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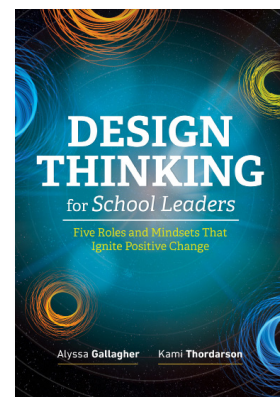
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Design Thinking for School Leaders

Five Roles and Mindsets That Ignite Positive Change

by **Alyssa Gallagher and Kami Thordarson**



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THE SUMMARY IN BRIEF

Design Thinking for School Leaders explores the changing landscape of leadership and offers practical ways to reframe the roles of school leaders using Design Thinking, one step at a time.

Design Thinking experts Alyssa Gallagher and Kami Thordarson detail five specific roles to help school leaders to identify opportunities for positively impacting students, teachers, districts, parents, and the community: Opportunity Seeker (shifts from problem solving to problem finding), Experience Architect (designs and curates learning experiences), Rule Breaker (challenges the way things are “always” done), Producer (gets things done and creates rapid learning cycles for teams), and Storyteller (captures the hearts and minds of a community).

Leaders can shift from “accidental designers” to “design-inspired leaders,” acting with greater intention and achieving greater impact. *Design Thinking for School Leaders* can help you guide your school to the forefront of this pivotal change in education.

IN THIS SUMMARY, YOU WILL LEARN:

- How to move beyond the conversation about change to making changes.
- How Design Thinking can empower all leaders and teachers.
- How to design and build the perfect team.
- How to reframe problems as opportunities.

Design-Inspired Leadership

We are in the middle of major disruptions in almost every field, including education. With the world changing so quickly, how can we get to a place where schools are experimenting and able to adapt at the rate needed to keep up?

The role of school leaders—whether the principal or the head of school—needs a major disruption, too. What if leaders were able to approach their work more like designers? Designers see the world differently and therefore bring a new perspective to their work.

This new perspective is called *design-inspired leadership*, and it is one of the most powerful ways to spark positive change and address education challenges using the same design and innovation principles that have been so successful in private industry.

Design-inspired leadership is a shift from the traditional view or role; it is a dramatic move away from Leader as Manager and a move toward Leader as Designer.

Design-driven leadership offers opportunities for moments of impact, often unscripted and unplanned but still intentional. The mindsets are what help to identify these opportunities. They correspond to the five roles of leaders embedded within design-inspired leadership, which will help you move from an accidental designer to an intentional designer. Some roles may feel very familiar in your work, while others may be new. The five roles we will explore are Opportunity Seeker, Experience Architect, Rule Breaker, Producer, and Storyteller.

Regardless of our background and experience, educators are all actually designers with the common goal of making education better.

Design Thinking

Before we dive into reimagining the principal role, it will be helpful to have a basic understanding of Design Thinking and some foundational design principles. Design Thinking is a process for problem solving and a method for creative action whose origins date back to the 1960s, when design methods and practices were being investigated as a way to solve “wicked problems.” These are those that are explained as “difficult or impossible to solve because of incomplete, contradictory, and changing requirements that are challenging to recognize.”

Think of global warming or world hunger. In education, think of personalized learning, closing the achievement gap, or meeting the needs of multilingual learners.

All design thinking processes share the same foundational components of design:

- *Developing* a deep understanding of and empathy for users and their needs.
- *Cycling* through periods of divergent thinking to explore diverse sources of inspiration.
- *Learning* through quick cycles of prototyping, gathering feedback, and making necessary adaptations.
- *Testing* solutions with a small group and only scaling up after they have proved effective in meeting the identified needs.

The more you engage in the process, the more comfortable and adept you will feel at adapting it to your specific needs and context.

Empathy Is King

Empathy is king in Design Thinking. Empathy must be the driving force behind changes made in our schools. To effectively move our organizations forward, we must be willing to listen, compromise, and meet people where they are. Empathy allows for honest and transparent communication, which can be both frustrating and uncomfortable.

Opening the door for empathy allows us to engage each other in new ideas and build stronger relationships with those for whom we need to impact change. Because empathy is a skill that actually grows when practiced, let's focus on concrete ways you can build that empathy muscle.

Observe. One of the first ways to build empathy is to hone your powers of observation and cultivate the ability to see what others overlook. You will be amazed at how much detail actually escapes us on a daily basis. Dev Patnaik, CEO of Jump Associates, a strategy and innovation firm, says, “The secret to good observation is to observe, get bored, and then observe some more.”

Challenge yourself to find something new in the mundane. Do you always spend time in the school office? What are you missing? Instead of sitting in your office, sit in the chairs usually reserved for those waiting to meet with you.

Settle in and observe. What new details emerge?

Consider shadowing a student or a teacher for an entire day and putting yourself in their shoes: walk the halls they walk, sit in their seats. What is their daily experience at school? The aha moments that you will get from this experience are worth the time out of the office.

Actively Listen. Another way to build empathy for those in your school community is just to listen—really listen—to people. Listen with your ears, eyes, and heart. Interviewing for empathy is an important step in the design process. The goal of empathy interviews is to have conversations with end users (students, teachers, and parents) that are fairly open-ended and allow you to identify their needs, both explicit and implicit. Be vulnerable. Empathy is a two-way street. Yes, a very important skill in building empathy is listening, but equally as important is learning to take risks in conversations. This can be hard as a leader, yet removing our masks and revealing our feelings to someone is vital for creating a strong empathic bond.

Now let's look closer at the five roles of leaders embedded within design-inspired leadership.

Opportunity Seeker

Innovation is often about seeing opportunity in the everyday and being able to clearly identify a need where you didn't know one existed. Where might there be unmet needs in your school or district? As an Opportunity Seeker, you recognize that each unmet need or problem may actually present incredible opportunities.

Problem finding is a skill that Opportunity Seekers have mastered. When a leader faces a problem, it is common practice to offer a solution immediately, asking few questions. But problem solving is no longer enough. How do we know that we are solving the right problem?

Reframing problems as opportunities. Positive reframing is taking what appears to be a difficult situation and finding ways to turn the problem into something positive. The power of reframing is that it forces you to harness your creative thinking to achieve new solutions. Instead of first exploring how to get the problem to go away, challenge yourself to ask, "What is the opportunity here?" If you still feel stuck, step away from the problem and come back to it using five questions:

- What am I actually trying to solve?
- What would happen if I didn't solve this problem?
- What are the hidden opportunities in this problem?
- What constraints have I imposed on this problem?
- What if I'm the problem? Who might be able to share new insights and fresh perspectives?

Shifting perspectives. When you're stuck on a problem and struggling to positively reframe it, try explicitly looking at it from a different perspective. This might be all you need to come up with a great solution. The ability to successfully look at problems from different points of view comes from empathy, which we explored in the previous chapter. You can practice shifting perspectives by finding the humor in the situation, getting outside your bubble, and using a perspective matrix. A perspective matrix helps you identify and look at the problem at hand from a minimum of four perspectives. General categories in schools include students, teachers, parents, and community.

Divergent thinking: moving beyond the obvious.

Once you have a clearer understanding of your problem, it's time to get creative in your problem solving. In order to move beyond the obvious solution and into more innovative ideas, you need to practice building your creative confidence and divergent thinking skills. Divergent thinking is more than thinking outside the box; it's thinking without the box and figuring out how to create the structure later. Brainstorming is one of the better-known techniques that encourages divergent thinking, but there are also other techniques.

Experience Architect

An Experience Architect has been described as "a person relentlessly focused on creating remarkable experiences, a person who maps out how to turn something ordinary into something distinctive—even delightful—every chance they get." Being an Experience Architect is a key quality of any successful school leader. Think of the experiences you design every day for your teams, faculty and staff, parents, and students. Each of these presents an opportunity to turn something ordinary into something extraordinary.

Being an Experience Architect is, like many other elements of leadership, simply a set of behaviors and mindsets that you can learn and practice.

The first task of an Experience Architect is to prepare an environment where design-inspired leadership can flourish. One of the most difficult challenges in education is our posture toward the possible, which is directly tied to the type of culture created. How would you assess the culture of your school or district? Is it a culture of creativity or a culture of compliance? The way we lead determines whether our culture is creative or merely compliant.

An important job of school leadership is to encourage and reward creative thinking and collaboration, while also recognizing both formal and subtle ways those things are discouraged.

Let's Design (or Redesign) Experiences

A great place to start is with your school calendar. What types of events do you have scheduled? Who is the intended audience? What is the purpose of each of the events? Does the event in its current form meet the needs of the users? How do you know?

Take “back-to-school night,” for example. Before planning what would have been her 15th back-to-school night, a second-grade teacher we worked with in California, spent time talking to parents and uncovered some interesting needs and wants. She discovered that parents wanted to get to know more about the teacher on a personal level, get to know their children’s classmates, and get a glimpse of a day in the life of their child.

Much to her surprise, this teacher discovered that parents were less interested in hearing about the Common Core Standards, textbooks, or assessments—all topics that are typically covered at back-to-school night. With this new information, she set out to design a back-to-school night experience that actually met the needs of the parents.

One of the most powerful ways to design an experience is to consistently wrap it around your why. People are more likely to move forward when they have a clear picture of where they are headed, as well as a clear understanding of why they are being asked to do something new.

Rule Breaker

Breaking rules with intention is really a mindset of thoughtfully challenging the way we always do things. Some of these might be written rules, but more than likely, many

may just be common practices that have existed at our school sites forever. Why do we require students to walk in straight lines? Why do we give spelling tests every Friday? Why do we use bells to signal time at schools? Why do we attend school for 180 days a year?

Some of these rules or practices may have been created for a good reason, but many have outgrown their usefulness. To move beyond the traditional practices at school, focus on creating a culture of inquiry. Following are a few strategies to expand your curiosity, start questioning, and create a culture of inquiry at your school.

Seek surprise. What type of surprise learning itinerary could you create for your teachers? What if you queried teachers on topics of desired learning and then surprised different groups of teachers with a well-planned excursion that supported their learning? A middle school principal secured additional funding, asked teachers what topics they were interested in learning about, and then provided registrations to conferences that supported their learning goals.

Simple change, profound impact. What is the simplest thing you can reimagine that will have the most profound impact? Is there something small, a practice or rule that has bothered you at your school? If so, investigate it using a simple one-two-three approach: (1) identify one simple rule or practice getting in your way, (2) ask why the rule or practice exists, and (3) modify the rule or practice to make a big impact.

Question publicly. Create a public list of things you are curious about. What questions might make your top ten list? For example, you might ask, “Why do we determine what a child learns and is exposed to based on how old they are?” Once you have your list, share it with your staff via a whiteboard in the staff lounge or, if you’re feeling even bolder, share your questions with your community in the school newsletter. Then get comfortable saying, “I don’t know the answer; let’s investigate.”

We all spend lots of time in meetings talking about change, but the best way to effect change is to act. We need to learn by doing and put our ideas into action. By doing this, we actually create knowledge in context, making it easier to shift conversations based on the knowledge that has been gained.

Producer

A Producer plays a critical role in many industries, including music and film. Producers must facilitate all the individual actions, then pull together the necessary components to deliver an outstanding performance. Producers are the connective thread that moves a project forward from start to finish. They must also protect the line, which means staying true to the vision, working within constraints, and taking care of their talent. They are not only responsible for shipping a final product, they are responsible for all the iterations and pivots in the production cycle.

Producers must practice innovation and agile thinking at all times. In education, we need our leaders to embrace the talents of Producers.

Producers are the ultimate power switches; they are constantly toggling between the big picture and the practicality of getting it all done. They work to make the impossible seem not only possible but within reach.

How do you improve your own ability to do so? If you are constantly working in the day-to-day details, you may find yourself wondering how to make sure you aren't losing sight of the big picture. Ask, what is the context? What matters most, and what is our purpose?

If big-picture thinking comes more easily to you, you may need to spend some time zeroing in on the practicality of getting the work done. Ask, "What are the most critical small steps to take to make progress on our vision?"

Build a team. Another strength of Producers is their ability to put together a creative and talented cast and crew. They are able to do this by leveraging their network and the relationships they have built over time. Producers are relentless about putting together the best team and will work across all silos, even reaching outside the team to secure resources if necessary.

Create rapid learning cycles. Producers are masters of creating rapid learning cycles for their teams. Because there is constant hustle and urgency, producers help their teams learn through quick and dirty prototyping of potential solutions. They are constantly cycling through the stages of prototyping, testing, and iterating. This runs counter to the culture in many schools, where the use of committees is prevalent.

Take a break from committees. Instead, think about

creating Action Learning Teams that meet for a specific purpose, do their best thinking, and quickly get feedback from others.

Increase transparency. During times of change, organizations that have built a culture of openness fare better. When working with teams in organizations that value open communication, people are less fearful of the unknown and more open to being transparent with their own work.

Storyteller

As a classroom teacher, one of the first things you learn in working with students is that story matters. Stories are sticky. They are one of the most effective and underutilized tools for learning.

As a leader, you are required to step into a storyteller role and, as with any skill, it is one that can be practiced and honed to inspire and create change. You can inspire people and students to do great things, or you can zap the creativity and inspiration right out from under them. Storytelling is probably the most important and powerful tool that you have available. How you wield the tool greatly influences the outcome.

Crafting Your Story

Before embarking on a new storytelling journey, you must first understand the current story being told at your school. Whether you are aware or not, every person who walks onto your campus or visits a classroom leaves with a story about your school. This story comprises the actions of students and staff, overheard conversations, and artifacts, such as artwork and student work hanging on the walls. Everything taken in by the senses weaves together to create an impression and essentially become the story. Do you know what unintended stories your school or classroom might be telling?

Define your intention. What do you want to hear and see as you walk around your campus or listen to your students? Take a minute to sit and write or picture the story you want to tell. Define what students would be doing and saying. Think about what teachers are doing and what parents might be saying in the hallways.

Walk it. Take a purposeful walk through your learning spaces to see what artifacts are lining the walls. Better yet,

invite someone from outside your school to take the walk with you. Note what evidence of learning you see. Can you see students' process as well as the end product? Is their thinking visible? Can you see individual students in their work? Pay attention to what posters are on the walls, what signs line your hallways or are posted outside on your buildings. Do all the things you see tell your intentional story?

Talk it. As you walk through a classroom or school site, stop and ask for a story. Ask students to tell you about what they're learning—not what they're working on, but what they're learning. Ask teachers to tell you a story about the lesson they're currently teaching. Better yet, simply listen to the learning stories that teachers are using in classrooms. Are they inspiring learning? Some stories are crying out to be told. Listening carefully to the stories around you can give you insight.

Design Your Team and Your Mindset

Because design-inspired leadership practiced by a team will have the greatest positive impact on changes in our school system, the line from challenge to solution won't be straight, and the work won't be done solo.

Design Thinking is a team sport that requires the involvement of every member on the team, and design-inspired leaders know how to harness and utilize that energy. How do you design and build the perfect team? Google, looking to optimize their teams, set out to answer that question in 2012 with "Project Aristotle." The group—comprising statisticians, organizational psychologists, sociologists,

engineers, and researchers—was tasked with researching and identifying the qualities that make up the best and most effective team.

The list of factors they researched was extensive, but in the end, they discovered there is no such thing as creating the perfect team. Teams that are successful are successful because of the ways they have chosen to work together. The team's norms are a greater predictor of success than the actual composition of the team. So in some regards, it is less about who is on the team and more about the ways in which members interact with one another.

Consider the following norms as a starting point if you need to create norms for a group:

- Assume best intentions.
- Be a learner, not a knower.
- Bring your authentic self.
- Take risks and choose to engage.
- Respect confidentiality.
- Play (and work) hard.

Through this journey, you will start to see your world differently and bring a new perspective to your work. While the tools and strategies shared above are powerful accelerators of change, none of them matter if the thinking doesn't change. Shift thinking first, then anything is possible. The more you adopt the mindset and realize it's not about following a prescription, the more successful you will be.



Alyssa Gallagher is an experienced public school educator, school and district administrator, facilitator, and educational consultant. She has led districtwide blended learning initiatives, helped schools create integrated STEM programs, and launched strategic plans using Design Thinking. She is constantly exploring "What if...?" with school leaders and works to support radical change in education.



Kami Thordarson has worked in many roles as a public educator from classroom teacher to professional development and curriculum designer. She is involved with the Design Thinking movement in K-12 education and in her current role as an administrator and school designer, is working to integrate design thinking and innovative strategies into the daily practices of learning for both students and teachers. **Gallagher and Thordarson** share their recognized expertise on Design Thinking, education leadership and innovative strategies, in presentations and workshops with educators throughout the United States.

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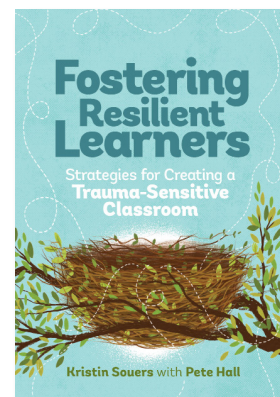
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Fostering Resilient Learners

Strategies for Creating a Trauma-Sensitive Classroom

by **Kristin Souers with Pete Hall**



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THE SUMMARY IN BRIEF

In *Fostering Resilient Learners*, Kristin Souers and Pete Hall explore an urgent and growing issue—childhood trauma—and its profound effect on learning and teaching,

Grounded in research and their experience working with trauma-affected students and their teachers, Souers, a mental health therapist, and Hall, a veteran principal, advise educators on how to cultivate a trauma-sensitive learning environment for students across all content areas, grade levels, and educational settings.

Educators face the impact of trauma in the classroom every day. Souers and Hall will help guide you to seek solutions rather than dwell on problems, and build relationships that allow students to grow, thrive, and learn at high levels.

IN THIS SUMMARY, YOU WILL LEARN:

- What trauma is and how it hinders learning, motivation, and success.
- Why it's important to stay connected to your personal mission.
- How to build strong relationships and create a safe learning space.
- How to adopt a strength-based approach to viewing destructive behavior.

PART I: Trauma

No one disagrees that students should be held to the highest standard of learning. Where conflict tends to occur is in how we tackle that goal. For many young people who have experienced trauma, success—academic or otherwise—seems out of reach. How do we support students who arrive at school affected by trauma and other not-OK experiences? How do we provide environments that are safe and predictable and motivational for learning? Before we answer these questions, it is important to acknowledge some fundamental truths:

1. Trauma is real.
2. Trauma is prevalent. In fact, it is likely much more common than we care to admit.
3. Trauma is toxic to the brain and can affect development and learning in a multitude of ways.
4. In our schools, we need to be prepared to support students who have experienced trauma, even if we don't know exactly who they are.
5. Children are resilient, and within positive learning environments they can grow, learn, and succeed.

Understanding Trauma and the Prevalence of the Not-OK

The struggles that affect people's happiness, relationships, and coping ability, not surprisingly, bleed into the school environment. As an educator, you don't need a peer-edited research article to validate what your gut and your experience have already told you is true: a student's life outside school matters. Students' complicated, stressful lives can create conditions that present massive obstacles to learning.

When schools first started integrating trauma awareness, educators and other professionals felt compelled to learn a student's "story" as a means of understanding his or her behavior. That approach often led to getting caught up in the trauma narrative rather than supporting and understanding the effect of that event on the young person.

It is much more helpful to monitor the effect of the event on each individual, and not be preoccupied with the details of the event itself. This shift in perspective prompts us to be more sensitive to that effect and thus be better at fostering healing and growth. Moreover, by altering our approach, we can begin to see students as more than their story.

Groundbreaking research led by Dr. Robert Anda and Dr. Vincent Felitti in the late 1990s explored the relationship between adverse childhood experiences (ACEs) and their subsequent mental and physical health as adults. The more ACEs a student experiences, the more likely he or she experiences serious school and health issues. The initial eight ACEs that Felitti and colleagues studied were

- Substance abuse in the home.
- Parental separation or divorce.
- Mental illness in the home.
- Witnessing domestic violence.
- Suicidal household member.
- Death of a parent or another loved one.
- Parental incarceration.
- Experience of abuse (psychological, physical, or sexual) or neglect (emotional or physical).

Experiences that should now be added to that list include:

- Exposure to a natural disaster.
- Criminal behavior in the home.
- Terminal or chronic illness of a family member.
- Military deployment of a family member.
- War exposure.
- Homelessness.
- Victimization or bullying.

The ACE Study shows a remarkable link between not-OK childhood events and health issues later in life. What the original ACE research did not explore, however, was the immediate effect that these traumatic experiences had on children. This is crucial information that can inform educators' practice and the supports we offer to the young people under our care.

Trauma is toxic to the brain as well as to the body. When brains are triggered by threat or perception of threat, they release chemicals into the body to allow us to "survive" those states of stress. Because the infant and early childhood brain is so sensitive, chronically elevated levels of stress hormones can significantly disrupt the development of the brain in a multitude of ways, affecting learning, memory, mood, relational skills, and aspects of executive functioning—all required for success in a classroom setting.

We know that childhood trauma has become an epidemic. Children with mental health issues are not required to obtain professional mental health services, but they are legally obligated to attend school. Thus, school is the one place where we are guaranteed to access our trauma-affected children. Our students need us to create a trauma-sensitive learning environment for them.

The Manifestation of ACEs in the Classroom

With all the pressure we're under to push students toward mastery of grade-level standards, where does the trauma awareness piece fit in? We must first ensure that students are in a safe place.

When students are in a state of stress, they are in the part of their brain designed for survival: the limbic area. The limbic system controls arousal, emotion, and the flight, fight, and freeze response. Dr. Dan Siegel, clinical professor of psychiatry at the UCLA School of Medicine, refers to this area as the “downstairs brain.” When students’ downstairs brains are in charge, their capacity to learn and retain information is disrupted.

Our goal is to get them into the higher-functioning part of their brain—the prefrontal cortex—which enables them to think, reason, and maintain flexibility. Siegel calls this area the “upstairs brain.” One of its primary purposes is to regulate the downstairs brain—in short, to keep the brain online and to shift into survival mode only when absolutely necessary.

To climb out of survival mode, it is helpful for students to be able to identify the feelings, name the function of their brain, and attune to their biology. This will give them the power to manage the intensity associated with the stress. (In this context, *intensity* refers to the body's stressed state in response to the threat.)

By teaching them about the differences between the upstairs and downstairs brains, we are empowering them to understand their biology and make healthy choices to manage it. The overall goal for us is to act with integrity, to be consistent and reliable, to remain logical and regulated in times of stress, and—when facing disruptive, defiant, and disrespectful behavior—to stay in our upstairs brain.

PART II: Self-Awareness

In a trauma-sensitive learning environment, the adult is necessarily in charge of the setting and the tone of the

space. It is our demeanor, our approach, our behaviors, our volume, and our presence that affect how our young people live, breathe, and perform in the classroom. It starts with us. It starts with you.

Be true to you. The more self-aware we become, the easier it is for us to manage the needs of those in front of us. Begin to imagine and define what your true sense of self looks like. Think about which key aspects of yourself cannot, no matter what, be taken from you. What can you truly hold onto and rely on? The answers become your way of identifying your *cement shoes*.

Imagine that you're walking on the beach toward the ocean. When you are up to your ankles in the water and a wave hits, what happens? What about when you are up to your knees, waist, or chest? The farther you go out, the more likely you are to be toppled by the waves that crash upon you.

Now imagine that you have on a pair of cement shoes. If you were firmly grounded where you stood, you would be less likely to be toppled by the waves that hit you, no matter how big. Envision this as a way of staying true—to your ideals, integrity, vision, beliefs, and self—in your classroom or other professional setting.

Students and their families present to us a variety of stressors and levels of intensity that can throw us off balance. In your work with students and families, define your cement shoes and keep them on. If you do this, you will be less likely to be swayed from who you are and how you want to be, and you will be less likely to compromise yourself and your integrity in the process.

When we stay grounded in our truth, we will behave and interact in ways that make us feel proud, not remorseful.

When in Doubt...

Teaching students and ourselves to breathe deeply is key in helping us all access—and stay in—our upstairs brains. Deep breathing is particularly crucial before such tasks as eating, transitioning to a new topic, taking a test, or preparing for a change in the schedule.

Having students pay attention to the difference in their breathing when they are regulated (in their upstairs brain) and when they are dysregulated (in their downstairs brain) will help them become aware of how their bodies act differently in each of these states and how that affects their capacity to learn. Deep breathing can serve as a tremen-

dous resource in helping them maintain or, when needed, return to a regulated state.

To help you prepare for challenging moments, just think of saying, “When in doubt, shut your mouth and take a breath.” That simple piece of advice is a “pause” button for our decision-making processes. Although there will still be times when we descend to our downstairs brain, the more we pause, the closer we get to creating and sustaining a safe environment to nurture our students’ development.

Our overarching goal is to develop competent, capable adults who can contribute to society. However, that mission sometimes gets lost in the shuffle of our impatience, our protective nature, our fear, or our insistence that students do it *our* way.

When these factors interfere, we end up taking away students’ power to do, learn, and grow for themselves.

Identify the methods and strategies that communicate to students that you have faith in their ability to learn, grow, endure, and succeed. How do you find the right fit for students? The good news is that this is not just on us, the adults. Students need to be active participants in relaying what is and isn’t helpful.

The more we find ways to partner with them around this, the better. We can empower them to learn healthy ways to maneuver through the troubled waters themselves.

PART III: Relationships

The work we do is never in isolation. By design, schools are places where humans interact. Teachers, students, parents, administrators, counselors, and others are organized in such a fashion to support one another in reaching our mutual goals. The relationships we forge and maintain with others are essential to our collective and individual success.

No One Said Relationships Are Easy

We can be creative in adapting our relationships with students so that they all feel some connection with us. The first step is to think of ourselves as being “safe enough” and “healthy enough” for students—because for the most part, that is all our kids really need from us.

If they know we will be relentless in our support of their endeavors, forgive them the errors they make, and maintain our determination that they will live up to their potential and our expectations, then the relationships will follow.

For students who have experienced trauma, forging strong relationships is not simple. Because the source of many students’ trauma is another human being, distrust and a hesitancy to bond with others are common. Rather than forcing the issue and attempting to create a connection that will “save” a particular student, it’s more effective for us to concentrate on simply being safe enough and healthy enough for all students who enter our domain.

Trust is a fundamental part of a healthy relationship. A healthy relationship, in turn, is an instrumental aspect of feeling safe—and a sense of safety enables students who have experienced trauma to stay regulated and access the healthy parts of their brain. You can become that person they can rely on for support and empowerment.

Whether you work with students every day or just a short time each week, the consistency of your presence and influence provides the foundation for building a safe and sustainable relationship with every student in your care.

Above all, your relationships with students need to be authentic and sincere. Kids, particularly those who have experienced trauma, can see right through the façade of an insincere relationship.

Focus on the Person, Not the Label

The kids who enter our classrooms are ours—every single one of them. When we feel overwhelmed by a student’s behavior, having a label or a diagnosis assures us that the behavior is a result of something innate or developmental that we cannot control. So, the behaviors, to this manner of thinking, aren’t our fault.

Making students leave class and putting labels on them are both forms of dismissal that stem from our need for control. In both cases, we’re allowing our own needs to trump our students’ needs. We can do better.

A frequent trigger for teachers is the perceived lack of control. Can we control how students behave in school? When they’re trying to stay regulated, often without helpful tools, their behavior is not under our control. However, we can influence the situation dramatically.

We can provide an environment that is safe and predictable. We can provide a caring, trusting relationship. We can help them remain focused on learning, despite the distractions. We cannot control everything, but we can influence quite a bit. And this is what trauma-affected students need from us.

Shifting our thinking to looking at events through the student's eyes takes courage and openness. Identify which elements of a situation you can and can't control and then center your energy on effecting positive change.

Doors and Windows

How many times have you felt stuck with a student, trapped in a situation where you believed that the only option was to assert your authority, leverage your power, or otherwise act in a way that didn't align with your personal mission statement? Perhaps you've issued an ultimatum: *This is the last time I'm going to ask. If you don't do X right now, I'm going to do Y.* The problem with this approach is that you've effectively painted yourself into a corner. It's as if you were locked in a cabin and you were fixated on the locked door as your sole means of escape. Had you stopped to assess all your options you would have noticed a window.

When we arrive at that place where all we see is the locked door, this means we are exhausted, emotionally drained, and done. This response is our body's way of letting us know that we need to slow down, take a breath, and step away for a moment. This is when we need to take a break and seek some repair and rejuvenation so that we can summon the energy to find the windows.

When you hit a wall (or a locked door), it's important to give yourself permission to step away and widen your peripheral vision so that you can see the windows. As you widen your peripheral vision, you can access the parts of your brain that are conducive to partnership and problem solving.

It is important to meet students where they are and to acknowledge their skills, habits, strengths, and needs. We have to believe that students are doing the best they can with what they have in the moment, and it is up to us to help them develop in areas where they have been deprived.

This requires us to be flexible in our teaching methods, discipline approaches, and interactions with individual students. This is not an easy task, but it is essential if we want our students to grow and develop in healthy ways.

PART IV: Belief

The way we interpret the events, people, and situations in our lives determines our reality.

Those who have experienced trauma are forever

changed—not necessarily forever damaged. Many victims of trauma do feel damaged by their experiences. Some people never want to move past their trauma and feel a strong need to be validated for the hardships they have endured. Others don't want their trauma to be acknowledged at all and have worked their entire lives to ensure that it won't be. Each victim gets to choose whether to allow it to damage them forever.

Can we look at our students without seeing them as “forever damaged”? It can be challenging when we are familiar with a student's trauma history; when we are intimately aware of the abuse, neglect, or traumatic events that our students have suffered, it all becomes more real to us. How can we empower our students as well as ourselves to see their potential?

Many of us get hyper-focused on what happens during the 14 to 18 hours our students aren't with us. Sometimes we experience a sense of utter helplessness that threatens to destroy our motivation to keep going.

Instead, stop and think about the 6 to 10 hours you do have with those students. Focus on the things you can accomplish in those hours, because that is what you can control.

We have an incredible opportunity in this period to show students what they are capable of, to expose them to different ways of being, to teach them healthy ways of managing, and to empower them to learn and grow in productive ways. Can we focus on our students' strengths rather than their deficits? Can we view our students as overflowing with potential rather than doomed to failure? It's up to us.

Don't Let Fear Drive the Bus

With parents, fear is often the driving factor of their decisions. They admit that fear of something dangerous happening influences their decisions to allow or forbid their children to do certain things. Are we as parents letting fear drive our bus?

When fear drives, we go nowhere good. Without risk exposure, children are deprived of the opportunity to learn how to manage the intensity associated with risk and, as a result, may be set up for the possibility of even greater harm.

Sheltering children from risk and steering them away from possible stressors won't protect them in the end; at worse, our well-intentioned fear of the not-OK may ruin their childhood and sabotage their future. Instead of bubble-wrapping our children, we need to teach them the skills

to manage crises in a way that empowers them.

The same priority applies to educators. How much does fear influence our decisions, responses, beliefs, and interactions in the classroom?

When we see a student as a tornado waiting to happen rather than a child who needs guidance and instruction, we're letting fear drive our bus. The challenge is to shift our focus and set the table with positive expectations for every child in every situation. In other words, let facts, not fear, drive the bus.

PART V: Live, Laugh, Love

When we find ways to show our students grace, to model for them a sense of gratitude and acceptance, we empower them to do the same for themselves and others.

The Cookie Jar: The Art of Praise

We all have a strong innate need to be recognized and valued, and we often look to others to fulfill that need. We rely on external feedback to confirm that we did something well, that we're worthy of love, that our appearance is up to par, or that something we've done is valued. In short, we use external feedback, we'll call them "cookies," to help determine our sense of self-worth.

Students who have experienced trauma have a significantly compromised capacity to self-knowledge—that is, to recognize and validate themselves, their feelings, or their efforts. This is a result of their allocating resources toward managing their trauma-induced stress instead of toward healthy development.

