

## **"I DIDN'T KNOW I COULD DO THAT:"**

### **Parents Learning to be Leaders Through the Commonwealth Institute for Parent Leadership**

Dick Corbett  
512 Conestoga Road  
Malvern, PA 19355  
610 408-9206  
[corbett@pond.com](mailto:corbett@pond.com)

Bruce Wilson  
11 Linden Avenue  
Merchantville, NJ 08109  
856 662-6424  
[bwilson@voicenet.com](mailto:bwilson@voicenet.com)

December 12, 2000

## **"I DIDN'T KNOW I COULD DO THAT:"**

### **Parents Learning to be Leaders Through the Commonwealth Institute for Parent Leadership**

#### **Report Summary and Introduction**

Parental participation in education is indisputably essential to students' ultimate success in school. Traditionally this participation has revolved around one's own child, in the form of providing basic needs, supporting teachers' classroom efforts, and attending occasional conferences and events at school. While valuable, such activities are educationally conservative in nature. They reinforce rather than redirect students' formal educational experiences.

Frustration with the pace and substance of school reform in Kentucky stimulated the Prichard Committee for Academic Excellence to rethink the role parents can and should play in local schools. The Committee envisioned encouraging and enabling parents to be agents for change, not just in the education of their own children but of all children. The intention was to promote increased parental activism through enhancing parents' understanding of key educational issues and equipping them with a range of advocacy strategies. The Prichard Committee's creation of the Commonwealth Institute for Parent Leadership (CIPL), thus, represented a potentially significant development in forging new relationships between schools and parents.

An interim report (Parents as Learners and Leaders: An Interim Evaluation Report on the Commonwealth Institute for Parent Leadership's 1998 Fellow Cohort, September, 1999, available from the Pew Charitable Trusts) concluded that Institute participants had become both sophisticated learners about school reform in Kentucky and resourceful leaders in making sure that positive changes for students occurred. This dual role of learner and leader required parents to move well beyond the traditional one of supporting their children's schoolwork and occasionally assisting teachers and administrators with non-instructional tasks. Instead, Fellows zeroed in on improving the social and academic resources available to staff and students. This enhanced participation benefited their children's schools in a variety of ways, including making them more welcoming to parents, easing students' transitions between schools, promoting adult's and children's literacy skills, boosting schools' technological resources, bringing teachers and parents together to discuss mutual hopes for their schools, and encouraging schools to examine achievement and attendance data for clues about pressing needs.

In their initial year, then, Fellows took on non-traditional roles in settings that had not been equally prepared for such a change. Their activities, therefore, were "out of character." This meant that Fellows had to figure out how to approach and work with other parents and school staff, in addition to actually conducting activities themselves. In

other words, Fellows had to set the stage for them to be able to exercise leadership. No one had paved the way for them. While their success with carrying out activities was decidedly mixed as a group, all – or nearly all – of them had forced some people in their communities to encounter a parent engaging them differently than traditionally had been the case. This, in and of itself, was an act of leadership.

Data from subsequent evaluation activities, contained in this final report, reiterate and extend the above findings. The Commonwealth Institute proved itself to be an effective vehicle for:

- Arming parents with valuable information about how schools should and do operate
- Instilling a confidence in themselves as credible and worthy educational stakeholders
- Giving them a willingness to act on the behalf of all students, not just their own.

Subsequent to their initial training, parents from both the second and third Institute cohorts continued to grow in their knowledge about Kentucky education and their confidence to engage the schools in discussions about and activities that fostered school improvement. There was simply no question that an overwhelming majority of parents felt efficacious. They regarded the training they received to be of the highest quality – in terms of content and process; asserted that the encouragement, guidance, and information they received from their Community Support Coordinators was critically necessary to their maintaining a commitment to enhanced participation; and felt that their interactions with school personnel had been influential in the future organizational, cultural, and instructional directions their schools took.

CIPL's initial hypothesis was that supplying parents with pertinent information about educational issues, helping them to develop certain leadership skills, and offering them continued encouragement and support would enable the parents to be a positive impetus for change. The data showed that this hypothesis was valid. The data also demonstrated that this enterprise was complicated, requiring Institute staff and parents to make important adjustments to their original expectations and planned actions. This willingness to adapt greatly enhanced the Institute's effectiveness, especially in terms of keeping Fellows committed to active involvement in their schools – and even in the face of formidable obstacles.

The following report goes into considerable detail about CIPL's effects on the Fellows. After descriptions of the design of the evaluation and the Institute, the report targets each of the three primary effects (knowledge, confidence, and willingness to act) in turn. Each section discusses both the extent and nature of the effect, drawing on survey and interview data.

Then, the report turns to the factors that influenced Fellows' actions in the school. There were four categories of such factors: the work of the Community Support

Coordinators (CSC), opportunities for Fellows to collaborate with other Fellows in a school, competing demands on Fellows' time and energy, and the reactions of school personnel to the Fellows' endeavors. These factors operated as both facilitators and obstacles, depending on the form they took in particular settings.

Finally, the report concludes with six considerations for the future, all geared toward helping CIPL – and for other agencies that may want to initiate similar programs – refine its expectations for and support of the remarkable parents with whom they work. The report discusses six of these, in some detail. CIPL should:

1. **Develop a definition of what kinds of leadership actions parents could reasonably be expected to exert in schools.** The Institute has now operated long enough to reach some conclusions about the boundaries of parents' influence. The purpose of delineating such boundaries would not be to limit parents' actions but to guide them toward areas of potentially greater success, taking advantage of the early explorations of the first three cohorts.
2. **Decide what the most likely target population of parent participants should be.** Essentially, CIPL is effective at identifying potential leaders and giving them the skills to exert influence. CIPL is not a vehicle for directly involving parents who traditionally have not participated in their children's schools. While having more and better parent leadership in a school can reach some of these parents, the economic and political conditions that shape such participation remain sizeable and beyond the scope of a single initiative. CIPL has increased the diversity of Fellow cohorts each year, especially with respect to race, and this effort should be continued and extended.
3. **Identify ways to prepare school personnel for having to interact with a different type of parental role.** The early cohorts of Fellows have had not only to try to change their schools but also to prepare school personnel for interacting with non-traditional parental involvement. This preparation will continue to be a significant part of the Fellows' work, but the Institute could aid this work as well.
4. **Prepare parents realistically and authoritatively for the types of reception they might encounter from school personnel.** Likewise parents enter new waters as well. Current Fellows have acquired a storehouse of knowledge and experiences that, if incorporated systematically in training sessions, could allow new Fellows to anticipate better their entry into the schools. Also, Fellows would benefit from preparatory activities more specific to their actual situations.
5. **Take advantage of the “strength in numbers” effect on parents' activism.** Parents working alone often wished that they had other Fellows in their schools, and parents who were able to collaborate with other Fellows touted the benefits. Forming Fellow teams intentionally in the recruiting process,

and maintaining a Fellow presence in the schools, might not only boost the effectiveness of current activities but also enable activities to last beyond the tenure of the Fellows who instigated them.

6. **Adopt appropriate notions of how to determine the “success” of parents’ efforts.** CIPL will find it exceedingly difficult to establish a statistical connection between Fellows’ efforts and student achievement. The reasons have nothing to do with the value of the Fellows’ activities and everything to do with the complex environments in which schools operate and the crude nature of educational measures. However, parents can, and should, justify their activities on the basis of their “logical” connections to students’ academic performance – and, in Kentucky, to the particular skills students are required to demonstrate on the state tests.

CIPL’s willingness to address such considerations decisively has been crucial to the program’s evolution. The evidence from the first three years of its operation is that it has the capability and savvy to continue making wise adjustments in the Institute in the years to come.

### **Evaluation Objectives and Design**

The purpose of this evaluation was to provide the Pew Charitable Trusts and the Prichard Committee with information concerning the implementation and impact of the Commonwealth Institute for Parent Leadership. Such information was intended to help the foundation assess the Institute’s value as a vehicle for promoting parental involvement and leadership in school reform and determine the portability of the process to other settings.

In order to accomplish this purpose, the evaluation had to accomplish two primary sets of objectives. The first was: **To assess the quality of the participants’ training experiences and the other support they received in enacting a new parental role in schools.** This objective attended to the implementation of the Institute, especially participants’ assessments of the content and training strategies used in the regional institutes, how the regional community support coordinators provided guidance to participants, and what the major facilitators and obstacles to parents’ advocacy efforts were in their communities and schools.

The second objective of the evaluation was: **To describe the impacts of this training and support on parents, particularly with respect to their knowledge of the Kentucky educational system and its reform efforts and their attempts to improve the educational experiences of all students.** The immediate intentions of the Institute were to enable parents to become better informed about reform-related topics, especially standards, assessment, and effective instructional practices, and to equip them with strategies that promoted playing proactive roles in educational improvement in their communities. The Institute, thus, was not attempting to improve the parenting skills of

its participants; instead, it was trying to instill in them a commitment and ability to effect educational improvement.

The Institute aspired to far-reaching effects in this regard. The ultimate objective was to make parents an intentional and positive force in changing Kentucky's schools and in boosting student achievement. These objectives required that parents actually exercise "leadership." Since leadership can be thought of as "the ability to make others think and act in ways in which they currently do not," the eventual success of the Institute rested on the extent to which parents were able to use their knowledge and advocacy skills to effect substantial change.

The evaluation design had to attend to the training, the Fellows' actions in their respective home settings, and the contextual influences on the Fellows' efforts. We decided therefore that the design should incorporate both quantitative and qualitative strategies. The quantitative, targeting the entire 1998 and 1999 cohorts, enabled us to look at issues of breadth while the qualitative, concentrating on three of the eight regions, probed more deeply into the complexities of this ambitious endeavor.

The quantitative work had two components. The first was a demographic examination of the Fellows and their schools. This demographic analysis was conducted using data provided by Kentucky officials. Its purpose was to portray the range of schools that had contact with CIPL Fellows. This would provide some indication of the extent to which the Institute was in a position to influence a representative population of Kentucky schools. This database included 1998 state test scores results in mathematics, reading, writing, science, and social studies for the entire population of 1284 schools in the state. In addition, there was information on school enrollments and wealth, as defined by the proportion of students eligible for free or reduced lunches.

The second quantitative component of the evaluation was a survey sent to all of the 1998 and 1999 Fellows (see Appendix for a sample survey). The survey sought Fellows' opinions about the increase in their knowledge about a variety of educational reform topics, their comfort in applying that knowledge in conversations with others, their assessment of the value of what they had learned, the ways in which they had been involved with schools prior to the Institute, and how their schools solicited and welcomed parental involvement.

