Interim Evaluation of the Mid-Atlantic Laboratory for Student Success

I. Brief Overview of Laboratory

As part of the LSS interim evaluation team, I participated in a one-week site visit to the Laboratory on May 17-21, 1999. I reviewed Laboratory materials extensively and participated in numerous focus groups, presentations, and interviews with LSS staff and customers. I had full access to information, and the staff readily provided additional resources and information upon request.

II. Implementation and Management

A. To what extent is LSS doing what they were approved to do during their first three contract years?

1. Strengths

Overall LSS is meeting or exceeding all contractual obligations. LSS has assembled a highly-qualified, multi-disciplinary team that includes top-flight researchers and practitioners from a wide variety of fields, program development specialists, and collaborating schools. Under the direction of strong, focused leadership, this team is exceeding timelines for creating a direct path from research to practice through work that cuts across these groups. The partnership between the Lab director and the specialty program director contributes to a healthy intellectual energy built on the play between research and practice.

Several different boards play a strong role in the Lab's operation. The Governing Board acts in an advisory capacity and focuses on how all the pieces of the Lab fit together to create a

holistic approach to school reform, assisting with strategic decisions that need to be made to have overall positive impact on education. The board focuses on forging strong links between the research side and the practical implementation side of the Lab's work. The Stakeholder Board brings the practitioner's voice to the table, adding a different view, and the Technical Advisory Board adds strong, empirically-informed voice to this symphony, as does the cadre of Principal Investigators who work closely with LSS.

In addition to Lab personnel and formal participants in the organizational structure, LSS constantly expands its reach beyond existing members to include top scholars and practitioners in a variety of fields on an as-needed basis. Through an extensive web of strategic partnerships, LSS builds on existing regional and national strengths. Partnerships with professional organizations such as CBE and CCSSO, with high level school officials such as through the Superintendent and Dean's Network, and with practitioners has begun to create a systemic initiative that extends well beyond regional boundaries.

2. Areas of Needed Improvement

None

3. Recommendations for Improvement

None

B. To what extent is LSS using a self-monitoring process to plan and adapt activities in response to feedback and customer needs?

1. Strengths

LSS uses a data-driven, quality control system that includes collecting a wide array of data, and the Lab has a self-monitoring process in place to be able to plan and adapt activities in response to feedback and customer needs.

The technical review process for researcher publications is strong. Each paper developed is sent to at least two members of the Technical Review Board (or to specialists in the particular field) and is critiqued. Reviewers give direct feedback that includes comments throughout each paper and a scoring sheet. Respected researchers such as Susan Fuhrman, chair of the Technical Review Board, and David Monk are among the board members. Thus highly qualified researchers review the Lab's work. Prior to being sent to reviewers, there is an in-house process for screening work so that it is processed and reworked internally prior to being sent outside. Although the Technical Review Board meets only once a year, the process of review is continuous.

The quality control department holds technically correct, high quality standards and processes of quality control. Through this office, LSS has developed capacity to maintain high standards of evaluation across the Lab's work.

There is a wide array of opportunities for consumer feedback. In addition to more highly structured feedback processes such as formal needs assessments, consumers have opportunity to contribute to "what else the Lab can do to meet your needs" as a part of the ongoing work of the Lab. Once people have had opportunity use materials and training in the field, tracer studies – done by phone-- are used to compile follow-up data, with intensive sites subjected to tracer studies in greater depth. This information is looped back into the system.

2. Areas of Needed Improvement

The quality control process is quite tight for the research portion of the continuum of moving empirical understanding into the field through Lab-developed processes as well as for the evaluation of completed products and their use by consumers. There are two areas for consideration. First, the quality control process for monitoring empirical fidelity to the research

as it is translated to practice appears to be less clearly defined. This is true not just for the Lab but for the field, as well, and thus offers a gap for exploration. Second, the relative role of practitioners in relation to researchers as co-developers of products and processes seems to be uneven.