They often learn early-on to "cue off their environment" to determine who they are and how they feel. Their sense of self is heavily influenced by the reactions of those around them. The more they are forced to cue off others, the less they learn to cue off themselves, moving them further away from their own inner selves and needs.

Our job is to cue off the students and families we work with and determine what their needs are. When we do this properly, our actions and decisions are based on what they show or tell us.

For some youngsters, compliments are overwhelming: being so foreign to anything they have heard before, praise can actually be a trigger. The praise doesn't fit into the construct of their self-image and feels out of place. When this happens, we need to ease our way more gradually into the praise process.

How can students give themselves cookies if they're unaware of how deserving they are? We can teach our youngsters this skill by identifying their strengths, their goals, and the work they need to do to meet those goals. We can name and celebrate students' emotions, efforts, and accomplishments.

Introduce the notion of self-acknowledgment to your students and incorporate regular practices that encourage them to give themselves a cookie. The payoff could be extraordinary.



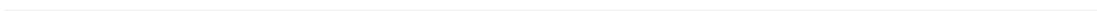
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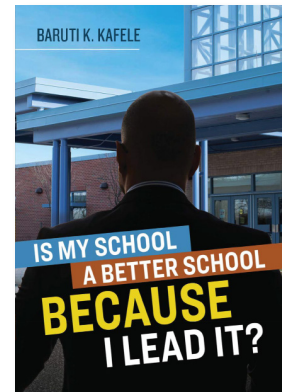
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ASCD® LEADERSHIP SUMMARIES for EDUCATORS

Is My School a Better School Because I Lead It?

by **Baruti K. Kafele**



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THE SUMMARY IN BRIEF

In *Is My School a Better School Because I Lead It?* school leadership expert Baruti K. Kafele offers hard-won wisdom to those seeking to improve the quality of instruction in their schools.

Kafele addresses such critical issues as ensuring an optimal culture and climate, engaging in parent and community outreach, rallying staff, and much more.

Because of the sheer volume of responsibilities for a principal or assistant principal can leave little time for developing an effective and consistent self-reflection regimen, Kafele has done the work for you.

Is My School a Better School Because I Lead It? will motivate you to embark upon an insightful journey destined to transform your practice, boost teacher satisfaction, and—most important of all—inspire students to excel academically.

IN THIS SUMMARY, YOU WILL LEARN:

- How to examine your leadership identity.
- To engage in self-reflection and self-assessment by asking and answering key questions.
- Why you must face uncomfortable truths in order to become a better leader.
- To become passionate about the value you can bring to your school.

Introduction

There are three key areas to consider when asking yourself if your school is better *because* you are there:

- Your contention
- Your evidence, and
- Your staff's perception.

Your contention is what you think, feel, and believe about your leadership. For your contention to be valid, your *evidence* must support it. If *your staff's perception* does not align to your contention or to the evidence, then a serious disconnect is present that needs to be addressed.

Addressing and rectifying any disconnect between contentions and your evidence of leadership in school begins with self-reflection and self-assessment, which can best be engaged in by asking and answering questions of ourselves.

Let's delve into the who, what, where, why, and when of your leadership approach.

My Leadership Identity—Who I Am

Great leaders possess a very clear and evident leadership identity. Their leadership attributes are clearly visible, identifiable, and distinguishable. Clarity of identity leads to certain expectations. Your leadership identity in school should make a statement from the outset.

So, who *are* you as the leader of your school? What is it about your leadership that sets you apart from everyone else? The answers that you come up with are your contention of your identity as a leader—how you see yourself through your own set of lenses. The ensuing challenge is to identify evidence that supports your contention of your leadership identity.

Volume and quality of classroom visits and pre- and post-observation conferences are certainly data points to examine, for example, but the most important evidence is your staff's perception of your qualities as a leader.

Do staff members feel that they have grown in their practice thanks to your instructional leadership? Is there any disconnect between your contention and your staff's perceptions of you?

Is who you think you are as the leader of your school consistent with the evidence? It is imperative that you see yourself objectively if you are to succeed as a that leader.

An effective leadership identity must be true to who you are as a leader, an educator, and a person while also modeling

for staff and students how to carry oneself with dignity and professionalism.

Just because principals don't work in the classroom doesn't mean they shouldn't teach! Motivation and inspiration are methods of teaching. Leadership itself is a series of lessons that you provide to students, staff, and even parents on how to approach matters big and small.

My Leadership Presence—What I Represent

Our identities outside of school inform our leadership presence inside of it, affecting which aspects of leadership presence we focus on most. Those with self-confidence and a strong sense of mission will always be a step ahead in the leadership game.

Is your leadership a positive, powerful, equitable, effective, hands-on, visionary presence in your school, even when you are not physically in the building?

Students. What does your leadership presence represent to your students? When they observe you, what exactly is it that they see? When they listen to you, what exactly is it that they hear? When they think of you, what connotations come to mind? Your leadership presence conveys a message to students whether you want it to or not; the question is whether you are in control of that message.

Staff. Does staff perceive you as a leader who helps shape the direction of instruction in school? As your staff is growing professionally, it is imperative that they can attribute at least some of their professional growth to their collegial relationship with you.

Parents. To cement a strong leadership presence among parents, maximize your visibility and interactions with parents during the school day and especially at school functions such as back-to-school nights.

For students to receive the support they need to truly soar academically both at school and at home, it is crucial that educational leaders make themselves as available as possible to their families. So, what does your leadership presence represent to your students' parents?

Community. Educational leaders can ill-afford to isolate themselves or their schools from the neighborhoods that surround them, as they are inextricably entwined. It is important to share with the greater community what your students and teachers are accomplishing. People need to know that the

school is giving the students a world-class education. And, community engagement is not a one-way street. There is much support and assistance available to draw on.

Do you have a leadership presence in your school's community? Have you established your leadership beyond the walls of your school?

My Leadership Impact—My Influence

As a school community, you must be in control of your brand identity or the outside community will define it for you based on how they perceive it, which may be counterproductive and inconsistent with the brand you are trying to project.

It's incumbent upon you to discuss with staff regularly how you wish for your school to be seen by the community and, most important, to work consciously and consistently at achieving this end.

Does your school's brand inspire loyalty? How does your leadership impact your school's brand? Have you and your staff helped to mold the brand, or has it evolved haphazardly without your influence?

A school's mission refers to what the school is about, and its vision to where the school is going. True leadership means ensuring that the school is "walking" in its mission and vision daily. Mission and vision statements should be seen as living documents that drive the work of the school. They should be posted throughout the building, including all classrooms.

How does your leadership impact your school's mission and vision? Do you prioritize internalization of values related to the mission and vision?

Creating a climate and a culture that inspires and motivates students needs to be a priority. One strategy for a principal is to give a daily morning message, coupled with ongoing monthly meetings with students in small groups divided by grade and gender. These can be used to discuss anything and everything, but always with a view toward developing the climate and culture in a positive direction.

What do you do to ensure that the mood is positive, vibrant, and focused on academic excellence?

My Leadership Mission—My What

Your mission and your work are two totally separate entities. The latter includes a lot of drudgery—endless paperwork, interminable meetings, all manner of adminis-

trative duties—that may or may not align to the former. It is crucial to identify the work responsibilities that are most vital to your leadership mission if you are to succeed in improving your school.

Whereas work deadlines can keep you up at night with worry, your mission should fill you with hope and inspire you to always work toward achieving student excellence.

What work do you do that is tied specifically to your personal leadership mission? What are you most passionate about?

How you act as a leader must align to your leadership mission—what you are about. You cannot claim to be a strong instructional leader, for example, if you never visit classrooms, or that you are strong on discipline if the climate of your school is toxic. You cannot say that you are all about your students if you don't even know their names. And you cannot demand that others remain calm in challenging situations if you appear worked up whenever the pressure is on.

My Leadership Purpose—My Why

Your leadership mission is only as significant as the purpose driving it. What are you striving for above all else in your leadership work? What makes you *need* to be a leader?

Practically everyone who enters school leadership enters with the best of intentions, but what's key is your evidence. Does your evidence support your intention and your contention?

As the leader of your school, it is imperative that your reason for assuming school leadership—your "why"—is supported with evidence, which is your daily walk. When your "walk" mirrors your "talk," the probability for school leadership success is very high.

Never allow your leadership purpose to be compromised. When you are at your most overwhelmed by minutiae, when you are drowning in paperwork, when you have more decisions to make *now* than there is time in the day—always keep your purpose to the forefront.

As long as you spend all your brainpower reacting to a barrage of stimuli, there is no way you are going to be able to take the reins and lead your school to true greatness. Your original purpose will be rendered irrelevant by the reality you've chosen.

It is crucial, then, that you continually examine the dynamics in your school for any that may be veering you away from what you became a leader to do and why.

My Leadership Vision—My Where

What do you foresee that your school will accomplish *because* you are the leader? Your school cannot afford for you to be the same person next year on this date that you are today. You have got to be able to demonstrate growth. Do not assume that your current level of effectiveness will carry over into subsequent years.

As a teacher, you may feel worn down and burnt out based on the climate, culture, and conditions you inherited and the leadership you replaced. You have much to correct. Where will you start?

You must begin by communicating your vision to everyone. You must lead in every respect—and that includes listening. In staff meetings, during PLCs, even one on one, you must provide your staff with as many opportunities as possible to add their input to your vision for the school. They must know that they have your attention in all matters related to student progress.

Do not impose your vision—you want staff to buy into it and hold collective ownership of it. You must therefore build solid relationships by building trust.

Having a personal vision of a destination is the easy part. The real challenge is in building the staircase that gets you there. Short-term goals for fulfilling your vision constitute the steps in this staircase. To make sure you're continuously climbing, be sure to write out each goal and assign a deadline to it.

You must also have a strategy in place toward meeting them or you are just leading on impulse. What are your short- and long-term leadership goals? Are your leadership goals and plan an indispensable component of your overall leadership?

a direct correlation between your leadership of the school and student outcomes? You must embrace the fact that whether your students succeed or fail is deeply rooted in your own leadership.

Are your **teachers** better *because* you lead them? Can you identify what it is specifically about your leadership that either motivates or drags down your staff? What role do you play in helping to make your teachers effective? What professional development resources do you provide them?

Is **parent engagement** better *because* you lead the effort? Teachers know all about the correlation between a lack of parental engagement and undesirable student outcomes (both academic and behavioral). Is parental engagement a priority of your leadership? If not, why not? If so, what is the evidence? Deep, ongoing parental engagement means a lot more than enduring the occasional gripe session. Leadership must focus on strategies to work with parents toward their children's success both at school and in the home.

Are **community relations** better *because* you lead the effort? Are community partnerships a priority of your leadership? A purpose-driven, mission-oriented, visionary leader reaches out to all community stakeholders. By utilizing the services of this diverse body of human capital, the implications can be enormous.

Is **your school** a better school *because* you lead it? Ask yourself this question daily. This is your daily fuel. Hold yourself personally accountable for the success of your school. Progress must be evident and continual. Be brutally honest with yourself and examine all the indicators. Although you are not leading alone or in a vacuum, everything that happens in your school is reflective of your leadership. Always remain cognizant of that reality.

My Leadership Value—My Worth

Are your **students** better *because* you lead them? Is there



Baruti K. Kafele

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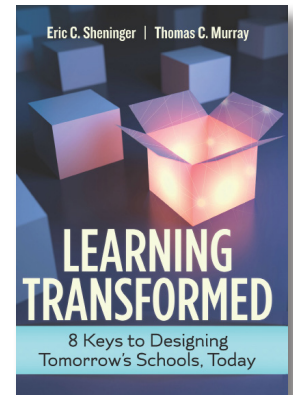


ASCD® LEADERSHIP SUMMARIES for EDUCATORS

Learning Transformed

8 Keys to Designing Tomorrow's Schools, Today

by **Eric C. Sheninger and Thomas C. Murray**



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THE SUMMARY IN BRIEF

With all that we know about how students learn, the nature of the world they will face after graduation, and the educational inequities that have existed for centuries, maintaining a traditional, one-size-fits-all approach to teaching and learning is tantamount to instructional malpractice.

It's our obligation to prepare our students for their future—not our past. In *Learning Transformed* authors Eric C. Sheninger and Thomas C. Murray outline eight keys—each a piece of a puzzle for transforming the K-12 education system of teaching and learning—to intentionally design tomorrow's schools so today's learners are prepared for success.

If we want our students to become successful citizens in a global society, we must dramatically shift to a more personal approach. We can no longer wait. Let *Learning Transformed* show you how you can be part of the solution.

IN THIS SUMMARY, YOU WILL LEARN:

- School improvement relies on high-quality, collaborative leadership.
- Students need real-world tools to do real-world work that matters.
- Learning spaces need to be flexible to unleash student genius.
- Professional learning needs a shift to a more personal approach.

Introduction: A Sense of Urgency

The American Education Crisis

The idea of the “American Education Crisis” is not a new topic. Outcries for reforming a broken system and the need to better prepare our nation’s students for their future have in fact gone on for hundreds of years. The difference today, however, is that the global world of work is evolving at an unprecedented pace, with the speed of change continuously accelerating.

A study published by The Education Trust found that only 8 percent of U.S. high school graduates actually complete a curriculum that is rigorous enough to prepare them for college and the workplace.

As the outcry for education reform continues, the opportunities available for those with only a high school diploma remain in a freefall. As corporations move manufacturing jobs overseas, the availability of lower-level positions moves with them. Simultaneously, the process of automation through technology has made many jobs that were commonplace for decades now completely obsolete.

Today’s pace of technological change is staggering, and the speed of current breakthroughs has no historical precedent. Consumers may seem well-versed with the latest personal gadgets, yet growth in artificial intelligence (AI), robotics, autonomous vehicles, the Internet of Things (IoT), and nano-technology remains hardly known except by technology gurus who live and breathe ones and zeros.

How are our schools preparing students for the jobs that will exist in this future global workforce? The traditional model of schooling in which students are taught to regurgitate information, ultimately preparing them for the industrial model of the past, must dramatically shift to a more personal approach if we are to prepare this generation of students to become successful citizens in a global society.

Next, we introduce eight keys to intentionally designing tomorrow’s schools so that today’s learners are prepared for success far beyond earning a high school diploma.

Creating a Culture of Innovation

Key: Leadership and School Culture Lay the Foundation

What is true leadership? Great leaders don’t tell people what to do but instead take them to where they need to be.

There is no agenda to create a harem of followers or disciples. True leaders know that their success is intimately tied to the work of the collective. As such, they encourage risk taking and create a culture of innovation and trust. One person doesn’t win a war, an election, or a football game.

The pinnacle of success comes from a dynamic team approach where each person knows that they have an important role to play—that the work has meaning.

The following acronym has been developed to add context to the evolving role of leadership in schools today. The best leaders do the following on a consistent basis:

- **L**earn,
- **E**mpower,
- **A**dapt,
- **D**elegate,
- **E**ngage,
- **R**eflect, and
- **S**erve.

Change Agents Build Relationships: A Key to Culture

Meaningful change has and always will begin at the individual level. The hardest, but most gratifying, work in which a leader might ever engage is empowering colleagues to change. School leaders need to remove barriers to the change process, eradicate the fear of failure, provide autonomy, and empower teachers to drive change at the classroom level. Dynamic relationships propel this change to happen.

Consider trying the following strategies to help your colleagues begin the process of changing their professional practice.

- Lead by example even when (initially) it might be a lonely place.
- Share current research and practices that support the change you are championing.
- Encourage colleagues who might be resistant to change to attend professional learning opportunities with you. Get them involved in high-quality professional learning related to the change effort.
- Tackle fears head-on to alleviate concerns.

- Help others see the value of the change on their own.
- Clearly articulate how the change will improve professional practice and result in improved student learning and achievement outcomes.
- Be patient. Like you would with your students, treat your colleagues with respect and remember how satisfying and rewarding it is when you help students succeed.
- Get your students involved. There is no better way to convince educators to change than when they can see firsthand the impact it has on kids.
- Work on building better relationships.

Redesigning the Learning Experience

Key: The Learning Experience Must Be Redesigned and Made Personal

Most often, students are told what to learn, when to learn it, and how it should be learned, which has ultimately led to an engagement crisis. Very rarely do students have the opportunity to follow their passions, explore their interests, and engage in personal and authentic learning opportunities. Therefore, massive disengagement has become a natural byproduct of a traditional education experience.

Intentionally designed schools not only break from the traditional one-size-fits-all lock-step progression of teaching and learning but also redesign the learning experience to one that is personal and authentic for students. To be globally competitive in the years ahead, students must be given the opportunity to exercise more agency and ownership over their learning. This can only be accomplished through intentional design.

The Educational Technology Fallacy

Research on educational technology indicates that access to devices alone is simply not enough to shift the learning paradigm. Educational technology is not, and never will be, a silver bullet to prepare students for their future. Technology provides many opportunities to engage learners like never before, yet it is imperative that this engagement also leads to high levels of learning in which students create a variety of artifacts that demonstrate conceptual mastery.

The 2016 National Education Technology Plan coined the term “digital use divide,” which is defined as “the disparity between students who use technology to create, design, build, explore, and collaborate and those who simply use

technology to consume media passively.” School leaders who intentionally design schools are cognizant of this divide, and they work to ensure technology is used actively.

Building Student Agency

For schools to transform learning, student agency must be a core component and value of all involved. Student agency is about empowering kids to own their learning (and school) through greater autonomy. It is driven by choice, voice, and advocacy. How can school leaders make student agency a reality? For example, they can,

- Develop pedagogically sound learning activities with standards-aligned assessments and enable students to select the right tool for the task to demonstrate conceptual mastery.
- Empower students to co-create rules and expectations.
- Provide avenues for students to provide honest feedback on school culture.
- Implement portfolios as a means of authentic assessment.
- When hiring new teachers and administrators, have students sit on the interview committee.

Ensuring a Return on Instruction

Key: Decisions Must Be Grounded in Evidence and Driven by the Return on Instruction (ROI)

In the United States alone, schools spend billions of dollars a year on technology purchases. What evidence do we have that our ed-tech expenditures have actually improved teaching and learning? Many school leaders may cringe while reflecting on that question, and that is okay. A major step in intentionally designing schools is to begin to critically analyze technology initiatives and align them to clear results.

For educational technology to be fully embraced as a powerful teaching and learning tool, there must be a focus on substance over assumptions and generalizations. The greatest technology in the world will not garner hypothesized improvement if a concerted effort to change pedagogy isn't the foundation.

The problem isn't the technology itself per se but the lack of high-quality pedagogy, which stems from a lack of high-quality professional learning to support educators with effective implementation. Showing teachers what “high-quality” actually looks like is key.

Driving Evidence-Based Instructional Leadership

It's easy to simply say how we should improve instructional leadership. However, actually doing the work is no small feat. To leverage a true Return on Instruction, consider the following suggestions:

Be present in classrooms regularly. Begin by increasing the number of formal observations conducted each year and commit to a schedule to make it happen.

Streamline expectations and eliminate ineffective practices. Begin by establishing a common vision and expectations for all teachers.

Improve feedback. Suggestions for improvement should always contain clear, practical examples and strategies that a teacher can begin to implement immediately. Just like with students, timely, relevant feedback is essential.

Be a scholar. Being a scholar not only helps a leader improve professional practice but also puts the leader in a position to have higher-quality conversations with teachers and their colleagues about their own improvement.

Model. The best school leaders don't ask their teachers to do anything they are not willing to do themselves.

Teach a class. This can be accomplished regularly during the year or by coteaching with both struggling and distinguished teachers.

Grow professionally. School leaders should attend a variety of conferences or workshops each year that are aligned to a major initiative or focus area in their school or district.

Designing Learner-Centered Spaces

Key: Learning Spaces Must Become Learner-Centered

Most of today's learning spaces were originally designed and built for teacher-centric learning environments, coined by Alfie Kohn in 1999 as the "cells and bells" model. In this analogy, students occupy cells until the bell rings and then move down the hall to another cell to do the same. The process repeats until freedom is granted at a particular time.

This type of design, however, is in direct contrast to what we know about how students learn, how tomorrow's teachers will need to teach, and all that we understand from educational research about the impact of learning space design.

As the learning space has been studied, considerable evidence indicates an explicit relationship between the physical makeup of the environment and educational outcomes. The research of Barrett and Zhang has suggested direct connections between the learning space and sensory stimuli among students. They identify three key design principles:

1. **Naturalness:** Hardwired into our brains, humans have the basic need for light, air, and safety. In this area, the impact of lighting, sound, temperature, and air quality are prevalent.
2. **Individualization:** Each of our brains is uniquely organized, and we perceive the world in different ways. Because of this, different people respond to environmental stimuli in various ways. Therefore, the opportunity for some level of choice affects success.
3. **Appropriate Level of Stimulation:** The learning space can offer the "silent curriculum" that affects student engagement levels. When designing the space, it's important for educators not to overstimulate and thus detract students' ability to focus but to provide enough stimuli to enhance the learning experience.

Today's educational paradigm is no longer one of knowledge transfer but one of knowledge creation and curation. Since the 1960s, constructivism, the idea that people construct their own understanding and knowledge through experience and reflection, has been foundational in many introductory college education courses.

According to Nancy Van Note Chism, learning spaces intentionally designed for a constructivist approach should not be limited to the classroom but instead should spill into corridors, across campus, and throughout the interconnected digital web. These types of spaces include

- small-group meeting spaces,
- spaces for projects,
- spaces for whole-class conversations,
- spaces where technology is easily accessible,
- spaces for display of ideas and working documents, and
- spaces that can easily accommodate movement and noise.

Next generation spaces pull from the current generation's

social development and constructivist philosophies to provide all students with a community that has opportunities to create, invent, and tinker. This allows students to learn in authentic and meaningful ways.

Making Professional Learning Personal

Key: Professional Learning Must Be Relevant, Engaging, Ongoing, and Made Personal

For decades, conventional wisdom has been that if schools could just get teachers the right type and right amount of support, then excellent teaching and learning in the classroom would be in reach. According to a report by The New Teacher Project (2015), school districts are spending considerable amounts of money on teacher development, but little of it is actually making a long-term difference.

For years, school leaders have pushed teachers to differentiate or personalize instruction in their classrooms, yet they have hypocritically utilized a one-size-fits-all model for professional learning. The term “professional learning” emphasizes a modern approach that is interactive, engaging, and ongoing rather than one-size-fits-all and completed over a fixed time period. At a time when school leaders are expecting teachers to make learning more relevant and personal for kids, they must also model the desired practice.

Developing a Learning Culture of Ownership and Empowerment

Professional learning in many districts must undergo radical reform, from a model that’s outdated and ineffective to one that’s personal, empowering, and owned by the learner. How can such a culture of ownership and empowerment be created?

Clearly define and articulate the vision. Do all stakeholders understand the district’s direction? How should instruction improve with the time that’s invested?

Model: Practice what you preach. Learn alongside your staff members and model expectations for them. Utilize time in an efficient and meaningful manner. Invest time in professional learning—not managerial tasks.

Learning should be anytime, anywhere. Today’s schools must work to provide a robust, digital curriculum where high-quality content is available around the clock.

Balance districtwide initiatives with the need for learning that’s personal. Maintain a laserlike focus on

the vision while meeting the individual needs of staff members through a more personal approach to learning, which happens only by abdicating some control.

Shift the culture of professional learning. Professional learning is a personal responsibility. It’s not just a few additional days built into a teacher contract or a handful of after-school workshops.

Empower staff to design their own learning. Teachers will see value when they are invested in the design process. Find ways to grow teacher leadership and build capacity in your staff.

Solicit teacher feedback. Districts need to seek out teacher feedback to see what’s working, what’s relevant, and what areas still need to grow.

Leveraging Technology

Key: Technology Must Be Leveraged and Used as an Accelerant for Student Learning

When implemented well, technology can help close achievement gaps and improve learning outcomes, but when paired with 20th-century pedagogy, it can be a substantial waste of money. The proper combination of talented, well-trained teachers and high-octane technology can create authentic and transformed learning experiences for all students.

The ability of technology to support personalized learning is dependent on a robust infrastructure. The National Educational Technology Plan of 2016 outlines four keys for designing a robust infrastructure:

1. **Ubiquitous connectivity:** Persistent access to high-speed internet in and out of school.
2. **Powerful learning devices:** Access to mobile devices that connect learners and educators to the vast resources of the Internet and facilitate communication and collaboration.
3. **High-quality digital learning content:** Digital learning content and tools that can be used to design and deliver engaging and relevant learning experiences.
4. **Responsible Use Policies:** Guidelines to safeguard students and ensure that the infrastructure is used to support learning.

When developing a school district’s infrastructure, or when refreshing existing equipment, school leaders should consid-

er the following:

- What is the vision for learning that technology will be supporting?
- What digital tools will be needed?
- What kind of professional learning will teachers and administrators need?
- How much bandwidth will be needed?
- What will the needs of your in-school network be?
- How many and what type of devices are needed?
- What resources are available to fund the transition?

Overcoming the Digital Divide: Equity in Access

The notion of a “digital divide,” the term used to describe the gap in access to and use of digital technologies, has been a popular topic of conversation since the turn of the century. Since 2006, metrics indicate that 99 percent of schools have had some sort of Internet connection; however, for many of those districts, the available connectivity has been extremely limited. A report by the State Educational Technology Directors Association and Common Sense Kids Action indicated that in 2016, 41 percent of schools were still underconnected.

Access and connectivity are essential to transform learning and ultimately prepare students for their future. Although great strides have been made to develop the proper infrastructure in our nation’s schools, far too many students lose access to connectivity when they leave school campus.

Collaborating and Engaging with the Community

Key: Community Collaboration and Engagement Must Be Woven into the Fabric of a School’s Culture

The correlation between family engagement and student achievement has been studied at length, and the evidence is both consistent and positive. Simply put, when schools, families, and the community collaborate to support student success, students achieve at higher levels, drop out less frequently, and think more positively about their school experience. For learning to be transformed, community collaboration and engagement are essential.

Parent communication and collaboration should mirror the type of engagement we want to experience with our own children’s schools. School leaders who intentionally design

their schools establish timely, two-way communication and dialogue; create regular opportunities for families to learn together at home; are responsive to cultural differences; and work diligently to support families living in poverty.

They understand that community collaboration is ongoing and systemic—not a few times per month. They meet families where they are and communicate accordingly; leverage digital tools to communicate in real time while being sensitive to families with limited or no home access; and build trust and relationships to form the foundation of community collaboration.

The Center for American Progress outlines what it takes to develop “community schools” where school and community leaders collaboratively develop a common vision and strategy for success. They outline six key strategies that successful community school initiatives use to build effective partnerships and relationships:

1. Ensure that all partners share a common vision. The entire community and all involved partners should agree on the same goals and expectations.
2. Establish formal relationships and collaborative structures to engage stakeholders, ranging from developing task forces to creating formal agreements.
3. Encourage open dialogue about challenges and solutions. To foster shared ownership, stakeholders must engage honestly and constructively with one another to solve problems and make midcourse corrections.
4. Engage partners in the use of data. Sharing data enables all stakeholders to understand where things stand and hold one another accountable for making measurable progress.
5. Create and empower central office capacity at the district level to sustain community schoolwork.
6. Leverage community resources and braid funding streams. Community schools capitalize on the financial assets of community partners and funding streams to support programs and activities aligned with their common vision.

Leading the Charge

Key: Schools That Transform Learning Are Built to Last, as Financial, Political, and Pedagogical Sustainability Ensure Long-Term Success

Change isn't easy, and it certainly won't happen quickly. Many of the best examples of sustainable change have resulted from an organic, grassroots approach. The ability to initiate, manage, and create sustainable change relies on a leader's ability—your ability—to understand it as a process as opposed to an event. This type of mindset takes vision, planning, patience, and perseverance. If sustainable change is the goal, then it is important to clarify the what, why, and how—followed by a clear metric of success.

Built to Last: Ensuring Sustainability

In every district, school leaders must make smart, student-centered decisions to ensure the long-term sustainability of progress. This type of sustainability encompasses three key areas: financial, pedagogical, and political.

Financial sustainability. Budgets have remained stagnant for a number of years, so the need for financial sustainability comes as no surprise. Being vigilant about financial sustainability isn't only the responsibility of school business managers and school board members. Financial sustainability is the responsibility of every school leader.

Pedagogical sustainability. As school leaders understand, teachers at the classroom level have the greatest impact on achievement. To redesign the learning experience and sustain those practices in the long term, we must invest in the capacity of those who have the greatest effect. Building pedagogical sustainability comes from ongoing, systemic, personal professional learning opportunities and empowering teachers to be leaders.

Political sustainability. Political sustainability is grounded in trusting relationships. From the school board and

district superintendent to individual parents and an elementary principal, political sustainability is built one relationship at a time. School leaders must work diligently to build trusting relationships so sustained transformation can occur. To develop political sustainability, school leaders must build capacity and empower people other than themselves. A leader's legacy can be seen in the capacity that remains when they leave.

Collaborative leadership for intentional design involves building a great team, empowering your people to run, arming them with the needed tools, and building positive, trusting, long-lasting relationships with all stakeholders.

Creating the schools that our kids need will not happen by chance. It is our responsibility to make it happen. The schools our kids need are, and always will be, intentionally designed. It is in these schools that learning is transformed. Together, we can do this.



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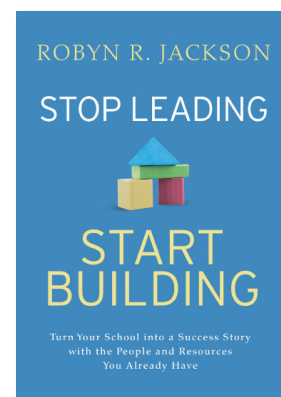


ASCD® LEADERSHIP SUMMARIES for EDUCATORS

Stop Leading, Start Building

Turn Your School into a Success Story with the
People and Resources You Already Have

by **Robyn R. Jackson**



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THE SUMMARY IN BRIEF

School administration has changed. As a result, most of what we have been taught about how to move our teachers and schools forward is now flawed and incomplete. It's a collection of strategies, advice, frameworks, and programs. Sometimes they work; a lot of the time they don't ... or they don't work as well as we'd like or for very long.

In *Stop Leading, Start Building*, you'll learn that it is possible to transform your school with the people and resources you already have. Internationally recognized consultant for building better schools, Robyn R. Jackson, shares her Buildership Model and much more to help you finally create the school your students and teachers deserve. The work involves a few simple shifts in how you approach your school's Purpose, People, Pathway, and Plan.

When you stop leading and start building, you let go of the idea that you need to work harder to make your school "work better." This is your guide to successfully move your school towards dramatic change and better learning outcomes for all.

IN THIS SUMMARY, YOU WILL LEARN:

- How to turn your school into a success story with the people and resources you already have.
- How to help every teacher grow one level, in one domain, in one year or less.
- How to power both short-term and ongoing transformation.

Introduction

Why you haven't made a bigger difference in your school (and why it's not your fault)

What if you could transform your school with the people and resources you already have? You absolutely can.

If you're like most school administrators, you probably face several of the following frustrations at some point every school year: lack of control, no sense of urgency among staff, a plateau, initiative fatigue, resistance, feeling overwhelmed.

The reason you are experiencing these frustrations is usually one or more of the following: you lack clarity, you lack cohesion, you lack competence, you lack confidence. The good news is that the clarity, cohesion, competence, and confidence you need can all be won when you make the switch from leadership to *buildership*.

There is a difference between bosses, leaders, and builders. Bosses say, "Go," and try to force their schools to achieve goals. That rarely works. Leaders say, "Let's go," and try to push or pull their schools toward their goals leaving you constantly exhausted, frustrated, and at odds with some of your staff. But Builders say, "Come," inviting others to help you create something extraordinary. There's no pushing, pulling, or dragging.

