

Learning, Leading, Changing

Leadership Academy for Supervisors: Evaluation Executive Summary

National Child Welfare Workforce Institute

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Evaluation Executive Summary

The Leadership Academy for Supervisors (LAS) is an online training program offered to experienced child welfare supervisors who are motivated to become leaders in their unit, agency, and community by learning leadership skills that facilitate successful implementation of change. The LAS provides professional development, peer networking, and access to research and best practices to improve outcomes for children, youth, and families.

LAS Curriculum

The LAS training framework includes a core certification curriculum (*Introduction, Foundations of Leadership, Leading in Context, Leading People, Leading for Results, and Leading for Change*), stand-alone modules on related topics, and facilitated learning networks with peers. The first few modules were launched in late 2009, with all modules fully operational in 2010. Full completion of the LAS training consists of completing each core training module and participating in a facilitated *LAS Learning Network* (LASLN) via webinar or in-person meeting after each module.

LAS Participants

Initially the LAS curriculum was designed to be a self-directed training program. However, participants struggled to complete the challenging time-intensive coursework on their own, so the LAS team piloted a cohort approach that involved groups of supervisors in a jurisdiction completing the LAS with the support of local training teams.

Because this approach was successful in improving completion rates, the LAS team began offering cohort trainings to additional jurisdictions, customizing the delivery to meet the needs of individual states and counties. Between 2010 and 2013, 10 states participated in the LAS, with 17 training cohorts (some states had up to three supervisor cohorts participate in the LAS).

To capitalize on the benefits of the cohort model while still allowing flexibility for individual supervisors to participate, the LAS team began implementing national cohorts of self-directed participants in early spring 2012. Three national cohorts have completed the LAS.

In 2012-2013, a Tribal National Cohort began participating in the LAS. Unfortunately the Tribal National Cohort was discontinued because of low participation.

From 2009 to 2013, a total of 854 supervisors have completed or partially completed a pre-training, post-training, and/or follow-up LAS evaluation questionnaire.

FIGURE 1 Supervisors' Level of Education and Average Years of Professional Experience

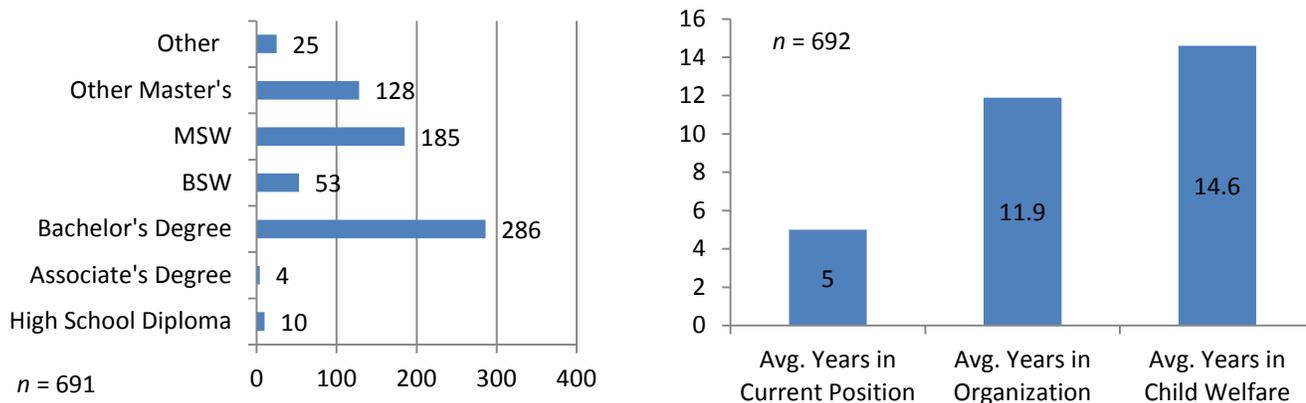


FIGURE 2 Reasons for Registering for the LAS

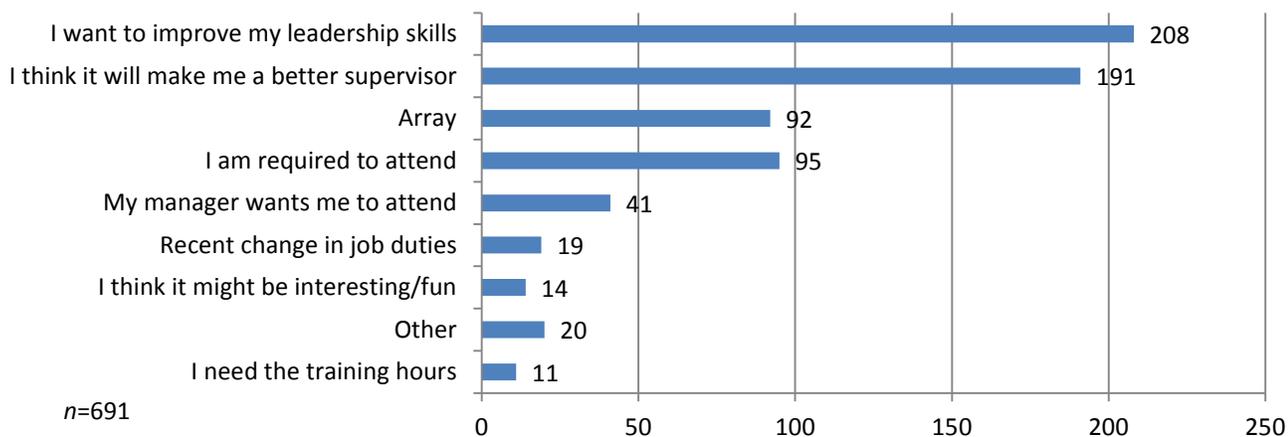
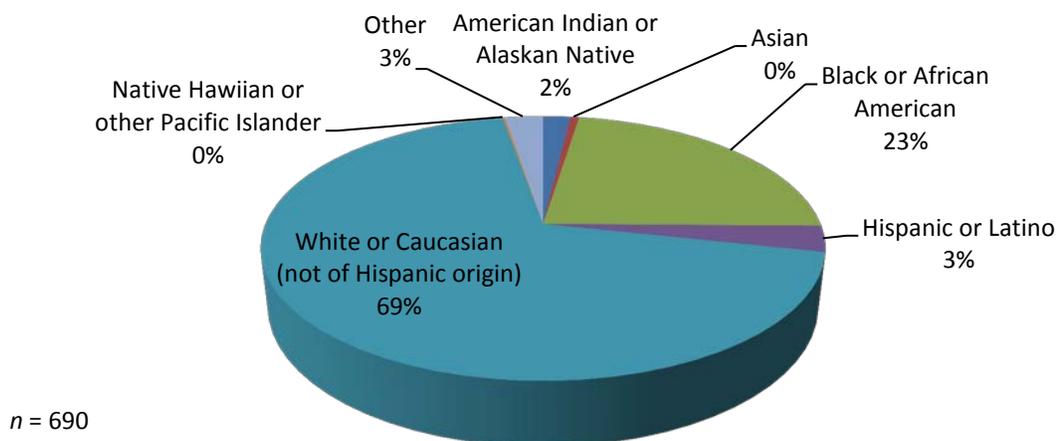