We sent the surveys to all 177 members of the 1998 cohort; more than half (n=92) were completed fully and returned for analysis. A year after the first survey we sent a modified version of the original survey to the same 1998 cohort, as well as to the 1999 cohort. Just under half of the mailed surveys (68 of the remaining 146 Fellows from 1998 and 91 of 196 Fellows from the 1999 Cohort) were returned. The initial mailings were followed a letter of support from CIPL. Subsequently, Fellows were urged via email, phone, and in person (by the Community Support Coordinators) to complete the surveys. Obtaining nearly half of the entire population of interest (251 of 519) was sufficient in our estimation for conducting a reliable analysis of Fellows' opinions.

We also employed three qualitative data strategies. First, the surveys solicited written comments from Fellows about (1) the value of their training and what they had learned as a result of it, (2) their assessment of their experiences with conducting projects, (3) the contribution of their local community support coordinators, and (4) any other pertinent comments they wished to make concerning the program. Over two-thirds of the responding Fellows availed themselves of this opportunity.

Second, we, in conjunction with CIPL, selected three regions within which to interview Fellows. These three insured that we would be able to talk with Fellows from city, suburban, and rural settings. The interviews were open-ended and covered the Fellows' motivations for becoming involved in CIPL, their activities in their schools during the school year, the facilitators of and obstacles to working in the schools, and the support CIPL provided them to do their work. Numerous attempts, via telephone messages at home and work, emails, and letters were used to contact Fellows from the three regions. We interviewed 50 Fellows from the 1998 cohort talking to them six months after they had completed their training and then again a year later when their formal commitment to the Institute was about to expire. We also interviewed 37 participants from the 1999 cohort, speaking to them about a year after their initial Institute training.

In an effort to reach beyond just Fellow accounts of their work and in an attempt to establish a different perspective on the impact of their work in schools, a final qualitative strategy involved interviews with 17 principals. We specifically targeted schools where more than one Fellow had been working, hoping to maximize chances that their efforts would have reached the eyes and ears of principals. In these conversations we learned more about the characteristics of the school communities where these parents worked, the kinds of parental involvement activities that were commonly carried out, and school's reactions to the project efforts of Fellows.

The initial evaluation design called for only evaluating the efforts and effects of the 1998 Fellows. In addition, an expectation of the Prichard Committee was that these Fellows would involve a significant number of non-CIPL-trained parents in their local communities who could replicate or carry forward the efforts of the initial Fellows. That proved optimistic. While many of the Fellows did recruit other parents to assist them with their projects, it became clear that those parents did not have the same ownership in the project and had not internalized the new norms for parent leadership to anywhere near the same degree as the trained Fellows. Furthermore, CIPL staff refined their curriculum and their approach in working with Fellows based on what they had learned from early cohorts. Thus, it seemed wise to incorporate the experiences of the 1999 cohort as part of the revised evaluation plan.

A final aspect of the evaluation design called for two feedback meetings with the leadership from CIPL/Prichard, prior to the interim and final reports. These face-to-face meetings served a two-fold purpose. First, by sharing findings with the staff prior to a report being published we could use the staff as a reality check on the validity of our findings. That check also ensured that no surprises would emerge in the printed report.

But more important, the dialogue generated around the findings led to important reflection among the CIPL/Prichard staff. Two concrete manifestations of these conversations were the addition of a new set of indicators of intermediate effects from the training and a give-and-take that led to the six future considerations for CIPL and other programs seeking to enhance parental leadership in school reform.

### **Program Description and Goals**

CIPL hoped to train approximately 200 parents a year (only 100 were targeted the first year) over the course of a long-term effort to reach a wide range of parents from across the state. In the first three years of the program 486 parents completed the training. In this section we look at the recruitment process, the characteristics of those who were recruited, the program they were exposed to, and Fellow reactions to their training.

#### **CIPL Recruitment Process**

The CIPL staff specifically sought people who were leaders in their local school community who would benefit from skills enhancement, were involved with other community associations, and/or supported educational reform. An unavoidable tension emerged between finding volunteers willing and able to give a sizeable chunk of time to CIPL activities and reaching parents who traditionally had not been very active in their children's schools. The concern was that these two groups of parents would have little overlap and that the former would be overly represented in the Institute.

This imbalance seemed almost inevitable, however, given the nomination criteria CIPL used and the simple fact that the economic, political, and cultural factors that diminished parents' visibility in school settings would also hinder their enacting the more extensive role CIPL envisioned. CIPL's hope was that, at the least, the Fellow cohorts would touch the full range of school settings in Kentucky, thereby increasing the chance that students who had historically not performed well in school would not miss out on the benefits of the Fellows' efforts.

Fellows were trained in groups of 25 through eight geographically proximate training centers. The Fellows attended three two-day sessions over the course of several months in the fall and were expected to return to their school communities to learn more about them and implement project plans that were enduring, enhanced parental involvement, and were linked to improved student achievement.

The Prichard Committee canvassed a wide range of people and organizations throughout the state, including previous cohorts of CIPL Fellows, to solicit nominations. The Committee also mailed brochures to all superintendents, schools where past Fellows had provided leadership, and groups on the Prichard Committee mailing lists. In addition, the CSCs were invited to use their local contacts to recruit participants. Their

role was to ensure geographic and economic diversity in the applicant pool and to review the submitted applications.

The Fellows we interviewed reported a range of ways in which they had been referred to CIPL. Four stood out as most frequent: someone in the school or district recommended them, some form of direct contact from Prichard (mailing through the PTA, radio, newspaper, visit to the school, association with board member), local CSC referrals, and prior Fellows. No one mechanism seemed to be most prevalent among the Fellows we interviewed, thereby validating the multi-pronged recruitment approach.

Fellows talked freely about the characteristics of the Fellow pool when we interviewed them. One parent jokingly likened the experience to “*preaching to the choir.*” By that she meant the CIPL information was being delivered to people who were already convinced of its importance and who were already predisposed to respond favorably to the communicated message. Many acknowledged the accuracy of that statement, but refused to accept it as a given. They had two different but complementary reactions. The first was that just because CIPL was tapping the more active parents did not mean efforts to further develop their skills should be stopped.

*I think the goal is right of arming the people who are active with information and already involved. This is the fastest way to do that. You don't have to spend a lot of time explaining why. No matter how involved you are you still need more information and ways to get people more involved. You have to start with the more active folks. It is just like the church. You need to build even those people up [who are already converted] to go out. Just because you are in the choir doesn't mean you don't need to hear the message.*

*I have been a volunteer for seven years, but I learned more in a few short months that the seven years couldn't even touch.*

But equally important was the message from Fellows that Prichard should continue to try and recruit the more difficult to reach parents.

*If you eliminate the less active ones, that may be just the thing to get them involved. It's just the way they [CIPL] pump you up. They do such a good job. They may never get involved without that.*

*There is another group who aren't involved but would like to be – they aren't because of work schedules, or they just feel intimidated. They don't feel like they know enough. Those are the ones who need to be targeted. But it doesn't mean people like me shouldn't continue to be recruited.*

*Parents who do attend are professionals. Get good input from them, but we have them involved anyway. We lack those with the self-esteem. We need to reach out to them.*

The Fellows seemed to have no concerns about parents with all different levels of knowledge being part of the training. One parent spoke for most when she noted:

*I think it is important to be with people at all different levels. I was able to share information with them and help them. I learned things about their schools that I could not believe. That is important – part of the whole learning process. You get as much from others in the networking as you do from some of the presenters. If anything, you could have more time networking. The last Friday we sat around for several hours and people really found that beneficial.*

### **Characteristics of the CIPL Sample**

But just how diverse were these parent recruits? Three sources of data enabled us to establish the representativeness of the two cohorts. First, we collected self-reported survey data on their geographic and educational backgrounds. Second, we were able to compare school-level data on the wealth, size, and student achievement levels in the schools where Fellows volunteered their time compared to the state as a whole. And, finally, we reviewed Fellow self-reports on the frequency and type of activities they engaged in at their children's schools prior to CIPL.

**Parent geographic and educational background.** It is difficult ethically and accurately to collect background information about participants in any program. Respondents must be given the choice to release such information and are understandably reluctant to provide any information that may either be personally sensitive (such as income or marital status) or uniquely identify them (despite promises of confidentiality). Based on feedback during the field tests of our survey, we limited our request for background information to just geography and education.

Geographic representation in the cohorts appeared well balanced among rural, suburban, and urban communities. This balance was true for both the 1998 and 1999 cohorts.

The Fellows were also diverse in their educational backgrounds. For those completing our survey, approximately half had less than a college degree. The remainder were split nearly equally between those with a bachelor's degree and those with more advanced graduate training. These numbers were similar for both cohorts. These figures suggest that the CIPL recruits are better educated than the overall adult population in Kentucky where only about one out of every five adult citizens has a college degree.

**School demographic and performance data.** To supplement our limited survey background data, we used the Kentucky Association of School Councils' education database to compare the 258 schools that the Fellows worked in over the past three years (cohorts one through three) to the other 1026 around the state. The database provided measures of school wealth, size, and student performance. From this comparison we

were able to determine how representative Fellow schools were in relation to the state population.

The Fellows' schools were **somewhat wealthier** than the state population, based on the proportion of students qualifying for free or reduced lunch – a commonly used substitute measure of family wealth. At elementary, middle, and high school levels, Fellow schools had fewer children of poverty than the rest of the state's schools. On average, the Fellow schools were 17 percent wealthier. A standard test of statistical difference indicated that this was significant, i.e., not likely to have happened by chance.

A comparison of school size (i.e., student enrollments) showed that the Fellows' schools were also **larger** than the average school in the state, with the former enrolling about 23 percent more students. Again, this difference was significant when measured against standard statistical tests.

**Similar to slightly higher test performance** marked the population of CIPL Fellow schools compared to other schools in the state. The schools where Fellows worked had higher test scores, but those numbers were only marginally higher (usually just a point or two). In all cases but three (reading and mathematics in middle school and mathematics in high school), those differences were not significant (i.e. they happened by chance). Table 1 summarizes those differences across five major subject areas for each of the three grade levels.