The Buildership Model has four parts:

1. Clarify your **purpose**.
2. Grow your **people**.
3. Chart your **pathway**.
4. Execute your **plan**.

When you adopt this model, you'll gain clarity, as everyone gets focused on doing the right work the right way; cohesion, as everyone works together to achieve your school goals; competence, as everyone grows the will and skill they need to be successful; and increased confidence that you will achieve your goals. Taken together, these four components create a self-correcting system that helps you not only turn your school into a success story but also sustain your success over time.

Let go of the idea that you need to "work harder" to make your school "work better." Stop settling for incremental gains when what you really want to achieve is dramatic transformation and a whole new narrative. It's time to make the shift from leadership to buildership. Get ready to turn your school into a success story.

Purpose

How to get off the "school improvement hamster wheel" once and for all

Here is what you need to understand: Without a clear sense of purpose, you'll never escape the school improvement hamster wheel—you'll always be chasing your goals but never reaching them. There is a way to get off that wheel once and for all. It starts with defining your purpose—figuring out where your priorities lie, and where your focus should be. In order to define your purpose, you're going to need to clarify your vision, mission, and core values.

Your vision answers the question "What are we building?" Your mission answers the question "Why is it important?" Your core values answer the question "What role does each of us play?"

When you think of your vision, mission, and core values this way, you begin to create a cohesive narrative that clearly defines school purpose for both your staff members and those you serve. Plus, thinking of your purpose this way helps you create a vision, mission, and set of core values you can use to drive every decision you and your staff make in your school.

Your Vision

Builders recognize a vision as a promise they are making to students and their families. A vision says, "If you join this school community, here is what you can expect from us." Any vision that doesn't include 100 percent of students is saying, "Our plan is to let certain kids fall through the cracks." It's saying, "Some students will not succeed here." Your vision must include all your students. Period.

The first time I introduced this concept in one of my professional learning workshops, hands shot up. I called on the veteran principal of a struggling high school. She said, "But there is no way that I can achieve a vision that includes 100 percent of my students. We have so many kids with so many different problems. We're barely making it as it is."

I said to her, "You're right. You can't reach a 100-percent vision with the school you currently have. So, ask yourself this: What would your school have to look like and be like for you to reach this vision and then go build that school?"

After a moment, she started talking about the school she really wanted to build: one where students could believe that their history of failure didn't mean that their future would look the same. One where students could feel successful and

empowered and learn to love learning. One where students would see themselves as architects of their own futures rather than victims of their current circumstances. The more she talked, the more her passion grew. By the time she finished, her face was glowing. People applauded. That's what your vision should spark in you and your people.

When you set a 100-percent vision for your students, you have to reconsider everything. But that's where the opportunities lie. When you reconsider everything, you find ways to serve students who have gone underserved. Imagine the creativity and innovation it would demand from you.

Once you've established your vision, nothing else is sacred. Everything you do must align or be revamped to align with it—from your hiring practices to your curriculum choices to your master schedule. Start with creating an ambitious vision. Then work to build a school worthy of it.

Your Mission

Ready to clarify with your staff why you're building what you're building? Here's what the process can look like.

Share your vision with your staff. Once you've thoroughly explained it and you're sure they understand what it is and how you arrived at it, engage your staff in conversations about what they think about the vision. Although these conversations might begin during a formal meeting, they ought to continue in smaller team or department meetings and informal conversations between teachers in the halls.

Here are some prompts to guide those conversations:

- What does the vision mean to you personally?
- Why is achieving this vision important for our students?
- What would our students' lives look like if we were to achieve this vision for every student in our school?

The conversation should continue until everyone's personal whys have been shared and heard. You should start seeing some themes emerge, and before long, you'll arrive at a collective why around which everyone can rally. That is your mission. In the end, try to articulate your mission in one simple sentence. Don't overthink this. What you want is whatever clearly, simply, and succinctly describes your collective why. Builders are careful to connect their vision and mission to create a complete picture. You'll know when you've arrived at the right mission when you can directly connect it to your vision using the word "because."

For example:

(Vision) Every student will be reading at or above proficient by 2nd grade and maintain or improve their proficiency for each subsequent grade because we empower students to succeed in a rapidly changing world (mission).

(Vision) Every student will graduate with a confirmed post-secondary option because we exist to help students find and successfully pursue their passion (mission).

When the vision and mission are connected in this way, not only does it make clear to everyone what you are building and why it is important, but it also creates a cohesive narrative for your school. It tells everyone who you are and what you're about.

Your Core Values

Now it's time to help everyone understand what part they will play in achieving your vision and living out your mission on a daily basis.

Core values tell a school staff, "This is how we need to behave, and this is what we need to do in order to live out our mission and achieve our vision."

There are two things builders do to generate core values that are powerful and useful. Builders make them non-negotiable, and they get everyone's buy-in. Builders ensure that their school's core values capture the absolute essential priorities of the educators in the school and are expressed in a way that is clear to all. There's no room for multiple interpretations.

Writing core values to be non-negotiable terms of practice establishes boundaries for a school that define its organizational culture and signals to everyone who works there, what their role is, and how they will be held accountable.

For example, a core value of "respect" might become: We treat others the way that we want to be treated. If a teacher is unsure how to treat an annoying parent, the guidance is right there in the core value: We treat others the way that we want to be treated, which is likely some variation on being direct, polite, and empathetic.

Another example, a core value of "grit" might become: We keep working until we're successful. If a teacher is struggling with a student, that teacher knows the right course of action is to keep working with that student until that student is successful. A student who is ready to give up can also look to the core value and be reminded that here, we keep working until we're successful.

In order for core values to be non-negotiable, they must be embraced by everyone. And, in order for them to be embraced by everyone, they must be created by everyone. Core values that are dictated have no real power. When your staff co-creates core values, these core values become what defines your culture and guides what you do.

People

How to have an entire staff of master teachers (without having to “get rid” of anyone)

School administrators often feel like their vision, mission, and core values are being held hostage by a few resistant teachers or a few stubbornly ineffective ones.

Builders don't go after teachers or see them as “the problem.” Instead, they simply get to work helping every teacher — no matter where they are currently — to become a master teacher.

Builders know that we can help all of our students achieve our vision for them, but we can only do it if there is a master teacher in every classroom. It's just that simple.

Your teachers' ability to reach mastery is largely dependent on a combination of their skill and will. Ideally, they will have both the pedagogical and subject-area expertise (the skill) necessary to help students reach your school purpose and the motivation to do so consistently (the will). But often, this is not the case.

The Four Disciplines of Buildership is a tightly focused system for equipping every staff member with the will and the skill necessary. To improve will and skill, there are four things you can do:

1. **Feedback.** You can give teachers feedback that helps them know where they are on the pathway to mastery and what they need to do next to reach mastery.
2. **Support.** You can give teachers support to help them grow their practice and be more effective with students.
3. **Accountability.** You can help teachers focus on accountability to your vision, mission, and core values so that their practice aligns with your school purpose and goals.
4. **Culture.** You can create a healthy school culture where your teachers feel comfortable taking risks and are committed to the vision, mission, and core values of your school.

When you integrate all four of these into a system, it differentiates your approach to meet teachers' specific needs. Applying the right discipline at the right time can help every teacher grow their will and skill until they reach and maintain mastery. Let's look closer at the four disciplines.

Feedback

The way we are typically trained to give teachers feedback can feel more like an exercise in compliance. It's hard to see how those structured and artificial conversations are going to lead to lasting and meaningful change in a teacher's practice, will, or skill.

If, however, we understand how to harness the power of the right kind of feedback, we can dramatically improve teaching and learning in our building.

Builders don't offer a laundry list of feedback to teachers. Instead, they look for patterns and offer ONE-thing feedback to get teachers focused on the most important thing they need to do right now to either grow one level in their practice, or sustain excellent practice over time.

Support

Builders understand that teachers are at different stages in their development and, thus, need different types and levels of support.

Novice teachers have limited experience, exposure, and expertise. Sometimes it's because they have only been teaching for a few months or years. Other times it's because they have been repeating their first year of teaching over and over. Either way, novice teachers need help acquiring knowledge or skill.

Apprentice teachers have a basic understanding of teaching. They generally know what to do, but they struggle with how to do it. They lack “teacher sense,” where they can read the needs of their students and respond in real time to those needs. Apprentices need support around the execution of skills. Apprentice teachers need help applying the teaching strategies more effectively.

Practitioner teachers are proficient in the classroom. They have a repertoire of practice that works with most students and are generally effective and efficient in the classroom. However, they do have some gaps. While their strategies will help most students get back on track, they may inadvertently leave a few behind. Practitioner teachers need help assimilating their skills to close these gaps.

Master teachers are not only effective and efficient but also able to reach every single student in their classroom. Their practice is seamless, and they not only anticipate students' needs, but they also transfer ownership and responsibility for learning to students so that students can become self-directed. However, Master teachers can become “unconsciously competent,” not enhancing their areas of strength or pursuing opportunities to extend their practice further. Thus, Master teachers need help continuously adapting their practice to new and novel circumstances.

Once you understand a teacher's current skill level and you know what type of support will help them improve, you need to design and deliver that support in a way that helps the teacher advance to the next skill level.

Accountability

The kind of accountability builders practice is about getting everyone in the organization so committed to the school purpose that they will hold themselves accountable for achieving the vision, living out the mission, and aligning their practice to the school core values each and every day.

By aligning your accountability system to your purpose, making the right behaviors easier and the wrong behaviors harder, and reinforcing your system, you will see progress from your low will/low skill teachers. But you'll also see progress across the board.

True accountability is not forcing teachers to do the right thing or else; it's growing your staff's ability and motivation to make better and better choices and, thus, get closer and closer to achieving the vision, mission, and core values of your school.

Culture

You can give teachers all the great feedback and support and accountability in the world, but if you do it inside a toxic school culture, that toxicity will undermine everything else. A healthy school culture will magnify feedback, maximize support, and increase the school's accountability to students.

Culture is really just a collection of organizational habits and the stories we tell about them. Our organizational habits are the things we do every day to accomplish our goals for students. They are a school's true purpose on display, revealing what we think our work really is, what we think is important, and what we think our role is in accomplishing that work. Our stories are the narratives we

tell ourselves and one another about the work we do. Our stories reveal how we view the work, its relative importance, and how we view each other. Those two critical elements—habits and stories—are what we use to shape culture and maintain it. They create the norms and unwritten expectations by which everyone abides.

Culture is not destroyed in one fell swoop. It erodes over time. The opposite is also true. You can't instantly create a new culture; you've got to build it over time. And the stronger your new culture becomes, the less power toxicity has to derail you from achieving your school purpose.

When you've helped everyone in your school join you in building your success story together, you're ready for the next phase, Pathway.

Pathway

How to stop tackling every challenge and focus on what matters most

Where should your school improvement work start? At the heart of the Pathway phase is a process that will help you focus on root causes so that you can address what's actually holding your school back from realizing its purpose.

The tool for this work is called the Builder's Blueprint, which prompts you to revisit purpose to locate your biggest constraint, examine data to confirm or redirect your focus, identify the work your teachers will undertake to help remove your biggest obstacle, and identify which of the Four Disciplines of Buildership you'll use to support the change.

Ultimately, your Builder's Blueprint lays out a hypothesis for the transformative actions you will take over the next 90 days. Once completed, it should tell the story of how you will move your students toward your goals and sound something like this:

If I/we want students to _____ (vision, mission, or core values), then teachers need to _____ (apply this principle of instruction); therefore I/we need to _____ (apply this discipline).

Buildership means focusing on less so that you and your people can achieve more. With the right focus, you'll be able to determine what work you should be doing now and what work you need to pass on for now because it doesn't serve your purpose. Armed with a clear pathway, you're ready to turn it into a solid Plan.

Plan

How to knock down your biggest constraint in the next 90 days (even when “life” tries to get in the way)

Creating a concrete plan with built-in accountability helps everyone work to achieve each goal and, ultimately, your school purpose.

Builders break their planning down into 90-day periods, focusing on less-distant goals that they want to achieve in service of their bigger vision. This way you can focus on meeting a single, clear objective every 90 days. Ninety days is long enough to build up momentum and short enough to allow you to adjust your trajectory as your circumstances change or as you gain new data and new insights.

Builders plan not just to achieve the outcome but to meet the challenges they’ll face along the way. Their tool for this is the Builder’s Transformation Cycle. Here’s an overview of the work it entails:

1. **Excite:** Get everyone to buy into the proposed 90-day transformation work.
2. **Explore:** Surface and address the constraints that threaten this transformation work.
3. **Engage:** Set everyone up for success with the transformation work.
4. **Expect:** Get everyone implementing the transformation work consistently and pervasively.
5. **Evaluate:** Get everyone implementing the trans-

formation work with quality and embed it in your culture as standard practice.

6. **Extend:** Realize success, examine results, and identify next steps.

Each stage of this process is calibrated to create greater and greater momentum: energizing your staff, deepening their commitment to the work, and honing your ability to anticipate and mitigate new challenges.

In order to make your plan work, you will need disciplined execution. Using the concept of *meeting rhythm* — having a regular and frequent cadence of meetings — is absolutely the best way to keep you and your team committed to realizing your purpose, focused on your pathway, and consistently producing results. You’re not meeting for the sake of meeting; you’re meeting to consistently confront and solve issues before they derail progress.

Over time, this process will be embedded into your school culture and be the means through which you reach milestone after milestone on your way to realizing your school purpose.

Ultimately, the true story of our success as builders is the ways in which our actions have improved the lives of the students, staff, and families we serve. Every success story will be different; each is a unique tale of what you, your staff, and your students have built together.



Robyn R. Jackson is passionate about building better schools. As the CEO of Mindsteps® Inc., she has helped thousands of K–12 administrators and teachers develop the clarity and confidence to turn their classrooms and schools into success stories, most recently through her Builder’s Lab workshops and her online training program, Buildership University. A former National Board–certified high school English teacher and an award-winning middle school administrator, Dr. Jackson is an internationally recognized keynote speaker and consultant who has worked in thousands of schools and districts worldwide to help teachers and administrators develop rigorous instructional programs that provide students with the support and motivation they need to reach or exceed the standards. Dr. Jackson is the author of 10 books, including the award-winning *Never Underestimate Your Teachers* and the international bestseller *Never Work Harder Than Your Students*. She also hosts the popular podcast *School Leadership Reimagined*. Connect with Dr. Jackson on Facebook, LinkedIn (Robyn Jackson), and mindstepsinc.com.

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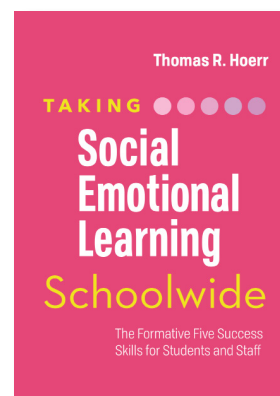


ASCD® LEADERSHIP SUMMARIES for EDUCATORS

Taking Social Emotional Learning Schoolwide

The Formative Five Success Skills for Students and Staff

by **Thomas R. Hoerr**



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THE SUMMARY IN BRIEF

Growing numbers of people recognize that social-emotional learning (SEL) is central to a well-rounded education and to success in life outside and beyond the school building. What's missing is the know-how and framework for weaving SEL into the fabric of the school.

In *Taking Social Emotional Learning Schoolwide*, Thomas R. Hoerr shows teachers, administrators, and other school staff how to integrate the Formative Five success skills—empathy, integrity, self-control, embracing diversity, and grit—with school culture essentials of values, vision, mission, practices, people, narrative, and place.

Incorporating the author's years of hands-on experience as a school leader, relevant research, and helpful strategies for use at all levels and with all K-12 populations, *Taking Social Emotional Learning Schoolwide* is the ultimate blueprint for making sure students and staff are equipped to thrive.

IN THIS SUMMARY, YOU WILL LEARN:

- How to ensure your school is helping students develop SEL skills.
- How to cultivate students' appreciation of the differences among us.
- How to establish and nurture a welcoming school environment.
- Why you should settle for excellence and not pursue perfection.

SEL: It's About Time!

Many educators have been bothered by the fixation on test scores but were given neither the voice nor the opportunity to view students more broadly. The test-score mantra of legislators, school board members, the local press, and some parents has made it very difficult to go beyond percentiles and address the needs of the whole child. That's because in most cases test scores have been viewed as *the* barometer of a school's quality.

Our battle for high test scores has caused us to lose the larger educational war. Children do need to learn to read, write, and calculate, but there is much more to consider in their education. We must also be focused on developing the kinds of people that these children will become. Will they be caring and productive, respectful and honest? Will they be good neighbors and understanding friends? Will they work to improve their communities?

We need to prepare students to succeed in life, not just to do well in school, and for that we need to address their social-emotional learning (SEL).

Social-Emotional Learning (SEL)

The Robert Wood Johnson Foundation describes SEL as “a framework that focuses on the core social and emotional skills necessary for students of all ages to be healthy and successful.” In an article for *Educational Leadership*, Angela Duckworth divides SEL into three categories:

- **Interpersonal character strengths of the heart** (gratitude, empathy, honesty, and social and emotional intelligence);
- **Intrapersonal character strengths of will** (academic self-control, grit, and growth mindset); and
- **Intellectual character strengths** (curiosity, open-mindedness, intellectual humility, imagination, and creativity).

What standardized tests cannot do—indeed, what almost no test can do—is capture a child's essence. Tests don't speak to the internal factors that play a major role in life success: curiosity, effort, resilience, and compassion.

The Formative Five Success Skills

People grow and succeed in a range of settings. Sometimes this is surprising and sometimes not. What qualities and behaviors relate to who succeeds where?

I have taught in city and suburban elementary schools, been an adjunct professor at two universities, coached athletic teams, and led public and private schools. Although my roles varied considerably, there was one commonality. It became clear to me that the people who advanced toward a goal were able to do so primarily because of their interpersonal and intrapersonal qualities—and especially from what I call the Formative Five success skills of *empathy*, *self-control*, *integrity*, *embracing diversity*, and *grit*. I address these in this book using the lens of John Coleman's “six components of a great culture”: vision/mission, values, practices, people, narrative and place.

1. Empathy is sorely lacking in today's society. Its lack is reflected in the harshness of public comments at the school board meeting, conveyed by the facial expressions of someone impatiently waiting in line, or vividly displayed in the rhetoric at a political rally. Clearly, our obligation to teach our students empathy has never been stronger.

From kindergarten up, empathy is a word that should be part of everyone's vocabulary and used routinely. Posters and signs proclaiming the definition of empathy and offering some visual examples should pervade the school.

Students need to intentionally pursue empathy by working to hear and understand others' experiences, perspectives, and feelings, and by engaging in activities that stem from these understandings.

2. Self-Control incorporates many attitudes: focus, restraint, patience, and optimism.

People with strong self-control can ignore distractions, count to 3 or 33 before responding impetuously, recognize that the goal is a long way away, and remain confident that they will succeed.

According to Walter Mischel, self-control skills, both cognitive and emotional, can be learned, enhanced, and harnessed so that they become automatically activated when they are needed.

3. Integrity is what we show through our visible behaviors. It is a public statement, made with or without words.

Whether our goal is to live and work in an effective and healthy setting or whether it is to make the world a better place, integrity is essential. Integrity is manifested by taking a public stand and doing the right thing for others to see. Integrity is a conscious choice that often requires courage.

We see the leadership aspect of integrity in action when taking a public stand is designed to influence others.

We often must push against injustice, entropy, gimmick solutions, and others' perceptions, and our integrity enables us to follow our values and our conscience.

4. Embracing Diversity means that respect for others goes beyond accepting or even appreciating others. To truly exhibit it, we must embrace those who are different than we are.

Recent events in the United States and around the world have illustrated the need to assert the importance of developing an awareness of and a sensitivity to diversity in students.

Verna Myers, a Cleveland attorney, captured how far we have come and yet how far we need to go when she told *The Cleveland Plain Dealer*, "Diversity is being invited to the party; inclusion is being asked to dance."

To teach students to embrace diversity, I suggest taking the following steps: appreciating ourselves, recognizing others' diversities, appreciating others, planning, and implementing. These steps must be taken with intentionality and transparency; we need to be clear about our goals and our strategies and share them openly.

5. Grit. Successful people come in many sizes and colors, degrees of talent and academic preparation, but the one thing they all possess is grit. They may refer to it as their tenacity or perseverance, or talk about their passion and relentlessness, but it's grit all the same.

Perhaps Leila Janah put it best when she told the *New York Times*, "The biggest reason for success in entrepreneurship is not brilliance. It's not creative genius. It's the simple ability to not quit when things are really bad."

When interacting with someone who is highly skilled, it can be difficult to recognize the role that grit has played because their success appears so effortless. But that fails to consider the thousands and thousands of hours of preparation and practice that this level of skill requires. A manifestation of grit is standard practice for athletes at all levels, as it is for high achievers in most other fields.

district. Although these schools operate under identical policies and guidelines, there is almost always a different feel between the schools.

Now in her seventh year of teaching at Pershing School, Stacey finds comfort in routine. If you asked Stacey what messages she received between the time she entered the school and opened her classroom door, she might respond, "Messages? Not many. There was some mail from yesterday, a dozen emails awaiting me, but that's it. Oh, and several people gave me a friendly greeting."

In fact, Stacey received many messages about her school's culture. What she saw, heard, and felt pointed to the school's values, student achievement, diversity, the roles of educators, and more. She felt expectations, rules, habits, and norms. Their omnipresence caused her to be unaware of them. These messages would be received by every adult or child who walked the halls and entered the office, and would reflect the school's culture, even if it's unintentional.

The culture that embraces Stacey as she enters Pershing School each day affects all aspects of the school's operation. It determines how faculty and committee meetings, parent-teacher conferences, and professional development activities are conducted and perceived. It frames how staff members view students and treat one another.

Stacey's expectations for how students should enter her classroom each day is framed by both the school's culture and the culture that she has established in her classroom.

In most situations, our colleagues' expectations and perceptions have a greater influence on us than do formal policies or guidelines. Culture doesn't usually have a single author.

It is vital for principals to appreciate that leadership is a shared responsibility. Every faculty member should feel engaged and have a voice. Teachers own a lot of the culture in every school; strong principals widen the definition of leadership to ensure that all voices are heard and that everyone is engaged. That does not mean that everyone's vote is equal or that administrators abdicate their responsibilities; it does mean that everyone owns the culture.

In the following sections, we will use culture as a tool to develop students' Formative Five success skills.

What Is Culture?

The power of school culture is obvious if you visit two or more schools with the same grade range in the same school

Vision, Mission, Values

When principal Kim Bilanko helped to set up Ella Baker

Elementary School in Redmond, Washington—a school centered on the Formative Five skills plus curiosity, optimism, and gratitude—she started with the expectation that the mission, vision, and values they would hold would become their driving force, their mindset, in all decisions that they made.

It's important to share the mission and educate everyone about what this means. "The physical environment of a school sends a message to students, staff, and families," Bilanko says. "For us, the walls speak volumes about who we are. We want to ensure our environment is aligned with our mission, vision, and values. Since character building is an essential aspect of our school, our eight character traits are found everywhere in our hallways. We value students and families feeling connected to our school."

Often a disconnect occurs in schools at faculty or committee meetings, during parent education evenings, and even during professional development sessions. We have a vision and proclaim a mission, yet it's easy to get caught in the activity-response cycle: We do things because they need to be done and have always been done, without stepping back and asking how our actions help us achieve our mission.

Distractions and deterrents abound, so our vision and mission should be our lodestar, something that ensures that our efforts are on target and focused.

Practices

Social-emotional learning should be part of the fiber of after-school activities, athletics, and assemblies. It should be evident on walls, in halls, and on signage. Although everyone is pursuing the same vision and mission statements, the result can be quite different norms and practices.

In a *Harvard Business Review* article, "The Leader's Guide to Corporate Culture," Boris Groysberg and colleagues state that "cultural norms define what is encouraged, discouraged, accepted, or rejected within a group." These norms are our practices, how we bring our school's vision, mission, and values to life. They stem from how we see the role of educators, the ways we interact with others (students, their parents, colleagues, and the community), and our approach to curriculum, pedagogy, grading, and professional development activities.

Unfortunately, many faculty meetings are not engaging, productive, or insightful; a strong learning focus is not the

norm. Faculty meetings should be designed so that they are relevant, interesting, and sometimes even fun, addressing academic topics, schoolwide issues, and students' and educators' SEL. A practice of vibrant and inclusive meetings would speak volumes about a school's culture and faculty engagement.

Intentionality, Transparency, and Collaboration

In all of our practices (and indeed, in all of our interactions), we need to remember that we should act with intentionality, transparency, and an eye toward collaboration. *Intentionality* means that we must deliberate and prioritize our practices. We should choose strategies as part of an overall quest, balancing time, energy, and resources. *Transparency* means being public and clear about what our practices are, why we implement them, and what our hopes are for the future. We must explain the conditions or changes that cause us to act as we do, presenting information in various venues and ways to ensure that everyone understands. *Collaboration* means creating opportunities for teachers and administrators to work together and develop practices, thus increasing the likelihood that they will be better designed.

Ensuring an SEL Focus in the Classroom

At Arundel High School in Gambrills, Maryland, I saw teachers asking

- What are the characteristics of good citizenship? What do good citizens do?
- What does it feel like not to belong? Write down three emotions you would feel.
- Write one thing about you that gives you confidence.
- Write something nice about the person sitting next to you.

Teaching students how to identify emotions begins with raising an awareness about emotions—what they are and how they can be identified.

Second grade teacher Karen Brennan of Fairway Elementary in Grover, Missouri emphasizes the Formative Five with her students. "I encourage grit on a daily basis rather than explicitly teach it," she says. "Any time students are challenged by their learning is the perfect time to remind them that it's not time to quit, it's time to show grit! When we're in the halls, walking by working classrooms, we also remember self-control. When someone's feelings are hurt unintentionally (or intentionally), we talk about empathy. When we're using other languages for our morning greet-

ing and some are tempted to laugh, we revisit celebrating a diverse world. When I'm called into the hall for a moment, we remind ourselves to show integrity."

One incredibly creative way to teach integrity was developed by teachers from Roosevelt Elementary in Iowa City, Iowa Jami Mundt (3rd grade), Anna Brooks (2nd grade), Hannah Owens (special education, 3-5), and Mary Biggs (5th grade). They led their students to develop "What would you do scenarios?"—situations in which students were confronted with good and bad choices (e.g., finding money on the ground or having the opportunity to look at another student's test). Students discussed the temptations and what they should do to show integrity. Teachers created a series of 30-second videos with students acting out each scenario. When the moment of decision arises, the actors turn to the camera and ask, "What would you do?"

Producing the videos was a wonderful learning opportunity for everyone in the class, not simply those who appear on screen.

There is no limit to the practices that can teach SEL. Almost any practice can be placed within a Formative Five context to develop SEL.

People

If we want to advance the Formative Five success skills, we must be sure that we have teachers who can effectively teach and model them. A school is only as good as the quality of its teachers, and teachers who are effective will connect with their students regardless of content or grade level.

When people were asked to share their recollections about a teacher who had made a significant difference in their life, a response from Jane, a 4th grade teacher was: "My 6th grade teacher, Mr. Reed, made a significant difference in my life. Mr. Reed was always trying new techniques with his students. His was the first class where students did not sit in neat rows. He was constantly moving us around the room and pairing us with different classmates. Mr. Reed encouraged us to read anything, even a comic book. He was extremely interested in each and every student. We all felt special."

Students are good observers, and they see whether we practice what we preach. They notice whether adults' actions are congruent with their words and whether adults demon-

strate the same social and emotional competencies they expect of students.

Administrators want to hire teachers who both possess and are comfortable teaching each of the Formative Five success skills, although empathy and embracing diversity move to the front of the line when considering candidates. Schools and districts can structure the hiring process to create opportunities for learning about these qualities.

My preference is to convene an interviewing team of two or three others with whom the new hire would be working most closely. I'd say to them, "Together, we will decide who's the best fit. I can veto your choice, but I will not hire someone unless we are all enthusiastic about the decision." Then, I would ask the team what sort of qualities we're seeking. "Beyond hiring a good teacher, what specific talents, interests, or experiences do we want?"

We need to recognize that our natural tendency is to hire people who look like us and have the same kinds of experiences we do. Articulating that bias early in the hiring process and asking people to be self-aware and guard against this tendency is helpful. Having a range of backgrounds and experiences on the interviewing team is important.

"We want all students to bring their identity with them to Burroughs," says Andy Abbott, head of school at John Burroughs School in St. Louis, Missouri. "Leave no part of yourself at the door." Asking both teacher and administrative candidates what this might mean and how they would respond in their role at the school could be a good way to elicit their understanding and perceptions of diversity.

What all high-quality schools have in common is a collegial faculty of teachers and administrators who learn together and view one another as resources. Collegiality puts relationships and synergy at the heart of a school.

People are what determines the quality of our schools and the experiences of our students.

Narrative

Strong leaders recognize the power of narrative and work to fashion it by consciously creating traditions and habits that foster the culture they value. Narrative helps us envision history, rationale, intention, and possibility.

From the dunking booth at the school picnic in which the principal routinely plummets into the water and arises to

students' cheers, to everyone getting an ice cream treat on the last day of school, to beginning faculty meetings by noting birthdays, and to opening assemblies with the school song, traditions form the narrative that is culture.

At Edgefield Primary School in Singapore, principal Michel Saw says that staff begin every meeting by sharing thanks and appreciation for the good things that colleagues have done. They practice greeting everyone cheerfully with a smile and saying thank you.

Narrative includes who hangs out together and who talks to whom. It's important for teachers and especially administrators to understand that everyone is watching where they stand and with whom they chat; everything they do sets a precedent.

When I was a principal, every school day at dismissal time, I made it a point to stand outside the building, step out of my comfort zone, and initiate conversations with parents and other caregivers with whom I may not otherwise have the opportunity to engage.

An important part of a faculty or group pursuing SEL is knowing and trusting one another. One principal ends all faculty meetings by asking everyone to turn to their neighbor and tell them what they are looking forward to during the following week. This focus on positives and sharing with a colleague becomes part of the narrative that frames the culture.

Place

Who is responsible for decorating and maintaining the common areas and shared spaces in a school? Lack of ownership for this responsibility is a major hurdle to ensuring a place sends the messages we want. Use the halls to inform

and elicit. The best way for people to learn is by being actively involved in creating knowledge.

To this end, in learning about the power of place, teachers might distribute a floor plan of the school on an 8.5 x 11-inch sheet of paper and ask students to indicate areas of the building where they feel valued and safe by coloring them in green. They can use red to identify areas where they feel unsafe or where they feel no attention is paid to their SEL. The colored-in floor plans can then be posted anonymously on the wall so that faculty members can review them and then discuss in small groups. Perception is reality, so we need to consider why students have marked an area red.

At Arundel High School in Gambrills, Maryland digital arts teacher Betsey Heeney had students form teams and create posters reflecting the Formative Five success skills. "My kids really embraced this project," said principal Davenport. "Not only did they learn about the Formative Five, I think they really nailed the essences in a graphic format. My print and design shop is enlarging the posters and mounting them for display in my building."

All children should see themselves—their efforts and progress—on the walls. Even if they aren't there today, they must feel like they could be there tomorrow.

Social-emotional learning "is for every adult and every kid, all day every day. Attending to emotions is necessary on the bus, in the playground, in the cafeteria, after school, and during academic classes," writes Joshua P. Starr. "Every adult has a role to play in creating a consistent and emotionally healthy school climate."



Thomas R. Hoerr retired after leading the New City School in St. Louis, Missouri for 34 years and is now the Emeritus Head of School. He teaches in the educational leadership program at the University of Missouri-St. Louis. He has also written *Becoming a Multiple Intelligences School*, *The Art of School Leadership*, *School Leadership for the Future*, *Fostering Grit*, and *The Formative Five: Fostering Grit, Empathy, and Other Success Skills Every Student Needs*. He has written more than 160 articles, including "The Principal Connection" column in *Educational Leadership*. trhoerr@aol.com.