FIGURE 3 Distribution of Participants' Race or Ethnicity



Evaluation Goals and Method

The LAS evaluation uses a mixed-methods longitudinal design to measure learning, transfer of knowledge to the workplace, facilitators and barriers to transfer of learning, and whether participating in the training as part of a state cohort or self-directed impacts participants' experience. The design included pre-post data as well as 3-, 6-, and 12-month follow-ups for the core curriculum. Stand-alone modules were assessed at post-test and 3-months. Links to online pre-post questionnaires administered through Qualtrics were available through the LAS training website for supervisors' voluntary participation, while links to the follow-up questionnaires were sent via email invitation.

Research Questions

1. Was NCWWI successful in developing a distance learning academy for child welfare supervisors?
2. Did LAS participants learn the leadership competencies that were addressed in the training modules?
3. How did LAS participants transfer their knowledge and skills to the workplace?
4. What factors acted as facilitators and barriers to the transfer of learning?
5. How did participating as part of a state cohort versus self-directed participant impact supervisors' experience?

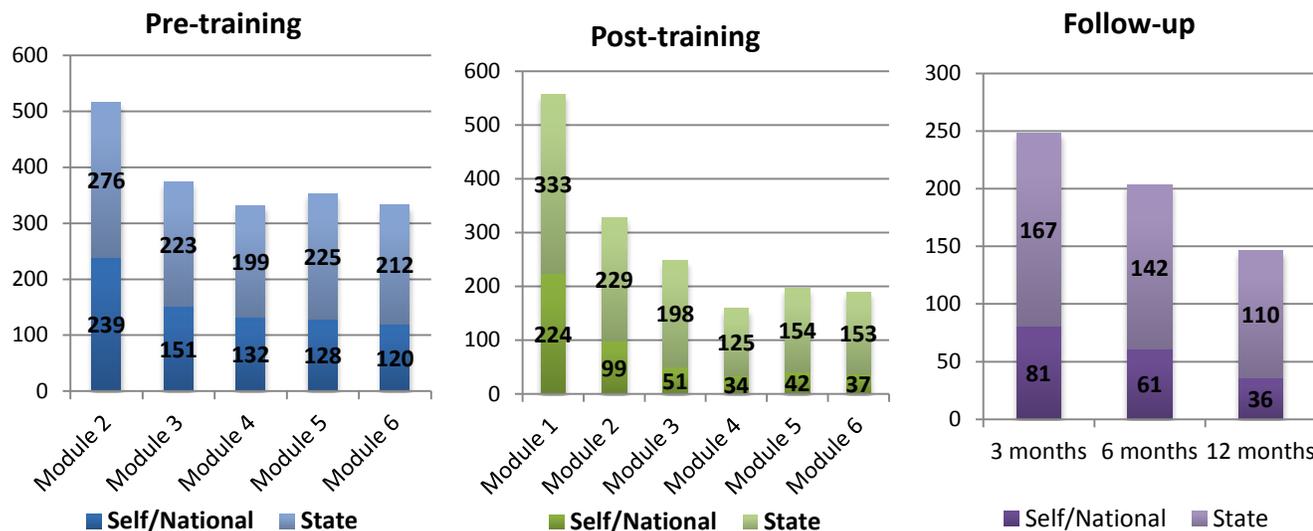
Although the total sample included 854 supervisors, the sample analyzed for each question varied depending on available data. Data analyses typically included:



Relative to state cohort participation, self-directed and national cohort participation decreased more over time. At 12-month follow-up, only 25% of respondents were self-directed and national cohort participants.

FIGURE 4 Total Pre- and Post- and Follow-up Responses by Self/National and State Cohort Respondents across LAS Modules*

*Module 1 = Introductory Module, Module 2 = Foundations of Leadership, Module 3 = Leading in Context, Module 4 = Leading People, Module 5 = Leading for Results, Module 6 = Leading for Change



Successful Development of an Academy

Supervisors participated in one of three ways: as part of a state cohort (44%), as a self-directed participant (50%), or self-directed with a national cohort (5%). In total, 3 national cohorts, 17 state cohorts (from 10 states), and 1 national tribal cohort participated in the LAS. Typically, counties and states that employed a *state cohort* approach to the LAS selected supervisors into their cohort, completed modules according to a pre-determined schedule, and conducted LASLNs with state facilitators via face-to-face meetings or teleconference.