Table 1: 1998 KIRIS Test Results:  
Comparison of Fellow Cohort School Means to the State Means by Subject and Grade Level

	Elementary			Middle School			High School		
	Cohort Mean (n=198)	State Mean (n=525)	Dif	Cohort Mean (n=77)	State Mean (n=245)	Dif	Cohort Mean (n=77)	State Mean (n=152)	Dif
<b>Reading</b>	58.6	57.1	1.5	48.0	46.0	2.0*	52.1	50.2	1.9
<b>Math</b>	44.7	42.8	1.9	54.7	48.2	6.5*	48.2	43.2	5.0*
<b>Writing</b>	38.3	37.2	1.1	28.5	28.1	0.4	43.0	43.0	0.0
<b>Science</b>	37.7	36.7	1.0	22.1	20.6	1.5	44.6	43.6	1.0
<b>Social Studies</b>	38.1	36.9	1.2	34.0	31.8	2.2	50.0	47.9	2.1

\* A statistical test to determine if these differences occurred by more than chance indicates that these particular differences are significant.

Do these numbers suggest that the Fellows' schools performed any differently than schools from around the state? The general answer was **no**. The numbers are so similar as to indicate that the Fellow schools were similar in performance to schools from across the state. The implication from this is that Fellows were not taking on assignments in schools that either represented any more or less of a challenge (at least in terms of

promoting students' academic performance) than what parents might encounter in any other setting.

**Fellows' prior level of activity in their schools.** Based on Fellows' responses on survey questions about how active they had been in their children's schools prior to CIPL, we found that the 1998 and 1999 cohorts of Fellows were active. Half of them reported that they had served as a PTA/PTO officer and two out of every five (40%) indicated that they had been elected to a local school-based decision making council (SBDM). But less than one in twenty had served on a local school board.

We asked parents to report how frequently they did activities traditionally associated with the parent role, like meeting with their child's teacher, helping their child with school work, working on learning activities beyond what was required by school, and meeting with school personnel about their child's academic progress. The CIPL Fellow responses confirmed their active engagement in these traditional activities with an average of 78 percent reporting that they did them either "often" or "very often."

We also were interested in learning how frequently the cohort had acted beyond this traditional role prior to CIPL. Such behaviors included participating in workshops on student learning, promoting conversations between parents and teachers about curriculum standards, encouraging school staff to use KIRIS data to plan instructional needs, or urging school staff to use data in addition to KIRIS for school improvement planning.

Forty-four percent of the Fellows reported that they engaged in such activities "often" or "very often." While this rate was just over half of the traditional one, it still indicated that this group of parents had quite a presence in their respective school buildings. Of course, this was possibly a function of the requirements the state had placed on schools to include parents on the SBDM councils. Nevertheless, it suggested that CIPL went to work with a group of parents that should have already had glimpses of what they were expected to do in their new role as advocates for reform.

Ironically, this was not the case. Many of the parents who had been on SBDM councils reported that they were frustrated with the experience. They felt "kept in the dark" and often ignored. They said the knowledge they gained from CIPL was needed to make SBDM participation meaningful.

## **A Description of the Training Program and Fellow's Reactions to It**

CIPL created a series of three two-day workshops that would introduce participants, to a host of education- and advocacy-related topics. Held in eight sites, the workshops introduced Fellows to their rights to know about and gain access to school operations, key elements of Kentucky's reform legislation and policy, where to go and whom to contact for information about educational and community resources, specific ways to act as advocates for school reform, as well as topics related to curriculum,

instruction, assessment, and learning. These sessions were conducted over the course of the late summer and fall across the state.

CIPL used the CSC position to serve as a resource to the Fellows. These eight coordinators, one for each training region, acted as conveners, presenters, and troubleshooters during the training period. But as important as this early support was, their ongoing availability throughout the duration of the Fellows' involvement was what really earned their praise and admiration. The CSCs provided on-demand individual assistance with project design, arranged numerous periodic meetings among groups of Fellows, and attended/facilitated Fellows activities in the schools. The CSCs also served as the main link to new information about CIPL via newsletters, regular mailings, electronic mail, and telephone contact. In other words, the CSCs were the lifeline to the larger CIPL initiative. But more important than the materials they provided was the moral support. Fellows knew there was always someone they could count on for assistance.

The **first two-day session** allowed participants to get to know one another, discuss the importance of parent engagement, learn about the Kentucky education system, and become prepared to do a homework assignment of gathering information from local schools. It began with a welcome from the Prichard Committee and Learning Styles Inventory to help the participants better understand how they, and by extension their children, acquire and process information. Later, participants discussed a range of different roles that parents might play in their schools with an eye toward viewing themselves as advocates for all students; worked with a professional storyteller to help them craft and share their own experiences in school (a prelude to understanding how other parents' school histories might affect their willingness to become active in their children's schools); and participation in a workshop conducted by the Kentucky Department of Education and the University of Kentucky staff to help them learn more about standards, assessment, accountability and the SBDM process. This included an exercise where parents were able to relate standards to their own lives and practice explaining standards to others.

The session ended with parents being given guidance in how to complete a "Welcoming Schools" checklist for their own children's schools and how to assess "Core Content" in their schools from another checklist. Fellows were expected to use these checklists in their own schools as a homework assignment. With each component of the training, participants were given handouts to help explain and reinforce the content. These were assembled in a notebook that Fellows often referred to as a valuable reference as they continued to define their role.

The **second two-day session** was designed to provide the Fellows with more skills for gathering information about their schools, information and skills related to engaging other parents, an understanding of leadership for change and how to work with groups, an introduction to a model project, and the skills to encourage parents and teachers to work together. For example, participants were introduced to a consolidated planning model similar to one schools had to use for designing their own projects and reviewed a model project; participants focused on a variety of training techniques and

exercises to make parents more sensitive to the varied skills, experiences, and needs of parents as well as to ways to encourage them to become more involved in school, with particular emphasis placed on parents who traditionally had not been active; and Fellows were exposed to a behavioral styles inventory that explains why different types of people behave differently in groups.

This session also concentrated on varying perspectives on leadership and how power and authority become exercised in schools. This was followed by a group process skills workshop designed to improve Fellows skills in agenda planning, running effective meetings, generating and prioritizing information, and working together in groups. They devoted considerable time to learning about a process developed by Prichard Committee staff to bring parents and teachers together to discuss common educational concerns. This process, known as Parents and Teachers Talking Together (PT3), had been used throughout the state since 1994 and had involved over 8000 Kentuckians in more than 300 school settings. The process sought to alter the working relationship between parents and school staff by having them collectively agree on what they want for children and how they think they can accomplish that, resulting in an action plan.

The **third two-day session** addressed skills for looking at student work, helped parents understand the power of having information to use making decisions affecting student achievement, offered information about regional resources they could use, and gave guidance on the preparation of the Fellows' projects. Participants were taught what student work (through a review of student writing portfolios) reveals about instruction and student achievement, and how to use a school's achievement data, consolidated plans, and their own observations to begin identifying priority needs for their projects. The session included roundtable presentations by resource organizations for parents (e.g. the PTA, Kentucky School Board Association, Kentucky Association of School Councils, Regional Service Centers, and Kentucky Family Resource and Youth Services Centers). These groups distributed printed materials describing their services and representatives were available to answer questions.

Finally, the session reviewed KIRIS data for each participant's school disaggregated by race and gender as a means of further identifying possible projects. To help ground that exercise, parents reviewed several additional model project designs drawn from past Fellows' efforts. The morning ended with independent and small group work as a way to help improve Fellows' plans for their own projects. A graduation luncheon ended the formal training with participants being awarded "Fellow" status for completing the training.

Survey and interview data show that Fellows were nearly unanimous in their praise of the training sessions. On the 2000 survey, 95 of the 165 respondents from the second and third cohorts took the time to write about the training. All but seven of these comments were glowing. The interviews recapitulated the written comments almost exactly, with the only difference being that they were slightly more positive in terms of numbers. The Fellows said that the information they received was eye opening and directly relevant to their situations, and that the manner in which the information was

presented was engaging and professionally done. Acquiring knowledge about the schools and how to interact with school people instilled in them a confidence in their credibility and worth as educational stakeholders. As we discuss in the remainder of this report, this knowledge and confidence provided a solid foundation from which Fellows launched their activities in the schools.

Recommendations for improving the training were rare. Occasionally someone with already-extensive knowledge of Kentucky education (e.g., someone who worked for the Kentucky Department of Education or in another professional education capacity) said that they knew much of the material prior to training and, thus, would have liked to have had their knowledge extended in some way. However, they also appreciated the review, echoed others' comments in saying that it was effectively presented, and recognized that for some Fellows the amount of information may have been overwhelming. Some of the other Fellows agreed that there was too much information to absorb; but they, too, thought it was well-presented and preferred to get an abundance of ideas to think about as opposed to being spoon-fed just a few topics.

The only other issue that was raised concerned the extent to which the training built in opportunities for Fellows to learn from firsthand accounts about how they might expect school personnel to react to their efforts. They felt the discussions they had about this topic dwelt more on strategies for them to learn about potential school reactions than actual instances where parents had acted on their knowledge in similar situations. More specifically, minority Fellows said that having none or only one of their peers on the training staff left them alone in figuring out how racial considerations might complicate and/or alter the applicability of what they were learning. This lack of a diverse voice from the front of the meeting room did not diminish their estimate of the value of what they were hearing for Fellows as a whole, it just made them question how useable it would be to them personally.

### **Knowledge, Confidence, and a Willingness to Act on Behalf of All Students: CIPL's Effects on Fellows**

In the interviews, Fellows continually referred to what they had learned, a new found assurance that they could make a meaningful contribution to their children's schools beyond their culinary skills, and a yearning to actually make a difference as the primary benefits to the Institute. In the Fellows' comments on the survey, 80 of the respondents (or nearly half of the number who returned surveys) volunteered references to what they had gained from their participation in the Institute. More than 95 percent of these specifically mentioned a better understanding of schools, greater confidence in approaching school staff and other parents about addressing school needs, and actually spurring the school to make changes. They frequently underscored their pride and amazement with having acquired these attributes with exclamation points. This extended section of the report looks at each in turn. In reality, however, the three interacted. Knowledge begat confidence; confidence begat action; and action identified the need for additional knowledge, which set this affirming cycle in motion again.

The most obvious effect was Fellows' **growth in knowledge and understanding about Kentucky education**. They became learners again and truly valued what they learned. This was true for all Fellows, regardless of educational level. Two Fellows, one with limited formal education and another with extensive professional training, illustrated this point.

*I don't have a college degree. A lot of this stuff I don't understand. But CIPL has really enlightened me. I know what my rights are. There are lots of bridges you can get to but you can't cross. Sometimes you wonder why you can't do some things. Now you know where your limitations are [as a result of CIPL training].*

*From my CIPL training, I learned the vocabulary and how to look at a comprehensive plan. I learned the language. . . . I realized after attending the sessions that I live in my own isolated, jargony world. It made me realize what narrow path I have gone down since I couldn't even talk knowledgably about what my child's school is doing. I didn't even know they had family and youth service centers.*

The key contribution to this new knowledge was that Fellows began to see a bigger picture for the actions being taken in their children's classrooms. They no longer regarded the teacher as doing something because the teacher wanted to, but rather because there were curricula and assessments in place that teachers were to follow.