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ASCD® LEADERSHIP SUMMARIES for EDUCATORS

The Coach Approach to School Leadership

Leading Teachers to Higher Levels of Effectiveness

by **Jessica Johnson, Shira Leibowitz and Kathy Perret**



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the Principal's Role

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THE SUMMARY IN BRIEF

In *The Coach Approach to School Leadership*, Jessica Johnson, Shira Leibowitz and Kathy Perret address a dilemma faced by many principals: how to function as learning leaders while fulfilling their evaluative and management duties. The answer? Incorporating instructional coaching techniques as an integral part of serious school improvement.

The authors explain how principals can master the skill of “switching hats” between the nonjudgmental coach role and the evaluative supervisor role, expand their classroom visits, nurture relationships with teachers and much more. Based on the authors’ work with schools and their conversations with educators across the globe, *The Coach Approach to School Leadership* speaks to the unique needs of principals as instructional leaders, providing solutions to challenges in every aspect of this complex endeavor.

The role of the principal is changing rapidly. Let this resource guide you in improving your own practice while helping teachers master the high-quality instruction that leads to student success.

IN THIS SUMMARY, YOU WILL LEARN:

- Three steps to reconcile the roles of supervisor and coach.
- Six principles that embody a power with rather than power over approach.
- To use concrete goals to structure feedback.
- Why classroom visits are essential for transforming your school into a team.

Hero Maker: Reframing the Principal's Role

Roland Barth, founder of the Principals' Center at the Harvard Graduate School of Education, is quoted as having said, "The best principals are not heroes—they are hero-makers." This humble eschewing of the title of hero in favor of a supporting role is the essence of principal-coaching.

But principals, ultimately accountable for the quality of learning in their schools, must set high professional expectations, evaluate teacher effectiveness, make budgetary decisions, allocate resources, assign teachers to classes and, at times, determine whether or not to rehire a teacher.

Principals and teachers alike may wonder, how can principals possibly coach when they must evaluate? How can teachers feel safe to experiment, take risks and reveal vulnerabilities with a person who makes important decisions about their employment? To reconcile the apparently contradictory roles of supervisor and coach, leaders must do three things:

1. Reframe the role of the principal: The varying roles of principals lie on a continuum, with judge at one end and team captain at the other. At the middle of the continuum are principals who behave primarily as coaches, carefully balancing high expectations with robust supports.

Principal-coaches see their role as learning leaders, directing resources to those areas that are most likely to affect the quality of student learning. These leaders visit classrooms and offer nonjudgmental feedback to teachers, provide time and training for teachers to work collaboratively on enhancing student learning, and creatively allocate resources in order to provide teachers with high-quality instructional coaching. While holding high expectations, principal-coaches support teachers as professionals and care about them as individuals.

Although there is no recipe for transforming one's leadership style, principals can begin to reframe their role through careful and ongoing collaboration with both supervisors and teachers and a commitment to learning a number of new coaching approaches.

2. Nurture a school-wide culture of coaching and professional collaboration. This culture involves not merely action but also interaction, not merely learning but also relationship. To nurture such a culture, principals can adjust budgets to add coaching positions, reframe existing job descriptions to include some coaching components, demonstrate their appreciation for coaching, respect the

confidentiality of coaches and teachers, and make clear that coaching is not remedial but a significant means of activating professional learning.

3. Acknowledge the vulnerability inherent in professional learning. In his 1998 book *The Courage to Teach*, Parker Palmer asserts, "Good teaching cannot be reduced to technique; good teaching comes from the identity and integrity of the teacher." He asks, "Who is the self that teaches? How does the quality of my selfhood form—or deform—the way I relate to my students, my subject, my colleagues, my world? How can educational institutions sustain and deepen the selfhood from which teaching comes?"

Principal-coaching at its most powerful guides teachers to reflect on the "who" questions, opening them to their own vulnerability and potential in ways both poignant and frightening. It is this duality—inherent in great coaching and great teaching—that transforms teacher support and evaluation into a far more complex and meaningful endeavor than is typically understood.

Putting on Your Coach's Hat

The first concrete task of a principal-coach is to get out of the office and walk into classrooms. Just as a teacher spends the first few weeks of school getting to know her or his students and building classroom community, a principal taking on this new paradigm of leadership must begin developing a "classroom visitation rapport" with teachers and students.

Visiting classrooms will help you to get to know each student, become acquainted with each teacher's strengths and instructional style, learn the curriculum for each grade level and put your finger on the pulse of what is happening in the building.

Before making classroom visits a regular habit, you will need to inform teachers of your purpose for being in their classrooms. If you just enter a classroom without explanation, you will likely disrupt that class. If you simply tell your staff about your intention to come into their classrooms on a regular basis, you are bound to encounter resistance.

When you meet with teachers, explain that just as an athletic coach is invested in the success of individual players and the team as a whole, you are invested in the success of each teacher as well as the entire school. Make it clear that your goal is not to evaluate but to reflect on the teaching and learning happening in their classrooms and to offer feedback to facilitate their professional learning.

Tell teachers that they should assume that when you offer observations and feedback, you are speaking to them as a coach. Let them know that if you ever have a concern as an evaluator, you will let the teacher know that you are wearing your “evaluator’s hat” rather than your “coach’s hat.”

Principals often find that making the switch to the coach’s hat is an overwhelming experience. In the beginning, they may fear that they’ve just increased their workload from “too heavy” to “insurmountable.” Here are two of the most common objections.

Obstacle 1: “I don’t have time to do more observations than the minimum!” The problem with sticking to the minimum number of required observations is that you may not get an accurate snapshot of the teacher’s practice. When you visit classrooms frequently, you will see the good, the bad and the ugly—and you will know when you need to give feedback, when you need to give support and when you need to document your observations for dismissal.

Obstacle 2: “How can I visit classrooms when I’m always dealing with student discipline issues?”

When a teacher sends a student to the office, it is because the situation has gotten beyond his or her control. When a teacher repeatedly sends a student to your office, it is because he or she does not know what to do with that student or because what he or she is doing is not working. In these cases, teachers need your guidance on how to move forward and possibly some additional strategies to add to their toolbox.

Building Successful Coaching Relationships

On the surface, coaching conversations grapple with curriculum and pedagogic techniques, but at a deeper level, they are expressions of our core beliefs about teaching, learning, students and ourselves. Preparing your school community to embrace self-exploration through coaching will require planning, effort and ongoing reflection.

The education field is notorious for its acronyms, and here is another to add to your list: HAT. This mnemonic will help you remember the coaching mindset needed to empower and influence others.

H stands for humility. Yes, your position gives you the highest authority in the building, and you hold more degrees than some of the staff, but education is a people business. Theodore Roosevelt’s oft-cited quote “No one cares how

much you know until they know how much you care” still holds true today. Find ways to show you appreciate staff members. Get to know them and let them get to know you!

Most important, keep in mind that you are not superhuman. Today’s school leaders are often expected to do more than they are humanly capable of doing, but you aren’t going to be able to please everyone all the time. When you end up taking on or promising more than you can uphold, your relationships will suffer. Be humble in knowing that you are just one person. You don’t need to have all the answers; the answers are found within your school.

A stands for action. Principals are respected when they walk the talk and act with integrity. To gain acceptance in a coaching environment, you need to model action, even when something is out of your comfort zone. If you want teachers and students to take risks, you need to do the same. To truly understand what it is like to be coached, it’s important to accept being coached yourself. Is there another school leader in your district who could serve as your coach? Discovering firsthand the empowerment that coaching brings will provide you with valuable insight and skills for coaching others.

Finally, T stands for trust. First, trust the process of acquiring a coach’s hat. This trust is part of the process of adding coaching skills to your repertoire. Accept where you are now and continue to set goals for yourself throughout your journey.

Second, continue to build trusting relationships with the staff. Teachers will need to trust that coaching is a different process from the typical, obligatory evaluation that principals conduct. Develop the coaching process with teachers rather than just announcing that you will now be “coaching them.” Learn to navigate between your coaching role and the other aspects of your position.

Giving Feedback to Increase Effectiveness

Distinguishing feedback and evaluation is at the heart of the challenge of being a principal-coach. You cannot lead with a coach’s hat without struggling to reconcile the contradictory tasks of evaluating and coaching. Goal setting is core to leading with a coach’s hat.

When giving feedback, principal-coaches act not primarily as advisers, cheerleaders or judges but as coaches invested in helping others to articulate goals and to decide how to go about achieving those goals.

You can begin by setting your own goals and sharing them with faculty. Afterward, meet individually with all the educators you supervise, to support them in coming up with a professional learning goal, an action plan for meeting the goal, supports to use throughout the process and evidence you will use to monitor progress.

Only after setting goals and observing teachers in their classrooms can principals embark upon the vital process of giving feedback. This process actually entails substantially more listening than speaking on the part of the principal-coach, whose goal is to empower teachers to take ownership of their professional learning. There are a few practical ways to incorporate feedback into your practice, through conversations, narrative feedback and digital tools. Let's look at two of those ways in more detail.

Conversations. You can schedule formal conversations with teachers throughout the year, typically three in addition to the post-conferences held for formal evaluation: one at the beginning of the year, one during the middle of the year, and one at the end of the year. During the first conversation, set goals for the year. Midyear, reflect on progress toward goals and make any course corrections that appear to be warranted. At the end of the year, assess progress goals, celebrate successes, reflect on remaining challenges and plan for next steps.

Narrative feedback: You can formulate written narrative feedback in ways that are as low-effort as possible for principals but as high-impact as possible for teachers. An efficient, effective approach is to offer nonjudgmental prompts connected to the teacher's goal and then to remain open to teachers' reflections based on these prompts. Such prompts include "I notice. . ." "I wonder. . ." "What if. . .?" and "How might. . .?" Teachers are not required to reply to the principal but can if they choose to; the prompts are offered for teachers to use in whatever way makes the most sense to them.

Time: Managing Your Most Precious Resource

You can learn everything you want to about instructional coaching and having critical conversations with teachers, but if you can't figure out how to get out of your office, you will never be able to use your insight and expertise to foster improvement in your school. To lead as a principal-coach and help your teachers become top-notch practitioners, the key is working smarter, not harder.

It is essential that you have a reliable system to help you schedule your day's meetings, classroom visits and work tasks. In addition, you must recognize the amount of time you have and be realistic about allotting it. A calendar can help you figure out your priorities and ensure you spend your time on work that matters and that will pay off in the long run.

If you don't currently have a solid calendar system in place, then decide what you're going to use, whether it be paper, Google Calendar or another online system that your secretary will have access to. Teach your secretary how to add events to your calendar.

What does effective scheduling look like? A helpful visual draws from Stephen Covey's story about a man trying to fit rocks, gravel and sand into a jar. The only way he could fit all three was to put in the big rocks first, then put in the gravel and finally pour in the sand to fill the spaces in between. The lesson here is that if the big rocks don't go in first, they won't fit at all.

The first step in creating a calendar is to determine the non-negotiables that must be included before other, lesser duties. To be an effective learning leader, you've got to prioritize coaching as one of the biggest rocks.

Once you've entered your big rocks and required meetings, keep adding to the calendar and tweaking as needed throughout the year; you can even color-code it (e.g., coloring classroom time red to signal its importance). Set aside five minutes at the end of each day and 15 minutes at the end of each week to review your progress. Is your calendar aligned with your priorities? What's getting in your way? How can you plan accordingly?

Enlist your secretary or office assistant to help manage your calendar and make your staff aware of this scheduling process. Giving the secretary access to your calendar ensures that he or she knows where you are throughout the day and is able to schedule appointments for you with any teachers or parents who request them. The secretary doesn't need to ask if you can meet with Mrs. Smith tomorrow, because he or she can already see on your calendar that you're free during Mrs. Smith's prep time.

Use a tool or app for your never-ending to-do list. Consider a "Tasks" or "To Do" calendar in Google Calendar (making sure to use the reminders feature), Remember the Milk, Todoist, Toodledo or Omnifocus. Feel free to research other options that work better for you.

Transforming Your School into a Team

Transforming teaching from an individual race into a team sport is arguably the single most important goal for principal-coaches. Yet even school leaders who are extraordinarily skilled in coaching teachers often struggle with this goal.

“Get out of your office and into classrooms” is essential yet ultimately insufficient. An equally important call to action is “Get your teachers out of their own classrooms and into the classrooms of their colleagues.” When principal-coaches empower teachers to use instructional coaching techniques to support one another, they inspire their school to evolve from a collection of independent practitioners into a high-functioning, cohesive team. This shift, arguably more than any other, has the potential to transform schools.

There are four basic approaches to teacher classroom visits that help teachers get acclimated to and comfortable with the process: visiting other schools, beginning with a small number of interested teachers, beginning with one grade-level team or department, and school-wide implementation with preparation.

There is no proven recipe for structuring classroom visits. There are, however, a range of options that can be adapted to meet teachers’ and schools’ specific needs. These include peer coaching, in which teachers use techniques of instructional coaches to support one another; instructional rounds or learning walks, in which groups of teachers visit classrooms, reflect together on what they have observed and design a plan of action based on their findings; and lesson study, in which teachers create a lesson together, observe as one of them teaches the lesson, and then reflect on the

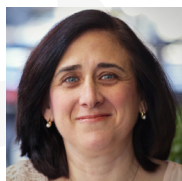
lesson with the goal of improving their craft.

All of these structures ask participants to

- Determine a problem or question of practice related to teaching and learning that is directly observable, is actionable, connects to a broader strategy of improvement, and has the potential to have a significant effect on student learning.
- Observe and gather evidence related to the problem or question of practice through such activities as examining student work samples, conducting interviews with students and with teachers, creating lesson plans, visiting classrooms and analyzing video recordings of classrooms.
- Reflect on the evidence gathered and determine action steps accordingly.

The true impact of principal-coaching occurs once principals can turn their attention from coaching individuals to nurturing a team of professionals who have the maturity and skill to blend professional autonomy with a commitment to professional collaboration.

Getting to this place of creative collaboration and coordinated teamwork occurs gradually, over the course of years. It is the single most powerful contribution to improving the quality of teaching and learning for our students, and it is the aspiration for all school leaders who truly seek to lead with a coach’s hat.



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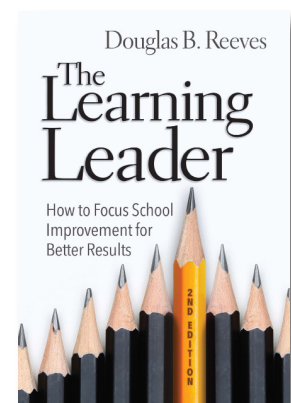


ASCD® LEADERSHIP SUMMARIES for EDUCATORS

The Learning Leader

How to Focus School Improvement for Better Results
Second Edition

by **Douglas B. Reeves**



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THE SUMMARY IN BRIEF

School improvement can often feel like a losing battle, but it doesn't have to be.

In the fully revised and updated second edition of *The Learning Leader*, Douglas B. Reeves helps leadership teams go beyond excuses to capitalize on their strengths, reduce their weaknesses, and reset their mindset and priorities to achieve unprecedented success.

Reeves asserts that when leaders focus exclusively on results, they fail to measure and understand the importance of their own actions. He stresses that effective leadership is neither a unitary skill nor a solitary activity. He helps leaders reconceptualize their roles in the school improvement process and motivate themselves and their colleagues to keep working to better serve their students.

The Learning Leader will provide guidance for the most challenged schools. Perhaps a hero can win a battle here and there, but it takes a team to prevail over the long term.

IN THIS SUMMARY, YOU WILL LEARN:

- The specific leadership actions most linked to improved results.
- Why collaboration has become an imperative.
- The distortions that occur when results are the sole focus.
- The specific, actionable elements of successful school improvement plans.

Introduction: The Leadership for Learning Framework

One thing that neither health threats nor economic calamity will ever change is the need for value-based leadership, characterized by decision makers who share their successes, admit their mistakes quickly, and demonstrate to every stakeholder that no external condition stops the imperative for learning. We need Learning Leaders more than ever.

The Leadership for Learning Framework is a framework for success. Basically, it helps leaders identify and distinguish among four different types of educators.

Lucky leaders and teachers achieve high results but don't know how their practices influence achievement. "Lucky" schools tend to treat their best teachers shabbily because they do not recognize their extraordinary qualities.

Losing leaders and teachers are self-defeating in "Losing" schools, who keep doing the same thing and expecting different results.

Learning leaders and teachers have not yet achieved desired results, but they possess deep insights into the antecedents of excellence (the observable qualities in leadership, teaching, curriculum, parental engagement, and other areas that help us better understand how results are achieved). These leaders and teachers look at data and, rather than blaming the students or expressing bewilderment at their lack of success, they dig deeply into the data on student performance and teaching practices.

Leading leaders and teachers enjoy an optimal combination of high results and a deep understanding of the antecedents of excellence, yet they are perpetually seeking opportunities to improve.

Our focus here is on the Learning and Leading leaders and teachers. Both types offer hard work and receive scant recognition. We must vigorously pursue their social-emotional learning by providing the professional support and emotional nurturing they need to persevere in their work.

There are three main takeaways from the research: that leadership, teaching, and adult actions matter; that certain leadership actions are proven to raise student achievement and educational equity; and that leadership is neither a unitary skill nor a solitary activity.

Research further suggests that school improvement plans need to include specific, actionable elements if they are to

succeed. The three most important elements are inquiry, implementation, and monitoring:

- **Inquiry** is the degree to which leaders correctly analyze the underlying causes of deficiencies and successes in student achievement and equity. Our analysis makes it clear that successful inquiry attributes causes to adults in the educational system—teachers, school leaders, and policymakers—whereas unsuccessful inquiry attributes causes to students. In other words, "blame the victim" is not only a morally reprehensible position but also statistically untrue.
- **Implementation** is the degree to which school improvement processes are implemented at the student and classroom level. Successful planners recognize that implementation is a continuous process with varying degrees of effectiveness rather than simply something we either do or don't do.
- **Monitoring** is an essential component of school improvement. The research is clear: frequency of monitoring is strongly associated with improvements in educational achievement and equity.

The Results Paradox

Leaders respond to what is measured, especially when what is measured determines their professional longevity. Unfortunately, as examples from business, medicine, and education show, the maxim "what gets measured gets done" has disastrous effects. We pursue success by clamoring for results, and that pursuit often leads to calamity.

Yet most jurisdictions tenaciously cling to testing as the best way to measure student success.

There is a real effect on students' lives. For example, if the only objective is improved test scores, it's much faster and easier to have underperforming students drop out of school than to craft effective intervention programs for them.

At the elementary school level, distortions result from a focus on results. If reading and math are all that matter, then we forget about science and social studies. When accountability starts only at 3rd grade, prekindergarten and kindergarten are ignored and devalued in many systems.

The "results paradox" shows us that when we focus only on results without focusing on the causes behind the results, the achievements we celebrate will be illusory. If the only results that matter are test scores, then we reward cheating or, at

the very least, a distorted and narrowly focused curriculum.

Challenging Leadership Myths: Hope for the Exhausted Leader

Influential leadership thinker Dan Heath's book *Upstream* makes the fundamental argument that most leadership decisions are reactive. We get the bad news, then try to solve yesterday's challenges. A far more effective process is to consider the root causes of problems and solve tomorrow's problems—not today's. In order to engage in "upstream thinking," it is important to look at effects *and* causes.

Analytical Models

Whereas a regression coefficient can express the statistical relationship between demographic factors and student achievement, only a narrative analysis will explain why some students and teachers defy the odds and perform at an exceptionally high level despite the presence of factors statistically associated with low achievement.

For example, there is a persistent gap between the achievement of Black and Hispanic children and their Caucasian counterparts. The purported causes range from institutional racism to disparities in housing and parental employment opportunities. More rarely studied are the differences in the professional practices of leaders and teachers. Nevertheless, all those factors have strong correlations with low student achievement, and many are related to one another.

The central challenge of analytical leadership is that we must know more than the interaction between variables. Every time we are confronted with the apparent association between two variables, we must ask: What other variables are in the equation? Which variables are most important? What is the sequence of the variables? Which variables are most subject to our influence, and which are intractable?

Relationship Models

The key requirements for leaders include compassion, trust, inspiration, and deep caring. The foundations of caring relationships include honesty and trust. These qualities make up what Apple University leader Kim Scott calls "radical candor." Relationships that are so fragile that they require an unrelenting stream of positive reinforcement without regard to the accuracy of the feedback are what Scott calls "ruinous empathy." This dynamic, in which professionals are unwilling to challenge one another to be their very best, is mimicked in the classroom.

Architectural Leadership: Why You Cannot Do It Alone

The leader's task is to create an organization that is exemplary in every dimension—not to engage in the myth that a single person bears the burden of exemplary performance in all areas.

Many definitions of leadership perpetuate the myth of the lone leader, so here's an alternative definition in their place, from *The Daily Disciplines of Leadership*: "Leaders are the architects of individual and organizational improvement."

This architectural definition of leadership helps us understand that leadership must be distributed. Distributed leadership is based on trust and on the certain knowledge that no single leader possesses the knowledge, skills, and talent to lead an organization alone.

For example, the architect of the Temple of Concord, a 2600-year-old structure in Sicily, knew how all the puzzle pieces fit together—from the stone masons to the laborers, from the artisans to the engineers. Architectural leaders in education make similar connections, conceptualizing how everyone—bus drivers and cafeteria workers, teachers and support staff, students and parents—fits with everyone else.

Furthermore, architectural leaders know that every class—music, technology, art, physical education, physics, culinary arts, welding, and other subject areas—is an opportunity for students to engage in creativity, literacy, project management, personal responsibility, teamwork, and a host of other skills that will contribute to their success.

In schools led by architectural leaders, there is no such thing as a "nonacademic" class, assembly, or experience, nor is the faculty divided between those who are accountable and those who are not. Every certified and noncertified staff member in the architecturally led school supports a common focus on improved teaching and learning.

What Matters Most: From Planning to Performance

Leadership time and attention are pulled in many directions as stakeholders compete for resources, leadership support, and a place at the table where decisions are made.

A combination of quantitative studies of thousands of schools and case studies of the impact of focused leaders reveals that when leaders concentrate on a few high-lever-

age strategies, students benefit. There is a political price to pay for focused leadership, because making choices among competing demands requires a leader to say no to many popular initiatives. The evidence concludes that the discipline of concentrated leadership is worth the cost of an occasional loss of popularity.

The Virtues of “Ugly” Plans

Imagine two principals, both of whom approach their superintendent with planning documents a couple of months after the beginning of the school year.

The first principal is equipped with a plan that meets every format requirement, with every *i* dotted and every *t* crossed. It has received the blessing of the high priests of planning. Neatly packaged in plastic pocket protectors, the plan is untouched by human hands and uninformed by the changing realities of students and faculty. By any measure, it is a pretty plan.

The second principal approaches the superintendent with a decidedly ugly plan. The pages are dog-eared and smudged, with some elements crossed out and others added in the margins. Apologetically, he explains that the needs of students and families change, and the purpose of his planning meetings is not to execute a neat plan but to continually revise a messy one.

Economist Tim Harford argues that evidence from neuroscience—as well as case studies from the classroom to the boardroom—require that responses to complex challenges require rapidly changing plans. Messy is not the same as chaotic. Harford’s suggestion is not that leaders swing from one priority to the next without thought; rather, leaders recognize that as conditions and needs change, so must plans.

When it comes to planning documents, ugly beats pretty, provided that ugly is a reflection not of wanton messiness but of the continuous updates and modifications that make planning documents correspond to reality.

Transforming Research into Action

San Bernardino City Unified School District, one of the nation’s poorest school systems, has dramatically reduced student failure over a few years despite the persistently high poverty rate. And from 2015 to 2019, Dearborn, Michigan, increased its high school graduation rate from 67 percent to 97 percent, even while the percentage of low-income students and English language learners increased.

This is not the story of some kind of singularity—a uniquely great teacher, principal, or superintendent—but rather of the distributed leadership and architectural leadership described above.

Synthesis of the research reveals that low-income, ethnically diverse schools with high student achievement rates all adhere to the following practices:

- **Focus constantly and consistently on student achievement.** These schools post visible indicators of success on the walls and in the trophy cases. School leaders also prioritize student achievement over administrative details and understand that good relationships with both colleagues and students are nonnegotiable.
- **Emphasize nonfiction writing in all classes.** When students take part in more nonfiction writing, achievement improves in all content areas—not just in English language arts.
- **Use frequent common assessments.** In order to be effective, frequent common assessments must be an integral part of the teaching, leadership, and learning cycle.
- **Analyze data constructively.** Rather than using data to rate, rank, sort, or humiliate students, teachers in successful schools use data as celebrations of teacher effectiveness.
- **Score student work collaboratively.** Many educators draft standards and evaluate work collaboratively using a uniform method. That way, they are able to identify inconsistencies in scoring and even save time.
- **Engage in units of instruction across disciplines.** Students need to know that what they are learning has applications, not only beyond the test but also in other disciplines. For example, learning geometry will also help them understand the basics of graphic design, quilting, and carpentry.
- **Organize schools as professional learning communities (PLCs).** PLCs work in teams rather than in isolation and take collective responsibility for student learning. They set clear and specific expectations for students, implement a guaranteed and viable curriculum, and use common formative assessments that are based on that curriculum.

Leadership and Effective Feedback: The Dilemmas of Grading

Why are issues of grading and feedback the concern of leaders? Because leaders are responsible for connecting values with practice. If the mission and vision statements of a school and district are committed to equity and fairness, for example, then any practice—including grading practices—that violates those values must be challenged by leaders.

In today's classrooms, letter grades very often do not reflect student achievement. We have long tolerated this status quo out of a belief that teaching is a private endeavor and grading policies are the exclusive domain of those private practitioners. However, a growing chorus of voices is calling for the “de-privatization” of professional practices in teaching and leadership.

If individual practitioners assign grades that are fair, accurate, and effective, then they should be free to be as creative in their practices as they want. But it helps for all teachers in a school to be on the same page. This takes intensive work. Without agreement among educators about grading processes, we are doomed to work in an unfair system.

Two distortions plague grading systems: inflating the grades of low-performing students and reducing the grades of high-performing students. The common theme of both is that we elevate compliance over proficiency.

We err gravely when we conflate good behavior with proficiency. Are we rewarding some students for being academically proficient in a complex and competitive world? Or are we rewarding them for being quiet, compliant, polite, and acquiescent to the authority figures around them?

In addition, to insist on the use of a 0 on a 100-point scale is to assert that work that is not turned in is worthy of a penalty of 0. Because just two or three 0s can cause a student to fail an entire semester, doling them out for missing work is a punishment out of proportion with the offense.

Some grading systems maintain rigor while avoiding the errors inherent in using 0s and averages. One was instituted by a secondary school faculty that agreed every student would receive six assessments each quarter. The definition of assessment was left to the teacher—it could be a lab, an essay, or a musical presentation, depending on the context of the class. Each assessment would be scored according to a four-point scale as follows: 4 = Exemplary; 3 = Proficient; 2 = Progressing; 1 = Not meeting standards.

The grading system was uniform and simple: A = Four assessments scored “exemplary” and two scored at least “proficient”; B = Four assessments scored “proficient” and two scored at least “progressing”; C = Three assessments scored at least “proficient.”

Any performance lower than a C was scored as IP (In Progress) for two weeks after each grading period, and it would then become an F unless the student submitted work up to the standards of a C. When students received low scores on assessments, they were encouraged to work harder and resubmit work.

When grading systems are mathematically flawed (as in the case of 0s and averages), when they are unfair (as in the case of the same performance receiving dramatically different marks from different teachers), and when they are ineffective (as in the case of grades being utterly unrelated to student achievement), then fundamental values of equity and fairness have been violated. It is the leader's role to ensure that practice is consistent with values.

Putting It All Together: The Five Essential Transformations of Leadership for Learning

Committing to the Leadership for Learning Framework means committing to a set of interconnected journeys.

1. From islands of excellence to systemic impact.

In even the most troubled schools and systems, there are almost always islands of excellence—classrooms where 100 percent of special education students are meeting state standards; there is little or no achievement gap related to student demographic characteristics; and multilingual students are reading, writing, and speaking English with joyous enthusiasm.

Though it is imperative that leaders find, document, and recognize these islands, they must also take the next step and transform them into systemic successes. Transforming islands of excellence into systemic successes requires leaders to focus their energy and time more narrowly. One way to do this is by thinking of the leadership map not so much as a series of nodes but as a small number of hubs.

2. From nodes to hubs. Each node on the leadership map implies its own system of connections. By shifting their attention from nodes to hubs, leaders can sharpen their focus on what matters most. Not every island of excellence

or every island of mediocrity deserves the leader's attention. Rather, the leader must identify and focus on hubs, both those that hold the key for great improvement and those to watch out for as emerging networks of negativity.

3. From frantic to focused. Focused leaders engage in daily disciplines that maximize their energy, bringing the highest level of concentrated effort to bear on the most important challenges. One effective time-management discipline to consider is as simple as avoiding lines. Be the first or last in a line, but don't be in the middle of a line unless you can use that time to read or listen to important information, reflect in a focused and systematic way, or otherwise avoid more than a few seconds of wasted time.

4. From private to public. The heart of professional learning communities is not only asking the four questions about learning, assessment, intervention, and enrichment but also assessing the functioning of collaborative teams in which teachers and leaders share openly what works—and what doesn't—in their classrooms and schools.

Public professional practices are not merely the result of scheduled events, such as collaborative scoring conferences. When fully integrated into a school, the public practice that is at the heart of professional learning communities is simply business as usual, with colleagues casually exchanging ideas, assessments, writing prompts, and student work. They share their practices and related student achievement results with one another daily.

5. From the bell curve to the mountain. The difference between those who are committed to long-term sustainable change and those who aren't lies in an under-

standing of how human potential and achievement are distributed. According to what is known to statisticians as "normal distribution" (commonly graphed as the bell curve), when it comes to most endeavors, a few will wildly succeed, a few will abjectly fail, and a majority will settle somewhere in middle. The bell curve has a strong foundation in observed behavior.

We value the extraordinary and ascribe exceptional features to those we love (including ourselves), but when we are on the other end of the analysis—receiving evaluation rather than assigning it—we find "normal" or anything resembling the middle of the bell curve unacceptable.

How do we distinguish the extraordinary from the ordinary? This is a question faced by every teacher and educational leader. In many ways, our job is to change the distribution of skills and talents from normal to extraordinary. If we receive a bell and deliver a bell, then we have done nothing more than deliver human cargo from one year to the next. But if we receive a bell and deliver a mountain, then we have done something extraordinary indeed.

Each incremental move from the bell curve to the mountain represents a teacher who would not give up, a school leader who did not wait for universal buy-in, a student whose work ethic defied traditional expectations, a parent who sought challenge and encouragement, and a school board member who supported teachers and administrators who demanded more over politically connected constituencies that clamored for high grades for unacceptable work.

Every decision we make influences leadership and learning. It all comes down to this: What we do matters.



Douglas B. Reeves is the author of more than 40 books and 100 articles on educational leadership and student achievement. Twice named to the Harvard University Distinguished Author Series, Doug received the Contribution to the Field Award from the National Staff Development Council (now Learning Forward) and was named the Brock International Laureate for his contributions to education. Doug's research and teaching have taken him to 50 states and more than 40 countries. Douglas.Reeves@CreativeLeadership.net

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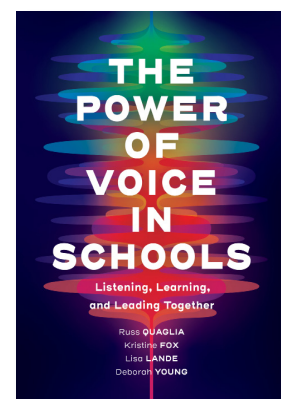
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The Power of Voice in Schools

Listening, Learning, and Leading Together

by **Russ Quaglia, Kristine Fox, Lisa Lande, Deborah Young**



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THE SUMMARY IN BRIEF

In *The Power of Voice in Schools*, Russ Quaglia and his coauthors at the Quaglia Institute for School Voice & Aspirations synthesize the thoughts and experiences of thousands of stakeholders and offer a vision for schools where everyone's voice matters.