FIGURE 5 Distribution of LAS Participants Across States*

*States with stars followed the state cohort model of LAS participation

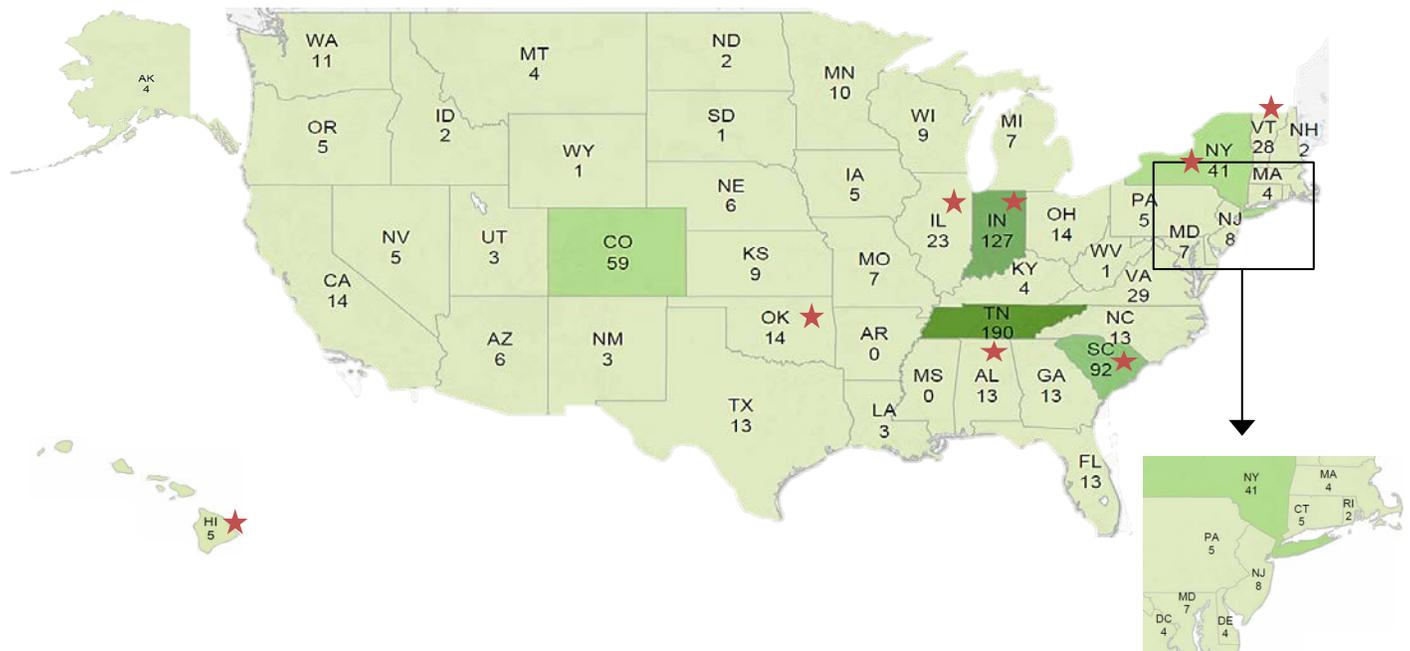
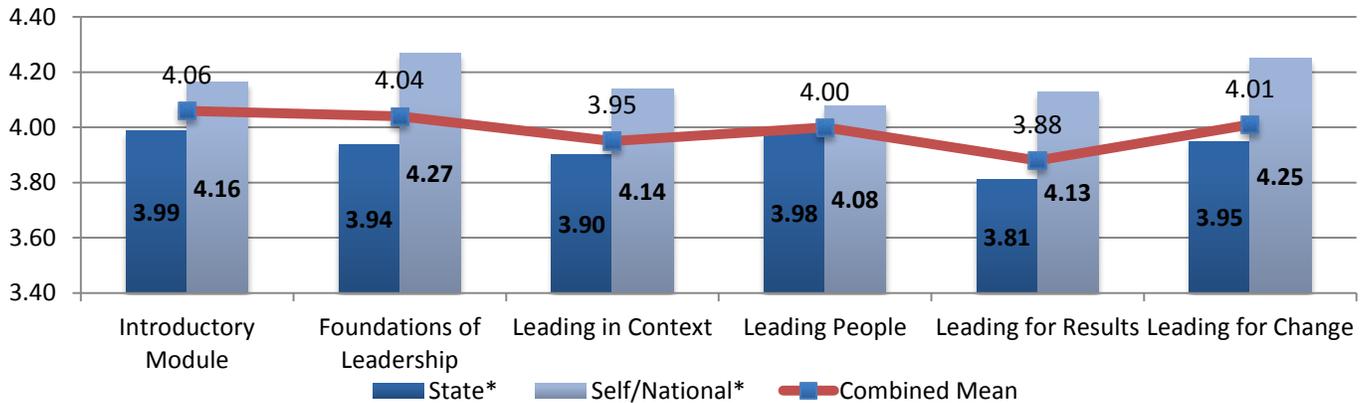


FIGURE 6 Average Satisfaction Scores for All Modules by Participant Type

*State and Self/National sample sizes: Introductory Module $ns = 333, 224$; Foundations $ns = 225, 89$; Leading in Context $ns = 196, 50$; Leading People $ns = 125, 34$; Leading for Results $ns = 154, 42$; Leading for Change $ns = 152, 37$



