



Fairfax County (Va.) Public Schools

CCL's customized programs and partnering expertise put a foundation under a school district's complex leadership development initiative.

In the mid-1970s, Fairfax County, Virginia, began experiencing a tremendous population boom, with the public schools growing at the rate of 6,000 students per year. As was inevitable, three decades later the school district faced the impending retirement of a large majority of its most experienced leaders. The challenge was to accelerate the development of a new generation of administrators, teacher leaders and other key personnel for the Fairfax Public Schools system.

“The issue for us was how to start incubating pools of people and then accelerate those pools,” said Andy Cole, director of Employee Performance and Development at Fairfax, the 12th largest K–12 district in the country. “I went out looking for an organization that could provide the foundation for developing large numbers of people for excellence in an intentional way.”

Fairfax chose as its partner the Center for Creative Leadership (CCL®), which has collaborated with educators on a number of complex leadership initiatives. The partnership with CCL's Education Sector presented an opportunity to create sustainable leadership across time rather than provide “single shot” programmatic responses. When it became evident that funding a plan of such size and import would require outside resources, the Fairfax officials went out, using CCL's global reputation for excellence for leverage, and won a series of renewable grants as part of the Wallace Foundation's national Learning, Empowering, Assessing and Developing (LEAD) initiative.

With Fairfax's growth and diversity issues, the district decided to focus its first development efforts on schools with the largest percentages of disadvantaged students. CCL became the major vendor for LEAD Fairfax, and the ideas formulated in early discussions with district officials became elements of the overall plan.

Critical attributes of the program included focused individual development plans; learning cohorts of principals, assistant principals, administrative interns, teacher leaders and support personnel; and site-based professional development embedded in daily practice. As a foundation piece for principals, CCL implemented a threeday

OBJECTIVES:

- Attract, develop and put in place a new generation of leaders, including a diverse corps of superintendents, principals, assistant principals and teacher leaders
- Create sustainable leadership and a diverse learning community across multiple levels
- Obtain funding needed to support a complex and expanding leadership initiative

OUTCOMES:

- Nearly 1,900 persons at multiple levels graduated from the program in the first three years and more than four-dozen positions were filled from this talent pool
- The LEAD Fairfax program will be supported by grants from the Wallace Foundation through 2007
- The program was expanded to include students and the community and was made sustainable within the district

Educational Leadership Development Program (ELDP) featuring customized 360-degree assessments, simulations and action-learning activities.

“We spend a lot of time in the first tier of our program focusing on leading people,” said Cole, the LEAD Fairfax project director. “We wanted the principals to get the benefit of a full leadership experience.” Following this phase, participants progress to two additional tiers of skill-building and stretch assignments within the schools and the school system.

The school district staff began to become involved at a deeper level as CCL programming became more a part of the LEAD project and the district culture. As groups of staff moved through the various programs, they also became advisors to persons who would go through training at a later date.

In the third year of the program, Fairfax's goal to create in-house sustainability was achieved when LEAD staff was trained to perform as CCL adjunct faculty to conduct the ELDP sessions and deliver CCL's SKILLSCOPE® assessment tool.