Making this collaborative effort successful requires widespread recognition that all stakeholders have something to teach and learn, and they all have a role to play in moving the entire school forward. Student and teacher voice is critical to school improvement. Students and teachers are the potential—not the problem. Working together is the only way to ensure that every student and educator reaches their fullest potential.

When the potential of voice is fully realized, teaching and learning will look and feel different. Listening, learning, and leading with students builds trust, respect and responsibility. Most important, the entire school community will work in partnership with one another for the well-being of students and teachers. *The Power of Voice in Schools* offers a proven way forward that can be used in any school.

IN THIS SUMMARY, YOU WILL LEARN:

- The importance of everyone's voice in the school community.
- Lessons learned from listening to voices of the last decade.
- Practical strategies to foster voice for all students.
- A clear definition of voice, self worth, engagement, and purpose,

Hindsight Helps Us Move Forward

We need to realize there is no “us” versus “them” in education; there is only “us”—all learners on a journey of aspirations and growth together.

To be successful, schools must listen to, learn from, and lead with the students, educators, and families who comprise the very life of the school itself.

Voice is a process that leads toward collective action. It involves listening to what people are saying (and not saying), learning from what is being said, and leading together on what actions need to be taken.

Historically, student voice was viewed as gathering students’ opinions and thoughts, rather than engaging students in school improvement efforts.

Teacher voice was directed more toward addressing working conditions than creating a partnership for learning.

Parent voice was seen as sufficient if schools had a PTA or booster club, but parents were not valued as partners whose ideas, perspectives, and actions are necessary for schools to be able to fully support all learners.

Administrators inherently have a voice, but it is still one perspective. The most effective way for a school administrator to use his or her voice is to listen to the voices of others.

When all these voices are engaged in dialogue and the sharing of ideas, when they work in true partnership with one another, meaningful change is achievable. Fostering voice requires all participants to be open to learning from one another and recognizing that everyone has something to teach others. It is time to move forward together, engaging the voices of the entire educational community.

School Voice Today

Although student voice was not an overnight phenomenon, it is now taking the educational world by storm. States, districts—even countries—have embraced the importance of student voice, and the United Nations features student voice in the Convention on the Rights of the Child.

Despite this increased attention, the voices of teachers and parents are still underrepresented. There are the usual suspects to consider, such as lack of time, insufficient training, and inadequate financial support, but the real issue is the lack of a clear definition of voice and how to embrace it.

Defining Voice

Voice is sharing thoughts and ideas in an environment underpinned by trust and respect, offering realistic suggestions for the good of the whole and accepting responsibility for not only what is said but also what needs to be done.

To develop a common understanding, we’ll explore each component of this definition.

Sharing thoughts and ideas in an environment underpinned by trust and respect. It takes effort and sincerity to build a culture of trust in schools. Also, people are more willing to share their honest ideas and suggestions in a culture of respect. Students respect teachers who take the time to listen to them and are honest with them. They respect teachers who get to know them as unique individuals with equally unique and important perspectives to share. And teachers appreciate those same characteristics in their colleagues and administrators.

Offering realistic suggestions for the good of the whole. Encouraging the sharing of ideas is great, but if those ideas aren’t realistic, then it’s just noise! All stakeholders must recognize that they are part of a larger community and be willing to contribute ideas that consider the needs of others—not just their own.

Accepting responsibility for not only what is said but also what needs to be done. Voice includes not only accepting responsibility for your own ideas and suggestions but also taking action to make them a reality.

The Aspirations Framework

The Aspirations Framework provides a road map for developing voice and supporting students in realizing their dreams. The framework is a research-based set of three guiding principles and conditions, yet it does not provide a prescription or program for implementation.

Aspirations are the ability to dream and set goals for the future while being inspired in the present to reach those dreams. There are two key dimensions to aspirations: dreaming and doing. Today’s schools need to foster students’ aspirations by encouraging them to be both dreamers and doers. Voice is the critical component at the intersection of dreaming and doing.

The Aspirations Profile

The Aspirations Profile offers a model of the behaviors that support or hinder success based on the two dimensions of

dreaming and doing. There are four categories—hibernation, perspiration, imagination, and aspiration—that help us understand how to foster aspirations with different students and teachers.

Hibernation. Students and teachers in hibernation do not think about the future, have no clear goals, and put forth no effort in the moment. Students in hibernation lack a sense of purpose and rarely experience a sense of accomplishment in anything they do. Voice in hibernation is predominantly silent.

Perspiration. Perspiration defines someone who consistently works exceptionally hard but lacks a sense of purpose. Voice in perspiration is active but often undirected.

Imagination. Imagination is characterized by students who readily articulate what they want to be and are able to share their future plans. However, these students show little, if any, effort to reach those dreams. The challenge with supporting voice for these students is to help them focus on their goals and think about how they can achieve them.

Aspiration. Students in the aspiration quadrant can simultaneously think about the future and set goals for themselves. They are also inspired in the present to work toward those goals. Voice in aspiration is productive. Students use their voices with intention, focused on achieving their goals and making a difference for others.

Research shows that voice by itself does not directly affect academic motivation; rather, voice leads to better experiences with the guiding principles of self-worth, engagement, and purpose—all of which greatly affect academic motivation.

Self-Worth: Middle and High School Student Voice

Students who fall through the cracks tend to feel isolated, left out, and as though no one even notices they exist. Cultivating a culture that promotes self-worth requires schools to ensure that everyone is known, valued, respected, and acknowledged for their uniqueness and personal accomplishments.

Although there are innumerable ways to foster self-worth, survey data and focus group work reveal several important themes:

School pride begins with a sense of belonging—of

genuinely feeling welcomed, respected, and appreciated by others in the school community. When individuals feel accepted for who they are, they develop an attachment to the school community and an intrinsic desire to care about and positively contribute to the school.

Names matter to students; they are intensely personal, meaningful, and fundamental to one's identity. Yes, it can be challenging to learn the names of 150 or more students each year, but it is a **MUST!**

Respect emerges when people take the time to understand one another. Respect requires dialogue, openness, and a belief that everyone has something important to say.

Showing up. One area ripe for rapid—and easy—improvement is letting students know it matters if they show up! Currently, only half of students agree with the statement “Teachers care if I am absent from school.”

Standing on the shoulders of giants. Students may or may not rival the accomplishments of Sir Isaac Newton, but it should be noted that they can indeed “see farther” if they have opportunities to learn from positive role models.

Student Voice Strategies to Foster Self-Worth

- Learn prior knowledge. Ask students to share their prior knowledge before beginning a lesson.
- Allow choice in assessments.
- Learn and use names.
- Provide silent opportunities. Strategies such as exit slips, written reflections, and one-on-one conversations provide opportunities for all students to voice their ideas.
- Allow students to be teachers. Voice takes on a whole new level when students use their voice to teach others.

Engagement: Middle and High School Student Voice

How would you rather spend your day learning? Option A: Sitting at a desk, listening to lectures, and taking notes. Option B: Rotating through stations, engaging in dialogue, and sharing insights.

Option B requires students to use their voice in the learning process, whereas Option A lets students pass the time daydreaming. Engagement is about involving student voice—having students participate, question, teach, and self-assess.

We live in an amazing time. There are infinite paths to success, no matter how you define it. People invent in their basements, market on YouTube, and change the world through donations. None of this would be possible without creativity. If adults and students alike never asked “Why not?” and “What if?” then nothing would change. Both curiosity and creativity require an environment that is open and expansive to thrive.

Student Voice Strategies to Support Engagement in the Classroom

- Show and tell—and ask. Share what excites you about teaching. Tell your students what you find fun. Wear your passion on your sleeve! Most important, check in with your students. Ask them about their level of engagement in class.
- Understand that movement matters. Regardless of age—5, 15, or 55—no one likes to sit for extended periods of time. Incorporating movement can be as simple as moving to do group work or as complex as doing role-plays and engaging in outdoor learning.
- Be daring. First, take risks yourself. Do no harm, but as much as possible you should push the envelope in your teaching; in your assignments; and in expressing your concerns to colleagues, administrators, or the school board.
- Say, “Not Yet.” This phrase applies to those trying to cultivate a classroom or school environment that welcomes learning from mistakes and failures.
- Don’t use grades. On a weekly basis, assign a fun, out-of-the-box learning assignment where the goal is simply to learn.

Purpose: Middle and High School Student Voice

Finding a purpose for one’s voice, the epitome of aspirations, is the goal of student voice. Using your voice merely to be brash, complain, or criticize is, quite frankly, tiresome for everyone. However, using your voice to lead and make a difference is an entirely different story. What does it take for student voice to find its purpose?

Students must be trusted to make decisions and be responsible for the decisions they make, including the impact those decisions have on the learning environment. For example, when teachers give students ownership over the format of

their homework assignments, students must abandon their excuses for incomplete assignments. Alternatively, when students provide feedback on a lesson and teachers make an adjustment accordingly, then they must rise to the challenge of the new approach that surfaced in response to their voice.

When students have a voice in the learning process, they also have a responsibility to engage in the changes that result, even if they are not yet ideal.

Everyone needs to challenge the traditional view of leadership in schools. There should be no ranking in leadership when it comes to deciding how to improve the learning environment. True leadership involves listening to, learning from, and leading with others, with a shared goal and a commitment to take action together.

Student Voice Strategies to Foster Purpose

- Explicitly teach leadership skills. Developing leadership skills should be a regular part of the learning that students experience in school.
- Grow decision makers. Just as leadership skills must be explicitly developed, so must the ability to be an effective decision maker. A good starting point is for administration and teachers to be transparent about their own decision-making practices. This will build trust and demonstrate what effective decision-making looks like.
- Ask “who?” rather than “what?” Make an intentional effort to ask students about the type of person they want to become rather than what type of career they want. Ask students if they want to be someone who helps others, builds, creates, or heals.

Never Too Young: Early Learner Voice

In elementary school, enthusiastic learners often speak rapidly and loudly, and they have endless questions. Young learners crave new information, engaging experiences, and acknowledgment that their ideas are worthy. They tell stories about everything from their pet turtle to what their uncle ate for dinner.

However, as students progress through school, their passion and engagement for learning wanes. Students need to know that their voices matter now and will continue to matter in the future. We need to teach our youngest learners that genuine and deep learning includes their active voices.

You may wonder how to effectively capture and listen to the

voice of young learners, given the range of attention spans, comprehension levels, and length of time they can sit still.

At an early childhood center in New Jersey, the educators used picture prompts. The first question for the 4-year-olds was “Who do you like to play with?” Students were shown a picture of kids playing. These pictures were essential and helped get the kids started by facilitating a cognitive connection, which was further developed by some neutral prompting. Students were able to explain why they like to play with specific friends.

Stories are also an effective and engaging way to introduce voice to young students. Choose stories in which characters use their voices and ideas to make a difference for themselves or others.

Student Voice Strategies to Support Early Learners

- **Choice:** Students voice their preferences for everything from which books to read to which games to play at recess. Choice is perhaps the quickest way to honor students’ voice.
- **Students as Helpers:** Students help peers and teachers, which demonstrates the adults’ willingness to learn from students. This strategy also creates a platform that allows students to share their prior knowledge.
- **Relevance:** Students share what is relevant to their lives, and then lessons are adjusted to help students see the connection between what they are learning and their own experiences.
- **Generating Ideas:** Students are provided with brainstorming opportunities as a means to represent that there are no bad ideas.

Awakening All Voices: Teacher Voice

If student voice is so important for learning, isn’t teacher voice equally important? The short answer is yes. In order to fully understand voice, to realize its value, and to support others’ voices, teachers must have a voice themselves. When teacher voice flourishes, so does student voice. And when teachers experience authentic voice, they truly understand why student voice is a must for learning.

In their own classrooms, despite their expertise, teachers are too often told what to teach, when to teach, and how to teach. Most teachers have master’s degrees, and many hold doctorates. Their expertise should be an integral part of

deciding the best course of action for schools.

Teachers and the School Voice Process

All stakeholders must be willing to consider the school voice process from a teacher’s point of view. They need to think about how teachers experience voice in their profession while they are being asked to foster their students’ voices.

Listen. This is where it all begins. Teachers need opportunities to share their honest ideas and opinions, and they also need to be willing to listen to others’ voices. Listening requires a sincere ear and a genuine belief that we can all learn from one another.

Learn. This is where perspectives are gathered and understood. Active listening is a powerful process that honors voice. However, listening without learning is like having a fantastic recipe but never cooking. You may have incredible ingredients and ideas for an amazing dish, but if you never put them together, it all goes to waste.

Lead. Without action, listening and learning fall flat—the process is incomplete. Leading with voice requires honoring what has been learned from others and collaboratively implementing ideas based on informed decisions.

A Promising Partnership: Parent Voice

It is not uncommon for educators to feel that parents should unquestionably be invested in their child’s education, but the actual decisions about how to educate children should be left to the professionals. It’s not parents’ place to tell educators what to do or even how to do it; rather, their role should be a partner with the school to develop a learning environment that benefits everyone.

Educators need to embrace the fact that parents are the experts about their own children. They have valuable insights into who their children are as people, their interests, their strengths and challenges, and the type of environment in which they thrive.

We need to change the narrative of parent partnerships in schools. This includes moving away from mere compliance to positive commitment. What if we viewed parent partnerships as a way of enhancing the learning experience in schools? What if schools believed that parent partnerships lead to richer dialogues, deeper understanding, and more informed decisions?

Historically, parents have consistently been invited to school

presentations and parent conferences, and the data show they feel positive about those events. But they should also feel involved.

Asking parents to volunteer at school events is a step in the right direction, but if parents are only being asked so a school has enough people to handle logistics, then the effort falls short. Parents should be encouraged to contribute to events, discussions, and decisions that affect the school.

Schools need to actively seek the ideas, opinions, and insights of parents in order to foster meaningful engagement and collaboration. Feeling welcome is the first step, and schools must take the critical next step of inviting conversations with parents, so they know their insights are valued.

Constructors of Voice: Administrator Voice

Voice has gotten considerable press recently, but it has not yet gained the necessary traction to be a “way of being” in all schools. For this to happen, leadership must not only understand and support voice efforts in the classroom and staff rooms but also lead schools in a direction that demands voice to realize success.

For voice to truly become part of the foundation of teaching and learning in schools, administrators must commit to making it ubiquitous in all that the school does. Administrators must reflect on who participates. Whose voices are part of the hiring process, curricular decisions, and assessments?

They must consider what opportunities stakeholders have

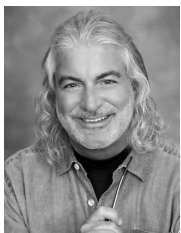
to be involved in the life of the school. And they must be conscious of how they are listening, learning from others, and leading in collaboration with everyone’s voices.

In order for voice to become a way of being in schools, administrators must first articulate the goal and make it universally known. They must then establish a culture that unquestionably values voice. This includes championing voice by

- Actively seeking the thoughts and ideas of teachers, students, and parents.
- Valuing and requiring different perspectives and experiences in decision-making.
- Insisting on student- and teacher-centered learning environments.
- Supporting pedagogy that includes students as creators, assessors, and teachers.
- Realizing that voice is a means to teaching and practicing democratic values.
- Modeling empowerment by supporting voice.

The goal of fostering everyone’s voice in schools is absolutely achievable. For this to occur, we must all embrace a common understanding of what “having a voice” really means.

And for voice to thrive and truly be effective, we must commit to creating a culture driven by trust and respect rather than testing and accountability.



Dr. Russ Quaglia has authored the School Voice suite of surveys and best-selling books, including *Student Voice: The Instrument of Change and Engagement*. He is the cofounder of the Australian Institute for Voice and Aspirations.

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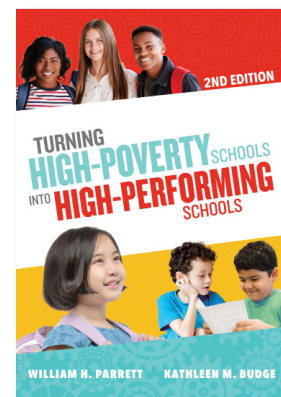
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ASCD® LEADERSHIP SUMMARIES for EDUCATORS

Turning High-Poverty Schools into High-Performing Schools 2nd Edition

by **William H. Parrett and Kathleen M. Budge**



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THE SUMMARY IN BRIEF

This second edition of *Turning High-Poverty Schools into High-Performing Schools* continues to support schools in “doing business differently.” Those who work in high-poverty schools can benefit from the information provided here, as can anyone working in a school where an achievement gap exists between students who live in poverty and their more advantaged peers.

In this edition, William H. Parrett and Kathleen M. Budge have modified their original Framework for Action to be a Framework for Collective Action to acknowledge that a relentless sense of urgency to better serve all students is part of the cultural fabric of high-poverty/high-performing (HP/HP) schools.

Turning High-Poverty Schools into High-Performing Schools is for every adult in the school community who is interested in better serving the needs of children and youth who live in poverty. It takes everyone (including those in the roles of administrators, teachers, teacher leaders, instructional coaches, specialists, media specialist/librarians, counselors, coaches, paraeducators, cafeteria staff, custodians, bus drivers, security staff, and front office staff) working *collectively* to turn a high-poverty school into a high-performing school.

IN THIS SUMMARY, YOU WILL LEARN:

- What educators in HP/HP schools do to make a difference.
- Why high-poverty schools need to change the way they do business.
- Practical applications of strategies used in HP/HP schools.
- Why it takes everyone in the school community working together to turn a high-poverty school into a high-performing school.



Based on *Turning High-Poverty Schools into High-Performing Schools 2nd edition* by William H. Parrett and Kathleen M. Budge. Published by Soundview Executive Book Summaries® (ISSN 0747-2196), 2 Christy Drive, Suite 302, Chadds Ford, PA 19317 USA. • Copyright © 2021 by ASCD. All rights reserved. © 2021 by ASCD. All rights reserved. Reproduction in whole or in part is prohibited. • To subscribe, visit www.ascd.org or contact ASCD, 1703 N Beauregard Street, Alexandria, VA 22311.

Introduction: We Can Do This

High-performing, high-poverty (HP/HP) schools are *models of the possible*. They are places where the belief that transformation is possible has been proven correct and where students who live in poverty experience success. These models and experiences lead to optimism, hope, and self-efficacy.

High-poverty schools do not become high performing by tinkering their way to success. A former superintendent of a high-poverty rural district described the district's efforts to confront underachievement like this: "We could not continue to do what we knew would, at best, only minimally raise student achievement . . . and for only some of the kids. We had to fundamentally change the way we did business."

The following theories, research, and practical ideas can be applied to your unique context to help your school to become high performing and to close achievement gaps.

Turning Any High-Poverty School into a High-Performing School

Most students who drop out—more than 1 million a year in the United States—leave school between the ages of 14 and 16 after enduring years of schooling in which frustration, embarrassment, failure, and minimal achievement were daily realities.

Not all students who drop out or who underachieve live in poverty, but many do. Despite recent modest progress in student achievement at the elementary and middle school levels, most of our high schools continue to demonstrate little success in closing long-standing achievement gaps between low-income and more advantaged students.

Improving student learning in high-poverty schools is one of the most daunting challenges confronting public education today. The work is highly complex and demanding. Yet public schools continue to demonstrate that the work can be accomplished, and the successes can be sustained.

Learning From High-Performing, High-Poverty Schools

For this second edition of *Turning High-Poverty Schools into High-Performing Schools*, twelve HP/HP schools were carefully selected and rigorously profiled. Chosen from an initial sample of 51 schools, all of the schools selected had to first meet the following two criteria:

1. Secondary schools had to have a minimum of 60 percent of their students qualifying for the federal free and reduced-price meal program; elementary schools had to have a minimum of 65 percent qualifying.
2. All schools had to have demonstrated a pattern of performance at or above state averages for *all* public schools in their respective states in *all* areas of mandatory state achievement testing.

One example of the twelve schools profiled is Evergreen Elementary.

Following years of being the lowest-achieving elementary school in the Bethel School District in Washington State, Evergreen Elementary embarked on a journey to change its results. "We were on the verge of being closed . . . we needed to do something," voiced several of the school's staff.

Led by a committed group of teachers and a supportive principal, the school slowly began to realize modest achievement gains that moved them up from last place. But the team wanted more and, with the district's support, attended the annual conference of No Excuses University, which culminated in a group decision to apply for membership in the network and embrace its approach to school improvement.

Five years later, in 2015, Evergreen, with an enrollment surpassing 67 percent low income, became the highest district performer of its 16 district elementary counterparts, and it continues to garner this distinction today.

Principal Jamie Burnett fully credits the leadership and hard work of his "pillars," a group of veteran Evergreen teachers who were in place from the beginning, for leading the way. He further acknowledges the crucial structural importance of the school's partnership with No Excuses University, which helped them establish the Eight Exceptional Systems that drive their success: Culture of Universal Achievement, Collaboration, Standards Alignment, Assessment, Data Management, Interventions, Building-wide Discipline, and Character Counts. Blended together, these systems support growth in academic, social, and emotional learning throughout the school.

Burnett and his staff's daily standards-based instructional approach exemplifies how their system adherence has translated into increased academic success for Evergreen students. Classrooms reflect increased rigor and expectations for all students as staff turned to a consistent use of student data to guide instructional decisions and support. Teacher-led grade-level teams assume a "no excuses stance" as they collabor-

orate to tackle challenges and improve practice, particularly for students who are underperforming. The instructional day increased to extend learning, and Response to Intervention (RTI) supports were deployed and shaped to better help individual students improve reading and math skills.

Burnett and his staff attribute their sustained success to a change of mindset regarding their expectations of their students, an established “code of collaboration” among staff that translates to growing collective efficacy across the school, and a sense of urgency to do better for their students.

Understanding Poverty and Our Moral Responsibility

Improving schools begins with educators who are unequivocally committed to equity—and that commitment starts with a better understanding of the meaning and influence of poverty in the lives of the students they serve.

As of 2017, 19 percent of all people who lived in poverty were children—more than 14 million, or 19 percent of all children in the United States. Children of all races live in poverty. How does poverty influence lives and learning? Poverty often places constraints on the family’s ability to provide material resources for their children. Substandard housing, inadequate medical care, and poor nutrition can affect the rate of childhood disease, premature births, and low birth weights, all of which influence a child’s physical and cognitive development and, consequently, his or her ability to benefit from schooling. Family stress and trauma can adversely affect the ability to make decisions, solve problems, and set goals. It can cause people to lose hope and view their actions as futile.

Although improvements in public education alone will not eliminate poverty, such improvements are an important part of the solution. The question is not whether too much is being asked of public schools, but rather, have we held up our end of the bargain?

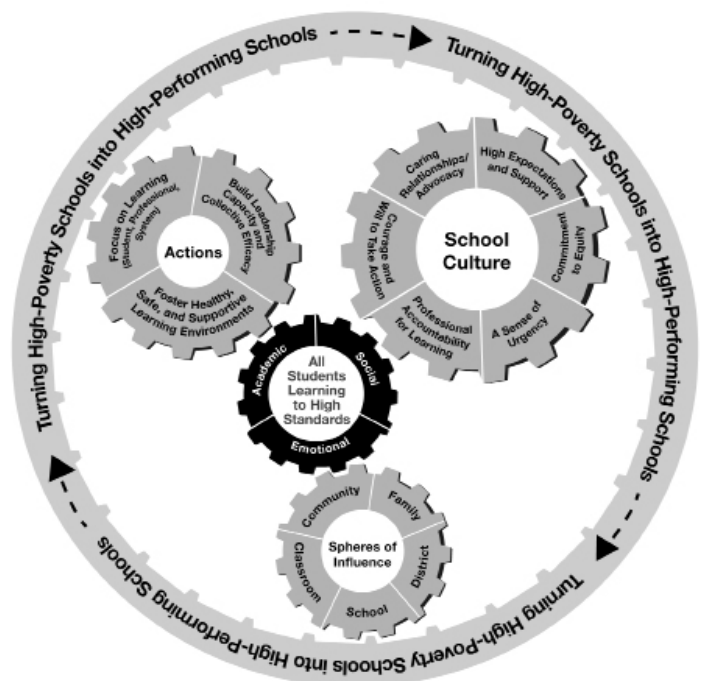
Using a Framework for Collective Action

A Framework for Collective Action helps explain the relationship among the various interactive components that need to be in place for a high-poverty school to become a high-performing school.

A Framework for Collective Action features the following gears: (1) All Students Learning, (2) Actions, (3) School Culture, and (4) Spheres of Influence. These four gears

are placed within the largest gear, which represents the idea that school improvement process is propelled from within—by the smaller gears.

Figure 4.1 A Framework for Collective Action



The All Students Learning to High Standards gear reflects the central mission of high-performing, high-poverty schools. It is the “drive gear.” In these high-performing schools, it is recognized that each student matters and each student’s needs are known, supported, and met through the interaction of all components of the gears.

The Actions gear focuses on three arenas in which educators need to act: They must develop and build the leadership capacity and collective efficacy needed to foster the creation of healthy, safe, and supportive learning environments, and support a relentless focus on student, professional, and system learning. Taking action is the necessary first step in making any kind of change. It’s through strategic action that the norms, values, and beliefs, which constitute school culture, begin to change.

The School Culture gear represents the characteristics of culture in HP/HP schools. Such culture is characterized by caring relationships and advocacy for students, high expectations and support, a commitment to equity, a sense of urgency, professional accountability for learning, and the courage and will to take action.

Finally, educators' concerted efforts to take action and change the school's culture are targeted to affect the Spheres of Influence gear on students' education, including their classroom, school, school district, family, and community. Leaders and the entire school community work in partnership and collaboration with stakeholders in these various spheres to ensure that every student succeeds.

Building Leadership Capacity and Collective Efficacy

Leadership capacity acts as the context for improvements in learning and the learning environment. Three elements characterize leadership in HP/HP schools: (1) shared and distributed leadership, (2) a spirit of reciprocity, and (3) the principal as lead learner.

Six guiding questions can serve as leverage points for building leadership capacity and collective efficacy:

1. How are we developing an inquiry stance and embedding reflection into professional practice? This process typically involves identifying a problem, gathering and analyzing data, setting goals, selecting and implementing strategies, and conducting an evaluation. Although this form of planning is likely used in many schools, what distinguishes HP/HP schools from others is the manner in which such a cycle of inquiry becomes the norm. In these schools, people tend to be curious about their practice and eager to innovate.

2. How does our data system support data-informed problem solving? HP/HP schools facilitate an ongoing, courageous look in the mirror. These schools have access to accurate, timely data that enable educators to set goals and benchmarks; monitor progress; make midcourse corrections; and design and successfully employ effective instruction and targeted interventions.

3. How are we developing relational trust? Bryk and Schneider (2002) defined relational trust as mutual respect, personal regard, competence to do one's job, and integrity.

4. How are we deploying resources effectively? Several leaders in HP/HP schools began their remarkable turnarounds by making tough calls—and many of those decisions were about how to use resources. One school deferred a planned textbook adoption in order to redirect monies to provide literacy coaching and targeted assistance for students.

5. How are we optimizing time? Extending academic learning time can occur in at least two ways—literally

extending the available time for students to learn or better using the time within the traditional school day. High-performing, high-poverty schools do both.

6. How are we ensuring equity? To transform a low-performing, high-poverty school into a high-performing school, leadership must be shared, distributed, reciprocal—and equity focused. Such leadership begins with educators who have answered the question, as Palmer (2007) puts it, “Who is the self that leads?” Understanding one's self means understanding one's mental maps, which entails facing personal biases and blind spots.

Then such leaders ask a second vital question: “Why am I engaged in this work?” The embodiment of leadership cannot be separated from the leader's purpose, for good or for bad.

Fostering a Healthy, Safe, and Supportive Learning Environment

To learn, children and adolescents need to feel safe and supported. Without these conditions, the mind reverts to a focus on survival. Educators in high-performing, high-poverty schools have always recognized the need for providing a healthy, safe, and supportive environment for academic as well as for social emotional learning (SEL).

One HP/HP elementary school in a West Coast state uses the acronym CARES to express how they support social, emotional, and academic learning. CARES stands for Cooperation, Assertion, Responsibility, Empathy, and Self-Control. CARES provides the entire school community with a common language and common norms. Students, families, and educators alike live their “CARES.”

Comprehensive support derives from a “whatever it takes” mindset. Educators in HP/HP schools adhere to the key principle of continuous improvement—acknowledging that the work is never completely done—and ask these key questions to guide their actions:

1. How are we ensuring safety?
2. How are we developing an accurate understanding of poverty?
3. How are we strengthening the bond between students and school?
4. How are we engaging parents, families, and caregivers?
5. How are we engaging the broader community?
6. How are we ensuring equity?

For example, when it comes to strengthening the bond between students and school, some HP/HP schools have started student advisories. At The Preuss School, the educators were committed to making the school more personal and helping students meet high expectations. So they created a highly effective advisory program as one of the required foundational blocks of the school's detracked curriculum and instructional day. Teachers, as well as the principal, convene their advisories of 25 students two to three times each week, guiding students on their path to success in school, graduation, and beyond.

Many HP/HP schools provide additional protective factors, such as restructuring into small learning communities. These schools create focused learning environments that help keep smaller groups of students connected with one another, as well as to a smaller group of core teachers throughout the day.

In large or moderately sized high schools, this approach may be in the form of 9th grade academies. These academies "protect" 9th graders from the impersonal nature of the large, comprehensive high school experience in which it is too easy to get lost.

Focusing on Student, Professional, and System Learning

Is your school focusing on student, professional, and system learning and the links among the three? Five questions can support educators as they make student, professional, and system learning agendas the focus of their actions:

1. How are we employing a pedagogy of possibility?
2. How are we ensuring that every student can read proficiently?
3. How are we providing targeted interventions for students who need them?
4. How are we providing job-embedded opportunities for professional learning?
5. How are we ensuring equity?

For example, let's discuss employing a pedagogy of possibility. Unpacking standards, aligning curriculum to those standards, creating a common vision of what excellent teaching looks like, using research-based instructional practices focused on student engagement and empowerment, integrating SEL objectives into academic learning and the learning environment, and developing and using common assessments are all part of creating a pedagogy of possibil-

ity that brings coherence to teachers' professional practice and positively influences the instructional core.

Too often, schools continue to use ineffective curricular approaches and instructional practices with students who live in poverty. Such practices are described as a "pedagogy of poverty" (Haberman, 1991), which is characterized by overuse of teacher-controlled discussions and decision-making, lecture, drill and decontextualized practice, and worksheets.

Rather than a pedagogy of poverty, students who live in poverty need "powerful pedagogy"—powerful instruction resulting in powerful (or deep) learning. Powerful pedagogy has been conceptualized in various ways: as relevant to the learner, meaning centered, supportive in the development of various kinds of understanding, accelerated, strengths based, empowering, and encompassing of higher-order thinking, deep knowledge, and connections beyond classrooms.

When a powerful pedagogy is employed, students are actively engaged in making meaning and developing understanding not only of content but also of one's self as a learner.

Eliminating Practices That Perpetuate Underachievement and Inequity

Committing to equity in our public schools is fundamentally about providing all students with an equal opportunity to learn. That won't happen until we confront the low expectations that often stem from classist and racist beliefs. Such beliefs are foundational to the inequitable conditions and counterproductive practices found in far too many schools that continue to perpetuate underachievement.

High-poverty schools become high performing in part by abandoning what doesn't work and replacing those approaches with those that *do* work. HP/HP schools work to eliminate the pervasive and destructive outcomes for students that accompany nine specific practices, which perpetuate underachievement and achievement gaps by denying students the opportunity to learn:

1. **Toleration of low expectations.** Leaders and educators in HP/HP schools don't tolerate excuses for underachievement. They're relentless in their efforts to help all students feel safe and develop a sense of belonging at school, they honor the effort required of students, and they celebrate student accomplishments.
2. **Inequitable funding.** HP/HP schools commit to the equitable use of resources. They create and maintain

budgets that become moral documents intended to target support where it's needed most.