LAS Leadership Competencies Learned

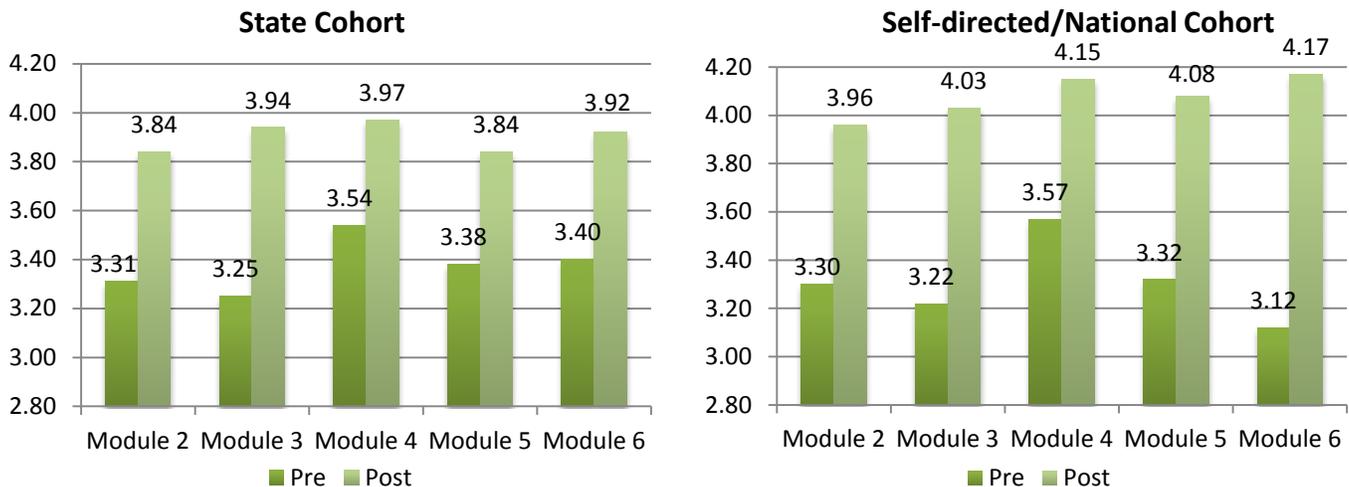
To gauge LAS participant learning, questionnaires included a total of 69 leadership competency items across the five content modules, with respondents rating their baseline competency level on all items prior to beginning the *Foundations* module. Post-training competencies were specific to each module and were assessed at completion of the module.

“I have taken away a lot of new skills regarding what my staff is looking for from me. How I can be better supportive of them, more engaging and model more. I also learned how to reach out to community members.”

Across all modules, supervisors reported statistically **significant competency gains from pre- to post-training that remained significant at 3-, 6-, and 12- months**. However, all supervisors showed slight declines, or “skill decay,” over time.

FIGURE 7 Pre-Post Competency Gains by Module for Self-Directed/National and State Cohorts*

* State and Self/National sample sizes: Module 2 (Foundations of Leadership) $ns=181, 76$; Module 3 (Leading in Context) $ns=133, 33$; Module 4 (Leading People) $ns=83, 21$; Module 5 (Leading for Results) $ns=115, 24$; Module 6 (Leading for Change) $ns=98, 21$



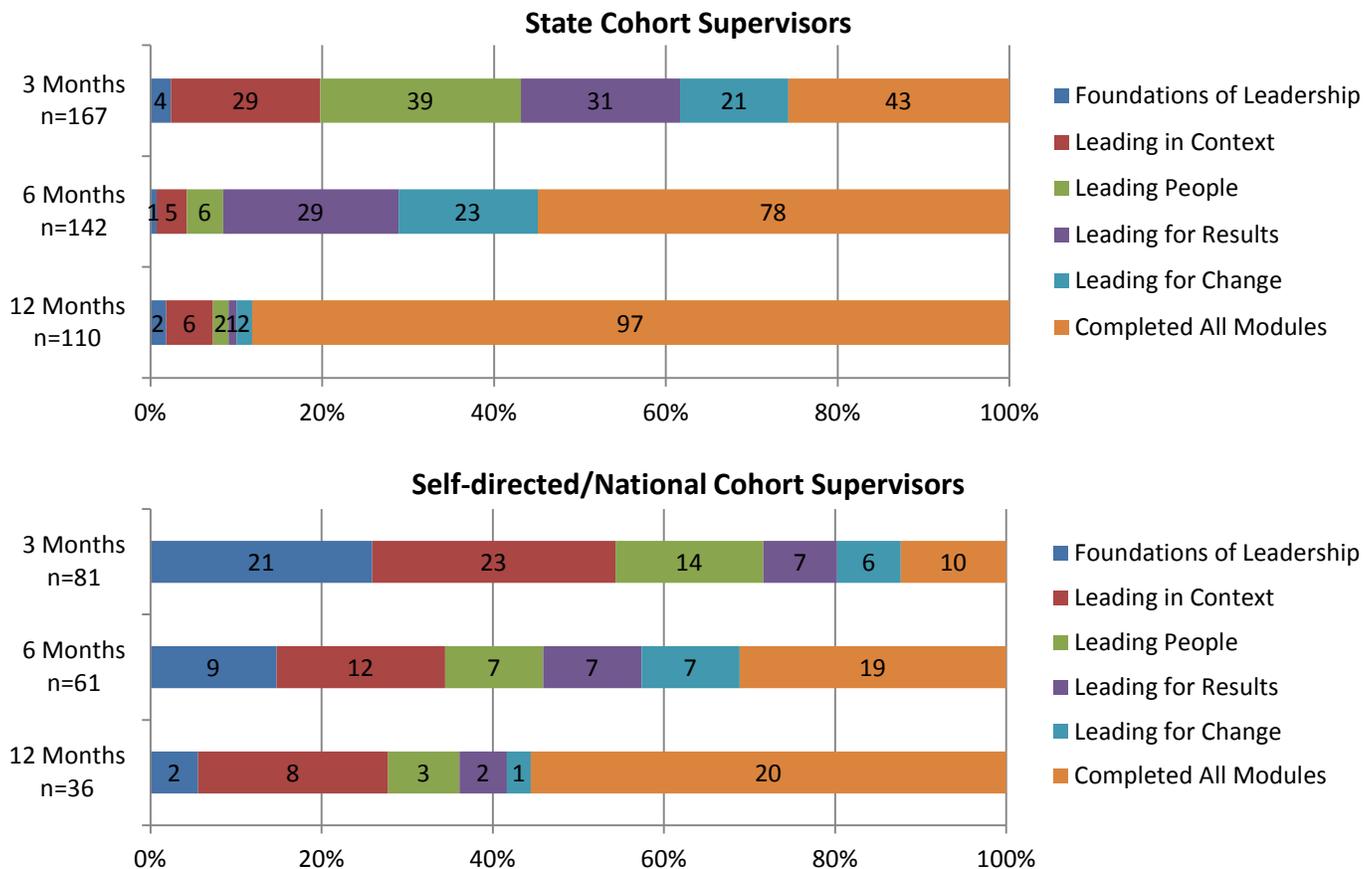
"I've very much enjoyed the training, networking and the fact that it was done over the course of a year with each class building on the last. I found value in this experience. Many participants have dropped out over time and there are just a few of us left. Don't let this discourage you from continuing to offer other cohorts. I am spreading the word about this to other supervisors and managers I know."

