



Springfield Public Schools: Leadership in need of Support

Problem

The Principals in the Springfield, Massachusetts Public School District has been facing numerous challenges. The City, facing bankruptcy, has been in a state of receivership and is being managed by a state assigned control board. Since 2003, teachers have been working without an updated contract and experiencing salary freezes as a result. The district has seen hundreds of qualified educators depart for other systems. Historically, the Principals in the district have been isolated from one another and from the Central Office. They had viewed one another as competitors for resources, students and staff. Like many urban school districts, the city has been challenged to meet the state testing requirements (MCAS) mandated by the National “No Child Left Behind” Initiative. With chronically underperforming schools and strained inter-school and school to Central Office communications—exacerbated by the day-to-day crisis existence—the district needed to find ways to support the front-line leaders and managers, the Principals.

Solution

Under the leadership of a new School Superintendent, the district applied for and was awarded a grant from the Wallace Reader’s Digest Foundation. The grant monies were to be spent on leadership development. Under the moniker of Project LEAD, Springfield Schools hired the Gilburg Leadership Institute to conduct a series of Leadership Laboratories® with the District Principals. The goals of the Labs were to:

- Develop small, closely bonded groups of principals who see each other as resources within a professional support network.
- Provide principals with the opportunity to evaluate and refine their own internal resources in order to be more effective change agents within their schools and the district as a whole.
- Give principals time and structure to reflect on their own personal goals and behaviors in order to consciously choose actions that will support their intentions. Impel them to choose simple, high leverage practices that will support their goals.

To date, GLI has conducted five Leadership Laboratories® with Springfield Principals with a planned sixth program to commence in the winter of 2006. In addition, GLI has supported the ongoing development of these individual cohort groups. They have continued to meet after the conclusion of their Lab experience on a monthly basis to find ways to additionally support one another and share best practices. GLI facilitators are currently providing training to help these cohort groups structure and process their own meetings to ensure their ongoing success.

Results

According to formal survey responses and anecdotal feedback, the Springfield Principals felt that the Leadership Laboratory® was one of the best—if not the best—professional development trainings they had experienced. This information is particularly telling, as Principals in the Springfield District are required to attend a spectrum of professional development trainings every

year. Participants expressed that they had increased their own level of confidence, developed stronger collegial relationships, and increased skill in managing and leading others. Many believed that their ability to balance personal and professional expectations had significantly increased, thus improving their performance on and off the job. The follow up meetings came about as a result of Principals wanting to stay connected to one another and carry the learning of the Leadership Laboratory® with them as they navigated the every day challenges of their profession. GLI's flagship program, The Leadership Laboratory® provided an antidote to the chaos that existed within the system.

For more information contact Gilburg Leadership Institute, Inc. at 413-534-6934, or visit our website: www.gilburgleadership.com.