*Prichard put the whole KERA process together for me. You suddenly realize why your third grader is writing an essay in math class – it all comes together now.*

*I now understand why the school does the things it does. It's not something the school just dreams up.*

In addition to seeing order behind the school's actions, the knowledge also broadened Fellows' views of the roles they might play in that process. Fellows commented how they went into the training with one idea about what their concerns were and came out with something very different in mind.

*Many CIPL parents came with specific complaints and then they broadened out. They went from asking why aren't the schools doing a better job for my child to why aren't they doing better for the entire school. CIPL did a good job at that.*

*I did find I could ask better questions (after CIPL). And I thought of questions I never thought about before. I learned different approaches. I began to look at things I never looked at before.*

Nowhere was this alteration in perspective more apparent than for a Fellow who came into the training with an us vs. them perspective and came away realizing that change would best be facilitated by everyone working together:

*I initially went with the attitude of learning something I could use against the schools. But I learned to see the schools from their point of view. I have a better attitude about looking at schools from their point of view. The them vs. us – I hope that will change as a result of CIPL.*

This increased knowledge led to an **enhanced confidence** that they were worthy participants in school improvement. Parents, as outsiders in the educational process, often felt like they were unwelcome or that, without specialized training, their ideas would not carry much weight. This lack of confidence was even voiced by parents who had been strong leaders in other community affairs.

*Even I would not have challenged my school before having gone through this training. Everyone needs permission to do it [i.e. ask questions of their school leaders]. I didn't know I could do that.*

*It really gives you confidence as parents to talk to others about it. They say that knowledge is power and that is absolutely true!*

*There was a time [before CIPL] when I felt like I had no power, but now I don't feel that way. I now have a voice.*

This confidence is best illustrated by one story of a parent's being emboldened to challenge both the district and state department regarding a personnel decision. She doggedly pursued the issue, confident in her understanding, until she felt what was best for students had been accomplished.

*CIPL hit a lot of things. I now know whom to go to get more information. I have been able to get answers for some questions that in the past they [the local district] could not get answers for. For example, one teacher got sick last year and the school put a substitute in her room. The original teacher had major surgery and was out for three months – much longer than they anticipated. The substitute didn't have her certificate and the board thought they couldn't hire her as a long-term substitute. But all the parents wanted to keep her in the classroom -- she was doing such a fabulous job. The superintendent said we couldn't do it. He called the state office and they said "No" we couldn't do it. The parents were in an uproar, having to pull her out of the classroom. I spent two days calling everyone in Frankfort. I finally found someone who gave me a loophole. It turns out she was technically not a long-term substitute as long as she was not "the teacher of record." Since the original teacher was coming back, she was still the teacher of record. We got to keep the substitute teacher. The state person called the superintendent and he couldn't*

*believe it. He called me. He was supportive of that decision. Everybody was happy with how it turned out.*

As seen above, CIPL also gave participants an **increased desire and willingness to act** on behalf of students. This went beyond just confidence. Fellows recognized that a new imperative existed for them to do something for the benefit of all students. This happened both to parents who had not been very active in the past and also those who were more active.

*I was one parent who wasn't as involved. I just expected it to get done by the school. For me, the training really helped me out a lot. I now know there are things I have to step up and get done.*

*It was announced at a recent school meeting that 40 to 45 percent of incoming freshmen can't read well enough to survive the high school curriculum. And one teacher said he didn't have time to stop and work with those who were behind. At that comment my hand shot up. I never would have done that before CIPL. I asked if they ever thought of parent volunteers to work with them.*

The remainder of this section will look at each entwined effect in more detail.

### **Increased Knowledge**

CIPL had to first ensure that Fellows had the appropriate knowledge and skills to carry out their role as change agents. The training sessions gave parents information about how schools operated, the intricacies of the policies guiding reform at the state and local level, and the ways in which parents might help the reform process. Thus, the workshops promoted the development of the Fellows as learners in several content areas. We designed survey questions that addressed each of the topics, asking Fellows to assess how much their knowledge had increased in each area and how important they felt that knowledge was.

Table 2 summarizes Fellow responses to survey questions regarding their **increase in knowledge**. Parents uniformly rated this aspect of the training highly. On a four point scale from 1=no increase in knowledge to 4=great amount of increase, the average for all four key content categories was above a 3.0. There was not a noticeable difference from one content area to another. Furthermore, there was not any appreciable difference in knowledge gained when comparing parents with less education and those with more, with parents who reported they had served on school councils with those who had not, or with those from particular geographic regions.

Table 2: Mean Score for Increase in Knowledge

<b>Content Area – Increased Knowledge</b>	<b>Mean Score, 1998 Cohort</b>	<b>Mean Score, 1999 Cohort</b>
Understanding the KY standards-based system	3.03	3.41
Leadership and group facilitation	3.23	---
Parent involvement/enhancement	3.16	---
Creating family-friendly schools	---	3.46
Bringing parents and schools together	---	3.54
Taking action to improve student achievement	---	3.51
Fellow project	3.12	3.44

The qualitative responses reinforced the ones from the survey, with Fellows noting that the workshops were equally effective whether they were encountering content for the first time, extending their understanding of topics they had previously learned about, or simply reinforcing information they already knew. And, Fellows indicated that they benefited from hearing about them all.

Parents made clear in their hand-written comments on the survey, and in our subsequent interviews, that the process CIPL used to present the information had a lot to do with how much they learned. The frequent opportunities to discuss the information with other participants were especially noteworthy for them. One participant reprimanded our survey's apparent inattention to the importance of this part of the process:

*You seem to ignore the tremendous value of learning from the other CIPL participants. I got as much from them as I did from the staff.*

Parents also reported that the knowledge was acutely relevant to their new roles as parent leaders in school improvement. Table 3 summarizes the Fellows' views, with mean scores generated from a four point scale from 1=no importance to 4=great importance.

Table 3: Mean Score for Importance of New Knowledge

<b>Content Area – Importance of New Knowledge</b>	<b>Mean Score, 1998 Cohort</b>	<b>Mean Score, 1999 Cohort</b>
Understanding the KY standards-based system	3.35	3.51
Leadership and group facilitation	3.44	---
Parent involvement/enhancement	3.55	---
Creating family-friendly schools	---	3.59
Bringing parents and schools together	---	3.69
Taking action to improve student achievement	---	3.74
Fellow project	3.57	3.69

The Fellows indicated that all of the content areas were highly important and relevant to their work. As with the other questions, there were no differences in the responses among Fellows based on geography, education, and school council experience.

### **Increased Confidence as a School Improvement Advocate**

The knowledge parents acquired led them to internalize a sense of confidence and self-assuredness that they could actually make use of that knowledge in constructive ways. On the survey Fellows assessed their comfort with the knowledge they had gained from being in the training sessions as well as their comfort in carrying out some of the activities when placed in a reform leadership role.

The three two-day training sessions were organized around several broad themes (e.g. from understanding the Kentucky education system, to bringing parents and schools together, to designing and implementing a project). These themes were modified somewhat from the 1998 and 1999 cohorts, reflecting CIPL's willingness to respond to participants' needs and to pay attention to their assessments of what had worked well. Because of those shifts, the survey items were not exactly comparable, making it difficult to make numerical comparisons.

However, the most important finding was that the trends in response patterns across the two cohorts were remarkably consistent (see Table 4). Fellows reported mean comfort levels in a narrow range from 3.12 to 3.51 (on a four-point scale from none to great amount), suggesting that the Fellows were very comfortable applying the knowledge they had gained to their new role as reform leaders.

Table 4: Mean Score for Comfort in Applying New Knowledge

<b>Content Area – Comfort in Applying New Knowledge</b>	<b>Mean Score, 1998 Cohort (Time 1)</b>	<b>Mean Score, 1998 Cohort (Time 2)</b>	<b>Mean Score, 1999 Cohort</b>
Understanding the KY standards-based system	2.99	3.34	3.16
Leadership and group facilitation	3.21	3.28	---
Parent involvement/enhancement	3.24	3.51	---
Creating family-friendly schools	---		3.31
Bringing parents and schools together	---		3.40
Taking action to improve student achievement	---		3.42
Fellow project	3.20	3.12	3.31

We were surveyed the 1998 cohort twice, once shortly after the training (time 1) and again more than a year later (time 2). Their confidence in applying what they had learned remained high, even after considerable time had lapsed between the training and the survey. Indeed, as these Fellows talked about Kentucky's standards-based system with other parents and promoted increased parent involvement, their comfort level in those two areas increased.

CIPL not only asked parents to use the knowledge they had gained from the training sessions, but also to use a host of leadership skills. We asked Fellows how comfortable they were in carrying these skills out, with their responses on the same four point scale. There was more of a spread in the mean scores (from 3.54 to 2.90) as compared to their comfort with using the content from the training session, but all the responses were again on the high side of the four-point scale, as summarized in Table 5. Fellows were at least moderately comfortable applying all the skills.

Table 5: Mean Level of Comfort in Carrying Out a Range of New Skills

Skill	1998 Cohort (n=68)	1999 Cohort (n=91)
Working in parent groups on improving student achievement	3.54	3.49
Reading materials related to improving student achievement	3.49	3.43
Seeking advice from other parents about school improvement activities	3.25	3.37
Seeking advice from school staff about school improvement activities	3.19	3.32
Working with the principal on school improvement activities	3.31	3.31
Moving forward on a school improvement project	3.14	3.20
Making the case for school improvement plans with other parents	3.22	3.26
Summarizing important information about improving student achievement	3.22	3.14
Working with teachers on activities to improve student achievement	3.40	3.24
Designing improvement programs for the school	3.17	3.24
Making the case for school improvement plans with school staff	3.05	3.10
Making public presentations about school improvement activities	2.90	3.06

### Willingness to Act on Behalf of All Students

Knowledge and confidence were the foundation for action, which was the real measure of the program. Adding to the complexity of this action step was the fact that parents were encouraged to work on behalf of all students, not just their own. Prior to their CIPL training, many of these parents had been advocates for their own children's education, but rarely considered seeking benefits for students beyond the scope of their own family. However, CIPL changed that by shifting the focus to improvement issues for the whole school and by extension to all students.

