Northwest Rural School Improvement Network Project

THE NORTHWEST COMPREHENSIVE CENTER (NWCC) at Education Northwest is partnering with Boston College (Drs. Andy Hargreaves and Dennis Shirley) and state education agencies (SEAs) in the Northwest to initiate and grow a network of rural schools that share common problems of practice and desire to significantly improve outcomes for students. Starting in fall 2013, Network members will participate in a series of face-to-face and virtual meetings over the course of several years to share innovative, research-based, and promising practices derived from purposeful efforts to improve teaching and learning.

What participants will gain

As a result of participating in this project, **school leadership teams** will learn to lead collective, disciplined inquiry among teachers and focused, school improvement efforts tied directly to student outcomes. **Schools and districts** will benefit from:

- Increased capacity to implement initiatives and practices that significantly improve student learning outcomes for rural students
- Increased professional capital (encompassing human, social, and decisional capital) among teachers in schools
- Increased leadership capital among administrators and staff in schools and districts

"The challenge is: **How in the uniquely American environment of small school districts of three levels of control (district, state, and federal) can we create a new architecture where schools can help schools, professionals can work with professionals, and the strong can help the weak?** I believe this project has the passion, the commitment, the resources, and the time scale to lead the country in terms of how that might be done."

—Dr. Andy Hargreaves

(see an interview video at nwcc.educationnorthwest.org)

SEAs will learn how to develop infrastructure to help grow statewide, school improvement networks and to support local education agencies in disseminating and scaling up effective practices. By participating, SEAs will gain:

- Increased capacity to support and sustain networked communities as a strategy for supporting school improvement (a sustainable networked community architecture)
- Improved ability to identify school improvement practices and tools to disseminate more broadly to other schools in the state

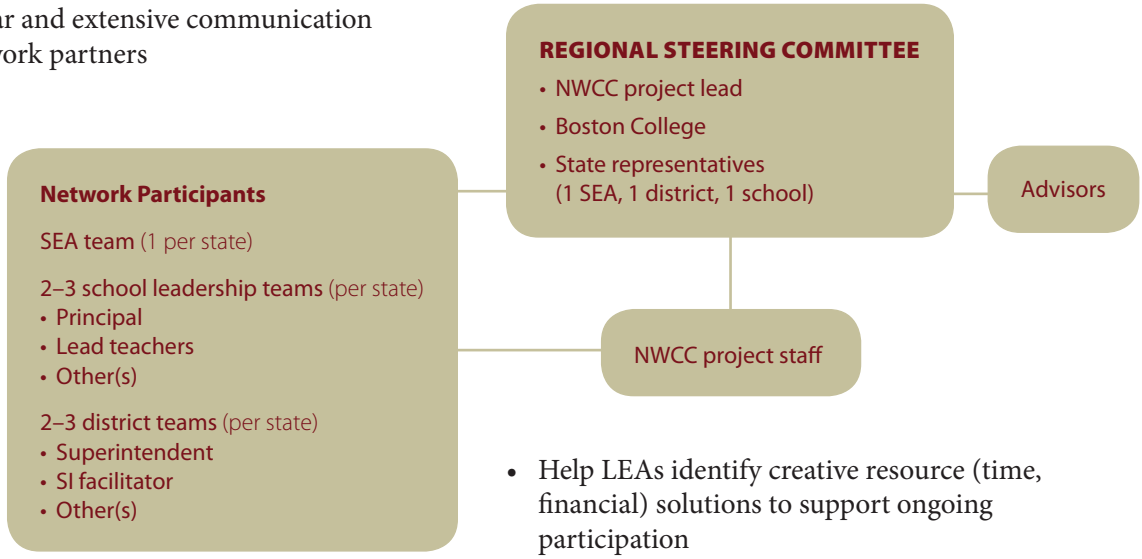
Membership and leadership

The NWCC, in partnership with Boston College, will serve as the lead organizer for the Network. In this role, NWCC/Boston College will provide facilitation, capacity-building technical assistance, and other resources to help support network activities.

The Network's focus, design, and activities will be guided by a **Regional Steering Committee** comprising at least two members from each of the five participating Northwest states (Alaska, Idaho, Montana, Oregon, and Washington). Each state will designate one SEA staff member, one district staff member, and one school staff member to serve on the Steering Committee from March 2013 to September 2017. Examples of Steering Committee responsibilities include:

- Actively participate in regularly scheduled meetings (full-day, in-person meetings three times per year; shorter virtual meetings six times per year)
- Identify common purpose and shared improvement focus for the Network

- Help recruit and retain Network members and communicate the benefits of collaboration to potential partners
- Determine desired level of formalized membership commitment
- Monitor Network progress and provide input to inform ongoing design and development
- Problem solve
- Share responsibility for planning Network activities and engage network partners in planning efforts
- Develop a sense of collective responsibility among partners for making improvements
- Help develop trusting relationships among participating partners
- Support clear and extensive communication among network partners



The primary participants in the Network are school leadership teams (consisting, at a minimum, of principals and several teacher leaders). School participation in the Network is voluntary. We expect to recruit a total of 10–15 schools (and corresponding districts) for the initial launch of the Network. NWCC, SEA Leadership Teams, and Regional Steering Committee members will nominate schools to participate in the Network. Schools will also be required to secure the commitment of a district team to participate. Examples of school and district Network team responsibilities include:

- As teams, actively participate in virtual and in-person collaborative network sessions
- Take purposeful action to improve student outcomes by planning and leading iterative cycles of inquiry and action
- Engage in ongoing assessment and review of Network-sponsored activities

Finally, each participating state will designate an SEA Network Project Team to participate in the Network and to lead capacity building activities to support Network efforts. Examples of SEA Network team responsibilities include:

- Help recruit and retain Network members; communicate the benefits of collaboration to potential partners
- Help LEAs identify creative resource (time, financial) solutions to support ongoing participation
- Work with NWCC/Boston College to create a state infrastructure for maintaining and scaling school improvement networks
- Conduct school site visits with NWCC staff
- Work with NWCC to identify and disseminate promising and innovative practices, success stories, and lessons learned throughout the state

For more information about this exciting opportunity, contact NWCC Director Danette Parsley (Danette.Parsley@educationnorthwest.org), 503.275.9633, and visit nwcc.educationnorthwest.org.