3. Recommendations for Improvement

1. As a major contribution to the procedural knowledge base, explore opportunities to develop quality control measures across the continuum of research to practice. The field has established well-recognized – though separate and distinct -- practices for holding both research and products/processes to high standards, yet there is a large gap in the procedural knowledge base on quality control measures for the translation process itself. At each point in the research-to-practice translation process, the purity of the empirical base is naturally compromised. As the process gets further and further from the empirical base, an increasing proportion of the work depends on conclusions drawn from the literature – a shift from empirical knowledge to interpretation of that knowledge. Quality control processes for the translation process itself need to be as rigorous as those already undergirding both ends of the continuum. Creating these processes would to allow the Lab to maintain the highest level of fidelity to the literature as it moves into practice and, more importantly, to inform the field in this critical and relatively untapped arena. Gains in this area would offer major contribution to the national and international procedural knowledge base on translating research to practice.

2. The role of practitioner knowledge seems to be secondary in the process of developing research-based materials and processes. Consider ways to strengthen practitioner voice in the translation process and in the development and ongoing revisions of products and processes, looping sophisticated information on product use/implementation back into the system in an ongoing way as part of the development process.

III. Quality

To what extent is LSS developing high quality products and services?

1. Strengths

Because LSS has built on its strong background, including thick empirical grounding as well as practical knowledge in comprehensive school reform, the Lab brings depth of understanding to its work. With a deep background in research on resilience and other issues of

students and schools most at risk, the director brings a significant gift of quality, field-based research and strong national connections to the Lab's front door. Thanks to the hard work of a wide array of quality researchers, practitioners, and partners, the quality of LSS work far exceeds expectations for a three-year old operation.

With the CFL process, the focuses with intelligence and depth on creating effective, sustained change at a rapid pace, challenging the concept of incremental change through a process grounded in very targeted types of planning assistance that is continuous and sustained. Specific tools, such as 20/20 analysis and ALEM, assist schools and districts in user-friendly ways to harness the strength of research in practice. An important strand of LSS field work is based on trying to better understand what it takes to get individuals in schools to have capacity to make good choices, to create more adaptable delivery systems, and to persist in maintaining change.

Through its exciting series of invitational conferences, the Lab brings in top caliber individuals – both researchers and practitioners – around issues of national, boundary-spanning importance. Because the Lab has potential to move much of research to the field and to a broad audience, it is attractive to top researchers across the country, particularly those who have interest in urban issues. As well, the Lab's studies provide training ground for future researchers through university student involvement in research projects, thus further contributing to the intellectual base of the field .

Lab projects are firmly grounded empirically through literature reviews and syntheses, shared papers, and other searches of existing knowledge. Once work is completed, the new knowledge gained is cycled back into the field through publications both juried and practical, presentations, conferences, and research-based strategies/programs. The Web page demonstrates

functional accessibility to information on school change and supplies good technical information. The Lab's work is of stellar academic quality as well as of strong quantity, and LSS speaks to national issues through a national system of dissemination.

As an example, the national study on Effective Title I Schools brings a range of disciplines to bear on this critical national concern, using a telescoping system that combines creation of a national databases and intensive case studies as well as developing an extensive survey database. The basic belief is that by bringing focus to bear on effective strategies as identified through research, the Lab can increase understanding and support roll-out by informing the field, such as with the new information on the role of the district in "making or breaking" the school site. The study involves collaboration with other s, including AEL, NWREL, SERVE, and NCREL, and is used to inform the DOE as well as work done at other Labs (such as with Title I centers in those s). This database will be linked to other databases, such as the NAEP database, for future work. Through *Spotlights*, national invitational conferences, and other forms of dissemination, the gets information out to a wide audience.

