

League of Democratic Schools



**A program of the Institute for Educational Inquiry
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BRIEF DESCRIPTION OF THE LEAGUE OF DEMOCRATIC SCHOOLS

Purpose of the League

The Institute for Educational Inquiry's League of Democratic Schools (LODS) is organized (1) to promote professional development that emphasizes the growth of students as individuals who are successful members of a democratic society, and (2) to help preserve schools that successfully advance the Agenda for Education in a Democracy.

Characteristics of Schools

All League schools strive to be exemplars regarding the following characteristics:

- **Democratic purpose:** LODS schools believe that the primary purpose of schooling is to develop in young people the knowledge, skills, and attitudes students require for successful participation in our nation's social and political democracy.
- **Student achievement:** Students in such schools are successful academically and socially.
- **Ongoing professional development:** All members of the school community engage in continuous learning.
- **Approaches to learning:** These are schools that use a wide variety of approaches to learning including engaging students with parents and other adults within the community.
- **Personalization:** These schools deliberately personalize the relationships among students, teachers, parents, and administrators either by being small enough so that faculty members can gather as a group for dialogue or, if larger, by making other arrangements to facilitate communications among the

members of the school community.

Structure of the League

Initially, the League consisted of twelve schools located in two geographic clusters: the Northwest and the Rocky Mountain/Plains States. First steps have been taken to develop an Eastern Region, and as of 2007–2008, the Northwest Region has been modified to become a Western Region including California, Oregon, and Washington. The geographic clustering of the schools is designed to help schools learn from each other and to enable regional as well as national activities for the League.

In order to encourage cross-age activity and because secondary and elementary teachers have much to learn from each other, elementary, middle, and high schools are included with various age configurations represented in participating schools.

Each school is required to identify a partner agency (higher education institution, business, or other agency) that will assist them with their work. In many, but not all, cases, these partners are members of the National Network for Educational Renewal.

League Activities

League activities can be classified generally under one of two not always mutually exclusive headings: (1) professional development and growth and (2) protection and preservation. The schools included in this League are in many ways an endangered species. However, it is not enough to protect and preserve them; it is important to support their continued growth and development.

Professional development and growth is a key component of the work of the League.

The League seeks to support professional development that will

- Help members of school communities clarify their core values and build their internal capacity for renewal based on a clear understanding of their purpose and vision—**capacity building**;
- Provide members of the school communities with materials that will assist them—**materials**;
- Facilitate mutual assistance among the members of the League—**mutual assistance**;
- Encourage and promote constructive relationships between the schools and external support agencies—**supportive relationships**;
- Conduct and share research/inquiry on successful practices—**research**;
- Build stronger ties between community members and professional school employees—**community engagement**; and
- Expand school administrators' knowledge and skills so they provide effective leadership consistent with the Agenda for Education in a Democracy—**leadership development**.

Protection and preservation constitutes the second main component of League activity. To some extent, the professional development activities described above help preserve the schools. For example, establishing partnerships expands the support base for each school. In addition to the professional development work, the League strives to enhance the chances of survival for the schools by

- Strengthening their ability to obtain support for agencies on which they are dependent—**local support**;
- Providing national recognition—**recognition**;

- Providing them with guidance in communications with the media—**media**;
- Providing technical assistance to them in obtaining external funding—**funding**; and
- Providing access to IEI senior staff members and to associates from the National Network for Educational Renewal for help in problem solving—**expert help**.

Commitments by the IEI to the Schools

The IEI provides the following support to participating schools

- Funding to support travel, lodging, meals, and materials for participation by school leaders from each cluster for an annual leadership session in Seattle;
- Funding to support coordinators for each region;
- Technical support visits by Institute for Educational Inquiry (IEI) staff members/regional coordinators to schools in each cluster;
- Cross-site visits as funding permits;
- Books and other materials designed to help schools with their work;
- An occasional newsletter that shares information about work in the League; and
- Membership recognition.

Commitments by the Schools to the League and the IEI

Participating schools agree to

- Send an approved number of participants at IEI cost to the annual leadership session in Seattle;
- Help organize and participate in the regional cluster leadership program in spring or summer at their own expense;

- Provide required annual documentation of their work by September 30, 2008;
- Have a university or other agency as a partner;
- Obtain endorsement from their governing agency (school district in most cases) for participating; and
- Provide a \$500 contribution for membership.

