



PARTNERS

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“ALL CHILDREN WILL LEARN”

DEVELOPING SMALL LEARNING COMMUNITIES IN NEWARK HIGH SCHOOLS

Four of Newark’s largest public high schools—Barringer, East Side, Malcom X. Shabazz, and West Side—have entered a three-year commitment to ensure that *All Children Will Learn*, by transforming their large student-faculty populations into Small Learning Communities (SLCs). With training and technical assistance provided by a team of facilitators from the Princeton Center for Leadership Training (PCLT), Newark staff are beginning to turn their vision of developing academically rigorous, safe, and supportive school environments into a reality.

What are Small Learning Communities (SLCs)?

SLCs are thematic schools-within-a-school that foster close relationships and provide students with a vision for their future vocations. Students are divided among SLCs and become part of a cohesive community of peers and educators. In addition to a standard academic curriculum, students develop practical, marketable skills in exciting fields such as Aerospace Technology, Fashion Design, Science and Health, Travel and Tourism, Law, Business, Journalism, and Social and Consumer Services. Teachers seek to actively engage students in their learning to maintain motivation and improve academic performance.



At a PCLT training, Stakeholder Team members from Malcolm X. Shabazz High School planned how to move forward with their new Small Learning Communities.

Why Small Learning Communities?

Urban youth are at-risk for dropping out of school, using drugs, and engaging in other high-risk behaviors. Educational research indicates that a significant number of students leave school as early as 9th grade. The purpose of the SLC model is to provide each student with the academic and social/emotional support he or she needs to graduate high school and enter the work force or go to college.

How does PCLT help?

In each school, PCLT builds the capacity of a core group of Stakeholders. These Stakeholder Teams promote SLC development, focusing on three critical areas:

• **Teacher Teams:** Each SLC is organized into smaller teacher teams that collaborate to improve instruction and integrate

curriculum. Teachers will expand a repertoire of instructional learning strategies during a week-long summer institute. They also will participate in action planning on a regular basis to develop the SLC.

• **Social and Emotional Programming and Support:** The faculty employs multiple approaches to build lasting, meaningful relationships with students and ensure their

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PRESIDENT'S MESSAGE

URBAN SCHOOL REFORM IN NEW JERSEY: FIVE ELEMENTS THAT CAN MAKE A DIFFERENCE

PCLT's most recent opportunity to help make a difference in urban schools is taking place in Newark, where we are teaming with Newark administrators, teachers, and parents to create Small Learning Communities within four large comprehensive high schools. Newark has taken on the challenge of making significant improvements in the way students learn and teachers teach. To succeed, they know they need to get beyond "putting out fires all day long," as one teacher described it.

Unfortunately, operating in crisis mode can become the norm, while having time to plan and participate in training is all too rare.

I believe that the following five elements must be in place for any change initiative to be successful. Without these elements, we cannot build a strong foundation upon which to launch a new system of reforms.

1. Relationships have to be a priority and nurtured every day. This means taking the time to talk, get to know one another, find out what we have in common, and create a climate of respect and rapport among all parties invested in making changes—teachers, administrators, parents, students, and outside critical friends.

2. We must be clear about what needs to change, so we can identify a few crucial areas to work on and stay focused on these educational priorities.

3. We need to move away from working in isolation and instead create teams of educators and parents who share a common vision, who have the autonomy to make decisions, and who are willing to be held accountable for the results of those decisions.

4. We have to put students' needs first, and embrace flexibility and innovative practices over rigid schedules and out-dated regulations. This means using common

sense and being willing to overcome the myriad of obstacles that block our path every day.

5. Finally, we have to recognize that there is a state of urgency to our mission. We have been failing New Jersey's urban youth for too long, and we can't let one more year pass by without making

some significant changes in the way we use time, space, and resources in our schools.

If not now, when? If not by us, by whom?

Sharon Rose Powell

Sharon Rose Powell, Ed.D.
President

"ALL CHILDREN WILL LEARN"

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well-being. These modalities include PCLT's peer leadership programs, advisory structures, Freshmen Seminar, and innovative instructional techniques.

• **Parent Involvement and Support:** Each school adopts PCLT's Parents Supporting Parents Network (PSPN). Through PSPN, groups of parents and educators are trained to run Family Night events

that focus on reaching the parents of incoming 9th graders. In small groups, parents share their experiences, improve communications with their own teens, and develop avenues for collaborating with the schools to ensure the success of all students.