2. Areas of Needed Improvement

None

3. Recommendations for Improvement

None

IV. Utility

A. To what extent are the products and services provided by LSS useful to and used by customers?

1. Strengths

LSS operates through a systemic investment of time and resources, and their work fits within a larger conceptual framework that includes fostering student resilience, institutional contexts that foster resilience, and integrative analysis of the knowledge base. The assists states and districts by framing their issues in context of systemic change, rather than in isolated and separated responses while, at the same time, targeting the practical and compelling needs of the consumers. For example, Maryland just completed a study in the city of Baltimore, and the assisted them in analysis of data, helping them understand how to organize, focus, and formulate data-based recommendations. The then assisted the state in helping download those programs into the districts and get them underway.

The provides useful services to the region as well, such as creating a new infrastructure for supporting educational reform through strong regional partnerships focusing on critical regional issues. These partnerships are not a natural part of the configuration of the region, and the has begun to forge partnerships across a highly diverse audience that define the region as a new entity. For example, the sponsored conversations with representatives from every state, from business and industry, from universities, for continuing dialogue about teacher recruitment and how the region deals with teacher shortage issues and teacher recruitment issues. The served as ombudsman that helped prevent consumers from fighting over scarce resources, provided assistance in building capacity within the region through pre-service, and helped the region understand the issues through research perspective. The brought in top experts on

teacher quality and teacher preparation, so the conversation was both thoughtful and research-based yet practical. According to a customer the team interviewed, "We left the meeting and we had an action plan, and that's the kind of work I really admire in this . It was research-based but practical. Who else could do this?" The group agreed to pursue common licensure and to set up an electronic recruiting system, among other things, and those efforts are underway. At the larger level, the is helping members of this group understand how to formulate policy that is underpinned with good research and best practice.

The School-Family Partnership Project is another example of useful work conducted by the . This project focuses on developing a group of fundamental studies designed to fill gaps, with practical application through developing materials and processes aligned with the knowledge base to impact key issues. Information is available online, and consumers can download information from the Web. Teachers are given clear roadmaps of what to do before, during, and after by translating the data to a systematic, behavioral description of what they might do to enhance parent-teacher relationships and are supported by tools, such as adaptable draft forms to supplement the report card. The research is conducted in context of past knowledge and an emerging path to future increases in the knowledge base.

LSS screens sites for CFL and prefers school consensus on the decision to implement CFL, with all school members agreeing to participate in process, including the monitoring of teaching behaviors. DC sites are an exception, where the district mandated CFL despite the objections of the Lab and their recommendations otherwise. Despite the initial mandate, the sites ended up selecting CFL when given opportunity to change, based primarily on the strong support the Lab provides for the model and the ongoing professional development component, as stated in minutes and interviews.

With the CFL process, the Lab adapts language to the site for increased understanding. As part of the ability to sustain and build capacity for scaling up, the Lab created an infrastructure to be able to analyze teaching behaviors and then to create appropriate professional development activities. As part of the plan, data is used to look at school-wide issues that evolve from the combined data, such as combined teacher behavior weaknesses that are beyond individual capacity to impact because of school level problems.

2. Areas of Needed Improvement

The translation of the technical, deeply meaningful empirical knowledge base into the world of practice remains an elusive national goal, despite decades of attempts to bridge the chasm. LSS has set up a good process, with in-depth research and research syntheses undergirding the movement of the knowledge base into practice. Short research reviews such as *Spotlight on Student Success* and other translation processes reduce lengthy interpretations to more concise, manageable "bites" of information, and research-based products and processes then complete the empirical journey.

While there is much to celebrate, this translation route inherently holds fundamental limitations. Once information is simplified, much -- the subtlety and shades of meaning, the understanding of gaps and conflicts as well as of the deeply supported knowledge base -- is naturally lost. Or, in maintaining shades of meaning in short publications, the micro perspective clouds the practitioner's larger view. On the other hand, in attempting to hold the intricacies of the technical knowledge base, empirical work remains unreadable and unread by practitioners because of its prohibitive size, technical language, and overall complexity. Either way, practitioners remain out of the loop -- still not privy to the wealth of deep knowledge that so elegantly informs the researcher's view of schools and school reform. So handicapped, it is

difficult for the practitioner and the school to become a yeasty, thoughtful environment for change that equals the researcher's culture.

