



Lead for Diversity — A Year of Change and Impact

The Impact of Lead for Diversity as
Assessed by School-Based Advisors

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Lead for Diversity (LFD), the flagship program of the American Conference on Diversity's Youth Leadership Institute, is a yearlong process of challenge, growth, and impact for sophomores, juniors, and seniors from high schools throughout New Jersey. Students begin their LFD experience by attending a six-day residential summer program in school delegations comprised of up to four students. Students gain invaluable knowledge about prejudice and prejudice reduction through participation in facilitated workshops, evening programs, and discussion groups. Utilizing this knowledge and the skills they gain at their LFD sessions, delegates work with their school groups and school-based advisors to create Action Plans that will be implemented during the school year and will address challenges unique to their schools and communities.

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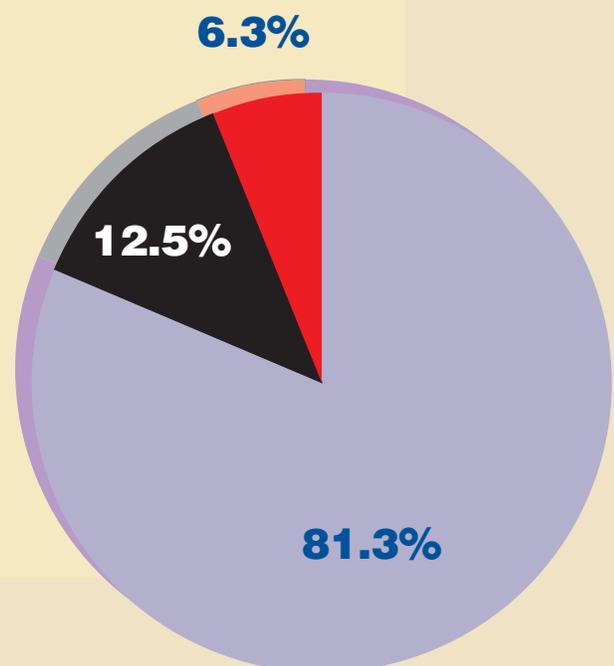
During the 2009-2010 school year, the American Conference on Diversity surveyed Lead for Diversity school-based advisors. Advisors were asked to complete a 10-question survey regarding their experiences with LFD. Survey questions were all qualitative in nature. Survey results underscored the positive effects participation in Lead for Diversity has had on student delegates and their advisors. Data also revealed that the impact of Lead for Diversity reaches beyond the youth that attend and the advisors who work with them. It extends to other youth, as well as adult professionals.

- Over half of all Action Plan initiatives were specifically targeted to educate high school students or provide peer mediation to them.
- One-quarter of advisors described Action Plans that, in part or in their entirety, have focused on educating middle school students.
- Nearly eighteen percent of plans have involved educating adults and youth within the larger community.
- Twelve percent of plans have specifically focused on teaching educators or other district representatives.

Action Plans with such diverse messages and directed at varied audiences have had a wide impact. Typically Action Plans directed at pupils reach the whole student body. Those that do not, are usually targeted to all students within entire grade levels. At just one school, an advisor estimated that her delegates' Action Plans impact 1,400 students annually. Likewise, educational initiatives directed at teachers are typically delivered to the entire faculty of a school, department, or grade level. Presentations at Back to School Nights and at Board of Education meetings reach a significant portion of parents, and Board and community members, respectively.

Area of Focus for Action Plan by Percentage of Advisors

- Education initiatives w/i schools
- Creating or Funding Clubs
- Other



Despite very real challenges associated with implementing Action Plans, advisors all reported having executed successful plans that have positively impacted their schools, and in some cases, their districts.

- Over 81% of advisors described their 2009-2010 Action Plans as specifically targeting education initiatives within their schools or districts. These educational initiatives have varied in scope, audience, and specific topics addressed.

School-based advisors mentor delegates as they implement their Action Plans during the school year. The positive influence of mentors on the lives of youth is well documented.¹ School-based advisors “have learned a lot about how to motivate [delegates] and let them take the lead [and] to foster leadership skills in them.” Delegates, in turn, “always come back excited and ready to teach others.” LFD advisors overwhelmingly reported witnessing delegate growth, as a result of participation in Lead for Diversity.

- Ninety-nine percent of 2009 delegates became more open to having friends of different races, genders, sexual orientations, religions, and ethnicities.
- Approximately 97% of 2009 delegates developed the confidence and leadership skills to contribute to people getting along better at their schools.
- Nearly 13% of advisors described Action Plans specifically focused on creating or funding student clubs geared to promote inclusion and engender respect.
- Longer-tenured advisors reported that former delegates’ selection of college majors, volunteer work, and career paths have been directly influenced by their participation in LFD.

Research has shown that mentoring relationships are not one-sided.² Survey respondents reported that they have received a variety of benefits, related to both personal and professional growth, in their roles as LFD advisors.

- Over half of advisors identified being able to **witness student growth and change, as being the most rewarding aspect of their roles in the program.**
- Three-quarters of all respondents felt **most rewarded for their service as school-based advisors because of the impact LFD has had on delegates.**
- Advisors have been exposed to different perspectives and challenged to explore new ideas, and have experienced professional growth. One advisor, pursuing a Ph.D., is writing her dissertation about the effect involvement in Lead for Diversity has on program participants.

Overall, the data demonstrates that advisors believe that LFD has had a very positive impact on them, their delegates, their school populations, and others within the community.

1 Goldner & Maysseless, 2008; National Council of Professors of Educational Administration, 2008; Alliance for Student Activities, 2007; Schmidt, Marks, Derrico, 2004.

2 Heirdsfield, et al, 2008; National Council of Professors of Educational Administration, 2008; Shore, Toyokawa, Anderson, 2008; Schmidt, Marks, Derrico, 2004; Grisham, Ferguson, Brink, 2003; Crocker & Harris, 2002; Ellington, 2002; McDonald, 2002; Dukess, 2001.

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THE VOICE OF THE STUDENT DELEGATES

When student delegates were surveyed following their LFD session (2009), more than 95% agreed that as a result of attending LFD, they are:

- More aware of their own stereotypes and prejudices;
- Are more open to having friends of different races, genders, sexual orientations, religions and ethnicities;
- Have an increased understanding and appreciation of people of different races, genders, sexual orientations, religions and ethnicities;
- Have an increased understanding of the effects of stereotypes and assumptions; and
- Feel comfortable that they can use the skills and knowledge they have learned when they return to school.

THE IMPACT

"I can honestly say I have never taken part in an experience as amazing, self-revealing and rewarding as this. I know I am forever a changed human being and my intentions can be fully played out to the world in the future." – Jacqui Cotton

"This is one week I will never forget. I have learned so much, met so many people and was really myself. What I want is to go home and stand up for what I believe in." – Juan Gomez

"For me, the needed change is ongoing. I need to honor this commitment for the rest of my life. I will honor this commitment for the rest of my life." – Marisa Pareti

"Lead for Diversity has given me a deep understanding of prejudice I don't think I would have gotten anywhere else and I am so thankful for that. Though I will have challenges in the future I feel empowered to move forward." – Sarah Thompson