Progress on LAS Core Curriculum Training Modules

Supervisors progressed through the LAS training modules from three months to twelve.

- 25% of State cohort supervisors completed the LAS within 3 months, 55% by 6 months, and 88% by 12 months.
- Self-directed and national cohort supervisors completed more slowly: 12% by 3 months, 31% by 6 months, and 56% by 12 months.

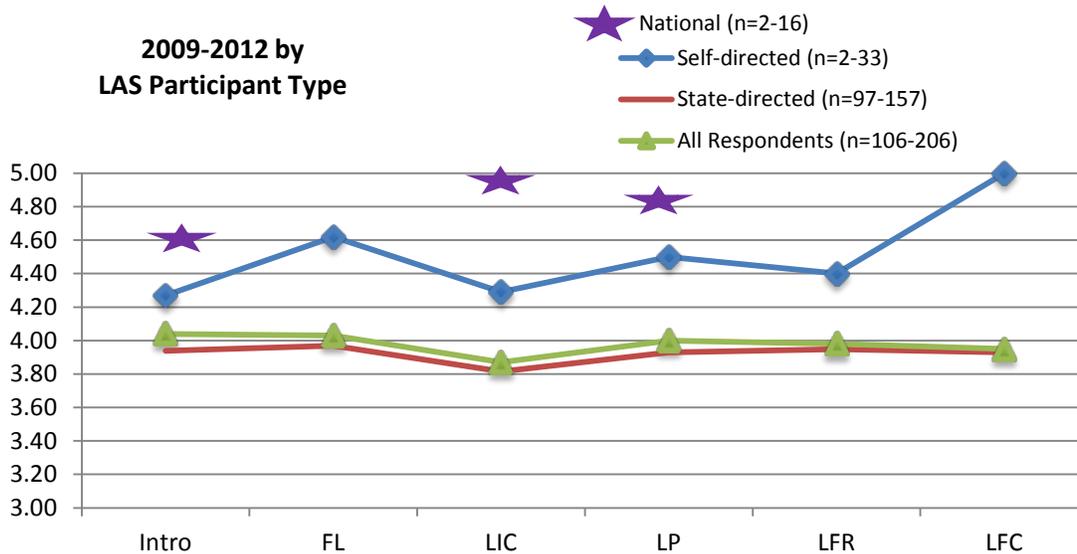
FIGURE 8 Supervisors' Progress through LAS Modules by Cohort



LAS Learning Network (LASLN)

A LASLN is an interactive webinar/teleconference or on-site meeting conducted after supervisors complete one of the LAS training modules. State cohorts customized the LASLNs to meet the needs of their jurisdiction. Aggregate data from each module's LASLN are reported in Figure 9. Self-directed participants were more satisfied overall with the LASLNs. Open-ended responses indicated that they valued the opportunity to gather with peers through teleconferences to discuss the content and how to apply the material to their jobs.

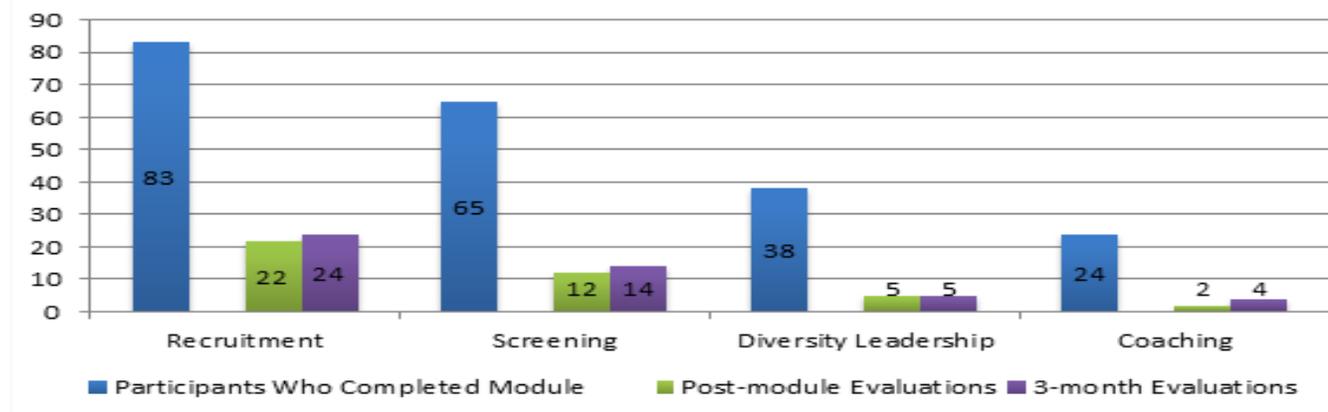
FIGURE 9 Average LASLN Satisfaction Scores from 2009-2012