It is an age-old problem, but one this Lab is capable of addressing with deep thoughtfulness as LSS develops.

3. Recommendations for Improvement

1. Explore new opportunities to inform the field, thinking creatively about improving ways to move thick and sophisticated understanding of the empirical knowledge base to the practitioner's world. Any contribution in this most tenacious area of difficulty would be of great value to the field. Consider the following as kick-off ideas for discussion purposes only:

    a) First, consider developing new ways to maintain the high quality of empirical information (with gaps and subtleties and conflicts) by adapting the writing style, layout, and overall communication style rather than simply slimming content. Explore different ways to communicate top quality research. For example, might it be possible to use the more "breezy" style of writing Margaret Wong used in writing the Education Week editorial as benchmark for a new type of technical writing that could maintain the high quality demanded by the researcher field and yet add the user-friendly tone that fits practice?

    b) Explore the extent to which research may be over-translated to practitioners, with excessively-simplified interpretations of the literature in the form of checklists or user-friendly "to-do" processes separated from the conceptual framework that undergirds the work. In other words, how might the tidy "do this" interpretations of the literature be delivered in context of the theoretical and empirical underpinnings that could allow consumers to use the work more thoughtfully, contextually, and insightfully?

    c) Develop a broad conceptual framework that gives a simple yet holistic picture of the Lab's vision for school change and resilience. Nest the CFL process within this framework, or use the CFL model as the over-riding framework. How can frameworks be used to provide context for research-based practice and to assist practitioners in grounding strategies in the macro view of reform?

B. To what extent is LSS focused on customer need?

1. Strengths

The Lab provides expertise in regard to areas of concern across the region in a consumer-oriented, customer-focused manner. By clarifying the architecture, the goals, and the scope of

the to consumers, particularly at the higher levels of school administration, customers are able to identify target areas that are a good fit in terms of potential services and partnerships. According to interviews with the Governing Board, the provides states with strong services in looking at research, in looking at best practices, and in helping to frame programs accordingly.

Repeatedly, consumers at the classroom, school, district, state, and top policy levels told wondrous, "hats-off" stories of caring, concern, short turnaround times, quality information – the picture was one of an overwhelmingly responsive, user-friendly organization. The moves beyond direct customer requests and focuses on customer needs in the larger arena of school reform. For example, the views the readiness of CFL sites for adding reform pieces, not in a formal way but rather in a more intuitive way, as a large piece of the CFL process and looks ahead to next-steps and future opportunities for growth beyond their immediate requests for assistance. Thus the anticipates future requests as well as responding to direct requests.

The serves as a source of stability for schools and teachers, such as in its work with DC sites who have experienced three different superintendents in three years. As each district transition occurred, the personnel automatically moved in -- without requiring request – to assist schools in maintaining clear focus and energy on school change and student achievement.

2. Areas of Needed Improvement

While not really a weakness, the tension between the 's role in adding to the knowledge base versus the 's role in training is a continuing discussion that bears mention. Some customers had interest in moving toward increased LSS focus on implementation, on helping a broader range of schools to use the kinds of planning and analysis already developed. According to this view, the has learned over the past few years how to support schools in implementing whole school reform models: it is timely to switch area of focus with funds to going back to schools to

offer the kind of translation service between research and school change on a broader scale. On the other hand, other customers do not share this view: they value continuing to generate knowledge and see continued focus on knowledge construction as an essential part of the overall health of the .

3. Recommendations for Improvement

1. Continue existing conversations about the tension between applying limited resources to knowledge construction versus implementation of knowledge-based assistance.

V. Outcomes and Impact

A. To what extent is LSS's work contributing to improved student success, particularly in intensive development sites?

1. Strengths

LSS is directly and powerfully focused on systemic reform for high student achievement. With focus on resilience in students at the heart of the 's mission, the leadership is moving that construct from the empirical knowledge base to the field through a variety of major thrusts.

