

# LSC Core Update

## UPCOMING EVALUATION EFFORTS

### Lessons Learned

The core evaluation involves collecting the same kinds of information from each LSC project, aggregating the data, and analyzing the results across projects. The cross-site analyses conducted to-date have identified a number of strengths of the LSC initiative overall, as well as areas that are proving problematic. NSF has been able to use the cross-site results, as well as information from PI and evaluator reports, and site visits to participating districts, to choose areas of focus for PI meetings, to work with individual projects, and to modify the LSC solicitation to increase the likelihood of impact on teachers and, ultimately, their students.

While evaluating the LSC program overall has been helpful, NSF would like to go further and identify particularly effective approaches and the circumstances in which they work best. The 72 projects funded thus far, and the additional projects being awarded each year, can be viewed as "natural experiments", and NSF has asked HRI to look at them in this light in order to identify lessons learned about planning and implementing successful initiatives.

Some steps in identifying lessons learned are already underway, and others are planned for the near future. A longitudinal component has been added to the core evaluation questionnaires and observations to enable us to look at change in classroom practice as a function of teacher participation in LSC professional development. HRI has also asked PIs to provide information about studies they have conducted (or are planning to conduct) to assess the impact of the LSC on student achievement. Additional activities

in the planning stage include collecting data on project strategies and conducting a conference to talk about lessons learned.

In the next few weeks, HRI will ask a subset of PIs to help us pilot a "Project Strategies Questionnaire" so we will be able to use that information in the planned longitudinal analyses. Items under development focus on such areas as:

- ☞ Who provides content and pedagogy expertise;
- ☞ The relative emphasis the project places on deepening teachers' content knowledge, knowledge of effective pedagogy, and familiarity with the instructional materials to be used in the classroom;
- ☞ What kinds of implementation support are provided for teachers during the academic year; and
- ☞ The strategy for ensuring administrative support.

Once the pilot process is completed, and the questionnaire revised accordingly, each project will be asked to complete a project strategies questionnaire. This information will then be used in the hierarchical linear modeling (HLM) analyses of the teacher questionnaires to help identify whether certain strategies are more effective than others in changing classroom practice for projects of particular characteristics (e.g., subject, grade range, and size).

The various quantitative analyses will be complemented by qualitative work as well. While project progress reports and evaluator reports have been helpful in providing a picture of the individual projects, and in identifying potentially important areas for investigation, it has been difficult to glean from them the kind of detail NSF is requesting. For example, quite a few reports have described as strengths of the

project the fact that there are both project-wide activities and activities that take place at individual schools. In addition to knowing that interweaving these activities seems to be a good idea, NSF would like to determine whether some sequences of activities work better than others. Similarly, projects have reported both successes and challenges in using teacher leaders; NSF wants to learn as much as possible about preparing and deploying teacher leaders to maximize their effectiveness.

A "Lessons Learned" conference has been tentatively scheduled for June 5-6 in Washington, DC. Each project will be invited to send a team comprised of the PI and lead evaluator, with the core evaluation contract paying travel expenses for the former and the project paying for the latter, using funds originally budgeted for the annual evaluator meeting. While details are still to be worked out, the preliminary plan is that we will identify a number of areas of focus ahead of time and then convene small groups to talk about what has and hasn't worked in each, and why, and what advice they might give to future projects facing these challenges.

### Assessing Impact of LSC on Student Achievement

In mid-February, PIs were asked to respond to several questions about studies they had underway, completed, or planned in order to assess the impact of the LSC on student achievement. PIs who have not yet provided this information should do so as soon as possible, accessing the request at:

[http://www.horizon-research.com/LSC/pi\\_questionnaire.html](http://www.horizon-research.com/LSC/pi_questionnaire.html)

## SPRING 2000 DATA COLLECTION

### Longitudinal Classroom Observations

Starting in the spring of 2000, the core evaluation is transitioning to a system of longitudinal classroom observations. When fully implemented, a typical project will observe each of 16 teachers three times over the life of the project: baseline, two years later, and at the end of the project. Depending on the duration of the project, the number of "subjects" addressed, and the number of teachers already observed, projects will be observing varying numbers of teachers this spring, from none to as many as 32.