LAS Stand-alone Modules: *Take the Lead* Series

The *Take the Lead* training series included four shorter, skill-based training modules (*Recruitment*, *Screening*, *Diversity Leadership*, and *Coaching*) that were open to all eligible supervisors regardless of whether they participated in the LAS Core Training. Of the stand-alone respondents, 58% were current or past participants of the LAS core training. The total number of unique participants across the four modules was 115. Satisfaction was moderately high for the standalone modules, with 60-75% rating the training as “good.” All respondents reported that the training met or exceeded their expectations. Only about 30% of participants who were not currently taking the LAS core training said they would be interested in participating based on their experience with the *Take the Lead* series, although response rates were low.

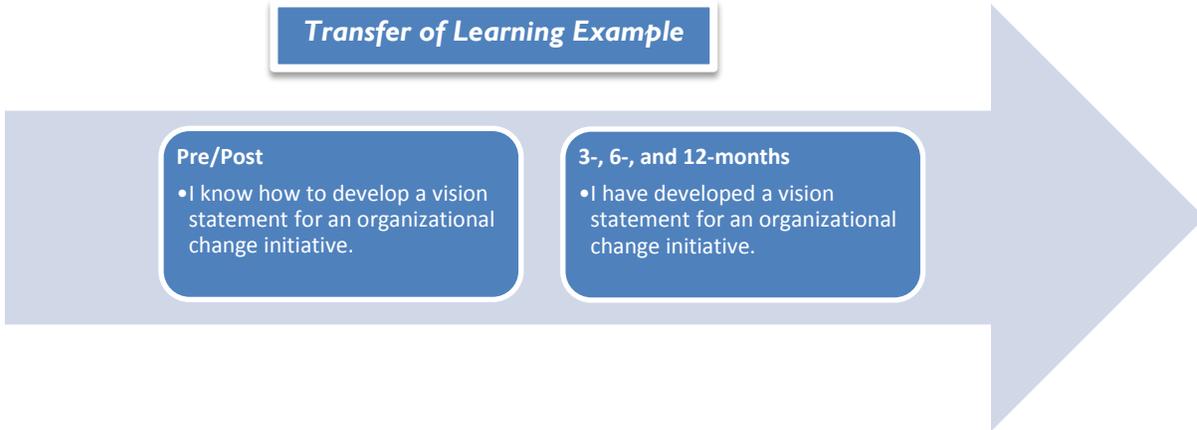
FIGURE 10 Participant Module Completion & Response Rates for Post-Module & 3-Month Evaluations



Transfer of Learning and Skills to the Workplace

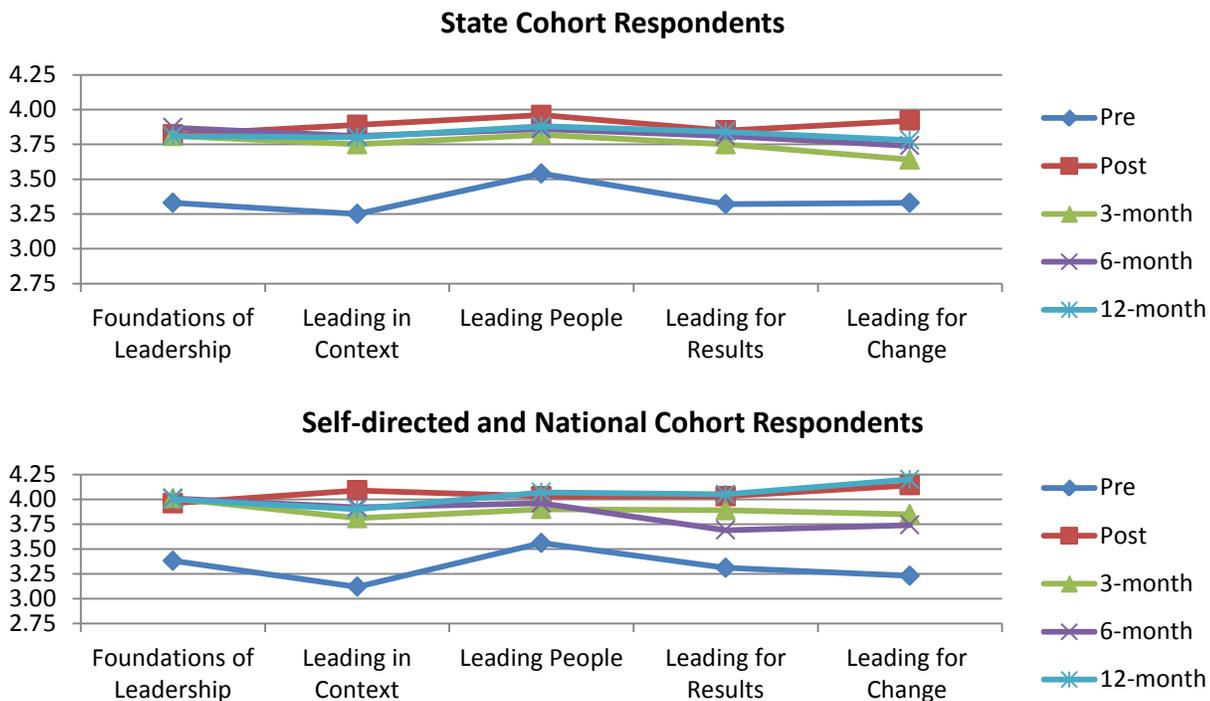
The evaluation of the LAS is designed to test a model of Transfer of Learning (TOL). Competency-self ratings are developmental and reflect the transition from *acquisition of knowledge* at pre-post to *competent performance* at the 3, 6, and 12 month follow-up (see example below).