3. **Inequitable teacher assignments.** Unfortunately, higher proportions of low-income students than their higher-income peers are taught by teachers who are not certificated in the subject they're called on to teach. In contrast, the most effective teachers in HP/HP schools are routinely placed with the highest-need students.
4. **Ineffective instruction.** Collaborative efforts, coaching, and other forms of assistance are used to support underperforming teachers who appear to have the potential to improve. Nevertheless, if improvement does not occur, principals in HP/HP schools initiate appropriate processes to dismiss a teacher, regardless of tenure status.
5. **Retention.** HP/HP schools typically do not employ traditional forms of retention. When students fail to learn, they focus on the individual needs of their students, with a goal of catching them up. Students are carefully assessed, and improvement plans are constructed and implemented around their specific needs.
6. **Tracking, ability grouping, and misuse of pull-outs.** HP/HP schools begin with the expectation that all students can and will achieve to standards. That mission stands in stark opposition to the practice of tracking students by ability or, far worse, by the perception of ability.
7. **Misuse of multitiered systems of support.** Many public schools use some type of multitiered system of support (MTSS), also known as Response to Intervention (RTI). Although many schools have experienced satisfactory results for their students, a study of RTI practices in elementary schools cautions educators regarding its effectiveness.
8. **Misassignment to special education.** Educators in HP/HP schools prevent disproportionate placement in special education by (1) providing excellent core instruction and follow-up interventions as needed; (2) fostering healthy, safe, and supportive learning environments in the classroom and schoolwide; and (3) developing a culture of high expectations and support for every student.
9. **Suspension and Expulsions.** Most HP/HP schools engage in a number of systemic interventions, which often prevent misbehavior or address it in a far more productive manner. Positive behavioral interventions and supports; restorative justice; social and emotional learning approaches such as responsive classroom; student courts; teaching self-regulation strategies; and, more recently, meditation, yoga, and mindfulness are some of the approaches HP/HP schools use.

We can do this work. The primary determinant in an HP/HP school's success is garnering and maintaining the collective will to ensure that all students succeed. Commit to embarking on your own transformational journey. Your students are worthy of nothing less.



William H. Parrett has received international recognition for his work in school improvement related to children and adolescents who live in poverty. He has co-authored eleven books, the past three being best-sellers. As Director Emeritus of the Center for School Improvement & Policy Studies, (1996-2019), Bill coordinated funded projects and school improvement initiatives that exceeded \$80 million. Recently honored as the Indiana University School of Education's 2021 Distinguished Alumni, he continues as a frequent speaker at international and national events. Contact him at wparret@boisestate.edu or on Twitter at [WHParrett](https://twitter.com/WHParrett).



Kathleen M. Budge brings a blend of 26 years of practical experience as a teacher and administrator combined with 14 years of work dedicated to bridging the gap between the university and the teaching profession. As associate professor Emerita of Educational Leadership in the Curriculum, Instruction, and Foundational Studies Department at Boise State University, she continues her research focus on poverty, rural education, school improvement, and leadership development. In addition to this book, Budge co-authored with Parrett, *Disrupting Poverty: 5 Powerful Classroom Practices*, and the video series *Disrupting Poverty in Elementary and Secondary Classrooms*. She continues to maintain that her most important and significant work has been teaching first graders to read. Contact her at kathleenbudge@boisestate.edu or on Twitter @[KathleenBudge](https://twitter.com/KathleenBudge).

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Becoming the Educator They Need

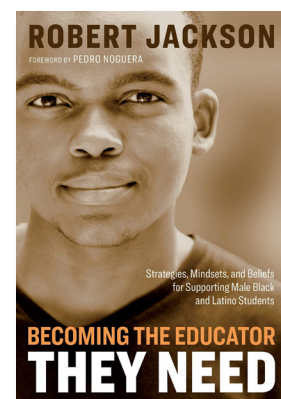
Robert Jackson

ASCD® LEADERSHIP SUMMARIES for EDUCATORS

Becoming the Educator They Need

Strategies, Mindsets, and Beliefs for Supporting Male Black and Latino Students

by **Robert Jackson**



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THE SUMMARY IN BRIEF

In America, Black and Latino males are overrepresented in categories typically associated with hardship and defeat. They experience disproportionately high rates of unemployment, incarceration, and homicide, and many of them are so disenfranchised (approximately 34 percent of Black males between the ages of 16 and 34) that they are literally “missing” from key census data because they are neither working, in school or college, or in the criminal justice system.

Becoming the Educator They Need by Robert Jackson is a focused guide to engaging, inspiring, and teaching young Black and Latino males to be successes. Drawing upon his life experience and his work as an educator and advisor to schools throughout the country, Jackson outlines strategies and practices that can help counter the negative trends and alter the life trajectories of young Black and Latino males. For those in search of solutions, seeking to make a difference in the lives of all students, especially young men, this will be an insightful resource.

IN THIS SUMMARY, YOU WILL LEARN:

- How to better understand the world Black and Latino males face each day, within the school and outside of it.
- Culturally aware teaching practices for leading these young men.
- Core beliefs, mindsets, and values necessary to best serve your Black and Latino male students.
- How to develop strong, healthy relationships among you, your students, and your staff.

Introduction

How often do you tell your Black and Latino male students that, despite their circumstances or their backgrounds, they will be success stories? How often do you affirm these young men? How often do you appoint them as leaders in your building? How many of them know that their lives do matter and that what is said about them in the media isn't necessarily true? How many of them do you call your "babies" or your "kids?" Speaking positive affirmations to students every day can truly help you build relationships with students and help educators and administrators connect with these young men.

If all successful people were honest with themselves, they would be able to think back to that one caring adult or mentor who took the time to help them discover their potential, help them know that it's OK to dream about their future, and understand that it is OK to make bad decisions and how to bounce back from adversity. They wouldn't be able to share the story of their lives without remembering that one vital, unforgettable person who taught them how to be better versions of themselves and was relentless about their success.

Cultural Awareness: Understanding the Realities of Life for Black and Latino Males

We live in a world where many young Black and Latino males gravitate toward gangs because the gang members treat them more like family than their own parents do.

According to the National Gang Center, in 2011, 46.2 percent of gang members were Hispanic or Latino and 35.3 percent were Black (as compared to only 11.5 percent white and 7 percent classified as "other") (2018). A disproportionate number of Black and Latino youth also live in poverty: in 2017, roughly 33 percent of Black youth and 26 percent of Latino youth lived in families with incomes below the federal poverty level (Anne E. Casey Foundation). When students living in poverty are arrested and booked (often unfairly), bonds can be set as high as \$3,000 to \$5,000, which they can't afford to pay. One in three Black males and one in six Latino males born in or after the year 2001 will spend time in prison at some point in his life (The Sentencing Project, 2017), a status quo that the private prison system does much to exacerbate.

Private prisons in the United States make an annual profit of more than \$3.3 billion for incarcerating individuals (Cohen,

2015)—most of whom have black and brown faces, and many of whom have committed minor offenses. Even more disturbing is the fact that Black and Latino males are also disproportionately at risk of being murdered. According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, homicide is the leading cause of death for Black males ages 15 to 24 (2018a) and the second leading cause of death for Hispanic males ages 15 to 34 (2018b). These numbers are disturbing.

Factors that Specifically Affect Male Youths of Color

Invisibilization

Invisibilization is the act of seeing a person or situation as invisible, as not important, and without breadth or depth. Think of how the public at large reacts to the police killing of an unarmed Black or Latino man as compared to a dog being mistreated (Michael Vick served more than two years in prison for his participation in a dog-fighting ring that led to the deaths of several dogs).

Marginalization

Marginalization is when someone is relegated to a powerless or unimportant position within a society or group due to a given characteristic like race or ethnicity. This occurs in the housing market, workforce, legal system, and educational system. When two students of different races commit the same offense at the same age and receive different punishment, that's marginalization.

Pre-criminalization

This is the tendency to perceive Black and Latino males as criminals when they haven't done anything wrong. If society and educators continue to look at students as if they are criminals, they will unconsciously treat them as such.

Stereotype Threat

This refers to the fear of affirming a negative stereotype associated with one's race, gender, ethnicity, or cultural group. According to psychologists Claude Steele, Joshua Aronson, and Steven Spencer, stereotype threat causes anxiety in students during tests and therefore plays a significant part in widening the achievement gap.

Colorism

Colorism is prejudice or discrimination within an ethnic group against individuals with darker complexions. For Black Americans, this began during slavery (during which

time Blacks with lighter complexions were given the opportunity to work in the house, while those with darker complexions were forced to work in the fields, resulting in a division within the race). This phenomenon is common within ethnic groups in places where Europeans imposed racial hierarchies featuring themselves at the top.

The Myth of Color Blindness

Some educators believe that they are colorblind and therefore don't need to increase their cultural awareness. Color blindness is the racial ideology that posits the best way to end discrimination is by treating individuals as equally as possible, without regard to race, culture, or ethnicity, notes Monica T. Williams (2011). Most Black and Latino males, who regularly encounter difficulties due to race, experience colorblind ideologies quite differently. Colorblindness creates a society that denies their negative racial experiences, rejects their cultural heritage, and invalidates their unique perspectives (Williams, 2011).

It is generally white educators accustomed to a life of privilege who claim color blindness and do not realize the disservice they do to students of color who likely don't enjoy a life of privilege. By refusing to expand their understanding of the students who most need their support, they are missing the opportunity to inspire those students and possibly change the course of their lives.

Culturally Aware Teaching Practices

Far too many educators haven't bridged the gap between themselves and their Black and Latino male students. They can't run down a list of these students' successes because they haven't been able to connect with them, despite being in the perfect position to serve as leaders and change agents in their lives. The disconnect, detrimental to students, is detrimental to teachers as well, leaving many feeling unfulfilled, burned out, and even resentful of the students who need them most.

The Six Core Values for Teaching Black and Latino Males

Love

Show your students that you love them:

- Love yourself enough to know that it is OK to care about your students' well-being.

- Love your students enough to make every effort to provide them with the best education possible.
- Love is a choice, not a feeling. Choose to love your students daily.
- Love always seeks the welfare of the other person; it does not seek to hurt people.
- Love sets aside your own beliefs, desires, and preferences and puts those of your students first.

Trust

Trust is:

- Taking your student's word as truth.
- Acting in ways that make students feel they can place their trust in you.
- Giving a student a chance to get it right and believing he can do it.
- Leading by example by keeping your word and following through.
- Making recommendations with a student's input instead of issuing demands.

Fairness

Fairness is:

- Treating all students in the same manner, regardless of race, socioeconomic status, or behavior issues.
- Not showing favoritism.
- Viewing all students as having the potential to do well.
- Giving all students the opportunity to be their best.
- Playing by the rules and not changing them to make it convenient for someone else.
- Listening with an open mind.

Support

Support your students by:

- Honoring their choices and voices.
- Gaining an understanding of their truths.
- Offering encouragement.
- Listening without judging.
- Valuing their opinions.
- Having a short memory when they make mistakes.

Accountability

Accountability is:

- Accepting responsibility for your behaviors and attitudes toward your Black and Latino male students and expecting your students to do the same.
- Admitting when you have made a mistake or have wrongfully accused or judged someone and expecting your students to do the same.
- Creating a mission statement for your building or classroom that is inclusive of all your students.
- Giving a concise explanation for your actions that helps everyone involved reach a resolution.
- For administrators, being responsible for the actions of the staff you hired.

Safety

Safety is:

- Refraining from intimidating and manipulating your students.
- Being aware of and respecting the physical space of your students.
- Providing interventions for bullies and the students affected by their behavior.
- Recognizing students affected by trauma.
- Protecting and helping emotional students learn to control their emotions and giving them steps to deal with their temperamental issues.

Core Beliefs and Mindsets of a Culturally Responsive Educator

If your students described you in one word, what would that one word be? Loving? Strict? Passive? Stubborn? Helpful? Angry? Abrasive? Nice? Sweet? Mean? Nonchalant?

Ask yourself, “How do my students view me?” If your students view you as mean and abrasive, they will more than likely shut down and not want to learn from you. Maybe you know that your students see you as strict, abrasive, or boring, but you think students need strong discipline and boundaries to ensure learning (which is not always the case). As an educator, I felt that I was too strict at times because I judged everyone by the acts of a few. Maybe because there is so much stress in education and so much content to cover,

you feel it’s OK to be strict, abrasive, or boring. Maybe you’ve heard other educators say it’s OK because “those kids” have trouble learning anyway.

It is imperative to turn your gaze inward and question what limiting and biased beliefs you have about students and teaching that are disadvantaging kids. It’s not always the students.

Sometimes it’s the teachers.

Who Are You?

When someone asks you who you are, you should be able to answer immediately. Take a moment and write down eight to 10 words that describe you.

Know Your Why

You must know your “why.” Your reasons for teaching will help you get through the tough days. When you understand who you are and why you teach, you become more patient, you’re able to show more restraint, and you’re more effective and happier as a teacher.

Ask yourself the following questions:

- What is my “why”?
- What is the one area of my life that I need to improve upon to help me better understand and work more effectively with Black and Latino males?
- What can I do to build stronger relationships with my Black and Latino male students?
- What three words would my students use to describe me?
- How do I want my students to remember me?

Be Caring

If you don’t feel like your students are going to be great students simply because you’re their teacher, show your students that you care—that’s half the battle. There is no perfect educator out there. Everyone has flaws. Having empathy will give you what it takes to turn any student around. Are you that one caring adult whom your students need to hear from daily? Are you speaking success into your Black and Latino male students? Claim your students as your success stories, and they will never forget it or you. Treat them like they are yours, and they will follow you and believe in you.

Commit fully. Becoming “that” caring adult comes with a responsibility. You must be fully committed, even on your

bad days. Some days you won't feel like coming to work, but you have to do it anyway. Many of us have our own kids and our own issues, but our students still deserve the best we can give them. Even when Black and Latino male students get on your last nerve, you must speak positive words into their spirits and teach them with care.

Don't feel sorry for them. Caring means having empathy for your students without feeling sorry for them. When you feel sorry for students, your expectations of them are lowered. Students need your expectations to remain high. Don't show favoritism. All students deserve to have you believe in them.

Be Open

Students will open up to you when you share who you really are. Although males can sometimes be stubborn and may not trust people enough to share their most inner thoughts and hurts, if you are open with them as you work to build relationships and rapport with them, they will open up—eventually. Do you have personal stories you'd be willing to share with students if you knew they could make a difference in their lives? It takes bravery to open up, but it can make all the difference.

Know and Work On Your Shortcomings

The first step to personal growth is honesty. We must be honest with ourselves about what we need to improve upon.

Take a moment and list areas in your teaching life where you think you can improve. (Take this exercise, which will require you to let your guard down and be completely honest with yourself, because your shortcomings could be holding you back from doing your job more efficiently.) Then write down how you plan to address the most pressing of your weaknesses. If you don't know how to overcome one or more of your shortcomings, seek further assistance and advice from your supervisor or counseling services in your area.

Believe in Every Student

Every student can be a success story. Whether male, female, Black, Latino, white, Mexican, Native American, Middle Eastern, Asian, Indian, or what have you, every student has the potential to be great, and every student deserves a champion.

Students don't always know their full potential. It's up to us as educators to convince them that they can change their narrative. Many students come to school broken and lacking direction. Some have no idea that all they have to do is focus—block out the noise and negativity in their lives and

focus on what they can control—and they can succeed at anything. Controlling responses to others is part core beliefs and mindsets of a culturally responsive educator. People can do or say whatever they want to a person, but how a person responds is up to them.

Building Strong Relationships with Your Students and Staff

Relationship-building is key to improving how educators relate to and reach students—especially Black and Latino male students. The lack of positive interaction among teachers, administrators, parents, and students is one of the reasons we lose too many of our students. You cannot teach those you can't reach. Whether you have been doing this work for one year or 31 years, the fact is that students respond better to and respect those who build relationships with them. It's tough for students to communicate with someone they don't have a good relationship with. The educator who builds strong relationships with students will be the most successful. Strong, healthy relationships share the following characteristics:

- Mutual respect
- Trust
- Honesty
- Cooperation
- Allowance for individuality
- Good communication
- Anger control
- Fair disagreements
- Problem solving
- Celebration of self-confidence
- Modeling

Trust

Trust your students and give them the benefit of the doubt. Trust will require that you be honest with your students as well as with yourself. You must work through the points of view of your students who are often hurt and easily offended and find a middle ground where you and your students can function comfortably. Don't expect students to conform in ways that limit their creativity and ability to express themselves positively. Give students room to be individuals.

Communicate with students, including working through misunderstandings, as you would have them communicate with you. Allow students to work through their feelings about something that is unsettling—and allow yourself to do the same—even if it means a few extra minutes of discussion after school or after class. Even when you feel like the young man is not listening, love out of him what’s inside. Look past the stubborn behavior. Students will eventually respond in a positive way to someone they feel they can trust.

Respect

Most people have different scales by which to weigh respect ... and disrespect. What is your definition of respect? What is your definition of disrespect? How do you gauge what’s respectful versus what is disrespectful with your students and staff? Most school districts don’t have any guidelines by which to determine discipline techniques. Educators determine what is respectful or disrespectful based on their own definitions, perceptions, and biases.

We are supposed to set the example of what leadership looks like. We can’t do that when we lead with our emotions.

Get to Know and Stay Informed About Students

Each of your Black and Latino male students will be different in the way they receive and process information. They will bring into your classroom a wide variety of home-life experiences that will influence the way they present themselves on a daily basis. Get to know the different economic statuses of students so that you can understand them. The more you understand each student’s needs, shortcomings, strengths, and motivating factors, the easier it will be to get them involved in the learning process.

Ask Probing Questions

One way to better inform yourself about your students is to ask probing questions. Early in the school year, have students building strong relationships with your students and staff. Form a circle, introduce yourself to the class, and then have students introduce themselves and share one thing that they like to do. (Administrators, do the same in a staff meeting or in a professional development workshop with staff.) Ask about their favorite subjects in school, extracurricular activities, and siblings, and find out whether they are the oldest, youngest, or middle children and what they plan to do during school breaks. Customize the list of questions for your students.

Listen to Students

The six essential rules of good listening are

- Be silent when others are speaking.
- Ask good questions to get the conversation going.
- Think before responding.
- Avoid outside distractions (phone, television, laptop, etc.).
- Show you are interested through your positive body language.
- Control the tone of your voice.

Give Black and Latino Male Students Leadership Roles

The only way to teach leadership is to model it and practice it with your students. Just because a student has high self-esteem doesn’t mean he is a good leader. Just because a student doesn’t say much doesn’t mean he can’t become an effective leader. Leadership requires trust, loyalty, consistency, perseverance, compassion, and resolve. Benefits include confidence, growth, better productivity, and fewer distractions and behavior issues. If you build trust, you will receive better buy-in from your students.

Following is a list of leadership roles to consider for your Black and Latino male students:

- Taking attendance
- Passing out papers, tests, and so on
- Running errands
- Tutoring students in need
- Mentoring other students
- Making copies
- Making announcements
- Passing out snacks
- Making phone calls
- Answering the phone
- (Administrators), crafting e-mails to send out to the student body

Tell the Truth

Be transparent about your hurts and disappointments. Tell the truth about wanting to quit at times but not giving up.

Tell the truth about having grown up socially and economically disadvantaged but refusing to use those things as excuses. Tell the truth about your upbringing, whether it was ideal or troubled. Tell the truth about trauma—including abuse, neglect, or abandonment—because someone may benefit from your story. Be transparent about the consequences of bad relationships that you have been in and learned from. Talk about the consequences of choosing the wrong friends. Let students know that if they show you their friends, you will show them their future.

Be the educator you were called to be. Be the educator you wanted and needed as a student. Make every effort to find fulfillment in this calling for yourself as well as for your Black and Latino male students. Be the educator they need.

Conclusion

If you haven't experienced students coming back to see you or reaching out to you via social media, put the time, effort, and patience into the task of thoughtfully educating all your students and just wait. You will feel joy and excitement when you see the fruits of your labor in the form of former students grown up with families and flourishing in the roles as fathers, husbands, and productive citizens. It's sometimes breathtaking. It is in those moments that it all comes full circle, and you will see with your own eyes that your efforts toward those distant and seemingly unreachable young men were well worth your time.

So, when you walk into your classroom or building and are faced with Black and Latino male students, you have an opportunity to put all that you have learned to work. What choices will you make? When your students come back in five, 10, or 15 years, what will they say to you? What impact will you have had on them?



Robert Jackson began his teaching career with a no-nonsense but caring approach to education in Indianapolis public schools more than 20 years ago—after being cut from the NFL (Minnesota Vikings). He created a No More Excuses curriculum, which has been featured in publications nationally and is being used in K–12 schools, colleges, and universities.

Becoming the Educator They Need: Strategies, Mindsets, and Beliefs for Supporting Male Black and Latino Students by Robert Jackson. Copyright © 2019 by ASCD, has been summarized by permission of the publisher, ASCD. ISBN 978-1-4166-2820-0 Summary copyright © 2022 by ASCD. Published by Soundview, Inc.®

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Coherent School Leadership

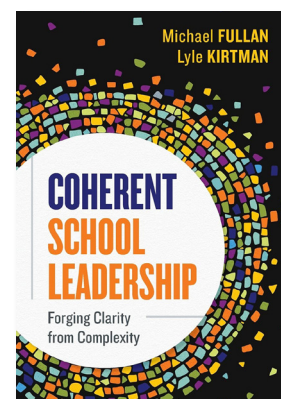
Michael Fullan, Lyle Kirtman

ASCD® LEADERSHIP SUMMARIES for EDUCATORS

Coherent School Leadership

Forging Clarity from Complexity

by **Michael Fullan and Lyle Kirtman**



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THE SUMMARY IN BRIEF

While many leaders are often told that they must put certain structures into place in order to enhance their leadership capabilities, they may not know exactly what structures are needed, or the skills that are required for implementation.

Coherent School Leadership will show you how to combine the components of Michael Fullan's Coherence Framework with Lyle Kirtman's 7 Competencies for Highly Effective Leaders to drive coherence—the shared depth of understanding about the nature of the work and how it impacts the results desired for student achievement—to change the culture in schools from reactive to proactive. This summary will go beyond typical leadership books that tell you what you need to put in place to enhance leadership in schools. It will show you how to use specific competencies to drive coherence. While the “how-to” steps will provide a platform, the order and magnitude of the steps will depend on your needs and your school community or district.

IN THIS SUMMARY, YOU WILL LEARN:

- How to use specific competencies to drive coherence.
- Day-to-day solutions to distractions and stresses so you can stay on-course.
- How to use the competencies in relation to the included Framework.
- How to challenge existing conventions and find new paths to successful leadership in schools.

Introduction

The net effect of this book will be to show how proven frameworks such as The Coherence Framework and the 7 Competencies for Highly Effective Leaders (“The Framework” and “The Competencies”, respectively) can help you cope with even the most complex scenarios. Our work comes from practice. The fact that practice is going to become even more unpredictable and constantly disrupted means that leaders will need grounded frameworks that can help them both influence and learn from the new world that is currently unfolding. Be ready for ever-greater challenges. Learners make the best leaders—this is the causal direction you should strive for.

Organizational Coherence and Leadership Competencies

Based on their work with school districts and state systems, covered in their 2016 book *Coherence: The Right Drivers in Action for Schools, Districts, and Systems*, author Michael Fullan, along with Joann Quinn, conclude that coherence consists of four interactive components. The first component of The Framework—focusing direction—is about vision and goals and consists of strategies to begin the coherence process. Developing the direction in practice requires purposefully cultivating collaborative cultures that begin to develop the essential capacities, at both the individual and collective levels, that will be needed going forward (the second component). The third component—deepening learning (the pedagogy or learning and teaching skills to engage and help students learn)—is at the heart of successful change.

Traditional approaches to accountability (the fourth component), which emphasize tests and corrective action, are not effective at stimulating progress. What works instead is a focus on a few ambitious goals, collaborative work in relation to those goals, good engaging pedagogy, and intrinsically motivated accountability that is co-developed and related to external accountability requirements.

Finally, Fullan and Quinn found that coherence is not static—not something that one can achieve and it’s done—but is continuous. There are three things that make coherence continuous:

- People come and go in an organization and each personnel change represents a coherence-making challenge and opportunity;
- The environment or context constantly changes in unpredictable ways—new technologies, population shifts, the economy, the future of jobs, climate, diversity, global and regional conflict, and the like; and, hopefully,
- People in an organization get new ideas—they innovate or engage in continuous improvement.

But, how do we get and keep coherence if we don’t have it? Although one could make some progress by working directly with the four components (the components) of the Framework, that is not enough. So, rather than focus solely on the components of coherence, Fullan and Quinn considered the skills and competencies that would be required to develop and maintain coherence and decided to revisit Kirtman’s 7 Competencies for Highly Effective Leaders and identify how to incorporate them into promoting organizational coherence and sustainable change.

The 7 Competencies for Highly Effective Leaders in Action

The observation of highly effective leaders in action toward identifying the skills that were associated with their success led to the development of The Competencies.

The characteristics that the observed leaders shared were the ability to: challenge the status quo, build trust through clear communications and expectations, create a commonly owned plan for success, focus on team over self, maintain a high sense of urgency regarding change and sustainable results, commit to continuous improvement of self and the organization, and build external networks/partnerships—in effect, the competencies that constitute the leadership core of the Framework.

The Competencies, as validated as they are, focused on the individual leader. There was a need for a solution that connected knowledge about individual leadership and organizational effectiveness. Hence, this book. The Competencies do not “function” in the same manner—that is, some competencies “push” change and some “pull” change.

The Competencies are valuable, even when there are numerous hierarchical forms of leadership as has been the case over the past several decades. However, they have become even more effective in the new leadership paradigm that combines the Competencies and the Framework. This new integrated model is based less on top-down vision and direct inspiration, and more on a type of leadership that requires enabling people to develop via lateral learning from others with lead-

ers enabling networking, innovative solutions, and collective assessment of impact and ongoing learning.

Putting the Coherence Framework into Practice

The Framework provides us with four areas on which to focus coherence-making in a school or district that position the work and behaviors that are needed to provide sustainability in improving student achievement: focusing direction, cultivating collaborative cultures, deepening learning, and securing accountability.

Framework Component One: Focusing Direction

This component involves:

- Purpose-driven mindset
- Goals that impact
- Clarity of strategy
- Change leadership

To begin to address this component of the Framework, the leader must identify where the strengths of the school exist and whether staff understand the direction of the school.

Competency 1—Challenges the Status Quo

The use of this competency will challenge many of the practices and behaviors of those who are comfortable in the current system. At the same time, the key skill for the leader is how to challenge the status quo while beginning to build a partnership with those in the organization. In addition, the leader will need to use subskills to enhance their use of the competency to obtain maximum results. In effect, it will be necessary to combine and integrate “push” and “pull” competencies at the outset.

To employ Competency 1, which is a “push” competency, you will need courage—courage to stay committed to effectively challenging others in line with your moral purpose—and a steadfast focus on improving the lives of your students!

Framework Component Two: Cultivating Collaborative Cultures

This component involves:

- Culture of growth
- Learning leadership

- Capacity-building
- Collaborative work

If this component was the area of choice for improvement in your district, three competencies tend to be employed by leaders.

Competency 2—Builds Trust Through Clear Communications and Expectations

Competency 2 is both a push and pull force. While the intent of this competency is to push people to a high level of performance and results, it is also effective in creating collaborative cultures—which, in turn, draws people in and supports them. Too often, leaders do not clearly communicate their expectations or provide direct feedback to staff to help them improve their practice.

Competency 4—Focuses On Team Over Self

If cultivating collaborative cultures was the area of choice for improvement in your district, the second competency that a leader would employ is Competency 4. This is a pull force.

Teaching is often a lonely position and, in many districts, schools operate in silos. Employing this competency entails explaining what a highly functioning team looks like. Teaching leaders about how to develop a team rather than a group of staff is core to collaboration.

Once new expectations are clear and the direction is effectively communicated, your leadership team needs to learn how to develop effective teams across your school or district. For example, a professional learning community (PLC) needs to learn how to be an effective team to be able to maximize learning for students. Effective teams frequently work across disciplines and rely on each other to obtain results. Often trust is the first area for focus. Trust issues must be surfaced honestly and discussed before a team can move toward common purpose and actions. As with all of the Competencies, building trust is a process.

Competency 3—Creates a Commonly Owned Plan for Success

The third competency associated with cultivating collaborative cultures is a pull force. The plan must be based on the content of the work in the school and include how the staff will work together. Remember: All plans should be “skinny plans,” simple to digest and focused on offering direction.

The Competency 3 subskills are key to collaboration in

the planning and implementation process. It is important to get input early from all constituents in your planning efforts. You will need them to support you through the action stage and their early involvement will build their ownership. Getting them to buy into the plan comes from their involvement. It is important to show some change of plans or a specific strategy that came from each group's input.

Framework Component Three: Deepening Learning

This component involves:

- Clarity of learning goals
- Precision in pedagogy
- Shifting practices through capacity-building

Competency 7—Builds External Networks/Partnerships

Although many, if not all, of the competencies can be used in this core work of schools, Competency 7 may be most effective. However, it is dependent on the level of instructional expertise and skill and the culture's openness to change.

The opportunity to build networks and partnerships in education is greater today than in the past. Leaders must extend their learning out to other schools in a district and to other communities. Capabilities for deepening learning can be assessed based on internal resources and the expertise of statewide, national, or international associations and networks. The expertise may include specific strategies for curriculum and potential human resources personnel to share experiences and expertise with your district.

It is wise to develop a partnership with parents to deepen learning. While in some communities it may be challenging to secure the commitment of the parents, it is essential that parents understand and be supported in their role. Leaders need to adopt the best practices to make parents partners in deepening learning—which may also involve making parents a part of the decision-making process.

The Competency 7 subskills can broaden and enhance deeper learning. The vast number of resources available on the Internet allows us to learn from districts in every area of learning. If one understands and accepts that there is someone out there who has an approach for your school on math, writing, or reading that will help your students, the options for networking are extraordinary.

Framework Component Four: Securing Accountability

This component involves:

- Internal and external accountability.

Competency 6 — Is Committed to Continuous Improvement of Self and the Organization

Based on the leadership principles, we need to develop an intrinsic drive in all leaders and staff to grow. Using Competency 6 is core to the switch in focus from external to internal accountability. Per Fullan and Quinn (2016), if you build the intrinsic internal drive for continuous improvement, the external accountability will improve. This competency must also be modeled by the leader. If the leader talks about their internal growth and development with their team, they make it safe for staff to acknowledge that there are areas for improvement. In a true collaborative culture, colleagues can serve as resources for one another for growth.

Competency 5—Has a High Sense of Urgency for Change and Sustainable Results

While Competency 6 is important to switch from external accountability to intrinsic accountability for sustainable improvement, Competency 5 is also needed. Having a high sense of urgency for results in improving student achievement must be the focus of your internal improvement process. The method of reflection in education has been more focused on empowerment without urgency for results for students. Reflection is an internal self-growth process. We believe reflection needs to be connected to a proactive, not reactive, sense of urgency.

Initiating the Coherence Framework

To make the work manageable, it is important that leaders consider with staff all of the components of the Framework to get an overview of where their strengths and weaknesses might lie. The organization could then choose an area of coherence on which to improve and employ the proper competencies to drive the improvement. Balance the push and pull competencies based on the culture of your school or district. Talk as a team about your change and leadership work and be a learning organization as you enhance your leadership craft.

The Coherence Framework in Action

When you move to action, it is misleading to think of the

Framework as four different pieces. The Framework as a whole is analogous to a healthy heart: there are four chambers with blood flowing in and out of each chamber. If any chamber is weak, you become ill or die. The same applies to the Framework and systems: if any one of the components—focusing direction, cultivating collaborative cultures, deepening learning, or securing accountability—fails, the organization as a whole falters. In short, leaders must take into account all of the components of the Framework as they proceed with coherence-making.