First, the focuses on issues related to student achievement, thus developing capacity to increase behaviors connected to student success. For example, in CFL sites, the Lab monitors changes in teacher behavior related to depth of implementation of the model as well as using the district's data to measure student achievement progress. The degree of each teacher's program implementation is measured twice a year, and includes 12 measures such as arranging space/facilities, creating and maintaining instructional materials, and other measures deemed by research to be important to making instructional gains, with over 200 sub-domains. This assessment is used as a tool to see what the teacher needs to work on next, rather than an evaluation tool. Teachers are given an in-depth feedback sheet on how they are doing in those

critical dimensions, with indication of areas where teachers may need to have support. When combined as a school, the report gives a total picture of the degree of implementation and the school's professional development needs. These reports can be combined across sites to create a total district report. In DC, there is significant change in observable demonstrators that show change in teaching behavior.

Second, the Lab is developing procedural knowledge on the level of support required to implement whole school change as part of their work. The Lab is monitoring and assisting in shifting school and teacher focus over time so that, at the third year, participants are focusing more on instruction, after initial focus on issues related to behavior and creating an orderly environment. This places the Lab's work in context of innovations designed to increase student achievement as a historical journey of both the individual and the institution. For example, LSS has data on which criteria of the ALEM model are easier to implement and which are more difficult. Through this process, the Lab can target "easy wins" as well as more substantive, challenging issues and begin to get a sense of the flow of the change process as viewed through teacher classroom behavior. Also, there is analysis of underlying causes for teachers' low scores, such as dependence on school for delivering materials on time impacting teacher scores, thus bringing the school and district perspectives to bear on the practical dynamics of classroom level change.

Third, the Lab is improving instructional leadership capacity, another less direct but critical link to high achievement. According to a Governing Board member, private organizations are seeing changes in leadership capacity to think strategically as they approach private foundations with information-based requests for support in designing programs to be funded. This member attributes much of this change to the high levels of conversation and

information provided through LSS services. The Principal Forum has been a critical piece of the process, because principals participate in LSS work over a long period of time, thus buying in to the process and understanding their work in holistic context.

Fourth, the Lab focuses regional, state, district, school, and teacher eyes on data. Using 20/20 as a replicable, clear process, LSS focuses attention on both ends of the achievement continuum as a conceptual lens for better understanding the whole. By looking at students having the greatest difficulty in conjunction with those having the greatest success and tracking changes over time, the Lab has developed an elegant process for field-based understanding. At this point, the Lab requires districts to submit three years of data in order to decide whether or not to work with the site, and this way LSS guarantees opportunity to learn through empirical analysis of Lab programs implemented in sites across the region and the nation.

Finally, and more specifically, work with LSS is correlated with increased student success, despite the infancy of the Lab's efforts in terms of contractual timelines. In DC, the CFL schools all made gains in ranking after the first year, exceeding the district's 10 percent gain requirement. Furthermore, follow-up data on ALEM program graduates demonstrates increased resilience in the high school, with highly significant differences in the levels of graduation/dropout for both regular education and special education students, thus indicating success for that portion of the comprehensive reform process.

2. Areas of Needed Improvement

LSS collects data around the larger contextual view of CFL, focusing to a greater degree on all of the critical dimensions working together, rather than on the separate pieces. As a self-monitoring and quality assurance feedback loop, the more holistic view has limitations. By limiting potential to unpack and track the relative impacts of the separate dimensions of the CFL

process, the Lab misses opportunity to better understand.

3. Recommendations for Improvement

1. Develop processes that allow not only holistic measures of CFL impacts but also component measures of relative impact. Exploring the subsets of the process and their interactions, the impact of timeliness on adding new processes and opportunities to CFL sites, and limitations of the model that might require revision, for example, could offer powerful insight.

B. To what extent does LSS assist states and localities to implement comprehensive school improvement strategies?

1. Strengths

The CFL process provides structure for schools to think systemically, but takes this broader perspective down to a level of the practical that allows institutions to struggle with real issues in context of the larger framework of comprehensive understanding.