*As many times as I have been told I am not welcome, I know I have as much right as anyone to be there. I don't want to disrupt instruction. But I do want all 370 kids to know I am there for them. I want students to feel comfortable asking me for help. I now know I have that right. Every person should know that.*

This more encompassing role is reflected in the survey numbers presented in Table 6. Parents reported how often they engaged in newly formed skills to help all students. The numbers reflect the proportion CIPL fellows who said that they engaged in these skills either “often” or “very often,” the two most positive responses on a five-point scale. They are arranged from the most to least frequent. The numbers combine both the 1998 and 1999 cohorts because there were no differences in how the two cohorts responded to each skill.

Table 6: Proportion of Fellows Carrying Out Skills Either “Often” or “Very Often” (n=159)

<i>Skill</i>	<i>Percentage of Fellows</i>
Reading materials related to improving student achievement	62%
Seeking advice from other parents about school improvement activities	51%
Seeking advice from school staff about school improvement activities	45%
Working with the principal on school improvement activities	45%
Working in parent groups on improving student achievement	43%
Moving forward on a school improvement project	43%
Making the case for school improvement plans with other parents	43%
Summarizing important information about improving student achievement	39%
Working with teachers on activities to improve student achievement	35%
Making the case for school improvement plans with school staff	34%
Designing improvement programs for the school	33%
Making public presentations about school improvement activities	20%

These proportions suggest that CIPL Fellows were actively engaged in a wide range of school improvement activities. With the exception of “making public presentations,” anywhere from one-third to two-thirds of the Fellows were regularly practicing these important skills.

As positive as these figures might be, they still speak too abstractly to what parents actually accomplished in their schools. In the following section we look more closely at concrete actions – the projects and other activities encouraged by the CIPL program.

In addition to attending the three two-day workshops, CIPL required that the Fellows complete a project in a local school. CIPL emphasized to the Fellows that a project should meet three criteria. It should (1) have an eventual effect on student achievement, (2) involve other parents in the school, and (3) be sustainable in subsequent school years. In other words, CIPL hoped that the projects would be school wide and systemic. By way of illustration, two Fellows described projects that seemed to fit that description, one successfully establishing a youth service center in a poor, rural area and another enriching a school’s curriculum in a poor, urban setting:

*My project was to get a youth service center open in the school. The school is one of the few to have never gotten a center funded. I first met with teachers at the high school (who had unsuccessfully applied three times) and then I went to Frankfort and met with the director. No one at the school had ever done that. The state staff were happy to go through the score sheets. Parent involvement had been the problem – we had scored 0s before. So I created a committee that was heavily weighted with students and parents. We eventually received \$33,000 from the state for the center. Once the grant was received we followed through with parents being involved – we formed an interviewing committee to hire a director with three parents and three school staff. Now when we have an advisory committee meeting we get a crowd. The center has only been open for two months but it is already helping students and families feel more comfortable with school. We have also been able to point families to other community resources. The director is visiting all the classes to speak about the services and alleviate any negative stigma about coming to the center.*

*I designed and implemented a life skills curriculum for 7<sup>th</sup> and 8<sup>th</sup> grade, relating it to the state standards. I did it because I learned through the SBDM that our scores in that area were very low and because I have skills in getting people to work together. I went into the community and found people who could teach important skills: a district court judge did a unit on team court, a local doctor talked about preventive health care, an international company put together a curriculum on group problem solving. It is all about giving kids information they think is important. We have set up three twelve-week sessions. We are doing the curriculum again this year. It is nice to see kids work through problems they will face in the real world. The school has now written the curriculum into their consolidated plan and they hope to add it to the lower grades as well (grades 3 through 6). I am in the process of putting a book together of the curriculum. Then I want to go out into community centers and present the ideas to their boards and help them assemble a curriculum of their own.*

CIPL's message concerning the goals of the project seemed to have been grasped well, and even internalized. For example, in the first survey completed by the 1998 Fellows, they were asked open-ended questions about the expectations for them as Fellows, the nature of their projects, and how well they thought their particular projects fit with CIPL's objectives. Three-fourth of the Fellows who responded to these questions specifically mentioned improving student achievement and increasing parental involvement as the targets of their work. This, of course, does not mean that the remaining quarter did not perceive these as goals of their work, only that they did not reference them explicitly in their written answers. Indeed, the high number of Fellows who used such nearly identical language is compellingly indicative of a commonly shared understanding about the role of being a Fellow.

From the foundation of a shared awareness project goals, the Fellows' efforts varied widely. They enacted reading programs, generated pools of parent volunteers, facilitated student transitions between grade levels, informed other parents about what was going on in their children's school, and made the schools more welcoming for parents. Some of these seemed to fit all three of CIPL's intentions for the projects while others did not, and Fellows' acknowledged these differences.

We drew on the open-ended, written comments and the interviews to look more closely at the projects. Those in the first category, who successfully combined all three general project goals, usually focused the project content on a student skill – most often reading, but also writing and “life skills” – and the project's implementation on parents' learning about and reinforcing this skill in children, both their own and others'. Sometimes volunteer parents were trained to serve as tutors in the classroom; sometimes parents attended meetings where they were informed about what was going on in the classroom so that they could do more at home, such as at a “family reading or writing night.” In each case, someone in a formal position within the school district or a community service agency eventually assumed responsibility for coordinating the effort in the future and/or the project made its way into the school's consolidated plan, which formally committed the school to continuing the activity.

In the “second” category, a host of Fellows concentrated their efforts on parents. This did not mean that they ignored achievement altogether. To the contrary, they argued that their efforts would indirectly affect student learning via better-informed parents. Thus, Fellows strove to pull together information that would enable parents to become better informed about instruction, curriculum, and assessment – through newsletters, handbooks, and brochures – or they enacted programs to increase the number of parents in the school – through either volunteer programs or making the school's environment one that was more welcoming for parents. Another topic that was of keen interest to parents that seemed to fall into this category was students' (and their parents) having to navigate successfully the transition from one level of schooling to another. Parents addressed middle to high school, elementary to middle, and even the primary grades to the intermediate ones. The Fellows' rationale was that the more effectively students made this adjustment, the more likely it would be that they would do well in school. Finally, some Fellows worked very hard to improve conditions in a building or district that would indirectly facilitate achievement, such as obtaining more computers, promoting safe schools, or boosting staff and/or student morale.

Fellows also varied in terms of their progress on implementing their projects. The first step for them was to write a description of the project using one of the reporting templates they received in training, such as the guide schools used for their consolidated plans. The CSCs reviewed these descriptions, made suggestions, and ultimately “approved” the project. Fellows then turned to the formidable task of implementing the idea. Fellows stressed that this did not come easily. They were treading into territory where few parents had previously ventured.

CIPL staff estimated that about 40 percent of the projects met their expectations, about 40 percent were on the way to doing so, and that the remainder might never be completed. However, our interviews indicated that this success rate underestimates the level of Fellow activity directed toward benefiting all students. Progress was made by almost all of the participants. In fact, parents engaged in activities that often went unnoticed by CIPL, as preludes to the projects or simply in addition to them. From our vantage point it is clear that the progress has been both substantial and appropriate given the conditions in which parents operated.

It would be incomplete to end the effects story here. The most enduring finding across decades of school reform research is that contextual factors either pave the way for or impede the efforts of those trying to carry out reform. The experience of these parents highlights the importance of facilitators and obstacles. In this next section we look at the factors that influenced Fellows' ability to act.

### **Factors That Influenced Fellow's Actions**

Fellows offered a litany of factors that explained whether or not they were making headway in their schools. These ranged from struggling to attract other parents to their plans, to being unable to decipher the tangled foreign language of education jargon, to receiving a helpful hand from a central office administrator, or to having a teacher smooth the way. As the dust settled from the list, the most significant factors fell into four categories. These were: (1) the role of the CSC, (2) working in concert with other Fellows, (3) other demands on Fellow's time and energy, and (4) the reactions of school personnel to the Fellow's efforts. For all but the role of the CSC, where there was near universal praise about their efforts, there were stories of how absence of a factor got in the way and its presence helped.

### **Role of Community Support Coordinators (CSCs)**

The praise, from the beginning of the training sessions to the last phone conversation we had with Fellows, was almost universal for the CSCs. They played a host of roles from teacher, to helper, to cheerleader, to information provider. Many parents said they would not have made nearly the progress they did without such support. Fellows identified this role as an absolutely essential element of the program. Even as the span of CSCs expanded with new cohorts, Fellows saw them as both symbolic and substantive links to the Institute and its goals.

*That is the one person you can go to and get an answer. She helps with networking, coordinating, and just keeping in touch.*

*You can't get by without them. I called mine up crying because of how the principal had treated me. She said, "Are you okay?" She guided me in the right direction to handle that situation.*

*I have contacted the local CSS and she has been helpful in providing me with information. The literature is excellent and well used. I am a highly critical person so I don't say these things lightly.*

*It is great to have a CSC as a motivator. Her emails were great. You can't discount the value of that.*

*They are such a resource, just having them available. I like having a source of support and a person to go to about questions. I was afraid to go to the school and she helped with that.*

The only concerns raised about the CSCs had to do either with the fact that sometimes the distance between the Fellow's home and that of the CSC made it difficult for them to get together as often as desired. Several Fellows said they almost felt guilty seeking the CSC's assistance because of all the others who were placing demands on their limited time. They understood that each successive Fellow cohort multiplied the CSC's workload.

*Our CSC is spread so thin. She could help by doing follow-up work. She is very helpful when I get to talk to her, but it is hard to get with her. I always hate to call on her. E.g. I want to ask what to do with my money or where to get additional resources – but I hate to bother her with these minor questions. Perhaps a person under her to help with the follow-up would make it easier.*

*[My CSC] has a huge job. There are lots of people she is accountable to. She didn't have to help me too much. It is just part of my personality to figure it out on my own. But other people feel like they are overwhelming her if they ask her for help since she is such a nice person [and won't ever say no to any request]. She needs another person to help her.*

### **Working in Concert with Other Fellows**

Parents who worked on their own in implementing projects often lamented the fact that they were strong in some aspects of implementing their projects but not others. Some parents said they loved the creative aspect of thinking up a project and putting that idea into a written statement. There were others who struggled with the idea generating part of the project but were adept at making sure tasks were implemented and followed up. Indeed, we encountered several accounts of individuals whose projects languished because they had strengths in one area but not in another.

*I tend to have good ideas and crunch time comes and it is hard to stay focused. Writing the project and getting the ideas on paper that was the fun part for me. Now, for me, the implementation is hard. With my work schedule it is hard to do my project.*

This comment was in stark contrast to the “doers” who carried out several helpful activities in their school but simply did not get around to formally designing and putting their activities on paper as “projects.”