Leaders must be devoted to and skilled at coherence-making relative to the components of the Framework and be skilled in the Competencies. Skilled leaders develop highly effective teams and build the capacity of each team member through the Framework and the Competencies. In addition, there are three crucial qualities that these highly effective leaders evince:

- They constantly demonstrate tremendous courage and resolve. They don't back away from challenges. They don't give up. They inspire confidence in others.
- They participate as learners with staff in moving the district forward. They lead and learn and learn and lead.
- They are conscious from day one that one of their main tasks is to develop leadership in others.

The leader's job is to develop collaborative leadership in others for six or more years to the point where they themselves become dispensable, leaving behind a legacy and capacity for the organization to carry on. The question then is, how does one deal with leadership and management and stay focused on effective implementation of one's goals for achievement and come out on top?

Implementation and Execution is Key

When coherence is working and the leaders are effective, there is often a silent element at work. When leaders effectively implement and execute, we often fail to notice the talent and systems that provide the foundation for coherence-making.

We have never seen a great leader who was not also an effective manager.

Unfortunately, the lack of management skills that translates to the ability to implement goals in a timely manner to get results for student achievement is becoming a quiet but serious problem.

Our current education system was built to produce workers for the factories created by the Industrial Revolution. The workforce demanded that graduates be able to work on assembly lines and do what they were told. Everyone had a separate role and if they did their job, the corporation was successful.

In fact, the current education system was redesigned to produce average workers and to discourage genius (Rose, 2017). The focus was on standardization and compliance. Administrators were trained to adopt a top-down, hierarchical management structure of "Taylorism" to manage the schools in a command/control model. Management was critical, and leadership was not needed in a world of order and control.

Today's world of work is more focused on innovation, critical thinking, analytical skills, teamwork, creative problem solving, partnerships, and technology.

The demands for school districts are to produce a workforce that is able to take their place in this innovative global society. Schools must produce students who are able to both think and do.

Education has responded with a focus on leadership and specifically on instructional leadership. Many educational leaders believe that management was needed in the past and has no place in today's world of education. One superintendent told one of us that management isn't sexy. We must stop and realize—as Mintzberg so vividly warned us a decade and a half ago—that leadership in education today is becoming too abstract for many leaders and carries the assumption that the ability to implement effectively and bring in all stakeholders in support of desired results is obvious and not worthy of attention. This is a mistake if we want to meet our goals for students and be rigorous in coherence-making.

Conclusion: Leadership for the Future

As we project to the future—or we might just as well say the present because the future we are talking about is already upon us—just about every global force we can identify is in unpredictable flux:

- Climate. Whatever side you take, it looks like grim. No one should be confident that we are safe going into the future.
- Jobs. Fewer jobs, more robots, and utter pessimism about what might be available.

- Economics. For the past 40 years, inequity of income and school performance has occurred in almost every country and is certainly overall increasing rapidly.
- Social cohesion. We have more access to more people in more far-flung places in the world. We have more digital connections, but they are increasingly superficial. One thing that is not increasing is positive feelings toward each other. Trust and social cohesion are eroding on a large scale.

Coherence-makers and the competency-equipped leaders on whom we have focused in this summary are especially suited for this new work of deepening learning—the key to educational improvement for the future. The need for leadership of the kind that we have been portraying has never been greater or timelier. Coherence-making is a never-ending proposition. Leading learning and learning leadership are indeed one and the same.



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Five Practices for Equity-Focused School Leadership

Sharon I. Radd, Gretchen Givens Generett, Mark Anthony Gooden, George Theoh

ASCD® LEADERSHIP SUMMARIES for EDUCATORS

Five Practices for Equity-Focused School Leadership

by Sharon I. Radd, Gretchen Givens Generett,
Mark Anthony Gooden, George Theoharis



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THE SUMMARY IN BRIEF

In *Five Practices for Equity-Focused School Leadership* the authors' main intent is to help educators build the type of relationships, teams, systems, and practices that make equity central to the experience of their students.

The first practice involves addressing historical, structural, institutional, and individual inequality. Next, school leaders must develop the skills, vocabulary, and context for developing equity-focused leadership today and into the future. Emphasis then moves to developing equity leadership teams. Here, the principles of the previous two practices are put into action in the development, selection, and support of leadership teams that are equity-focused in everything they do. Radiating out from the individual and team level, the next step of building equity focused systems is about helping educators and administrators build lasting and foundational systems that support equity independent of any one leader or team. Finally, leaders discover the information to make sustaining equity a successful career-long pursuit that ultimately leads to positive, systemic transformation.

IN THIS SUMMARY, YOU WILL LEARN:

- Why prioritizing equity leadership is essential today and long-term.
- How to prepare for more equity-focused leadership.
- How to build systems that support and foster equity at every level.
- How to sustain equity beyond the short-term, remaining motivated, inspired, and informed on how best to build a more equitable tomorrow for all students.

Practice I: Prioritizing Equity Leadership

Schools in the United States, while providing many great experiences and opportunities, are still grossly inequitable. Consider these facts:

School discipline disproportionately targets students of color, students with disabilities, and transgender students. Black students are suspended or expelled at three times the rate of White students (U.S. Department of Education Office for Civil Rights, 2014, 2016)

White and Asian students are twice as likely as their Black and Latino/a/x peers to attend high schools where the full range of math and science courses—Algebra I, geometry, Algebra II, calculus, biology, chemistry, physics—are available. English learners (ELs) are less likely to be in these classes even when they are offered.

While students with disabilities represent 12 percent of the student enrollment, they make up 58 percent of students placed in seclusion or involuntary confinement and 75 percent of students who are physically restrained (U.S. DOE OCR, 2014, 2016). English learners have graduation rates (Layton, 2014) at approximately 59 percent nationally, with some states graduating only 24 percent of their ELs.

Lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer or questioning, and intersex (LGBTQIA+) students are targeted at alarming rates. Seventy-four percent are verbally harassed, 36 percent are physically harassed, and 17 percent are assaulted.

Since 9/11, Muslim and Arab students and their families have faced heightened concerns about harassment and being targeted. In 2014, more than 50 percent of Muslim students reported being insulted or abused because of their religion (Blad, 2016; Shah, 2011).

Much can be done to change these circumstances, yet school leaders don't always have the tools, knowledge, and resources to actually do so. This book summary will offer an actionable framework that individual leaders and school, district, and interorganizational teams can use to address this need.

The Challenge and Urgency of Leading for Equity

We know that the spirit of universal public education is a spirit of equity and opportunity. Nonetheless, in the midst of this noble work and promise, we have gross inequity. This inequity must and can be changed.

This change requires a systemic and transformative approach. As you consider how to use your leadership to create equitable outcomes, we encourage you to also consider how the scope of systemic inequity spans historical, structural, institutional, and individual/interpersonal levels.

The Stories We Tell About Why We Don't Do Better

For complex and complicated issues, people often tell simplistic stories that make them feel better about the reality of the difficulties they and others experience. As a result, even in their best efforts to be fully honest, the stories people tell involve omissions, inaccuracies, even exaggerations. Sometimes, stories truly misinform and misrepresent what's going on.

What examples can you think of—in your work or outside of school—where stories shape the reality?

Who benefits from the way the story is told and who is disadvantaged, marginalized, or judged negatively?

Where do you see competing stories that keep you or others stuck in conflict?

What keeps you/them from developing a collaborative or mutually acceptable story?

There are no right or wrong answers to these questions, so resist judging yourself or others negatively. The way that stories shape reality and understanding is common throughout the world and across cultures. However, it's important that you begin to notice them and their impact.

Practice II: Preparing for Equity

Preparing to Learn for Equity: Key Concepts and Guiding Principles

Equity learning produces a range of responses within and among individuals. Consider that your emotions, your desire to understand, your desire to feel competent and worthy, and perhaps most of all, your sense of right and wrong are all affected by equity learning. When we share new equity-focused information, we see in the participants—and feel our own—cognitive, emotional, conceptual, physiological, moral, or technical reactions.

These reactions stem from dissonance related to paradigms. Equity talk touches on self and systems paradigms about what's fair, what's moral and right, what works and what doesn't, and which causes and effects are connected

to each other. One common paradigm is that most people see themselves as good and moral people. At the same time, nearly 75 percent of Americans have an “automatic preference” or unconscious bias that favors Whites over Blacks. Further, this preference or bias is strongly predictive of discriminatory behavior.

Your ability to recognize and work through moments of cognitive dissonance while avoiding and minimizing your defensive routines allows you to engage more fully and effectively in equity-focused leadership.

How do you do this? Your task is to surface and examine your self paradigms and the systems paradigms to which you subscribe.

Exploring Identities: Race

Increasing your understanding of race and how it affects schools and the broader society will help you better understand how to disrupt harmful practices related to race.

Well-meaning educators who have earnestly attempted to avoid judging students according to race have found it puzzling that inequities still occur and persist, often along cultural as well as racial lines. This situation is certainly baffling, and we hope you agree that this is a good reason to investigate race further. If you do, then we suggest that you examine your role as an educator in these race-related practices by asking yourself the following questions:

How am I reproducing versus disrupting the experience for students in terms of their sense of community and social support around race?

How am I reproducing versus disrupting the culture and learning of the adults at the school (teachers, administrators, other staff) around race to create a more inclusive staff?

How am I reproducing versus disrupting the structures, policies, and practices around race?

How am I reproducing versus disrupting the curriculum in terms of race?

Leaders develop a culture of curiosity around racial inequities and frequently seek to measure progress toward raising awareness and the resulting impact on school culture. They consistently seek ways to invent and reinvent policies and practices that create a strong sense of belonging for all students.

Exploring Identities: Disability

In the United States, special education services in preK–12 schools for the 6.5 million students labeled with disabilities are driven and mediated by the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act of 2004 (IDEA, 2004). The legislation identifies the following categories of disabilities:

- Autism
- Deaf-blindness
- Deafness
- Emotional disturbance
- Hearing impairment
- Intellectual disability
- Multiple disabilities
- Orthopedic impairment
- Other health impairment (OHI) • Specific learning disability (SLD) • Speech or language impairment
- Traumatic brain injury
- Visual impairment (including blindness)

When considering school equity related to students with disabilities, the body of research on the efficacy of inclusive services must both drive structural organization of services and provide a philosophical center for school leadership and school improvement.

To develop fully inclusive schools, leaders need to help their staff develop more inclusive personal and collective paradigms. One step toward achieving this is through the development of three types of collaborative teams. First, you need a service delivery team that oversees, creates, and maintains inclusive structures and services. Second, creating and maintaining inclusive schools requires building instructional teams of professionals who co-plan and co-deliver instruction. Third, authentic inclusion of students with disabilities requires collaboration with families.

Exploring Identities: Socioeconomics

In many ways, thinking about socioeconomic means purposefully seeking to understand economic and class realities in the United States. Although most Americans consider themselves middle class, their daily realities suggest a different situation.

Vast disparities in income and wealth cross all areas of identity. In terms of income, women earn approximately

82 cents for every dollar men earn (Center for American Progress, 2020), and Blacks earn approximately 74 cents for every dollar Whites earn (Economic Policy Institute, 2020). Income disparities contribute to profound wealth disparities over time. Wealth disparities have increased significantly over the past four decades and are now far greater than income disparities. For example, White families on average have 20 times the wealth of Black families and 18 times the wealth of Latino families (Gorski, 2013).

Income disparities affect the way children and families are able to access and participate in education.

Leaders must disrupt dangerous practices and deficit thinking around socioeconomics in order to create more equitable schools and systems.

Exploring Identities: Language

Students whose first language is not English now account for close to 5 million students or 10 percent of all public school students (National Center for Education Statistics, 2020d). They bring hundreds of different languages to the classroom (Kindler, 2002). Although large numbers of immigrants and refugees have traditionally settled in major urban areas, they are now putting down roots in suburbs and rural areas (National Center for Education Statistics, 2020d). As a result, ELs are now enrolled in schools and classrooms that have not traditionally served a linguistically diverse student body. With the EL population anticipated to double by the year 2050, most, if not all, teachers are likely to teach ELs in the coming years (Meskill, 2005).

We know that equitable schooling for ELs “is informed and buoyed by two sources: an asset-based orientation toward language and knowledge of the research on second language acquisition” (Theoharis & O’Toole, 2011, p. 650). An asset-based language orientation encourages administrators to seek change and helps them develop a sound knowledge base that influences their vision for addressing the educational needs of ELs. The schools in which ELs are most successful have leaders who know and use the research on language (Montecel, Cortez, & Cortez, 2002).

Leadership around EL is essential. It requires substantial knowledge of and advocacy for ELs and their families. Leaders need to take a collaborative approach while embracing a strong vision for improving services for ELs. Leadership that focuses on asset-based, inclusive approaches leverages the opportunity for all students to thrive academically and socially.

Exploring Identities: Sex, Gender Identity, and Sexual Identity

Cisnormativity, heteronormativity, and homophobia contribute to profoundly oppressive contexts for students, especially queer youth. Research suggests that, invariably, educators prescribe attributes to students based on biological sex and cisgender paradigms; in doing so, they maintain and replicate sex and gender-based inequities in schools. For example, heterosexual cisgender males and their perspectives are most represented within curriculum in U.S. schools. Across the 20th century—the time during which current teachers and administrators engaged with literature as children—children’s books contained, on average, two male characters for every one female character—assumedly all cisgender (McCabe, Fairchild, Grauerholz, Pescosolido, & Tope, 2011). Further, it’s well documented that many teachers unconsciously choose cisgender male students as the first students to respond or volunteer to answer questions (Sadker, Sadker, & Zittleman, 2009). In this context, cisgender girls and gender-nonconforming individuals are often silenced and rendered invisible, while cisgender male students receive more feedback and more of a teacher’s time and energy.

Reflect

As gender diversity and LGBTQIA+ people and issues have become far more visible in the last decade, how do you personally feel about the variety of gender expressions and identities that are now more evident? What about the variety of sexual identities? Are your feelings and thoughts inclusive or marginalizing for some? If so, what resources are available to you to work toward inclusion in your actions and interactions?

In what ways do you notice that the gender binary and heteronormativity are restrictive and marginalizing in your system?

Based upon the examples presented in this chapter, which of the inclusion practices would have the most impact at your school?

Exploring Identities: Religion

School leaders must be aware of religious identity and how it shows up in schools, especially when certain identities are marginalized. Leaders must acknowledge that even though the First Amendment prohibits the establishment of a religion, Christianity is currently the majority religion in the United States. As a result, public schools have historically

allowed the expression and promotion of Christian views and practices without constraint.

Given this reality, leaders must intentionally ensure an inclusive environment and be prepared to respond when intolerance surfaces at any level. Although we are concerned with every person's right to their own religion, equity-focused school leaders must be particularly concerned with ensuring the rights, safety, and security of those students who are in the religious minority.

How do students who are in the religious minority feel in your school? Are they expected to participate in, and be witness to, majority-religion activities?

Consistently centering and allowing one religion while marginalizing others sends strong messages about the school's position on diversity. School officials can and should be proactive about ensuring a religiously inclusive environment, while maintaining the separation of church and state.

Practice III: Developing Equity Leadership Teams

Routines for Building Effective and Cohesive Equity Leadership Teams

Your next task is to begin modeling for and engaging others in relationship building, learning, and meaningful equity-focused work—that is, to form a leadership team. This approach contrasts with the popular notion of the singular or heroic leader, which is rarely effective over time. Instead, equity-focused leaders need colleagues who are similarly committed. Leadership teams that are focused on transformative systems change must be capable, cohesive, and equipped with the cognitive, relational, and strategic skills to be effective.

Four Routines for Equity-Focused Leadership Teams

Routine 1: Expand and Strengthen Relationships

When you build strong relationships across differences in race, disability, socioeconomic class, language, sex, gender, sexuality, and religion, you expose yourself to different ways of knowing and being in the world.

With this in mind, you should expand and strengthen key relationships—using the following four steps as your guide for getting started:

- Make relationships a top priority.
- Assume best intentions in your interactions and relationships.
- Allow time for people to share personal and professional stories.
- Commit to engage in conflict constructively.

Routine 2: Transform Use of Power

Transforming the use of power means moving from a hierarchical structure and punitive process to an inclusive, engaging, community-building process. It means shared power and ownership in who the team is and the work the team does. It requires that power be used equitably, humanely, for the right purposes, in the right ways, and toward the right ends.

Routine 3: Integrate Personal Experience with Systems and Trend Data

Routine 3 guides you in integrating your personal experience with systems and trend data. Doing so is important because sometimes personal experience contradicts trend data.

Routine 4: Assess the Credibility of Data

“Statistics can be used to prove anything—even the truth.” Your lenses, priorities, and access determine the types of data you get. Consider that for a moment. Are you seeking data that support your beliefs and assumptions, to prove what you already believe? Or are you seeking a robust understanding, such that you continue to assess data for their accuracy and completeness? Are you willing to have your mind changed? This is what we mean when we say, “Assess the credibility of data.”

Team Roles - We recommend that equity-focused leadership teams regularly attend to four roles: Educator, Leadership Practitioner, Equity Champion, and Decision Maker. The roles are ways of thinking about how you show up as an equity leader in various spaces and for what purpose.

Educator - We use the term educator to represent the idea that each person in a learning community is both teacher and learner. Remember, each individual in a classroom—adults and children—brings the capacity and the knowledge to teach others as well as the obligation to learn from them.

Leadership Practitioner - To be a Leadership Practitioner means to think of your leadership as a professional practice and to engage in regular, critical reflection to improve it.

Equity Champion - Equity Champions are individuals who

keep equity at the center of their decisions and advance equity through their micro and macro actions and interactions. Although this definition is concise, it is packed with meaning. Stepping into and maintaining the role of Equity Champion requires ongoing, continual, and long-term awareness and commitment.

Decision Maker - Leaders have profound responsibility in decision making. Inclusive decision-making processes are those that meaningfully and authentically involve the people closest to the problem in defining the problem and discerning the solution.

Practice IV: Building Equity-Focused Systems

Conducting a Needs Assessment

Across the many available equity-audit models, several steps are common: establishing an audit team, designing the audit, collecting data, analyzing the data, identifying strategic priorities, and developing action plans. Throughout each step, you also need an effective communication plan to inform those stakeholders who are not directly involved about what is going on, and to obtain permission and support as necessary.

Analyzing Data and Identifying Findings

Your data collection activities will produce an abundance of information. Once you have completed your data collection, it is time to organize and analyze that information. We cannot overstate how important it is that you learn from the data and then use your learning to generate new, improved equity-focused actions. Gathering information and then proceeding as though the effort had never taken place is damaging to school-community relationships and a leader's credibility as well as an extraordinary waste of precious resources.

In addition, as you begin the data analysis process, know that it takes a lot of time. You should spend at least as much time and effort, if not more, in the data analysis stage of your audit as you did on data collection. Accordingly, you need to plan processes that allow time for people to sit with the data, explore what the information means, and consider the why behind it.

A Framework for Designing Sustainable, Systemic, Equity-Focused Change

Once you have worked through a collaborative process to analyze your data, the next step is to consider how to turn

your insights and conclusions into a set of strategic priorities, an initial action plan, and a framework for ongoing equity-focused improvement. The equity audit data and analysis will most likely point to several areas needing improvement. Don't be discouraged if the list initially looks and feels insurmountable. No district can fix everything at once, so avoid feeling overwhelmed. Reference this quote from James Baldwin to maintain your motivation and inspire others: "Not everything that is faced can be changed, but nothing can be changed until it is faced."

Remember, change is difficult, and change for equity is far more challenging than other changes because it requires high levels of personal investment in areas that cause tension and discomfort.

Practice V: Sustaining Equity

We want to remind you of the courage and commitment it will take for you to sustain your equity leadership over time. Equity leadership is not for the faint of heart. Over the course of your career as an equity leader, at one time or another you may end up questioning almost everything you ever learned or believed. You may become incredibly discouraged when you realize how powerful systems of inequality really are; how deeply entrenched old habits can be even when they are clearly inequitable; how much neglect and harm is inflicted upon children and their families who are marginalized; how much you did not or do not yet know about race and racism, ableism, homophobia, or religious intolerance; how few are the authentic relationships—or even encounters—you have with people who are different from you.

You must not give up. We believe we will not reach the end of this work in our lifetimes—but that doesn't excuse us from committing our best efforts, skills, and assets to move it forward. As Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. said, "The arc of the universe is long, but it bends toward justice." Your job is to do as much as you can, as well as you can, for as long as you can. If we all do that, we will make significant progress.

Five Practices for Equity-Focused School Leadership



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Qualities of Effective Principals

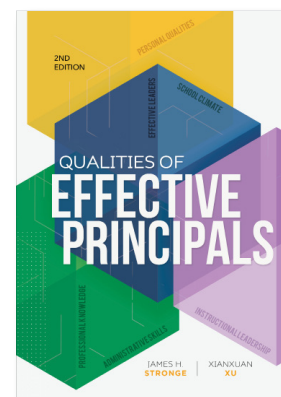
James H. Stronge and Xianxuan Xu

ASCD® LEADERSHIP SUMMARIES for EDUCATORS

Qualities of Effective Principals

2nd Edition

by **James H. Stronge and Xianxuan Xu**



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THE SUMMARY IN BRIEF

In the second edition of *Qualities of Effective Principals*, you'll find the research-backed qualities, skills, and capacities that help principals lead successful students, teachers, and schools, including instructional leadership, shaping school climate, human resource administration, teacher evaluation, organizational management, communication and community relations, and professionalism. Along the way, you'll discover the true depth of the role of a principal in student achievement.

Beyond safety, there are only two things that really count in schools and school leadership—teaching and learning, and supporting teaching and learning. It's not just principals who can benefit from the concepts found in this book. Other groups who can gain from these insights include assistant principals, administrators, staff development specialists, leadership coaches, human resource specialists, professors of educational leadership, and policymakers.

IN THIS SUMMARY, YOU WILL LEARN:

- The power of instructional leadership.
- How school climate and role modeling expand the role of principal into something transformative.
- How supporting staff help elevate principals and their schools.

Introduction

Do principals factor into student success? In *Qualities of Effective Principals, 2nd Edition*, we answer this question with a resounding yes! In fact, among school factors, the effect of principals is considered second only to that of teachers in facilitating student learning. Consequently, principals are expected to promote and develop the school vision, empowering stakeholders to build and maintain the conditions necessary for the success of all students. High-quality schools are characterized by high-quality principals. Without question, an effective principal is the key to a successful school, and principals are responsible for the overall functioning of their school. In their managerial role, they oversee the daily operations of schools. As instructional leaders, they direct and supervise the development, execution, assessment, and improvement of educational programs and activities in their schools. Principals' practices influence school conditions, teacher quality, instructional quality, and student achievement.

Without world-class principals, there will be no world-class schools. The 21st century has seen an array of tasks—school safety, crisis management, understanding and accommodating for increasingly diverse student populations, marketing, public relations, grantsmanship, data management, and technology—added to the repertoire of the principalship.

So, what makes great principals great? The nature of the principal's role has changed significantly in the past three decades, from primarily managerial to that of leading through quality instructional guidance and managerial responsibilities. Despite the recent emphasis on instructional leadership, principals remain responsible for traditional duties such as facility management, budgeting, school safety, and student discipline—tasks that continue to absorb a considerable amount of their time. Indeed, contemporary principals fulfill a wide array of responsibilities. Principals apply combinations of value-informed organizational, personal, and task-centered strategies in response to careful diagnosis of the situations or people they are trying to influence. In other words, principal effectiveness is highly contextual.

Considering the increasing number of responsibilities required of principals, it is not surprising to find that long hours are spent on the job. School principals work an average of 59 hours per week. Although it is generally agreed that the principal's role has evolved in recent years, there is no clear definition of that role and no method to balance the respon-

sibility of instructional leadership with important managerial and myriad other demands on their time. Given the competing demands for precious time, it is imperative not only that principals do their work well, but also that they do the right work. And to this end, effective principals understand that the core business of school is teaching and learning.

One essential ingredient for success in education or any business, for that matter, is effective leadership. If we are to succeed as an educational enterprise in a highly competitive world, then we must embrace leadership development—not in a cursory fashion, but rather in an ongoing, comprehensive, sustained manner.

What It Means to Be an Effective Principal

Focusing on what we know about effective principals, we attempt to capture what the best and most recent research tells us about the profile of an effective principal. Thus, we've summarized, in language as practical as possible, the findings about what good principals should know and be able to do. These eight chapters address the major qualities of principal effectiveness. The following sections provide an extensive review of the key roles and responsibilities of building-level school administrators, with the final section serving as a culmination of the previous chapters by exploring the direct and indirect effects of effective principals on school improvement and student success.

Instructional Leadership: Supporting Best Practice

Instructional leadership matters not only in addressing the challenges associated with national and state expectations, but also, and even more important, in achieving longer-term aims for student career and life outcomes. Principals play a leading role in creating engaging opportunities for students to develop the knowledge, skills, and attitudes necessary to thrive in an information economy and in diverse communities. Schools constitute an open system that is strongly influenced by their environment.

Essentially, schools are a microcosm of their communities. The global/local economy (a derivative of “think globally, act locally,” referring to the value of education on U.S. global competitiveness and the local impact of education) and society in the 21st century require younger generations

not just to succeed academically, establish paths toward their chosen careers, or be civically engaged, but rather build their capacity to achieve all of these goals.

Consequently, today's principals concentrate on building a vision for their schools; establishing learning communities; and ensuring the quality of curriculum, instruction, and assessment that are implemented in the school building with an eye on what is as well as what changes may come. Among other responsibilities, accomplishing these essential school improvement efforts requires gathering and analyzing data to determine needs and then monitoring instructional programs to determine if the identified needs are addressed. This chapter summarizes existing research related to instructional leadership and methods principals use to exhibit and harness that leadership to meet their school goals. In particular, we focus on the following key attributes:

- Building and sustaining a school vision.
- Monitoring and supporting instruction.
- Coordinating and supervising curriculum.
- Leading a learning community.
- Using data to make instructional decisions.

Nothing in the principal's role is more important for ensuring successful student learning than effective instructional leadership. Effective principals are not simply transformational leaders, developing vision and fostering goals, or good at day-to-day managerial tasks, such as budgeting, allocating materials, scheduling, and establishing procedures; rather, they are also solid and consistent instructional leaders. Effective principals demonstrate instructional leadership through supervising and supporting teachers, coordinating coherent instructional programs, and establishing a vibrant professional learning community. Combining these efforts with appropriate data use and regular monitoring of what takes place at the classroom level will increase the likelihood that schools will achieve their goals for student learning. Finally, the best principals know that effective leading, teaching, and learning are inseparable.

School Climate: The Heart of the School

It has often been said that one can tell the climate of a school simply by entering the building. How does the school feel? Are the school's vision, mission, and priorities

demonstrated clearly? Do administrators and staff efficiently ensure that effective teaching and learning are taking place? Are members of the school community treated with respect?

Is there a sense of pride in the school? Do staff members and stakeholders work as a team? Is there a robust professional learning community? What level of community involvement is evident? When all is said and done, is there a sense that this school is a great place to learn and work? These and many other factors coexist to form the climate of a school. So how does the principal influence all of these factors?

Although the influence of principals' leadership may be primarily indirect in nature, a significant way that principals exert their influence and affect schools is through forming and shaping the school climate. Simply put, when the principal facilitates a positive school climate, there is a positive impact on teaching and learning.

The needs of schools may vary, creating a need for differing types of leadership in different contexts, but the importance of a safe and positive learning environment in all schools remains central to school success. The school leader sets the tone for, nurtures, and sustains such an environment. To do so, the effective school leader must consistently model honesty, credibility, and trustworthiness to inspire the commitment of others. This requires the leader to demonstrate moral purpose, understanding of the change process, strength in relationship building, knowledge sharing, and the ability to provide coherence.

In an era of rapid change, the effective principal recognizes the desirability of involving stakeholders in school decision-making. This represents a paradigm in which the principal is no longer a larger-than-life figure, tackling the challenges of school leadership alone. The prevailing leadership mythology that generally embraces the unitary 'heroic' leadership model is unsustainable, unsupportable, and dangerous to individual and organizational health. Instead, through shared decision making with those in the school community, a culture of mutual responsibility is established that enhances student success. To this end, the effective principal helps create a shared vision and mission, cultivates a culture of trust, focuses on the right work, and develops other leaders within the school to promote sustainability.

Human Resource Administration: Recruiting, Selecting, Supporting, and Retaining High-Quality Teachers and Staff

A school's success is determined to a great extent by the effectiveness of its teachers: Great Teachers = Great Schools. One important lesson learned from the extant research is that recruitment and selection efforts have to work hand in hand with retention efforts. Schools that aim to make teaching a more attractive profession target recruitment and retention simultaneously, which helps build and sustain a stronger teacher workforce.

We learned that although competitive salaries and financial incentives help, teachers are drawn primarily to schools by other factors, such as by high-quality principals who are good instructional leaders, colleagues who are like minded and committed to the same goals, good teaching conditions, and opportunities to learn and grow as professionals. Schools that nurture core values and a culture aligned with these factors have a better chance of attracting high-quality and committed teachers. And of keeping them!

When done well, successful recruitment improves results in terms of providing a diverse and rich candidate pool. The next focal problem is how to maximize our ability to select the most effective candidates from the applicant pool. Challenges in identifying effective educators during the hiring process become more acute because, historically, we have tended to conduct hiring with instruments and processes that have low validity and reliability. In the absence of structure to ensure that administrators and teams involved in the hiring process and decision share a common vision for teachers they hire, a hiring process becomes a subjective and biased act, resulting in less optimal decisions.

Teacher effectiveness is a multifaceted concept, incorporating all aspects of the teacher, from personality to professional knowledge to technical skills. If we want success in hiring high-quality teacher applicants, it is of supreme importance to identify the qualities that really matter in an educator's effectiveness and purposefully look for those qualities during the hiring process. Schools can find the best employees by making hiring decisions through the lens of "effectiveness" in two areas of research—focusing on what makes an effective teacher (or other employee) and research-guided processes to make the selection process more effective. When the hiring processes delineated in this chapter are applied properly, administrators are in a better position to make

high-quality, evidence-based decisions in the screening and selection processes.

In the final analysis, here is a simple way to think about making the final decision of offering a job to a teacher: If given a choice, would I want my child in this classroom? We should be able to answer 'yes' to this question every time we make a hiring decision!

Retention is another key to maintaining the right mix of rich, diverse, novice, and experienced, effective teachers. Since retirement accounts for only a small proportion of all teacher attrition, stemming the attrition of early and mid-career teachers is essential to reduce turnover and address teacher shortages. Teachers, in general, cite social and economic reasons for leaving schools—for example, low salaries, inadequate housing, a lack of support in the school, a lack of resources, poor facilities, student discipline issues, poor school leadership, a lack of professional development opportunities, not being involved in decision-making, not being recognized and respected as professionals, large class sizes, a lack of parental involvement, and a lack of opportunities for advancement. Schools can turn some of these shortcomings into strengths and, by marketing the strengths well, the schools will be more attractive to applicants. Thus, the reasons why teachers leave can be leveraged to attract new hires.

We need a comprehensive and strategic approach to make teaching a rewarding profession. A holistic approach should include competitive pay and better principal leadership and administrative support, high-quality induction and mentoring programs, more parental involvement, increased teacher recognition and autonomy, more opportunities for leadership roles, better classroom resources, opportunities for collaboration, and stronger school cultures where teachers can grow and advance as professionals. If we insist on high-quality learning for our students, teachers' pay and working conditions would have to rise, and rise significantly, so that the smartest and brightest will select and stay in the teaching profession.