Faculty and administration are very enthusiastic about the process. After their initial inservice, teachers

"We are all sharing the same problems and looking for solutions. This staff development surely put us on our way."

Newark Faculty Member
PCLT Inservice

"We were able to address each other's concerns and begin a dialogue as to how to implement changes..."

Newark Faculty Member
PCLT Inservice

reported that they had begun an important dialogue to address student needs, solidified a common vision, and developed a sense of hope for the future of their school.

If you'd like to learn more about SLCs and other school restructuring strategies, please call Sharon Rose Powell at 609-252-9300 x 110, or send an email to Spowell@princetonleadership.org.

DAYS OF LEARNING—WHY HAVE THEM?

DAYS OF LEARNING AN INTEGRAL PART OF THE LEADERSHIP EXPERIENCE

It doesn't get much better than this: you and a group of students in your school are bonded together through a peer leadership program that establishes a cause, builds a sense of purpose, and offers knowledge and skills through which students can share their gifts with other students...

But it *does* get better. Picture 700 peer leaders from schools all over New Jersey, all in one place at one time, sharing knowledge and skills with one another as they generate more energy and motivation than you can imagine.

That's what PCLT's *Days of Learning* look like. For almost 20 years, our statewide leadership programs have incorporated an annual gathering of student leaders and their advisors. In 2002-2003, for instance, PCLT sponsored three days of learning, for NJ Peer to Peer (NJPTP), REBEL 2, and NJ Teen PEP. These events have proven to be so popular, that some programs also hold regional events, such as NJPTP's *Marches On*, to ensure all peer leaders can reap the benefits of these gatherings.

Student-led workshops, motivational speakers, visioning and networking activities, stacks upon stacks of box lunches, shared causes, getting to know kids from other schools, inspiring words from the governor



A team of peer leaders works on a project at Marches On, a NJPTP regional Day of Learning event held in April.



REBEL 2 students learned about media literacy at the Statewide Summit held in March. They then put their skills to work and designed counter-advertisements like the one shown above created by the students at Great Meadows Middle School in Warren County. All the ads will be compiled into a "Truth Book." Look out Big Tobacco!

or our sponsors, attention from the press—all of these add up to the highlight of the year for middle and high school peer leaders in PCLT's statewide programs.

Leadership means knowing you can step up to the plate as a strong individual. Leadership also means knowing that you have made a commitment to something meaningful. In that regard, *Days of*

"I got to meet all different people and...I think this program prepares us for future leadership."

**Peer Leader
Day of Learning event**

"This event has opened my mind to new ideas and was an excellent learning experience."

**Peer Leader
Day of Learning event**

Learning are an irreplaceable component of the PCLT leadership experience. Meaning is both shared and created as New Jersey's young leaders experience their strength and their power in numbers.



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PEER GROUP CONNECTION — OLÉ!

PGC EXPANDS INTERNATIONALLY

Peer Group Connection (PGC) recently added a second chapter south of the border. No, not in Delaware but in South America! In February 2003, the Princeton Center for Leadership Training (PCLT) ventured to Lima, Peru to train a diverse stakeholder team from the Colegio de Franklin D. Roosevelt School, an American School. Colegio Roosevelt joins our other South American chapter, Escola Graduada de Sao Paulo in Brazil, which has been an active PGC school since 1990.

According to lead trainer Angela Spence DeGraaf, Colegio Roosevelt's faculty and staff were eager to put Peer Group Connection into action. Through PGC, they will be able to help the school's younger students adjust to the many cultures and countries represented in the school. "[The stakeholders] loved the training and love PGC," said Angela. "[They] traveled to Brazil to visit Escola Graduada...and were amazed at the peer leaders' poise and maturity as well as their ability to

facilitate groups."

Ian Bayly, headmaster of Colegio Roosevelt, described the PGC training as "...an outstanding experience. By the time [the training] was over, we were all committed to ensuring that PGC took off at Colegio Roosevelt."

Mr. Bayly recently sent PCLT an update reporting that they held a workshop to select their peer leaders and that 24 juniors applied for the positions.

We're happy to welcome Colegio Roosevelt to the PGC family. *If you would like your school to become a member of PGC, please contact Melissa Brand, Director of Special Projects, at 609-252-9300 x 120, or send an email to Mbrand@princetonleadership.org.*

"I feel that the diversity and enthusiasm of the staff will ensure [PGC's] success."

**PGC Stakeholder
Colegio Roosevelt**