*I never wrote up my project. I am really bad with paperwork. I just see things that need to be done and I do them without filling in forms. Even when my kids were in Head start, I never completed any of the forms to document my volunteer efforts. It is just not my forte. But I ended up doing lots of mini-projects [for CIPL]. One was working with teachers in trying to think outside the box about parent volunteers in their classrooms. We picked up a couple of teachers who before didn't want parents in their room. Those who didn't want parents seemed to step up their efforts. Also, a teacher and I cold-called parents about getting involved.*

*We hardly have any many parents who come to PTO meetings. I surveyed parents last year and they said they needed daycare. So I helped set up some daycare. Last week we had about 60 parents at a PTO meeting when we usually only have seven. We had 40 kids in the daycare. We had interns do the daycare who volunteered as part of their training. So I think daycare is a big problem that we can solve. I just want to boost up our numbers . . . But I don't know if I will get it [written project] done. It's just hard to get it in the writing format and turned in. I am not the kind of person who likes writing it down. . . . I do want to get it turned in, but with all I have to do it is hard for me to get it done.*

Working together on a project proved to be a positive experience for those who tried it. They created a synergy, working off the strengths of the other. Here is how several successful collaborators described it:

*We work so differently, but we work well together. She is very creative, and I am very organized. We split things up very well. It is good to work in pairs. You are always stronger when you work with others.*

*In my case it has been a benefit to be working together because when working as a team two heads are better than one. We are friends outside of the school system. We walk every day together. She may have understood some things better than I did when we attended the CIPL sessions. I have taken more of the go-ahead role. Decisions come from me more than my partner. She has not been in this kind of role before – leading a project. I have led projects at the school several times before. [Partner] is more of a behind the scenes person. She does not want to lead, but rather just be there to help in any way we can. She is there to be my backbone. She does not want to speak in front of teachers.*

*It's a lot better working with somebody. I am not one who does well in front of people. With having a partner, she can help me out. It's too much work for one person. You can help each other out.*

Even those who did not have the good fortune of having a partner or partners to work with collaboratively were quick to point out the potential of such an arrangement, even in the abstract. It was seen as a real plus to have someone else around when energy lagged or when ideas reached a dead-end alley.

*I was disappointed there wasn't someone in the new CIPL class from my school. I tend not to collaborate with things, but I would have liked the moral support. You do feed off that energy from all the fellows working on their projects. For me the excitement faded – work with others may have kept me more motivated.*

*If there is a way possible, they need to match up parents with partners. It is so much easier if there are two people. One can say “where are we at on this.” The partner can bring it [progress on the project] to the remembrance on the other partner. I know there are some who work really well on their own and I wouldn't want everyone to be forced to work together, but there are lots of others who really could use the help from having a partner.*

*It's more the idea thing – people think of different things. Some parts of my project are solo. I am very methodical and logical. I am not as creative and it helps to have people who are different from you to work with. That helps to think differently. Plus there is the motivation and support of each other.*

A Fellow who was particularly successful in bringing a community together in successfully implementing her project, even though she worked without the benefit of another Fellow, summed it up best when she concluded as a reflection on her efforts: *Teamwork is always the answer.*

### **Other Demands on Time and Energy**

American culture's most precious commodity is time and the lack of it prevented some Fellows from carrying out their projects to the degree they had proposed. Interviews with these Fellows often began with a statement like: *I just didn't have the time I thought I would devote to this.*

Why was time such a difficult factor? For some it was simply the pressures of demanding jobs:

*This will be a short conversation. I have not done much of anything on my project. In my job I am overwhelmed with my work.*

*It is difficult to do with a full time job. The project often takes a back seat when I am busy at work. I guess I am not as diligent as I should be.*

For others it involved making difficult choices between competing priorities:

*I have to begin taking care of my own mental health.*

*I have had family problems – last spring we moved in with my mother-in-law to care for her.*

*Everything is on hold until May when I finish my internship (for a graduate degree). All of the other faculty have advanced degrees but me and I need to get my degree.*

*I got married a second time after I graduated and that took a lot of time away from any volunteer work, even church.*

*My husband got in a bad auto accident and that tied me up. He is disabled and I have to do everything.*

Some voiced concerns about the incompatibilities of school schedules with their own, particularly with jobs that did not allow them the flexibility to be in school to implement their project while school was in session:

*One barrier, as I see it, is that some of the target parents are working parents. They work the same time as the school day, like me. It's hard for me to get to the school. . . . We are hindered by our work schedules.*

Just as some parents lamented the fact that other demands took them away from their children's schools, there were others who were fortunate enough to have personal schedules that allowed them to be in their children's schools on a regular basis. These schedules included either being a full-time mom, having a flexible work schedule, or having some working relationship with the school.

*I am fortunate in that I have the luxury of being a stay-at-home mom.*

*I work out of my home so I have more flexibility with my schedule. I was able to spend two days on the phone [for an activity for her school].*

*At the time of my project I was a part-time paid person working in the school with [special reading program].*

And there were the few super humans who seemed to be able to balance the demands of family life, professional work demands, and taking on an assignment of

school improvement in previously uncharted waters. These people seemed to thrive on that challenge.

*I do community development for a non-profit agency. I build day care centers and homeless centers. I got involved in my school because I feel very strongly about community involvement and getting everyone involved in decisions when they impact the whole community, as schools do. As a community leader I wanted to be a better leader in the schools. Sometimes the schools did not want me there and this [CIPL] was a vehicle for me to get more involved.*

*To most persons, it is an impossibility to do this. Not to me. When it comes to education, I push everything else aside. I make time for it.*

The realistic, wistful commentary of a parent who struggled while juggling many balls in the air was more typical of the parents for whom time pressures were insurmountable.

*If I could just be a full time parent instead of having a full time job, helping my husband run a farm, and keeping a household. Maybe then I could get others set on fire and I could make a world of difference.*

### **School Personnel Reactions**

The schools came in all shapes and sizes as it related to their approaches to parent involvement. Some welcomed parents with open arms, others were not quite sure how to greet them, and some even pushed parents away, or at least kept them at arm's length.

In the survey, we asked Fellows to contrast their frequency of involvement with how well the school reached out to parents. Parents were twice as likely to report that they were involved on a regular basis (often or very often) than they were to say that the school was effective (did it well or very well) in reaching out to them. Thus, in general terms CIPL parents believed they were doing more in this two-way street of interaction than their school counterparts.

The variability in schools' willingness to accept proactive parental involvement was also evident when Fellows talked about their school projects.

*Our school was one of those "come as we call you" schools. I got tired of just baking cupcakes when we were asked. I want to be able to say that I will volunteer, but I don't know how to bake cupcakes. You know what they say: one parent equals a nut cake, two parents equals a nut cake plus a friend. Even though the Community Resource Center recommended [our project idea], I think principal was afraid of us. The other day the principal went white when I suggested I might make five copies of something he had just handed me. I had to explain that we are not here to*

*hurt you, but rather to help you. He needs to learn that we will look at the school from his point of view, not just ours.*

*It all depends on how receptive the schools are (when talking about appropriateness of projects). If the school is willing to work with you, those expectations can be met.*

*The effectiveness of the program depends of the receptiveness of the environment. I have yet to find a way to key into our district, except working through individual teachers who are more receptive.*

*I told the principal what I was doing, and now I'm involved in all kinds of different meetings for the school. The day we finished the training, the principal stopped the meeting and announced that I had graduated.*

Nowhere was school support more important for CIPL Fellows than with building leadership. Most of the projects required access and use of the school building, communication with school staff, and time to work with students. To do so, necessitated at least approval, if not the active support, of the principal. Yet, when Fellows tried to enlist that support they were met with varying degrees of success.

*When we first told her [about CIPL activities] she pretty much jumped in our face and said we were checking up on her. She did not want us to do it. I think she just wasn't aware of what it was. When she learned that it would help with the curriculum guide it got better, but she doesn't want us out there at the school. She wants us to just put our kids on the bus.*

*I talked to my daughter's elementary principal about the project idea and she just rolled her eyes . . . She said the things I was describing they already do. Her attitude was "who cares. I already have all the parent involvement I want, thank you very much."*

*We jointly shared the leadership [on a project] with the principal. It showed a unified front to have a parent, staff member and principal running the in-service. [The principal] is a very parent-oriented person. I asked him when I finished my CIPL class what I should do for a project and he had us put our heads together and we came up with the idea jointly. It also helped that he had other CIPL fellows go through the program so he was in tune with what they were doing.*

Parents also reported that they worked hard to successfully build a good relationship with the building principal only to discover that sometimes over the summer that leadership changed and they were then forced back to ground zero.

*It [project] didn't go anywhere. We had a principal change. I met with them (principal and assistant principal) once and all I got was lip service.*

But support required more than just the blessing of the key gatekeeper. Because project goals were structured around enhancing student achievement, many projects implicated both curriculum and pedagogy – the key domains of classroom teachers. As a result, parents described how they had varying degrees of success in getting buy-in from teachers even when parents made extra efforts to avoid the image of a pushy, domineering parent.

*I didn't always feel accepted . . . A lot of teachers felt threatened, even though I did not come on strong. It wasn't me they were reacting to. I think it is just an outsider coming in doing instructional [reading tutorials] things. . . . Something I wasn't ready for was not being accepted in the school setting. Maybe they [CIPL] should have a speaker to get us ready for that. I can't tell you all that I went through. I went in with a positive manner, but it was tough, a real battle. That was the one thing I wasn't looking forward to.*

Parents noted that teachers were often concerned about any new projects adding responsibilities to an instructional day that was already overloaded with demands.

*The biggest questions from teachers were what they would have to do extra to make it happen.*

But there were also important accounts of how teachers were very supportive of parent efforts, often providing important entry and moral support.

*The PE teacher likes to do a health fair. He recognized that part of the core content addressed some of those things. He had health providers come in during the day and give demonstrations to kids. I helped him add a one-night parent component. We had speakers on nutrition, emergency room care, firemen, gymnastics, etc. We had about 120 parents show up.*

### **Future Considerations for CIPL and Other Parent Leadership Programs**

There is no question that CIPL Fellows regarded the training they received as of the highest quality and that it instigated knowledge, confidence, and a willingness to act in many of them. By any measure, CIPL effectively entered the unmapped terrain of encouraging parents to become leaders for change and established important guideposts for others to follow. As the Institute continues to evolve there are at least six considerations on which CIPL, and other agencies hoping to emulate CIPL, should reflect.