NSF has approved the use of core evaluation contract funds to provide incentives to teachers who agree to participate in this component of the evaluation. Projects may implement the incentive system in one of two ways:

#### 1. Redeemable Vouchers

Along with the sample for classroom observations, lead evaluators will be sent copies of a special catalogue of mathematics and science education materials and a voucher form to be given to each teacher at the conclusion of the observation. Teachers will be able to mail or fax their voucher and order form to a distribution center here in North Carolina, redeeming them for "5 points" (roughly \$25 worth of materials) with shipping and handling included. We have used a similar incentive system in the past with good results, so we are hoping it will work here, as well.

#### 2. Flexible Incentive Funds

The project may bill HRI for "\$25 times n" (where n equals the number of completed classroom observations from those *required* for the core evaluation this spring). Projects will then be able to use these funds (and additional funds, if they wish) to provide whatever incentives make sense to them for individual teachers and/or schools.

Note that teachers included in "supplemental observations" paid for by the core evaluation or the project *do not* figure into the incentive allotment for the project, although projects may decide to provide incentives to them as a matter of equity.

### School Demographics

This year, projects were asked to provide race/ethnicity information for each participating school in a school sampling frame, and those items were removed from the principal questionnaire. While this system was initiated in response to requests from quite a few projects in order to reduce the burden on principals, other projects are finding it difficult to provide that information and have suggested we go back to getting it from the individual schools.

Given the importance of having demographic information on participating schools, NSF has asked that we follow up with projects to make sure we get that information one way or another. Accordingly, if a project is unable to provide race/ethnicity information for one or more schools in the sampling frame, we will send the project a "supplementary" page to be administered to each such principal along with whatever version of the questionnaire that project is scheduled to get this year. (As part of the streamlining of the core evaluation, NSF has decided to have each project administer the full principal questionnaire at only three points in the project: baseline, two years later, and at the end of the project. A shortened version will be administered in the other years.)

### Lead Evaluator Responsibilities

NSF asked us to remind projects that lead evaluators are required to participate in HRI-provided training on assessing professional development *programs* (not just sessions) and to conduct at least 3 of the 5–8 required professional development observations each year. While the additional observations can be carried out by other evaluators who have attended HRI training sessions (or have been trained in session observations by the lead evaluator), it is important that the lead evaluators themselves have ample first-hand knowledge as they prepare the evaluation reports. It is also important that the observed sessions encompass the range of project professional development activities and be dispersed

throughout the year in order to represent the project fairly and accurately.

### NSF Approval of Evaluation Team

Projects are reminded that prior to changing lead evaluators or sending observers for observation training, a project must first submit the proposed individual's resume to the program officer at NSF for approval. In addition to expertise in the project's subject of focus, NSF is looking for familiarity with schools and classroom practice. Once NSF has approved, you may send HRI the names.

### Questionnaire Reminder

When administering follow-up questionnaires to non-responding principals and teachers, you must bubble-in the school or individual's LSC ID in the "For office use only" box. Questionnaires returned without a proper ID number will not count toward the project's questionnaire response rate.

NSF has established 80 percent as the minimally-acceptable response rate for teacher questionnaires and a goal as close as possible to 100 percent for principal questionnaires.

## CORE EVALUATION REPORTS

### Reporting Guidelines

We have had a number of requests from lead evaluators for guidelines for the reports they will need to submit in the fall of 2000. We do not anticipate being able to provide the reporting guidelines until the end of June. NSF Program Officers make decisions about the questions evaluators are asked to address each year based on the ongoing information needs of NSF policy-makers and Congress, and end of June gives NSF as much time as possible to make these decisions while still providing ample time for evaluators to prepare their reports.

## FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

**Q** Is it possible to get a master list of teachers and their LSC IDs? I have been under the impression that the questionnaire number was the teacher's ID and I want to check our records.

**A** The questionnaire number is indeed the teacher's LSC ID, but for a given year only. HRI keeps track of the LSC IDs each year and keeps files for linking questionnaire and observation data with particular teachers from year to year. It is the project's sequential ID number that remains the same. Links between the project ID and the questionnaire ID are made available to the evaluator, but not to project staff, to maintain the confidentiality of questionnaire data. You will notice that the 1999–2000 sampling frame guidelines instruct projects to

leave all teachers in this file from now on (keeping the project's ID consistent through the years), coding teachers as "E" for eligible, "I" for ineligible, and "G" for gone.



