perspectives.

The work also identified one of the great challenges in LT; that is, supporting LT teams to bring LT back to their school. Several recommendations emanate from the data and reflections with the LT developers. LT may need some differentiation in the ways that LT facilitators teach and coach LT. Some LT teams needed to receive very direct information that was very specific and concrete (e.g., implement three practices per month) whereas others would have found this level of specificity limiting to their adherence to LT. Importantly, there appears to be a need to help each principal and/or LT team to find an authentic and individualized way of communicating LT to their school.

Studying the fully-implementing schools revealed insights into the extent to which use of LT can produce change in the adult community. Facilitation of LT practices related to improved adult community and enhanced collaboration, consistent with the logic model. Further, results in the fully-implementing schools showed increases in relational trust, particularly teacher-teacher



relational trust. In addition to these positive findings about the adult community, the research team observed evidence of LT implementation described by Han and Weiss (2005, p. 675) as “generalized use of effective program techniques,” which describes broad application of program strategies and approaches that are consistent with the principles of the intervention itself. Several schools implemented and embraced LT and then applied LT approaches to new situations that emerged that were challenging. Generalized use of LT appeared at one school, for example, as the school leaders and teachers used LT to implement their teacher evaluation program. The LT protocols were used to talk and to listen to each other as the new evaluation tools were introduced and discussed.

### **Overview and Recommendations for Next Steps**

The Innovating Together project produced a successful dialogue between LT developers and researchers and used data to inform next steps in the development of LT. The collaborative work produced recommendations for next steps in LT development and research. For instance, the work clarified the need to include some additional constructs into the logic model (and new corresponding measures, as well) to fully describe the extent to which LT enhances school leaders’ and teachers’ listening skills and empathy. The work clarified the importance of the principal in relation to LT implementation and facilitated a shared understanding that others within the LT team, not just the principal, can take a lead guiding and implementing LT. The project directed attention to next steps in revising the guidebook, for instance, specific examples from the initial LT cohort will be included in the guidebook to make implementation more concrete and a new handbook will be developed for future LT facilitators. Various critical ingredients of training and coaching emerged, some of which can be amplified in future efforts. In the initial phases of LT, for example, it appears important that LT facilitators speak to the full school faculty at the initial

recruitment visit to provide a big picture view of what LT is about and how it can help their school. Facilitators can provide guidance on how to choose members of the LT team. Finally, the project produced important data and findings—results that need to be published in peer-reviewed journals as evidence of LT progress and credibility.

Innovating Together also called attention to the importance of LT in the fields of school leadership and social and emotional learning. Effective school leadership, positive adult relationships in schools, and relational trust have been identified as critical features of effective schools. Yet, LT appears to be the only intervention that exists that brings principals, teachers, and other school staff together to pause, reflect, learn skills, and then, return to their school to produce change. LT has all the critical features needed to become a model for school change. Next steps involve producing papers and conference presentations to disseminate the new knowledge gained. Intervention development is an iterative process; future work is needed to design and implement an expanded version of Leading Together that incorporates recommendations from Innovating Together and includes new, well-honed measures of LT implementation and efficacy.

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