First, the Lab focuses attention on the student as individual learner at the heart of comprehensive school reform. The CFL project begins with the idea that every child has an individual learning style as the basis for the program. The Adaptable Instructional Strategies and Practices portion is designed to help teachers look at students in terms of individual needs and what supports need to be in place for that student to reach high achievement. Instilling self-responsibility for learning is critical, and it's up to the teacher to coordinate a wide array of strategies for learning. Student attention is clearly and directly tied to the objectives set on the prescription sheet. In short, the Lab keeps teaching and learning as the essence of change.

Second, in linking research to practice, the Lab focuses on creating systemic school improvement as context for reform using CFL as process. In CFL, for example, the program looks first at school-wide restructuring, including information such as how the school uses time, resources, organization, and governance, for example. Thus the Lab helps schools structure

reform efforts through a focused way that helps shape their thinking in dealing strategically and with strong information base.

Third, through involved management and decision-making, teachers and administrators are constantly learning and focus on how they and their students are doing. Empirical data is used to assess student progress and to assess the impact on professional development needs related to teacher growth as identified through data. Through discussion, education, and data analysis, the school community focuses on becoming a thoughtful community in a "can-do" atmosphere. The emphasis is on maximizing existing strengths and making strategic changes that are the powerful levers for impacting the system.

Fourth, CFL focuses on parental and community involvement as support for schools, teachers, and student achievement. The school-community council focuses conversations on issues of school improvement and provides opportunity for school and community to talk on a regular basis. Parent and community engagement is deliberate and substantive rather than being seen as a nicety.

Fifth, there is focus on moving to scale. Now, one of the criteria is to have clusters of schools in order to have a critical presence, rather than to simply have single schools choosing the model, with common work and common mindful processes in place. There are examples of district-wide strategies for scaling up, with promise for district-to-district CFL mentoring in the near future. The participating district CFL site has made major strides in the PSSA test over the past 3 years, as support for effects of this process. The next goal is to move to regional connections, and then national.

Sixth, the Lab focuses in impacting policy. The Lab approaches state sites in varying ways, working in accordance with their varying needs and interests. The Lab is learning its role

in policy, how to give advice and yet work with departments and states who make their own agendas.

Finally, the Lab provides strong and ongoing support both built in through Lab products and processes and through the willing work of quality employees. CFL, for example, is very different than other professional development programs where people come in and leave. As a stakeholder commented, "If we need anything, we call and they are there. They do searches in Internet, train new teachers, offer summer opportunities, and create a facilitators network." Also, the Lab assists schools in writing and getting grants such as 21st Century RFP's, making sure content fits within the scope of CFL and is coordinated with CFL's change processes.

2. Areas of Needed Improvement

This Lab, like educational systems across the nation, is struggling valiantly with issues of scale. A critical unknown in the scalability potential is the impact of strong support from top flight researchers and practitioners. The concern is twofold. First, what will happen to the existing sites, should the Lab become less available or be unavailable? Second, what is the minimum level of support essential for successful implementation and school change? As a stakeholder commented on the support issue, "It's like a baby you have to wean. Because they [the Lab] has done such a supportive job, people wanted the same level of involvement."

3. Recommendations for Improvement

1. Continue to explore the rather murky area of using products, processes, and training of CFL outside the strong and direct support network provided by LSS as a critical part of the product development process.

C. To what extent has LSS made progress in establishing a regional and national reputation in its field?

1. Strengths

The Lab is in the processes of creating viable demonstration sites that are operational exemplars. The CFL project is focused on comprehensive strategies for scaling up: (1) working with schoolwide projects, not classroom only, (2) beginning with a wide and deep assessment of the school (teaming process and how it's organized and then those teams begin to become much more data-oriented, (3) providing training and assistance for working with data so teams can follow the progress of students in school, (4) tailoring professional development according to data, and (5) monitoring and adjusting. As an example, the Lab began in 1996 to work with some of the lowest functioning elementary schools (six schools at end of first year) in DC as a demonstration site as an indication of the deep and sustaining issues of systemic reform in urban areas and as an example of how you can change schools in a systemic way. Problems faced include annual turnover of superintendents, high levels of principal level turnover, plus teacher and student turnover – among a host of other issues. LSS is thus implementing school reform in the realistic context of schools most at-risk.