**Q** In the past, teachers have been assured that there is a very small probability of their being observed a second time. Now, we are being asked to observe them two and three times. How do we explain?

**A** The revised longitudinal data collection system is meant to provide a better measure of the impact of the LSC. You should explain this change to teachers and *ensure them that the observations are not being used by the district as teacher evaluations* (thus the masking of identify by the use of changing LSC IDs distinct from the project's identifi-

cation number). Explain the incentive system that your project is using (see "Longitudinal Classroom Observations" on page 2) to provide a token of appreciation for their willingness to be observed and tell them that they will receive a similar incentive for the final observation when the LSC project is completed. As in previous years, projects will receive a back-up sample to be used if teachers from the original sample are unable, or unwilling, to be observed.



**Q** What do we do with a school that has left the project, given that all teachers are now to remain in the sampling frame?

**A** Leave the school in the school sampling frame; create a new column for school eligibility; code these schools with a "G" for gone.

## New Web Site Structure

<http://www.horizon-research.com/LSC/>

The HRI website for LSC 1999–2000 data collection has undergone major revision in recent weeks. Among the featured sections you may find useful:

### New Sections

#### Principal Investigators

Here, PIs may view their data collection schedules for the current year (with links to relevant documents) to keep abreast of the project's core evaluation requirements. A project-specific username and password will be issued to each PI.

#### Data Collection Manual

The entire LSC 1999–2000 Core Evaluation Data Collection Manual (orange version in hard copy) is online in PDF format (requires Acrobat Reader). This section now contains all LSC protocols and questionnaires, as well as sampling frame information.

### Revised Sections

#### Lead Evaluators

This section has undergone a major facelift. As before, lead evaluators may view summaries of data submitted for their project via the web. Before any observation protocols are submitted via the web, **lead evaluators should go to this section to update their list of certified observers** for both classroom observations and professional development observations. The lead evaluator must access this section using the project-specific username and password assigned to the project. For those of you who have forgotten or misplaced these pieces of information, click on "Log-in Help" for assistance. This section also includes the project's data collection schedule for the current year, with links to relevant documents.

#### News, Reports, Presentations

This section is updated with the publishing of each new LSC Core Update newsletter. It also contains frequently requested documents such as the LSC Cross-Site Reports, a list of certified observers and lead evaluators who are willing to consider taking on additional work, and a list of videos used in observation training.

The **Online Forms** section requires the current general lsc username (\*\*\*\*\*) and password (\*\*\*\*\*) in order to access protocols for data submission. In addition, your web browser must be JavaScript enabled for successful use of LSC online forms.

Each time you visit the web page, note the "What's New" sidebar highlighted in yellow on the left-hand margin. Postings of upcoming deadlines and events will be featured here, along with links to pertinent documents.

## Dates to Remember



**March 1–May 31**

**Spring Data Collection Activities**

**June 5–6 (tentative)**

**Lessons Learned Conference**

**June 30**

**Questionnaires Due at HRI**

**District Information Forms Due**  
Baseline and Final Year Projects

**July 1**

**HRI Sends Reporting Guidelines**

**July 31**

**HRI Sends Data Tables**

**August 31**

**End of Data Collection Year**

**September 15**

**Description of Data Collection Activities Form Due at HRI**

**October 15**

## Annual LSC Core Evaluation Requirements

### All Projects:

**Professional Development Observations**  
(5–8 per year, 2–5 for Baseline, optional for Final Year)

**Principal Questionnaires**  
(population)

**Individual Teacher Interviews**  
(10; not conducted Baseline Year)

**Project Team Interviews**

### In addition, Baseline Year, Year Two, and Final Year Projects:

**Classroom Observations**  
(16 per subject; in 1999–2000 this will vary)

**Teacher Questionnaires**  
(300 per subject, plus program sample)

Most data collection activities are conducted March–May annually, except Professional Development Observation and the Project Team Interviews, which may be conducted throughout the data collection year (September 1–August 31).

The PI is responsible for making sure that core evaluation data are collected in a timely fashion and reported to HRI each fall for

## Year Four Cross-Site Report

The “Local Systemic Change through Teacher Enhancement: Year Four Cross-Site Report” and “Executive Summary” are now available on the Web at:

[www.horizon-research.com/LSC/](http://www.horizon-research.com/LSC/)

Hard copies may also be obtained by contacting Horizon Research, Inc.

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