The evaluators' belief was that final reports should contain no significant surprises for program staff. Such surprises would only insert a potentially defensive element into what should be a constructively critical relationship. Thus, each point below was discussed in depth with CIPL staff prior to the preparation of a report draft. These

discussions improved the clarity of what was written, promoted agreement about what the words meant, and enabled the evaluators to better ground suggestions in the realities CIPL faced from an education standpoint. Research has shown that many activities can improve test scores without substantial, long-term learning taking place. The conversations with CIPL staff revealed that they had considerable confidence in the developmental appropriateness of the test and felt that this test was one that could productively inform and guide instructional changes. The final report, therefore, cautions against such a practice generally while acknowledging the specific situation that Kentucky enjoys.

**(1) Develop a definition of what kind of leadership parents could reasonably be expected to exert in schools**

Upset with the perceived slow pace of change in Kentucky's schools, the Prichard Committee determined that outside influences might speed up improvement beyond tinkering. Thus, in its initial discussions of the Institute, Prichard spoke boldly of enabling parents to become forces for reform. The prior sections of this report on the Fellows' actions in the school make it clear that parents did not instigate dramatic changes in school organization, curriculum, or instruction. Certainly no school that had either Fellows we talked to or Fellows who wrote about their efforts on the surveys seemed to have experienced any sort of comprehensive reform.

This is not to say, however, that Prichard's idea that parents could influence schools in ways that had positive benefits for students was misguided. Indeed, the prior sections indicate that the majority of Fellows instigated some idea, program, or event that gave the schools tools for working better with students and parents that had previously not existed. Moreover, many of these changes appeared to have roots that would allow them to continue into the foreseeable future.

The apparently modest impact of parents on the schools, we think, should be looked upon with pride, by both parents and CIPL, especially at this still early stage of implementing the original hypothesis. As we noted in the interim report and discussed again here, parents actually had to take several intermediate steps on the way to championing changes that benefited students. They first had to be learners of a wealth of information about Kentucky education and working effectively with schools. Then they had to engage school personnel as advocates for all children, not just their own. And, they had to develop a foundation of data and support for instituting their projects and activities. All of this had to occur before and/or while attempting the actual change.

Fellows broke the customary boundaries of parent/school interactions – in both style and content. Fellows had to spend a great deal of effort on preparing the schools for accepting parents who wanted to exert leadership over the direction of their children's schools. The majority of parents still seem to be doing this, even ones who have initiated specific changes in the buildings. In other words, the Fellows' remarkable

accomplishment was in getting school personnel to view parents as viable partners for change and not simply as external clients to manage.

At this point, four cohorts into the Institute training, it appears that CIPL has begun, and should continue, to refine its expectations for the type of leadership parents can reasonably be expected to exert in schools. Five such refinements are demonstrably achievable.

First, **it is reasonable to expect parents to accept and communicate the message to others that the schools must serve all students well.** Thinking beyond the needs of one's own child to those of all children is not natural for parents, so accomplishing this is no small feat. Nevertheless, Fellows continually voiced to us their understanding that this was the stance they must willingly take with school personnel and parents. Fellows enacted this expectation in numerous ways.

Second, **it is reasonable to expect parents to gather data about school needs and conditions and to present their findings in a public forum.** Parents collected information in several ways, such as gaining access to the schools' consolidated plans for examination or initiating small surveys themselves. More importantly, perhaps, Fellows learned which questions to ask. Communicating their conclusions publicly was, and is likely to remain, a troubling step for parents to take. However, they recognized that what they learned needed to be heard. Several expressed their ideas boldly, in large meetings, before peers and professionals. Others did so much more quietly, for example, in a small report that was shared with members of some planning committee or school council or administrative team. Regardless, what parents thought the school should do needed to receive a hearing beyond a principal if it was to move forward. The success of a majority of parents in doing this suggests that reaching an audience other than the building principal is both necessary and achievable.

Third, **it is reasonable to expect parents to talk knowledgeably about important educational issues.** Being effective advocates for change meant that parents had to become "bilingual." They had to be able to speak with parents and with educators. The former came easy for them; the latter was another matter. Conversing effectively with educators required Fellows to overcome their own concerns about status as well as to understand the jargon that infuses so much of the world of education. Parents demonstrated a refreshing ability to process the flurry of information that CIPL passed along to them, to determine the relevance of pieces of this information for their own settings, and then to apply this knowledge in word and deed in the schools. While stories about parents' gaining status in the eyes of school personnel remained sporadic in our data collection, the evidence is that maintaining constant and knowledgeable contact with the schools will ultimately result in parents having a substantial, as opposed to just an appointed, place at schools' decision-making tables.

Fourth, **it is reasonable to expect that parents will initiate activities that make schools more welcoming for parents, better prepare parents to work with their children academically, and promote productive communication between parents**

**and educators that leads to new programs and practices that benefit students' academic success.** The CIPL norm was that Fellow projects that did not have a direct connection to promoting student achievement were not as valued as ones that did. That expectation invoked a certain level of rigor into the Fellows' actions and infused the Institute with an "edge" that said just becoming more involved in a school was not good enough. Our discussions with parents indicated that this standard was probably too high for some parents in some settings; and it may be that more welcoming schools and more academically attuned parents are preludes to collaboratively enacting academically beneficial projects. Still, there is a balance that needs to be struck between CIPL's regarding the creation of a parent's room and a family reading night, for example, as nice but limited activities and viewing middle school and elementary student tutoring arrangements, as more in line with the Institute's goals.

**Fifth, it is reasonable to expect that parents will leverage the contacts they make during training into additional resources for change.** Through CIPL, parents became acquainted with a host of agencies, people, and materials that could help them and their schools do a better job of serving children and their parents. It is entirely possible that for some schools the Fellows were the first adults in the community to learn about and interact with potential resources at the state level. Parents seemed to gain confidence from their initial encounters with these entities and became emboldened to reach out in multiple directions to garner information, money, and influence that might further their efforts into the schools.

## **(2) Target a Diverse and Likely-to-Participate Population of Parents**

Put succinctly, CIPL is best thought of as a vehicle for promoting parent leadership; it is not a vehicle for directly engaging parents who traditionally have not been visibly active in their children's school. The literature on parental involvement is filled with reasons why schools do not see some parents at teacher conferences, back-to-school night, and other events – jobs, demands at home, and a host of other commitments to name a few. Moreover, invisible parents are not necessarily uninvolved parents. They may harangue their children to do homework and assist them wherever they can, but school personnel rarely see this side of the involvement equation. Regardless, in light of the time demands of being a CIPL Fellow in meeting expectations such as those listed above, it is highly unlikely that CIPL would succeed in engaging hard-to-reach parents where local school efforts have not.

Nevertheless, Fellow diversity remains an important consideration. To best benefit all parents, Fellows working in various communities need to be able to mesh well with the variety of parents that live there -- economically, ethnically, and culturally. To its credit, CIPL has incorporated a growing number of African-Americans in the Fellow cohorts. Those African-Americans we spoke with saw this development as critical for giving CIPL, their activities in the schools, and the schools themselves greater legitimacy in the parents' eyes and for increasing parents' comfort in approaching school personnel.

Whether improved perceptions of the schools resulted in greater parental involvement could not be determined because Fellows reported that the changes in this regard were subtle, such as someone venturing into a school for the first time to pick up a child rather than waiting outside or visiting the school at lunch time – the kinds of activities not likely to be formally counted or even noticed except over a period of time. Still, Fellows said that having a parent who others perceived as understanding their situations available was invaluable to promoting better school/parent interactions.

Many of the parents who have become Fellows, regardless of ethnicity, already had a history of active participation in schools. CIPL nurtured and channeled these parents into using their personal resources for the benefit of all children not just their own. In other words, for whatever reason, most CIPL Fellows had capital to devote to schools and the Institute helped them use this capital wisely.

Our interviews suggest that this capital has more to do with energy than with economics, as we contacted Fellows across the income spectrum. Demonstrably involved parents, or ones inclined to be so if they knew how, are the best targets for CIPL involvement. CIPL is unlikely to be able to affect the social, economic, and cultural conditions that constrain parental involvement, but it can support parents who frequently come into contact outside school with “invisibly involved parents.”

Additionally, CIPL’s original notions about having Fellows train other parents should be scaled back. Fellows appear to have been effective in raising specific topics for discussion and arranging for parents and educators to learn about these topics. To replicate all of the topics that Fellows learned about or to engage in the kind of extended interaction required to develop deep understanding and skills with all of these topics would require time and resources that are not present. Instead, Fellows should continue to do what they have been doing – figuring out which issues are most relevant to their schools, informing parents and educators about them, and spearheading efforts to address them.

This does not mean that CIPL should ignore the traditionally invisibly involved parents, or even the obviously uninvolved ones. It simply means that CIPL probably should not seek to train them. CIPL’s limited resources would best go to training parents who are in a position to recruit, inform, and involve such parents in school activities.

It might be worthwhile for CIPL to explore targeting potential Fellows who are part of, or have access to, identifiable groups of parents via church affiliation, community organizations, or special interest groups. Tapping already-existing groups creates an economy of scale in sharing information and ideas and may identify other potentially important Fellows.

Finally, Fellows argued that CIPL should broaden its definition of diversity. Understandably, it has emphasized ethnic minorities in its recruitment, particularly the African-Americans. Fellows say that there are numerous other minorities to consider, especially parents of children with special learning needs (or even learning styles) and

parents whose native languages are other than English. Such parents often find it necessary to be ardent advocates for their own children, and representatives from these groups say that schools rarely think of their children, even in espousing the belief that all children can succeed in school. They understand that a program like CIPL cannot become merely another vehicle for pursuing educationally appropriate situations for these children but they claim that a broader definition of the kind of diversity CIPL seeks with Fellows would render its desire to benefit all children more effective.

### **(3) Prepare a School for CIPL Fellows**

CIPL Fellows introduce a new role for parents to play in their children's schools. Exerting influence on school staff to change some aspect of what they do – be it making the school more welcoming for parents, adding another event or meeting to their calendar, accommodating volunteers in the classroom, or collecting and using data to inform decisions – definitely establishes new parameters for parent/school interactions.

Institute participants reported that their initial contacts and subsequent activities as Fellows were variously received in the schools. Open arms, cautious encouragement, indifference, wariness, and refusal to cooperate were all in evidence.

CIPL cannot extend its mission to making Kentucky's schools more willing and able to change. Enormous sums of money through local, state, and federal programs are already being spent on planning and professional development; and the evidence from each such program only adds to the conclusion that reform is demanding and complex. CIPL is, however, attempting to boost the impetus for change via its Fellows and the cachet that the name of the Prichard Committee has around the state might be used a little more to increase the chances that Fellows will receive a hearing in the principal's office.