Membership in the League of Democratic Schools

Western Region

Regional Coordinator—Antony Smith

- Friday Harbor High School, Friday Harbor, Washington
- Lincoln Elementary, Olympia, Washington
- Westside Village Magnet School, Bend, Oregon
- Whatcom Day Academy, Bellingham, Washington
- Fairview Elementary School, Modesto, California
- Franklin Elementary School, Modesto, California
- El Vista Elementary School, Modesto, California
- Pleasant Grove School, Pleasant Grove, California

Rocky Mountain/Plains States Region

Regional Coordinator—Judy MacDonald

- Eagle Rock School and Professional Development Center, Estes Park, Colorado

- Lab School for Creative Learning, Fort Collins, Colorado
- New Vista High School, Boulder, Colorado
- Wakefield Community School K-6, Wakefield, Nebraska
- Wakefield Community School 7-12, Wakefield, Nebraska
- Woods Learning Center, Casper, Wyoming
- University of Wyoming Lab School, Laramie, Wyoming

Eastern Region

Regional Coordinators—Tom Poetter and Stephanie Kenney

- Central Academy, Middletown, Ohio
- Stilson Elementary, Bulloch County, Georgia
- The Bulloch County Performance Learning Center, Statesboro, Georgia
- Lehman Alternative Community School, Ithaca, New York
- Center for Educational Options, Henry County Schools, Kentucky
- Park Forest Elementary School, University Park, Pennsylvania

Benefits for Schools

- Capacity building related to the school's vision, core values, and renewal;
- Facilitated sharing of strategies and ideas being used among members of the League for:
 - Integrating democracy in the curriculum
 - Integrating democratic practices in schools
 - Engaging the school faculty as a group for dialogue
 - Facilitating communication among the

- members of the school community
 - Engaging, building and/or strengthening engagement between community members and professional school employees, external support agencies;
- Professional development provided for teachers and administrators to expand knowledge and strengthen connections between classroom practice and the Agenda for Education in a Democracy;
- Research/Inquiry is conducted and shared on successful practices;
- Leadership development that expands knowledge and skills for effective leadership that is consistent with the Agenda for Education in a Democracy;
- Collaboration in grant-getting to support initiatives, problem solving, professional development activities, research, and conference presentations;
- Materials and expert help are provided to assist members of the school community with the work, as well as facilitation of mutual assistance among members of the League;
- Local support is strengthened through communication and collaboration;
- Visitation sites and networking with the national networks that are associated with the Institute for Educational Inquiry;
- Provides a forum for support and sustainability; and
- Recognition nationally.
- Sharing curriculum development ideas across colleges/universities (local and national);
- Development of supportive relationships/partnerships between and among area schools, institutions of higher education, business, other agencies, and other institutions of higher education;
- Collaboration for grant proposals, research questions;
- Conducting and sharing research focused on successful practices among the League;
- Opportunity for simultaneous renewal and participation in national networks that are associated with the Institute for Educational Inquiry;
- Ongoing professional development; and
- Recognition nationally.

Benefits for Colleges

- Sites that are practicing democracy provide a place for teachers, teacher candidates, school leaders, administrators, and community members to see it and work with it;
- Focused work with schools, teachers, administrators, and the school community;

LODS Activities for 2007–2008

During 2007–2008, the League of Democratic Schools will seek to:

- 1. Continue the development of the League so that it is helpful to the preservation and continued development of the schools involved.**

Site visits by regional coordinators will be important and of most benefit if arrangements are made for the coordinators to interact with key members of the school district or governing group for the school. In addition, we will continue to seek alliances with other initiatives that have similar aims to the League.

We anticipate paying increased attention to helping schools engage effectively with the communities they serve.

- 2. Provide professional development that will strengthen the schools' capacity to function effectively as democratic schools.**

During site visits by regional coordinators, we hope that at least one specific professional development activity jointly planned by the regional coordinator and the school can be included.

We hope that each school and college partner will plan for at least one professional development activity specifically designed to meet the needs of the school as it seeks to advance the Agenda for Education in a Democracy.

During the LODS annual meeting in Seattle, we anticipate that there will be specific professional development activities for the principals from member schools as well as other opportunities for networking and sharing among participants.

During each of the regional meetings, we anticipate that local planning will produce professional development experiences for

principals and others connected with the schools.

- 3. Strengthen the college partnership relationships with the schools, including strengthening ties between the NNER and the LODS.**

During the fall, we plan to conduct discussions with representatives from colleges in four meetings. These meetings will focus on helping colleges understand the benefits to them and to the schools in active partnership with League schools. We will encourage the colleges to strengthen existing partnerships and to help us recruit additional members. Many of the colleges will be affiliated with the NNER. In addition to the four meetings, we will conduct several sessions during the NNER's annual conference in West Virginia during October 2007. These sessions will be designed to provide participants with more knowledge of the League and ways in which they can increase their participation with it.

- 4. Expand the Western Region to include schools in California and additional schools in Washington and to continue the development of the Eastern of the League.**

We hope to add at least three schools from California and two from Washington by the time of the annual meeting in January 2008. We also hope to add four schools to the Eastern Region by the time of the annual meeting.