Transfer of Learning Example



At each follow-up measurement point, respondents completed the competency self-assessment for the modules they had completed to date. On average, participants' lowest reported competency scores occurred at pre-training, with the highest at post-training, followed by slight decreases at 3-months, 6-months, and 12-months, suggesting that **supervisors applied the leadership skills to the job and maintained their knowledge and performance months after training.**

FIGURE 11 LAS Participants' Average Competency by Cohort Type for Each Module and Timepoint

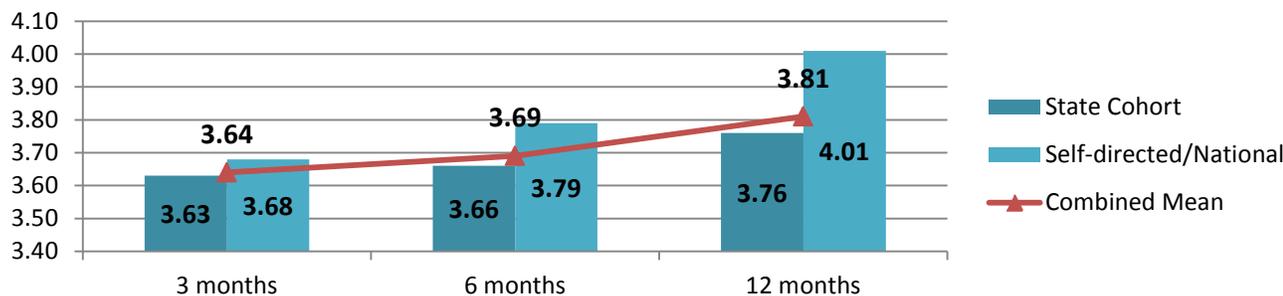


Another measure of the degree to which learning was transferred is participants' progress in implementing systems change initiatives. In the *Foundations* module, supervisors were asked to identify a change initiative for their agency that they were either currently addressing or planned to address, to which they could apply their learning from the training. Of the 347 individuals (state cohort $n = 237$, self-directed and national cohort $n = 110$) from whom follow-up data were

"I hope the change initiative will help me become a better leader and, in turn, make the workers I supervise better, stronger, more confident workers."

collected, 271 had selected and were implementing a change initiative (CI). Of these respondents, 77% were state cohort respondents and 23% were self-directed/national cohort respondents. There were statistically **significant gains from 3 months to 12 months in CI implementation progress** for all participants, and no significant differences between self-directed/national and state cohort LAS participants.

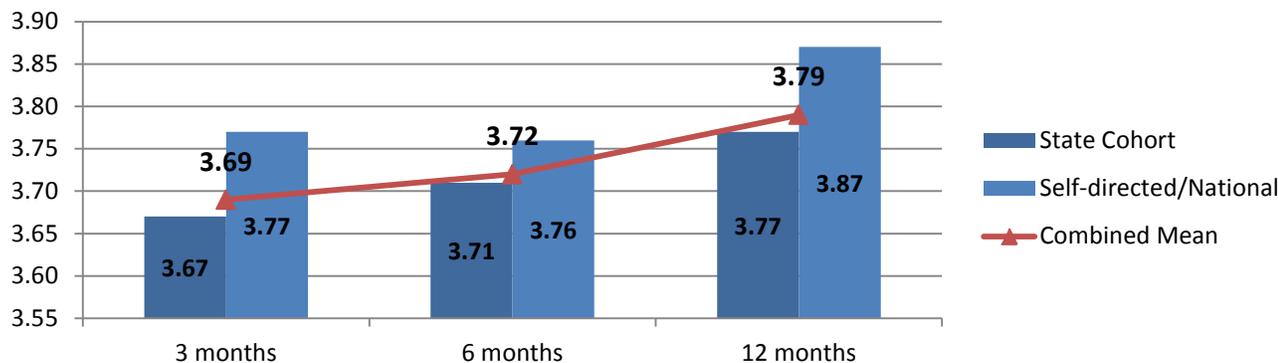
FIGURE 12 Average Change Implementation



Progress

In each follow-up survey, LAS participants were also asked whether they developed a personal learning plan (PLP) to help them apply specific leadership skills to their jobs. Of 347 follow-up respondents, 80% (24% self-directed and 76% state directed) indicated they were developing or had developed a plan.

FIGURE 13 Average Perceived Usefulness of Personal Learning Plans



Facilitators and Barriers to Transfer of Learning

The LAS evaluation was designed to identify the factors that helped supervisors continue to develop leadership competencies through practice and application of skills, and also those factors that hindered skills development and transfer of learning.

