

## **Charting a New Course for ASHA: Supporting Leadership Development**

*“The quality of an organization can never exceed the quality of the minds that make it up.”*

*~ Harold R. McAlindon*

### **Background**

As professional membership organizations struggle to recruit and retain members, the issue of sustainable leadership becomes critically important to the “health” of an organization. As a mature organization, ASHA’s membership has waned and it has become increasingly more difficult to identify school health professionals willing to accept leadership roles. Without a true leadership continuum, organizations like ASHA resort to “musical chairs” leadership—that is, board members move from one position to another on the board, resulting in burn-out and the perception that the board is an elite club open only to a select few. While that perception may be far from the truth, enlisting ASHA members to serve as board members, officers, or even committee chairs becomes a tedious task. Recycling board members may fill positions but it may also limit the growth of the organization and impede progress towards new ways of thinking and doing.

In 2006, ASHA President David Wiley developed the Future Leaders Academy (FLA) to identify and train individuals for future leadership roles in the organization. The FLA builds skills and familiarizes young professionals with the programs and activities of the Association. Since its inception, 25 ASHA members representing various school health professions have participated in the program and many of them have gone on to serve as committee chairs or board members. While limited in scope due to funding and resources, the concept of FLA has benefited both the individuals involved and ASHA.

In order to sustain the “leadership momentum” generated by the FLA, ASHA needs to foster leadership development opportunities that impact all members: students, novice professionals, mid-career professionals and seasoned veterans from all school health professions. If ASHA is to grow and prosper, it needs leadership from the many diverse fields it represents.

### **Creating a Leadership “Pipeline:” Linking, Learning and Leading**

In response to this challenge, ASHA has created a three-phase leadership continuum focused on **Linking, Learning, and Leading**—otherwise called “L<sup>3</sup>.”

#### **Phase I: Linking**

*“Mentoring is a brain to pick, an ear to listen, and a push in the right direction.”*

*~ John Crosby*

ASHA will actively recruit students in professional preparation programs across the school health disciplines for the “Linking” phase of this program. Selected students will be linked with

an ASHA member who will serve as a mentor or sponsor. The sponsor's role is to acquaint the student with the organization: its history, core beliefs and mission; ASHA's school health priorities; and the governance structure of the organization. The sponsor should also emphasize the importance of professional service and life-long learning. Each student will meet his/her mentor during the annual ASHA conference at a sponsored event where they will discuss how best to spend conference time and discuss career goals and plans. After the conference, students will be expected to remain in contact with their mentor via phone or email to discuss the impact of the conference and their plans to become more involved in ASHA's various committees, sections, and councils.

Students who successfully complete this program are eligible for the ASHA student scholarship program. It is ASHA's goal to create well-informed young professionals who are willing to commit to ASHA activities not only at the conference but year round. Sponsors will be encouraged to support the student's participation at the next annual conference by paying the student's conference registration fee.

## **Phase II: Learning - The Future Leaders Academy**

*“Leadership and learning are indispensable to each other.”*

*~John F. Kennedy*

Participants in FLA learn more about the organization by participating in leadership development activities guided by leaders in the field of school health. Individuals apply to become part of FLA and commit to monthly conference calls as well as meetings held at the annual conference. Participants also become involved with ASHA's advocacy agenda by visiting Washington, DC to meet with legislators from their home states. Members of the FLA also are invited to attend ASHA Board of Directors meetings at the annual conference and are encouraged to “observe” monthly Board conference calls.

The FLA allows 5-10 ASHA members to experience leadership in action while at the same time, reflecting on their own practices and strengths. In order to become a member of the FLA, ASHA members must show evidence that they have already assumed a leadership role in the organization through committees, presentations, and service as a chair or chair-elect. By observing the activities of the organization's governing body, FLA members have a better idea of the commitment needed to take on a leadership role in the organization. They also have a better understanding of how the organization functions.

### Phase III: Leading

*“Before you are a leader, success is all about growing yourself. When you become a leader, success is all about growing others.”*

*~Jack Welch*

Making the decision to accept a leadership role is never easy. It will, however, be much easier to recruit individuals who have followed the L<sup>3</sup> pathway. Once an individual agrees to take on a leadership role, leadership development cannot end. It is incumbent upon the organization to educate all Board members about their responsibilities. This begins with Board orientation: the role of Board members and how the organization functions; the by-laws and governance structures; understanding financial statements; ethical issues; confidentiality; the Association’s strategic plan, and communication protocols. More information about Board orientation can be found below:

<http://www.bridgespan.org/Publications-and-Tools/Hiring-Nonprofit-Leaders/Recruiting-Board-Members/Board-Orientation.aspx#.UGsn366GU84>

[http://www.chorusamerica.org/resourcefiles/conf2012/LJacobwith/LJacobwithSampleBoardOrientation\\_checklist.pdf](http://www.chorusamerica.org/resourcefiles/conf2012/LJacobwith/LJacobwithSampleBoardOrientation_checklist.pdf)

In addition to orienting new Board members, all Board members should participate in an annual self-assessment (see below). The Maine Association of Nonprofits summed up the critical importance of regular self-assessments for boards:

*“A strong, vibrant board of directors is a clear indicator of a healthy organization. Yet even the best organizations need a periodic check-up to ensure that they cannot just survive but will really thrive in today’s environment. To check your board’s vital signs, or to put in place practices and strategies for a healthy and energized board, the best place to start is with a board self-assessment.”*

<http://www.councilofnonprofits.org/resources/resources-topic/boards-governance/board-member-self-assessment>

Continuing to support Board members as they take on new roles in the organization is critical to the success of ASHA. It is incumbent upon the organization to develop a system that educates and supports Board members who sacrifice time and energy to serve. Leadership development does not end when an individual assumes a position on the Board; rather, it continues to strengthen and energize the Board.

### Conclusion

Through the **Linking, Learning and Leading Program**, ASHA has taken another step towards solidifying its role as a national leader and multidisciplinary school health organization. The L<sup>3</sup>

Program aims to cultivate a culture where young professionals learn and are welcomed, where mid-career professionals feel appreciated and respected, and where seasoned professionals share their experience and wisdom to benefit the organization, and the field of school health.

*“Alone we can do so little; together we can do so much.” ~Helen Keller*

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