According to the practitioners implementing CFL, the process has strong advantages for urban reform. The school staff is much more focused on the same goal. Teaching patterns have changed, with far more involvement in lesson planning through developing prescriptions for students. Increased parent participation, especially with focus on learning, is a plus. According to interviews, the process has created common language, ownership, focus on instruction and student achievement, and building the capacity of staff to focus on data in making decisions. The amount of serious discipline problems is reduced, and CFL sets the tone for a more positive

school climate. "Calm school culture and reduced disciplinary problems are the main gains we are seeing right now."

According to interviews, minutes, letters, publications, and reports, issues such as 20/20 analysis, focus on resilience, focus on what works in urban schools are garnering national attention. Laboratory has served as the vehicle for providing the conceptual and empirical base for a number of governmental initiatives. For example, the Lab provided assistance to Pennsylvania initiatives related to urban school reform by providing empirical expertise that grounded the commission's work in a firm research base, by linking with Chicago area expertise in school reform in that setting, and in linking the commission with other experts across the country.

The Lab has been very strategic in maximizing its impact. For example, the Lab has focused on creating cross-categorical partnerships, such as school deans and superintendents. The Lab is creating and stimulating markets, creating teams that operate within the context of the chaos of the field, and focusing on creating a regional mindset for systemic change through a stimulating system of networks across the region.

2. Areas of Needed Improvement

None

3. Recommendations for Improvement

None

VI. Overall Evaluation of Total Laboratory Programs, Products, and Services

Overall, LSS has made major accomplishments in a short contractual period. The quality of the Lab's leadership, personnel, partnerships, products, processes, and services is stellar, as

noted throughout the report. The Lab is already making powerful contributions both to research and to practice, and is positioned to make even greater contribution in the future.

VII. Broad Summary of Strengths, Areas for Improvement, and Strategies for Improvement

1. Strengths

LSS demonstrates major strengths in all of the areas defined by the eight evaluation questions. In the area of Implementation and Management, the Lab is doing (and exceeding, in most cases) what they were approved to do and has developed a self-monitoring process to plan and adapt activities in response to feedback and customer needs. In the area of Quality, LSS has developed high quality products and services. In the area of Utility, the products and services provided by LSS are useful to and used by customers, and the Lab is focused on customers' needs. In the area of Outcomes and Impacts, LSS's work is contributing to student success, the Lab is assisting states and localities in implementing comprehensive school improvement strategies, and the Lab has made progress in establishing a regional and national reputation in urban issues.

2. Areas for Improvement

LSS has four major areas of challenge, and most represent national issues and gaps in the national procedural knowledge base:

1. Moving information from research to practice, maintaining fidelity to the original knowledge base yet making that knowledge base useable and understandable to practitioners;

2. Continuing the discussion – again, a national issue – of the role of the in knowledge construction versus implementation of knowledge-based assistance;

3. Unpacking the separate impacts of interventions within the complex "oratory" of

field-based sites; and

4. Increasing procedural understanding of the role and importance of direct, quality support in moving reform to scale.

3. Strategies for improvement

While strategies for improvement are outlined more specifically in the body of this evaluation, the following is a summary of those recommendations:

1. In learning about moving research to practice, develop quality control processes for the translation work itself, strengthen the role of the practitioner and the level of sophistication of practitioner voice, and explore an array of creative solutions to improve the quality of the translation. In short, work to increase the procedural knowledge base in translation of research to practice.

2. Continue discussions of the relative value of knowledge construction and knowledge application, focusing in particular on how the interplay of these two critical areas of focus strengthens each.

3. Develop processes for unpacking the separate contributions of CFL impacts in field-based context.

4. Continue to explore the role of support in moving reform processes and products to scale, focusing in particular on future customers who will not have comparable depth of services available.