

# THE OHIO LEADERSHIP FORUM

## BACKGROUND

*Exercising leadership—*

taking initiative,  
putting new ideas on the table,  
taking personal risks without knowing that you'll be successful,  
asking people to face up to challenging realities,  
initiating difficult conversations that others may be avoiding—

*is complex and difficult, and requires the capacity to adapt to changing circumstances.*

School leaders in Ohio and across the nation need support as they navigate the treacherous terrain of school improvement, standards-based reform, and public accountability in the quest to improve the performance of all of Ohio's children. The Ohio Leadership Forum has been organized to support these school leaders and serves as a pilot project for the Education Action Network, which will offer the program to other states.

### **The Challenge of Leadership in Public Education**

Education leaders today face complex circumstances that require difficult changes to schools and schooling as we know it. As workplaces in the new economy change rapidly, workers equipped with only basic skills are left behind. To stay competitive in the emerging global economy, workers must be able to innovate, developing new and better solutions to both routine and non-routine problems.

*This new context creates a tremendous new challenge for our system of public schooling.*

If the ultimate future of this country depends upon the skill of our people, our nation's education system must be able to educate *all* of our children to higher levels of performance than ever before expected.

*As the fundamental expectations for what students should know and be able to do change, so does the role of our schools. It is our school leaders who will create the conditions that enable our schools to transition.*

We have ample evidence that superintendents and principals impact student achievement. Yet our school leaders rarely are equipped to manage the changes needed to support

improved student performance. As standards-based reform and the accountability movement require our school leaders to perform in new and difficult roles—roles where they challenge stakeholders’ beliefs, push against their feelings of competence and loyalty, and sometimes unknowingly ask them to experience loss—they face tremendous peril. Those of us who have ever stepped out on the line and led part or all of an organization, a community, or a family know the personal and professional vulnerabilities of exercising leadership.

While there has been a gradual acknowledgement that teachers deserve long-term, high-quality professional development that improves their effectiveness, a similar commitment to leadership development has been slower to emerge. As the pilot project of the Education Action Network, the Ohio Leadership Forum helps to prepare education leaders to step out on the line to change their school systems, schools, and classrooms to meet the challenges of high expectations in the face of uncertainty.

### **The Ohio Leadership Forum**

The Ohio Leadership Forum convenes cohorts of superintendents and state department of education staff to engage in leadership development, action planning and implementation, and the dissemination of lessons learned to the broader education leadership and policy community.

The Ohio Leadership Forum is notable for three important features:

- 1) *Support to participants will be sustained over a long term.* To improve leadership and implement hard-hitting action plans, superintendents will need intensive, directed, and personalized learning opportunities sustained over time. The Ohio Leadership Forum is designed to engage cohorts of leaders for a two-year period. Initial training sessions for participating leaders around Adaptive Leadership™ are only the start—regular, ongoing training sessions will be convened, as will small group consultation calls.
- 2) *Professional development sessions will be customized to meet the particular needs of cohorts over time.* While the first year of the cohort’s work will be focused on understanding and using the Adaptive Leadership™ framework, developed by Ronald Heifetz and Marty Linsky, the Ohio Leadership Forum will customize its offerings and seek expert assistance in areas Forum participants require.
- 3) *Lessons learned by participants will be chronicled and disseminated to the broader education community.* Experiences and lessons learned by the participants in the cohorts will be chronicled by researchers and professional writers. These learnings will be disseminated through case study reports, scholarly papers, articles, and other means in order to showcase and share the range of lessons learned about exercising leadership to improve student performance at the district level.

## **Staffing the Ohio Leadership Forum**

West Wind Education Policy, Inc., a policy consulting firm focused on national, federal, state, and district education policy and leadership development, has joined the Ohio Department of Education to create the Ohio Leadership Forum and continues to manage and grow the program. Launched with an initial grant from Learning Point Associates, the Ohio Leadership Forum has received funding from the Martha Holden Jennings Foundation, the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation, and the Ohio Department of Education.

West Wind has contracted with Cambridge Leadership Associates (CLA) to provide the initial training in Adaptive Leadership™ to members of the Ohio Leadership Forum cohorts. CLA was created by Ronald Heifetz and Marty Linsky to work with individuals and organizations to develop the leadership capacity to thrive in complex, challenging and competitive environments. CLA is working with West Wind to customize the trainings for the Ohio Leadership Forum, and sends its faculty to all of the initial year's face-to-face Forums.

## **For More Information**

You may contact the Ohio Leadership Forum at [info@ohioleaders.org](mailto:info@ohioleaders.org) or by calling toll free to 888-351-OHIO (6446). You may also visit our website at [www.ohioleaders.org](http://www.ohioleaders.org). For information about the staff and faculty behind the Ohio Leadership Forum, visit our websites at [www.westwinded.com](http://www.westwinded.com) and [www.cambridge-leadership.org](http://www.cambridge-leadership.org).