Currently, CIPL informs local superintendents that parents from their communities are taking part in the Institute and asks them to advise affected principals of this. This step seems to have had little effect. Only in schools where the principal or someone connected to the school originally nominated a parent for CIPL did school personnel know about a Fellow's involvement. That knowledge typically was limited to the fact of participation, with little inkling of the implications for the schools.

CIPL provides specific guidance to Fellows in contacting their schools in a couple of ways. As homework for their training, Fellows have to visit their schools and ask for a copy of the building's consolidated plan. This request alone may alert a principal to the possibility that a parent is going beyond his or her traditional involvement in the school. In addition, Fellows are to use a welcoming checklist as an initial tool for determining how open their school is to having parents in the building. CIPL views both of these activities as introducing the school to the Fellow's role.

These means of informing schools about CIPL Fellows does not appear to be as effective as the Fellows hope. Despite having likely encountered school officials at least

twice before or very early in the school year, Fellows still are almost solely responsible for introducing themselves, explaining CIPL's expectations for them, and negotiating a relationship with the school in this new capacity – all prior to beginning to work on a project. As discussed earlier, the relationship-establishing stage seems to be one of the critical points at which projects and activities become thwarted for a variety of reasons, including difficulty in scheduling a meeting with a principal, school personnel's lack of awareness of what meeting with a Fellow might mean for them, and having to begin anew when current principals leave.

Several Fellows suggested that CIPL hold sessions with school officials to describe the Institute and to help them see the benefits of having Fellows in the schools. Such an activity, to us, seems to be beyond CIPL's resources to carry out and, because these sessions could only be held on a voluntary basis, would compete with all the other demands on administrators' time and likely attract only those principals inclined to wanting intensive parent involvement anyway.

A possible low-cost but effective step might be to extend the letter-writing strategy to the buildings themselves, with specific reference to the Fellow who will be in the school and to examples of activities that Fellows have conducted in other buildings. At least this approach removes the superintendent as a gatekeeper of information about CIPL. Additionally, a phone call from the CSC to the principals might also improve receptivity to Fellows, at least in scheduling that first meeting.

Whether CIPL implements the above two ideas or some other of its own, the point is that it should engage in a little more preparatory work than it currently does. Even if such contact does little to alter officials' willingness to change, it should give the Fellows a greater sense that they are not embarking on their efforts alone and some confidence that the door is open at least wide enough to get their feet inside.

#### **(4) Prepare Parents Realistically and Authoritatively for the Types of Reception They Might Encounter from School Personnel**

Fellows were nearly unanimous in their satisfaction with the training they received. Both the process and content of the Institute seemed appropriate and relevant to them. Fellows that already knew some of the material appreciated the review and deepened their understanding of particular issues. Fellows for whom the material was new and somewhat overwhelming in its magnitude said that the training staff did an excellent job of making the daunting knowledge acquisition task comfortably manageable.

The only aspect of the training that Fellows retrospectively thought might be enhanced concerned forewarning them more concretely about the ways in which school personnel might react to the presence of CIPL Fellows. As discussed in the program description part of this report, CIPL did address this topic in the abstract, with information about ways to determine how welcoming a school is for parents and

leadership categorization schemes. These were helpful, but some Fellows indicated that since the Institute had been up and running for awhile, it would have been additionally beneficial to hear actual stories about what Fellows had encountered during their interactions with principals and other school staff. Such sessions, especially in a give-and-take format, would have added a dose of realism to the general conversations.

Minority Fellows carried this idea one step further. They argued that unless someone has tried to engage majority school staff as a minority, it is difficult to understand the complexities and subtleties that cultural and ethnic differences inject into the exchange. They said that any time they enter a school that they expect to have difficulty getting a fair and thorough hearing about their concerns. This expectation was fueled by years of, at best, distantly cordial and, at worse, adversarial, relationships. Thus, as they listened to the almost solely majority group trainers, they had to reflect on how what they were hearing would be tempered by racial considerations and to figure out the implications of this for their work in the schools.

Their recommendation was a variation on the one presented more generally two paragraphs above: Bring in minority Fellows who have already navigated the waters the new ones are getting ready to enter and let them share their experiences. This, Fellows argued, would better prepare them for their own efforts and would give the Institute an even greater authoritative position.

Certainly CIPL has a rich warehouse of actual incidents to draw on now. The interviews revealed one captivating anecdote after another about negotiating a parental leadership role, both unsuccessfully and successfully. Weaving these into the three formal training sessions could only improve an already incredibly praised training process.

### **(5) Take Advantage of the “Strength in Numbers” Effect on Parents’ Activism**

As reported above, Fellows spoke with near unanimity about the CSC’s essential contributions. Informing, inquiring, guiding, encouraging, prodding, critiquing, and chatting were all CSC actions that Fellows said maintained their activity in the schools. It was not that the Fellows were inclined to not engage the schools but time, resistance, and competing demands conspired to lower CIPL-related efforts on parents’ priority lists. The CSCs managed to alter this situation effectively and without resentment from the Fellows. Thus, this regular and sustained contact was an irreplaceable element in CIPL’s organizational makeup.

Fellows also spoke about the value of having contact with other Fellows. Parents that were in the fortunate circumstance of being in the same school touted their opportunities to share and complement each other’s skills. They said they could not imagine how they would have accomplished what they had without being part of a team.

Fellows who worked alone, who had few local resources to draw on, and who encountered one of the obstacles detailed earlier would often add wistfully in their interviews or written comments that they wished they had been able to talk to and work with another Fellow during the year. Certainly they wanted feedback on what they were doing, but more than that, they thought that having someone who was facing similar obstacles to commiserate with almost daily would spur the pair to strive to keep moving ahead.

Both viewpoints suggest that having multiple Fellows in the same school is advisable. It is unclear how CIPL might go about targeting their Fellow selection process to accomplish this, given the mix of nominations, self-initiated applications, and other recruitment strategies that the Institute staff now use. Perhaps formally asking for pairs in their informational materials would be a step in this direction.

However, it is an issue worth pursuing further, especially as the number of Fellows that a CSC must work with continues to grow. Currently, much of the communication and support among Fellows centers around the CSCs, like a hub in a bicycle wheel. For such a network to work, the hub must remain in direct contact with all of the spokes. Such an arrangement also will become increasingly unworkable. Because the Fellows claim that pairs can be more productive than isolates, it would make sense to examine the pool of applicants to look for pairing possibilities and to attempt to generate such opportunities proactively.

There is a generational aspect to pairing Fellows that also should be considered. Fellows, whether they worked with other CIPL parents or by themselves, had internalized CIPL's concern that their projects become institutionalized within their schools, otherwise all of the effort they had gone to would have been for naught. CIPL encouraged Fellows to have their projects adopted by the schools' SBDM councils or by some other ongoing group, such as the parent-teacher organization. In this way, then, the activity was likely to last after the Fellows' children had left the building, and the participants had moved on. Even with such adoption, an activity might be lost without a Fellow present to keep it alive and to help adapt it to changing circumstances. Thus, CIPL should begin to think about maintaining a legacy of Fellows in the same schools. Of course, identifying school teams and attracting a steady flow of parents to keep a CIPL influence in a school greatly complicates the selection process. But, both objectives would enable Fellows work to build on prior efforts and possibly result in greater benefit for the school and its students.

## **(6) Adopt Appropriate Notions of How to Determine the “Success” of Fellows’ Efforts**

From CIPL's inception, Fellows have been expected to explain how their activities, especially the projects, would improve student achievement. Although only one or two Fellows we spoke with had data that actually demonstrated their project had measurably altered students' academic performance, they all continually acknowledged

that establishing a connection between what they did and benefits for students was the ultimate goal of the Institute. Thus, in justifying their activities, they would spell out the logical path from an activity to student success – for example, making parents feel more welcome in the school would better inform them about what their children were doing and thus enable them to more effectively target their help, or implementing a mentoring program for troubled students might motivate them to work harder and this harder work would promote success. Essentially the emphasis on student achievement symbolically disciplined Fellows' thinking about their activities.

This represented an extremely significant development for the Institute in that it steered parents away from their traditional role of being passive responders to school requests and pushed them toward being active advocates for improved academics for all students. Making a logical connection between their actions and academics, it seems to us, should remain a core element of the program because it lends rigor and discipline to the Fellows' planning and quite noticeably sets them apart from the other parents.

We see no way that parents could ever, however, statistically measure the strength of this connection. Indeed, there is considerable debate among educational researchers and evaluators about how to demonstrate an empirical relationship between a comprehensive school reform initiative and student achievement. To tease out the influence of a specific Fellow's activity on students would far exceed the technological ability of even the most experienced evaluation agencies. Thus, holding Fellows responsible for constructing this logical bridge to academic performance seems appropriate and should not result in a lack of focus in the program.

While the Fellows' seem to use more generic notions of student achievement in their planning, CIPL retains an emphasis on KIRIS as the primary indicator of students' academic performance. Thus, ideally, Fellows should be able to refine the conceptual relationship between their actions and student performance to the point that they are targeting particular aspects of the tests students' take in Kentucky. In other words, a Fellow would not argue that his or her project affects students' reading skills, but that the project would address a certain set of skills that students must use in a test and that students have not performed well on in the past.

In essence, therefore, CIPL is asking Fellows to "teach to the test," loosely speaking. Teaching to the test often evokes immediate negative reactions, under the assumption that doing so needlessly narrows the curriculum and may in fact be a form of cheating. Others counter, however, that if the test is based on sound learning theory and requires students to perform complex and useful tasks, then assessments of this type can reinforce good instruction.

Generally we would be concerned about connecting reform intentions so closely to any standardized test because, far too often, such tests reward students who acquire and process information in certain ways and penalize those who learn in other ways. When such tests become high stakes (i.e., important decisions such as student promotion or the allocation of resources rest on a school's scores), a school's ability to

accommodate a variety of learning styles becomes seriously compromised. However, CIPL is convinced that, under KIRIS, the tasks that students must perform to show their achievement level are educationally justifiable. Moreover, the test is not used to determine student promotion, so their scores do not affect students adversely. Emphasizing KIRIS as the central indicator of academic achievement, therefore, gives Fellows an actual data source to examine and concrete targets on which to concentrate. This situation may be unique to Kentucky. Other states seeking to discipline parents' actions with student achievement as a criterion may want to look very closely at their tests before automatically adopting CIPL's stance.

**Appendix:****Sample Fellow Survey**

NOTE: Slight changes to the survey were made for different Fellow cohorts. The attached 1999 cohort survey represents the most complete version. The major change was that subsequent administrations of the survey eliminated questions 3a and 3c.