The Learning Transfer Systems Inventory (LTSI; Holton, Bates & Ruona, 2000) was modified to assess 15 facilitators and barriers across three domains: **Ability** (the degree to which the content of the training is relevant to supervisors' jobs and the extent to which they believe they will use the skills based on their own ability and the availability of appropriate resources at work), **Motivation** (the

“The Team is receptive to coaching, they give positive feedback. Caseloads are reviewed regularly to determine what can be done differently and a plan (rotation) is developed to eliminate stress to allow time for workers to have down time to work on case documentation.”

extent to which supervisors feel motivated, ready, and efficacious in their ability to transfer the learning as well as a belief that doing so will improve their performance and may lead to positive recognition), and **Work Environment** (the extent to which supervisors feel they will be supported by their own supervisors and peers and a gauge of the degree to which they believe their organization is open to change). Participants completed the LTSI after the *Introductory Module*. Profile analyses on state cohort and self-directed/national cohort respondents revealed statistically significant differences on the *Ability* and *Motivation* domains but not *Work Environment*, $F(1, 533) = 14.67, p < .001, \eta^2 = .03$, $F(1, 524) = 8.36, p = .004, \eta^2 = .02$, and $F(1, 525) = 0.43, p = .51, \eta^2 = .001$, respectively.

This finding indicates that compared to state cohort supervisors, self-directed and national cohort respondents had significantly higher scores on the *Ability* and *Motivation* domains. Specifically, self-directed and national cohort respondents had significantly higher perceptions about the relevance of LAS content and their personal capability to transfer their learning on the job; they were more motivated to learn; and they had higher expectations that the LAS would improve their job performance.

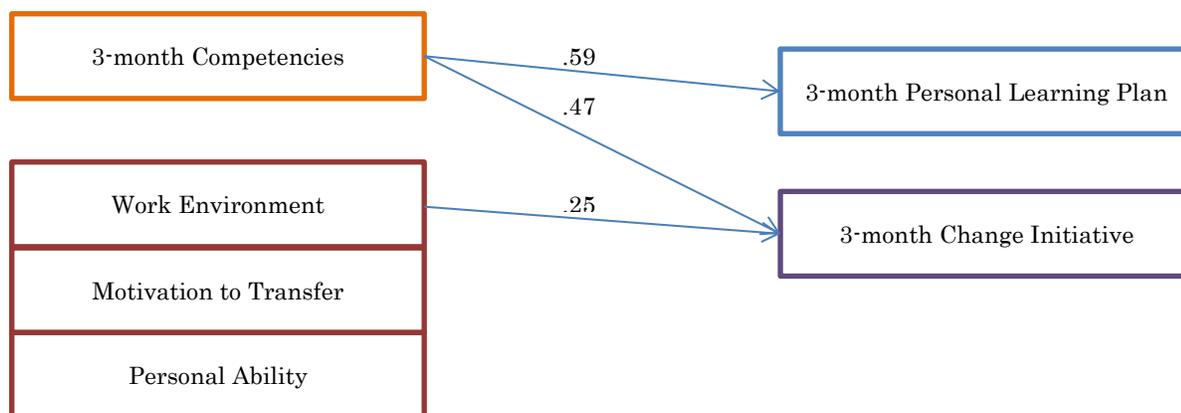
“I am more aware of how I am communicating in group settings. I am practicing taking the time to stop and listen and not to just take a position”

Transfer of Learning Model

Evaluators hypothesized that *Ability* and *Motivation* (but not *Work Environment*) would predict post-test competency, and regression analyses that controlled for pre-test competency supported that hypothesis, $F(4, 267) = 2.76, p < .001, R^2 = .30$. This indicated that greater ability and motivation were significantly associated with greater average gain in leadership knowledge and skills across modules.

Evaluators also tested a model of transfer of learning whereby leadership competencies, *Ability*, *Motivation*, and *Work Environment* were expected to predict progress on the supervisors’ Change Initiative (CI) and Personal Learning Plan (PLP) 3 months after beginning the program. Figure 14 depicts the statistically significant paths identified by regression analyses (standardized coefficients are presented for ease of comparison).

FIGURE 14 Model for Transfer of Learning at 3-Month Follow-up



At 3-months, supervisors’ leadership competency level and work environment predicted CI implementation progress [$F(4, 137) = 14.13, p < .001, R^2 = .29$], while only leadership competency predicted usefulness of their PLP for improving job performance [$F(4, 110) = 18.99, p < .001, R^2 = .41$].

In sum, evaluation of the LAS indicates that, by objective measures, ***NCWWI was successful in establishing a distance learning academy for child welfare supervisors and that LAS participants demonstrated learning gains as a result.*** There is evidence that participants transferred their knowledge and skills to the workplace as indicated by reports that their learning plans resulted in positive changes in themselves and their workplace and in their progress toward implementing change initiatives. ***A strong leadership curriculum that provides the foundational competencies and a work environment that allows supervisors to practice and develop their skills with the support of peers and managers are critical for the success of the LAS.***

Although those who participated as part of a state cohort and those who participated as self-directed and/or part of a national cohort both experienced significant gains in leadership competency that persisted over time and the two groups did not differ on progress toward implementing change initiatives, there were some indicators that their program experiences differed. While state cohort participants progressed through the program more quickly (on average) and experienced a higher completion rate than did self/national participants, they also expressed lower satisfaction with the training and felt less able and motivated to transfer the learning. In considering the meaning of these findings, it is important to note that the state cohort findings may be more representative of supervisors in general, while the self/national cohort group is made up of supervisors who are likely exceptional in their motivation and desire to learn as they persevered through the training independently.

In addition, supervisors in the state cohorts participated in the training under different conditions than the self-directed national cohorts. Ninety-five supervisors in the state cohorts indicated that they were “required to attend” the training. In some cases, the training was mandated by their jurisdiction, while others in a pilot group were designated by their area director to attend or participated because completion was a state requirement for a higher level supervisory position within six months of promotion. Under these conditions, it is not surprising that the satisfaction with the experience was reduced. This information strongly suggests that participation in the LAS should not be mandatory but offered as an opportunity for professional development.