



INTERIM REPORT

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Washington State Leadership Academy

YEAR 6 INTERIM REPORT – EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

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Members of *The BERC Group* have K–20 experiences as teachers, counselors, psychologists, building administrators, district administrators, and college professors. The team is currently working on research and evaluation projects at the national, state, regional, district, school, classroom, and student levels in over 1000 schools in Washington State and nationally.



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Executive Summary

This report documents changes in implementation of the WSLA program from its inception and evaluates the impact of the program on district and school leaders' attitudes and practices, teachers' attitudes and practices, and student achievement. To accomplish these goals, our evaluation focused on three different groups of WSLA participants. First, to study the effectiveness of the WSLA program, we followed Cohort 6 districts in their first year of the two-year program. Data collected about Cohort 6 were compared to data from the first cohort (Cohort 1) of ESDs and school districts that "graduated" from WSLA in Spring 2010 in order to track changes in the implementation of the WSLA program and the resulting impact of those changes. Second, we evaluated Cohort 5 districts in their second (final) year to assess whether changes in the program that occurred from Cohort 5 to Cohort 6 resulted in different outcomes for Cohort 6 (Year 1). Finally, to measure the sustainability of the WSLA program, we studied Cohort 1 (graduated) districts that participated in the program to see how the work they began as participants in WSLA has been maintained. Program leaders and participants noted increased state and federal requirements impacting the current educational system may impact the immediate implementation and effectiveness of WSLA.

Overall evaluation findings continue to suggest that Washington State Leadership Academy (WSLA) has had an impact on school leaders and has helped encourage a focus on student outcomes in participating districts. In general, participants reported satisfaction with their workshop and coaching experiences. Because this report only tracks one year of participation, it is difficult to determine what changes may occur over time as a result of districts' participation in WSLA. However, many participants reported they have a stronger sense of leadership and collaboration than before they began the WSLA process. Participating districts have developed or customized a Problem of Practice (POP) and put in place measures to address this problem. As a result, participants reported increases in personal leadership skills, communication, and data use. In some districts, participants believe their participation with WSLA will have an impact on teaching practices as well as student achievement. Many districts have adopted instructional frameworks in conjunction with their work with WSLA. While district and building administrators perceive increased collaboration and improved instruction, many teachers were unfamiliar with the WSLA process, suggesting a breakdown in communication regarding the goals and functions of the academy.

The WSLA program structure and implementation plan has remained relatively constant over time, with one exception. The WSLA program continues to utilize the six strand curriculum over a two-year period with coach support. However, Cohort 6 participants experienced a change in Problem of Practice (POP) implementation. Prior to 2013-2014, Year 1 participants developed POPs based on their individual district needs, whereas current Year 1 (Cohort 6) participants were provided one program-wide POP created by WSLA staff and reviewed by district leaders across the state. WSLA leadership identified the need for a common POP that integrates several state and federal initiatives through conversations with superintendents. WSLA participants create a theory of action that addresses the POP and is unique to the district. The majority of interviews with participants and WSLA staff found the change in POP made a positive impact to the program. WSLA participants identified the impact of a given POP as contributing to significant time savings and providing relevance to current participant issues. While participants and WSLA staff agree the

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broadness of the POP contributes to relevancy, some believe the program-wide POP should be more specific.

To determine differences in WSLA perceptions over time, evaluators compared scores between cohorts and year of participation in the program. Factor scores from the WSLA Participant Survey suggest the duration of participation in the program may be correlated with increased positive attitudes and practices around the six curricular strands, as scores were generally higher for Cohort 5 (Year 2) participants and coaches than those of Cohort 6 (Year 1). A similar pattern was observed with Cohort 1 (graduated) participants demonstrating significant increases in results from Year 1 to Year 2 participation, suggesting districts' attitudes and practices change positively over time. A comparison between Cohort 1 (Years 2 and 1) and Cohort 5 (Year 2) and Cohort 6 (Year 1) reveal some significant differences, with teachers demonstrating the largest difference. In most cases, Cohort 1 scored the factors higher than Cohort 5 in their second year of participation and higher than Cohort 6 in their first year of participation. This suggests that Cohort 1 districts may have had more of these practices in place prior to participating in WSLA, and this pattern is often observed with early volunteers. While baseline data for Cohort 5 is not available, collectively, this pattern of results suggests that administrators and coaches observed changed attitudes and practices for Cohort 5. There is less evidence, however, that teachers observed these changes. Qualitative data supported this finding, with participants attributing changes in attitudes and practices to the work with their coach, to the professional development provided through WSLA workshops, and to the focus on the POP.

When asked whether they believed the changes made as part of their participation in WSLA are sustainable, most stakeholders answered affirmatively. Many participants explained how the WSLA process has become embedded into their standard operating procedures. Building the capacity of leaders within districts is a strength of WSLA, which helps foster sustainability. However, few teams rated themselves at the level of “sustaining” on the WSLA curricular strand rubric. Qualitative findings from Cohort 1 participants suggest graduated districts are sustaining the work they did with WSLA; however, participants listed some common barriers to the sustainability of WSLA work including time, money, staff turnover, and (to some extent) state and federal initiatives. To further describe the sustainability and potential impact on student achievement for Cohort 1, evaluators analyzed student achievement data across Washington State. Evaluators gathered district level achievement data from OSPI's Washington State Report Card for all subject areas from 2006 to 2013. Overall, for all grade levels and subject areas, the models show no effect for WSLA Cohort 1 or any interaction between WSLA Cohort 1 and any of the time variables. This indicates that there was no statistically significant difference in the proficiency growth trend between WSLA Cohort 1 districts and other districts in the state. Therefore, while participants report that their behavior as leaders have changed positively, there is not a direct link to changes in student achievement.

Based on qualitative and quantitative findings, researchers suggest the following recommendations: further differentiate support at regional workshops, continually review and update program curriculum and coaching practices, enhance communication for stakeholders, increase program accountability measures, and provide ongoing support for graduated cohorts and leadership changes.

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