Teacher Evaluation: Assessing Instructional Quality

Program and personnel evaluations are some of the most powerful tools for school improvement and effectiveness that principals have at their fingertips. Strategic plans, mission statements, and school improvement plans are important

documents for defining current priorities and future goals, but they are not sufficient. High-quality people are needed to implement those plans and programs, make improvements, and work toward fulfilling the school's mission. No school or program is better than the people who deliver its services. Both programs and the people responsible for implementing them must be assessed on a regular basis to maintain and improve performance. Evaluation, therefore, is an essential activity for the principal of a successful school.

A high-quality teacher evaluation system improves the quality of instruction by, first and foremost, supporting teacher growth and success and, second, by ensuring accountability for classroom performance and teacher effectiveness. However, accountability is not enough. A meaningful evaluation empowers both teachers and leaders to recognize, appreciate, value, and develop excellent teaching and, ultimately, to optimize student learning and growth.

Too frequently, the key human resource functions are misaligned: One department is responsible for teacher recruitment, overseeing interviews and data review for recommending hiring decisions; another department directs the professional development program for teachers; and, finally, principals in the building are responsible for teacher evaluation.

To exacerbate the misalignment of the recruitment-selection-development connection, the teacher can be hired based on one set of criteria and evaluated later using a totally different set of performance standards than those used for the hiring decision. This human capital management process is disjointed, confusing, wasteful, and, ultimately, ineffective. However, if the standards we hire for are the same standards we develop for and evaluate for, then all human resource functions—recruitment, selection, induction, development, evaluation, and support—are properly aligned. It is important to understand that alignment increases the possibility of hiring, developing, evaluating, supporting, and keeping the best teachers possible.

Organizational Management: Building a Foundation for Teaching and Learning

Organizational management is a crucial role for principals. After all, schools must first and foremost be safe and positive places for students and staff. That is an important antecedent of academic achievement and the foundation of effective schools. Effective management is a necessary

component in high-quality schools, and principals with strong managerial skills are more likely to create a culture of continuous instructional improvement.

In the past quarter-century, the responsibilities of school administrators have changed dramatically, from building manager to instructional leader—and more. Although the expectations have shifted to encompass the leadership role, the managerial tasks required of school leaders have not diminished—and may also affect student learning. Today's principalship requires a dynamic combination of management, leadership, technical, and interpersonal skills. Effective principals foster high-quality teaching and learning through supporting, managing, and overseeing the school's organization, operation, and use of resources. Effective school leaders are master diagnosticians, facilitators, and collaborators who work with those in the school community to obtain resources, monitor progress, and continually improve teaching and learning.

The principal's role is evolving rapidly, requiring skills that may bear little resemblance to those learned in school leadership preparation programs. It is a job that is never finished, requiring lifelong learning, the ability to manage continual change, and tolerance of ambiguity. More than ever, it is evident that one person cannot do it all: Effective principals must share the many responsibilities of the role with those in the school community.

Communication and Community Relations: Working with Internal and External Constituencies

Schools are never an island unto themselves; rather, they exist within dynamic, changing social systems. Thus, it is essential that schools function internally and externally with an understanding that their functions and communication will interact with and affect the entire school community. Additionally, to adapt to constant and increasing global change, it is essential to involve stakeholders to make necessary improvements. Strong community relations involve purposeful, schoolwide efforts, but staff members' personal relationships with colleagues, students, parents, and the larger community are also a critical part of the principal's job.

Unfortunately, the importance of effective communication can be taken for granted or even neglected. When a breakdown in communication occurs with any constituency, it is always to the detriment of the school and its students. Thus, it

is critical for principals to communicate effectively with both internal and external constituents. The world outside schools is changing rapidly; consequently, it takes positive, effective, and ongoing communication to meet the challenges associated with preparing students to enter this changing world.

Professionalism and the Principal: Making a Difference in the Educational Community

How should principals balance the competing demands for their time and attention? In brief, the answer is consistent with professional standards and ethical behavior. How principals do their work is vitally important; results count, but so does the manner in which principals carry out their duties in this complex, demanding, and even occasionally overwhelming job. To be successful, principals must understand that they are the public image of their schools and, as such, are role models to their students, staff, and community. Thus, professionalism is paramount in the principalship.

The Ultimate Challenge: The Principal's Role in Student Achievement

So, why does the enterprise of schooling exist? And why do we have school principals, assistant principals, teachers, counselors, and other important staff members? The answer, most simply, is the students. Our mission—from

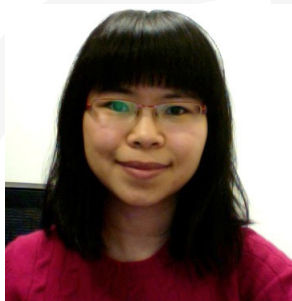
beginning to end—is about students. If this claim is true, then it is imperative that the principal makes a difference in the quality of teaching and learning in the school and, ultimately, in the quality of students' lives.

In the final analysis, does it matter whether effective principals influence student achievement directly or indirectly, as long as they have a positive effect on student learning? The important point, for both research and practice, is to understand the ways and means by which principals influence their schools and their educational programs. Without effective principals, we cannot possibly have effective schools. For effective principals, all the funds they receive and spend, all the resources they allocate, every employee they hire—indeed, everything they do—is about the students.

Examining school leadership can be a soul-searching process. Schools are about improving the lives of young people. Until students succeed, we don't succeed. If our students can't read; aren't adept with science, technology, engineering, and math; don't have an appreciation of the arts; and lack an appreciation of who they are, how can they continue to develop and participate in a democratic society? School reform, high-quality schools, and student success start with the principal. No effective principals, no effective schools. It's that simple.



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· Book 15 of 20 ·

School Leader's Guide to Tackling Attendance Challenges

Jessica Sprick, Randy Sprick

ASCD[®] LEADERSHIP SUMMARIES for EDUCATORS

School Leader's Guide to Tackling Attendance Challenges

by **Jessica Sprick, Randy Sprick**



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THE SUMMARY IN BRIEF

School Leader's Guide to Tackling Attendance Challenges advocates a shift in both mindset and strategies to address absenteeism. First, increasing student attendance is a goal that is absolutely within reach for school systems. This shift in mindset is essential so that educators do not abdicate responsibility or believe that attendance is a problem they have no control over. Schools where chronic absenteeism is a significant problem have expressed surprise that relatively simple strategies make such a huge difference in improving attendance across the whole student body.

The strategies in this book summary advocate focus on moving away from solely punitive and reactive approaches to absenteeism. Instead, it looks to apply multi-tiered approaches that are being used to improve behavioral and academic systems of support in schools across the United States.

IN THIS SUMMARY, YOU WILL LEARN HOW TO:

- How to build an effective school team to address absenteeism.
- How to create systems to collect accurate data and set priorities.
- How to develop an attendance initiative that generates student enthusiasm as well as staff, parent, and community support.
- How to design and implement strategies that are tailored to specific school-wide concerns and demographics that reach all students.

Introduction

For students to be successful in school, they have to actually be in school. Despite the obvious nature of this statement, far too many students miss too much school, and student absenteeism has been largely overlooked in school and district efforts to improve student outcomes. Fortunately, that situation is rapidly changing.

In the past decade, a movement has been building to research and address chronic absenteeism (defined in this book as missing 10 percent of school days for any reason—excused absence, unexcused absence, suspension). The strong correlations and negative effects associated with chronic absence have led to increased attention from schools, districts, and state and federal policymakers, and a host of new initiatives are being implemented to improve student attendance. This book provides a comprehensive framework as well as concrete and practical strategies to guide your team in addressing this critical issue.

Tackling school-wide attendance requires a paradigm shift in how we conceptualize the problem and implement prevention and intervention efforts to deal with chronic absence.

Within the field of education, a vast body of research provides information about best practices for changing student behavior. Evidence-based approaches such as Positive Behavioral Interventions and Supports (PBIS) and Functional Behavioral Assessment (FBA) may be more effective in changing student behavior than traditional reactive and punitive models like the truancy court example just described. The model of absenteeism prevention and intervention developed by our company, Safe & Civil Schools, takes what we already know about changing any problematic behavior (e.g., disruptive or defiant behavior) and applies it to address absenteeism. Some of the key components of this model include the following:

- A belief that behavior can be changed
- An increased focus on prevention and proactive measures
- An understanding that our efforts should attempt as much as possible to address causes of the problematic behavior

The Safe & Civil Schools approach applies a Multitiered System of Support (MTSS) model to address attendance and truancy problems in school. This model focuses on creating a continuum of support that ensures that no student

falls through the cracks. In an MTSS approach, a team tailors the intensity of services provided to the intensity of student need; no student receives more individualized services than he or she needs, and no student with a need for support goes unidentified or underserved.

For far too long, attendance was viewed as something that was beyond a school's control: "It's a parent problem" or "She's just unmotivated, so there's really nothing we can do to make her come to school." However, emerging research and the experiences that we've had working with schools to implement positive, proactive, and multitiered approaches to absenteeism issues have shown us that this issue is far from beyond schools' control. In fact, schools have great power to effect positive change. When all members of the school community work together to create a culture of attendance, the results can be immense.

Understanding the Stakes: Why We Should Address Chronic Absence

Until recently, it was unclear how widespread chronic absence was in schools across the United States. Based on data from six states that calculated and reported rates of chronic absence, Balfanz and Byrnes (2012) estimated that 10 to 15 percent of students, or roughly 5 to 7.5 million students, were chronically absent. The 2013–2014 data set from the U.S. Department of Education Office for Civil Rights (2016) was the first to report nationwide absence rates. These data indicated that approximately 14 percent of the student population—more than 6.5 million students—missed 15 days or more of school. Although this threshold is slightly lower than the 18 days of absence across a school year that is typically used to identify chronic absentees, it clearly indicates that far too many students are missing critical amounts of school.

Negative Academic Outcomes

Poorer student performance due to absenteeism begins as early as kindergarten and extends across grades, creating a cumulative effect. Each successive year of chronic absenteeism is related to significant and compounded risk of reduced learning (Chang & Romero, 2008; Easton & Englehard, 1982; Ehrlich, Gwynne, Pareja, & Allensworth, 2013). Research has also consistently identified chronic absenteeism as one of the strongest predictors of dropping out of school—stronger even than suspensions, test scores, and being older than peers (Byrnes & Reyna, 2012).

Problems with Behavior and Social-Emotional Aspects of School

Students may act out due to frustration. Falling behind in their classes due to absenteeism can lead to a dangerous pattern of negative behavior and exclusion. Picture the following vicious cycle: A student acts out due to frustration with academic or social difficulties in classes. If the behavior is serious, it leads to exclusion from class and school activities. The student's absence leads to further frustration upon the student's return to class or school, which can then perpetuate the cycle of exclusion. In many cases, frustration can lead to more withdrawal and absences from school (Finn, 1989).

Negative Behaviors and Activities Outside School

Students exhibit higher rates of involvement in delinquent and other risk-taking behavior and are at increased risk for involvement in the criminal justice system. Chronic absenteeism is linked to increased crime and delinquency (Dalun et al., 2010; Farrington, 1996; Loeber & Farrington, 2000). Students who are chronically absent are also more likely to engage in risky behaviors, such as use of drugs and alcohol, early sexual experiences, and gang activity (Dryfoos, 1990; Garry, 1996; Hallfors et al., 2002; Henry & Huizinga, 2007).

Building an Effective Team

Everyone in a school community has a stake in improving attendance and thus has a role to play in helping students and families achieve this goal. Rather than relegating the job to an attendance clerk or a counselor, this book highlights the importance of a team-led approach. In this section, we describe how to build an effective team that will analyze attendance data and disseminate information and resources to all staff and other members of your school community. When everyone does a little to tackle the issue, schools find that the onus on any individual staff member is significantly reduced, cultural change begins to occur, and schoolwide attendance improves.

Consider whether universal attendance issues can reasonably be addressed by a Positive Behavioral Intervention and Supports (PBIS) team, a Multitiered System of Support (MTSS) team, or some other existing team, or whether a new team should be formed. When a team is already well established and functions to tackle school priorities, it might be reasonable to add absenteeism to its responsibilities. However, if existing teams are at or beyond their capacity with current responsibilities, or if absenteeism is pervasive, it may be necessary to form a task force within an existing

team or an entirely new team.

As much as possible, the team should include members from across the school staff, including the following:

- In a large school, at least one building leader (e.g., principal, assistant principal, dean); in a smaller school with only one administrator, a lead teacher or a department head
- Interventionists, especially those who deal with attendance or related issues (e.g., counselor, social worker, school psychologist, behavior interventionist)
- Several teachers, from both general education and special education
- School resource officer or campus security officer
- Attendance clerk or other classified staff member in charge of attendance data

Creating Systems to Regularly Collect Data and Set Priorities

In this section, we clarify definitions and methods for collecting data that you can use to identify schoolwide rates of problematic absenteeism as well as to identify individual students who require support. We also provide examples of data that you can collect to help determine priorities for prevention and intervention in your school and provide suggestions for when to collect different types of attendance data.

The procedures may seem complicated, but your school or district likely has an attendance clerk who will have some knowledge about how to pull data from your school information system. If your attendance clerk is not familiar with how to compile the recommended reports, contact the information system operators and request information on how to gather necessary data.

In the last 20 years, researchers and school professionals have attempted to determine critical thresholds, or red flags, that indicate when a student's absenteeism could be viewed as highly problematic and a likely route to failure and dropping out of school. The following individualized metrics—which should be calculated using a combination of unexcused absences, excused absences, and suspensions—have emerged as critical indicators:

- Regular Attendance: Absent 5 percent or less
- At-Risk Attendance: Absent 5.1–9.9 percent

- Chronic Absence: Absent 10 percent or more
- Severe Chronic Absence: Absent 20 percent or more

Good work in schools starts with good data, and attendance data are an important tool to guide school improvement efforts. Now that you are collecting and analyzing attendance data regularly, the fun work of strategy implementation begins. The following sections offer universal strategies that you can use to inform, motivate, and reduce barriers to attendance throughout the school community. In discussing these universal strategies, one school practitioner informed us that “this work is the most gratifying work I’ve done in over 20 years in the field, and it has so much power to make a difference.”

Engaging and Supporting Staff in Attendance Efforts

To build a culture of attendance in your school, it is important for every staff member—including administrative, certified, and classified staff—to feel a sense of purpose and pride in implementing strategies to improve attendance. Although the attendance team will guide implementation efforts, your teaching staff will have the primary role in selling those efforts to your students and families. Therefore, staff buy-in is critical. There are key principles that will help you with engaging staff in attendance efforts, ensuring that they have a voice in the improvement process, and supporting them in implementing and maintaining your attendance initiative.

At the outset of the attendance initiative, allocate professional development time to work with staff so that they understand the negative effects of absenteeism on your school. Many staff members have probably heard or thought about the effects on academic outcomes; however, many have probably not thought about the range of other problems that may occur when students are frequently absent. Staff members may be reluctant to participate in planned lessons, motivational systems, or other activities if they simply view this work as a top-down initiative that will not greatly improve outcomes for their students or their own job satisfaction. Get staff members asking, “What can we all do to tackle this critical issue?”

Creating and Sustaining an Attendance Campaign

One definition of campaign in the Merriam-Webster

Dictionary is “a connected series of operations designed to bring about a particular result.” The work you do to create a culture of attendance in your school can be viewed as an ongoing campaign with connected operations, including initial efforts to build enthusiasm and momentum and continued efforts to sustain the active engagement of all stakeholders in the goal of improving attendance. In this section we describe strategies for kicking off an attendance initiative and methods for keeping up the momentum across years through motivational systems and ongoing communication.

Kick Off the Attendance Campaign

After conducting activities to get all staff members on board, consider how best to launch the attendance campaign with students, families, and community members. Work to generate excitement and interest. We suggest a twostage process. First, to create enthusiasm, develop a title or slogan. Then, to announce the title or slogan, launch an official campaign, which can include strategies such as classroom kickoffs, publicity at back-to-school or parent nights, and other strategies described in this section.

All kickoff strategies should share the rationale for why attendance is essential for success in school and in life and present information on the critical goal of regular attendance (missing 5 percent or fewer school days) and avoiding chronic absence (missing 10 percent or more school days). The more times and ways in which you share information about the attendance campaign, the more likely you are to create the momentum needed to change the culture of attendance in your school.

Sustain the Attendance Campaign

To create a culture of attendance, it is important to engage in regular efforts to highlight the goal of regular attendance and help all stakeholders understand ways in which they can support students to attend regularly. Communication can range from regularly posting schoolwide data on a website or school newsletter, sending out information through social media, asking community stakeholders to put up posters in the community, and connecting with local news and radio agencies to see if they can send out periodic Public Service Announcements (PSAs). Consider ways to engage community leaders, such as medical and dental providers, after-school programs and club, local politicians or religious leaders, and any cultural icons in your area to create partnerships in messaging and supporting students to attend school regularly.

Teaching Students About the Importance of Regular Attendance

Why should we teach students about the importance of regular attendance? The answer is simple: doing so is easy, it's cheap, and it may significantly reduce the problem! Many students simply do not understand that their attendance is a critical factor that can influence their success or failure in class, in school, and in their jobs or career. In a survey of students in grades 8 through 12 who reported skipping school a few times a month or more, only 18 percent of students believed it was "very likely" that they would personally fall behind in their classes if they skipped once a week (Get Schooled Foundation, 2012).

Many students do not understand that only two days a month could set them on a path toward dropping out. Brundage, Castillo, and Batsche (2017) found that only 43 percent of students who were chronically absent recalled or reported levels of absenteeism that would place them in the Chronic Absence category, indicating that many chronically absent students may not know they have problematic levels of absenteeism. In addition, 55.2 percent of chronically absent students believed they had levels of absence similar to those of their peers, overestimating other students' levels of absenteeism.

There are two strategies for teaching students about the importance of regular attendance.

- Teach formal lessons about attendance
- Informally emphasize attendance when possible

When used together, they can be quite effective. Consider how to distribute lessons across the year and in subsequent years so that the attendance initiative and the school's goals for regular attendance for all students remain relevant across time. Also consider ways to reenergize staff to informally emphasize the importance of attendance with students (and families) throughout the school year. Note that information that is taught in formal lessons and informally emphasized with students throughout the year should also be conveyed to families.

Enhancing Family and Community Involvement

Absenteeism is not a problem that schools can tackle alone. Because the negative effects have an impact on all stakeholders, building a culture of attendance requires the

combined efforts of everyone, including families and community members.

Many educators feel helpless when it comes to addressing attendance issues because they view it as primarily a parent problem that they have limited power to change. Our work with schools has shown us that most parents simply have no idea how important regular attendance is for the success of their students, and that simple strategies can go a long way to change the behavior of many parents.

Consider how best to generate enthusiasm within the parent population of your school. Use multiple formats and methods to connect with families, and as much as possible, provide materials in families' first languages. You might make a presentation about your attendance campaign for back-to-school night, publish a feature story in the school newspaper, and send home letters introducing the attendance campaign. As the year progresses, parents should receive regular communication from the school, including information about the overall attendance for the student body and their child's attendance. Provide increased communication emphasizing the importance of attendance leading up to predictably problematic times of year such as the week before and week after winter and spring break. Regular communication can also be designed to provide strategies for addressing common issues that contribute to absenteeism such as tips on technology and social media use, sleep habits, managing anxiety, and creating effective bedtime and morning routines.

Just as students and staff may be encouraged by acknowledgement as they work on improving attendance, parents often benefit from similar efforts. Consider ways to thank families for their collective efforts to build a culture of attendance such as holding a celebration, providing intermittent incentives (e.g., \$10 gas or grocery gift card, free drink coupon at local coffee shop, or free admission to a local attraction) for families whose students maintain regular attendance or demonstrate improved attendance. Many community leaders and organizations are willing to partner with schools to educate students and families and provide incentives.

Implementing Tailored Strategies to Address Schoolwide Priorities

Although individual schools may select different individual strategies, the general procedures and implementation considerations remain largely the same. The approaches in this

sec are different because those adopted may vary widely by district and by school, depending on the specific causes of absenteeism. What may work to address absenteeism issues in a school in rural Wyoming is vastly different from what may work in urban Chicago or Los Angeles. Even within a district, schools may identify different causes of absenteeism and so require tailored approaches.

In this section we describe common causes of absenteeism. Some of these causes may seem outside the realm of what the school can influence. However, for each cause there are things that schools can do that have been demonstrated to make a positive difference in getting more students to attend regularly.

Causes of absenteeism can be broken down in many different ways. For the purposes of this book, we define five broad categories:

- Lack of understanding about the importance of attendance (e.g., parents or students don't recognize the negative effects of absenteeism, the school does not place overt emphasis on the importance of attendance)
- Barriers to attendance (e.g., illness, dental problems, mental health issues, transportation problems, financial issues such as food insecurity or inadequate access to clean clothes, obligations outside of school such as caring for younger children)
- Escape or avoidance (e.g., avoiding stress and frustration related to academic deficits, lagging social skills, or inadequate coping skills, escaping conflict with peers or staff members or bullying situations, or avoiding uncomfortable situations in school such as highly punitive, unsafe, or chaotic environments, or avoiding boredom and lack of engagement)
- Desire to obtain or access something outside school (e.g., peer or adult attention, access to tangible items like technology or food, or access to activities like unsupervised time and gang activity or illicit substances)
- Lack of value placed on school (e.g., while a parent, culture, or community values education, they may not view school as valuable or systemic societal messages indicate school does not serve certain students).

While some causes may seem outside of the realm of what the school can influence, for each cause, there are things schools can do to make positive differences in getting more students to attend regularly. For example, the CDC reports that over 6 million children have asthma and that it is one of

the leading illness-related reasons—barriers that causes students to miss school. Schools working to address asthma-related absences have reported strategies such as determining how to reduce pollutants at school, monitoring air pollution levels and providing alternate indoor activities, partnering with the community to provide air purifiers and humidifiers in classrooms, and working with community agencies to ensure students who have asthma are linked with proper care.

Analyzing and Revising Attendance Policies

As your school continues to build a culture of attendance through strategies discussed in earlier sections, begin to analyze school and district policies to determine if they are aligned with your attendance initiative. Attendance policies often reflect a traditional approach, which is highly reactive and punitive, focusing solely on the metric of truancy (unexcused absence). Consider how you can revise attendance policies to reflect the school's goal of regular attendance for all students and to provide relevant information to families and students on how your school will monitor and address attendance concerns. In addition, recognize that attendance challenges are not static; new student populations and unforeseen changes might alter overall attendance rates, requiring school leadership and staff to be flexible. Every year, reflect on whether policies are appropriately designed to bolster your attendance initiative and help prevent the majority of attendance problems from occurring. Districts should conduct a formal analysis of policies every three to five years, using a team of representatives of key stakeholders (e.g., district administrators, building administrators, teachers, interventionists, and family and community partners).

Follow standard school and district procedures for assessing policy recommendations and making changes based on board approval or other required procedures. As policy changes are being reviewed and approved, create a plan for how any new policies will be taught to and reviewed with staff, students, and families. Also plan how to update any relevant documents (e.g., student handbook, school website, staff handbook) to reflect policy changes.

Designing and Implementing Effective Early-Stage Intervention Approaches

Once your school has implemented effective universal prevention procedures at Tier 1, you can begin to identify

students with more resistant attendance problems. Some of these students may have shown no improvement with universal procedures such as lessons and motivational systems. Others may have responded initially—their attendance improved for a short time and then began to decline again. These students require something more to sustain regular attendance patterns.

Relatively simple interventions should be tried first before moving to interventions that require more time and resources. Because classroom teachers are the primary staff who interact with students, it is beneficial to create time and resources for teachers to take the lead in the earliest stages of addressing an attendance problem. Whenever a student has been absent several days in a row or is identified as having a problematic pattern across several months, have teachers contact families to discuss the problem, using welcoming and supportive language. Teachers or other staff might also implement a planned discussion, such as a focused meeting between a staff member and student at a time free from distractions and interruptions. This meeting can emphasize the importance of attendance, convey the seriousness of the problem, and show students that the teacher notices and cares when they are absent. During the meeting, the teacher and student can brainstorm actions that the student or staff can do to support the student and resolve attendance concerns.

As concerns persist, implement targeted Tier 2 supports that can be implemented quickly (within three to five days) once the need is identified. Examples of Tier 2 interventions include Check-In Check Out (daily progress

monitoring), self-monitoring of attendance in an advisory or homeroom class, or using mentoring interventions to connect each chronically absent student with a supportive and caring staff member. The mentoring intervention can be designed to address underlying causes of absenteeism by helping the student complete academic work, problem-solving transportation issues, or simply increasing the student's connectedness to school.

Conclusion

We strongly believe that attendance is a critical variable that schools must address. Although schools have many priorities to tackle, attendance is critical for student success, and if students are not in school, no other priority, initiative, or strategy can realize its full potential. Schools simply cannot ignore patterns of absenteeism. For students to be successful in school, they first have to be in school. For academic and behavioral initiatives to be successful, students have to be present enough to benefit from those efforts. We hope that the strategies and resources in this summary have motivated you to tackle absenteeism and have given you the tools you need to build and support a schoolwide culture of attendance.



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So Each May Soar

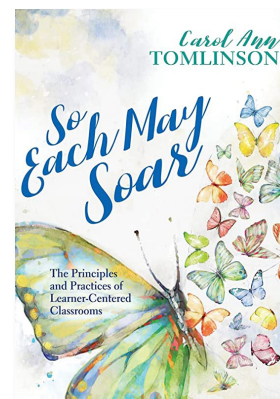
Carol Ann Tomlinson

ASCD® LEADERSHIP SUMMARIES for EDUCATORS

So Each May Soar

The Principles and Practices of Learner-Centered Classrooms

by **Carol Ann Tomlinson**



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THE SUMMARY IN BRIEF

So Each May Soar illuminates the next step in the education revolution— creating learner-centered classrooms that empower every student to gain a deeper and more lasting understanding of the content they study themselves, the people around them, and the world as a whole. This summary will help readers envision learner-centered classrooms that each child truly deserves, and discover that such classrooms are within reach at any institution.

There are four primary principles of learner-centered classrooms— establishing a positive learning environment, crafting curriculum with the right goals in mind, using formative assessment effectively, and crafting instruction that taps into student curiosity and interest, calls on students to build on what they know to solve meaningful problems, and fosters the type of deep thinking that has been proven to have lasting benefits for the learning.

IN THIS SUMMARY, YOU WILL LEARN HOW TO:

- What it means for teachers to honor themselves, each learner, and the content they teach.
- How to shape a curriculum that ignites students' imaginations and drives discovery.
- How to guide classroom experiences that draw on and develop the strengths and interests of each learner.
- How to use curriculum, assessment, and instruction to support both equity and excellence.
- Concerns and demographics that reach all students.

Introduction

This book is about creating classrooms that are intentionally and persistently designed with students at the center of thinking, planning, implementing plans, reflecting, and revising. It explores:

- What it means to honor each learner.
- What it looks like and accomplishes when teachers create communities of learners that help young people to develop intellectual, affective, and social attributes that are likely contributors to their own success and to the success of a free society.
- What it entails to envision curriculum that captures the imagination of learners and contributes to their willingness—even eagerness—to pursue content that reflects the wisdom and practicality of being human.
- What it looks like when assessment becomes a process for revealing a learner's growth to both the teacher and to that learner in ways that support each learner's growth.
- What it means to create learning opportunities that develop the mind of each learner in accordance with that learner's unique circumstances.

The book is also about:

- What it asks of teachers to lead classrooms that use our best knowledge of teaching and learning to shine the light of hope and promise on each young person in our care.
- Why equity of access to excellent learning opportunities is an imperative in our schools.
- How each of the key classroom elements—learning environment, curriculum, assessment, and instruction—appropriately shaped, contributes to both an ethic and practice of equity and excellence.

In sum, then, the book is about putting students at the center of classrooms where quality practice provides a trustworthy foundation for helping young people grow consistently toward a better understanding of themselves, others, and the world they are inheriting. It is about humanizing classrooms for every young learner who is more or less compelled to spend year after year in our company.

From Standardized to Learner-Centered

Nearly three decades ago, politicians raised the banner of a nation at risk, asserting that mediocre classrooms imperiled student learning. They proposed to address this problem by requiring annual student testing as a mechanism for improving the quality of teaching and learning.

Teachers have persisted on that course ever since, subscribing to the idea that the only way to measure a child's knowledge is through prepackaged, high-stakes tests that, in the end, have undermined teachers' autonomy; de-professionalized the teaching field; and left students of color, students from low-income communities, and students with significant learning challenges in the crosshairs of projected inferiority. (Love, 2020). These students persistently see themselves and their peers referenced as bottom-quartile scorers, regularly find themselves grouped with other low-scoring students, and experience curriculum that almost inevitably ensures that they will remain in the ranks of low test-scorers. Love poses a question that educators should not ignore: How does a student feel like he or she matters to a country and a system that measures knowledge against a gap it has created?

So where do we go from here? One possibility, of course, is that we continue on this path that requires us as teachers to leave their professional judgment and ingenuity in the parking lot when they enter the school building and sprint through increasing mounds of often-meaningless content handed to them in teacher-proof formats and pacing guides designed for coverage rather than for student learning. Notably, it's a path that requires students to continue to measure their worth in test scores rather than in possibilities and dreams realized.

This book offers an alternative: refocusing our vision and energies to place students, rather than test scores, in the center of the work we do and working to ensure that the fundamental elements in student-centered classrooms reflect our best knowledge of quality educational practice. With those two goals to guide us, we would consistently grow our capacity to teach in ways most likely to humanize learning, to engage young people with the power of learning and their power as learners, and to prepare them for the world in which they live now and will live in the future. Toward that end, this book is a guide for creating learner-centered classrooms.

What Learner-Centeredness Is— And Is Not

Educators are obligated to ensure that each of the young people in their care is well-equipped for a meaningful, productive, and satisfying life, both during and after their “formal” education. This statement does not imply preference for certain post-graduation pursuits, occupations, or lifestyles. (People find meaning, make contributions to the welfare of others, and feel fulfilled through a great variety of paths.) Instead, it asserts that educators bear responsibility for preparing young people to pursue and maintain the positive life they choose. The statement does not suggest that teachers and schools bear full responsibility for such an outcome. It does, however, represent the view that schools and teachers have significant opportunity and responsibility to support young people in acquiring the knowledge, skills, and other resources that will allow them to build healthy lives, strong families, and become productive, contributing members of their community.

Learner-centered classrooms are—or should be—catalysts for creating places where young people and their teachers have space and opportunity to spread their wings. These classrooms are—or should be—designed to increase voice, autonomy, and agency for young learners and for the people who teach them. This is the core of the “why” of learner-centeredness.

If the “why” of learner-focused instruction is providing young people with the opportunities, resources, and support necessary to help them build a sound foundation for meaningful and productive lives, both present and future, then what is the “what” of learner-centeredness?

Fundamentally, learner-centeredness encompasses beliefs about and approaches to instruction that place students and their needs at the heart of teaching and learning. Teachers who practice learner-centeredness ask themselves, In what ways can I help each of my students most fully develop cognitively, affectively, and socially? or, from a slightly different perspective, How can I create an environment and learning opportunities through which my students and I can work together to help each of us, and all of us, build strong lives?

Learner-centeredness is rooted in the reality that meaningful learning about any aspect of life generally results from the learner’s active participation rather than passive receptivity. Thus, learner-centered classrooms are designed to engage students actively in their own growth and devel-

opment and to ensure that what students learn endures and serves them well throughout their lives.

The Learner-Centered Teacher

Placing the student at the core of classroom decisions and processes, which is the essence of learner-centered teaching, is challenging because it asks us to make a major shift in classroom roles and structures. We’re asked to turn away from an arrangement in which we are the power source toward one in which we intentionally and widely share power with our students. Making that transition is perplexing for many teachers because it’s so different from the idea of school most of us experienced in our own educational journeys, and because top-down mandates have provided teachers little opportunity to entertain student-centered philosophy and practice.

Teachers affect learners and learning. There’s no surprise in that statement. And sadly, there are as many teachers who have a significantly negative impact on students’ learning as there are who have a significantly positive impact (Hattie, 2012). As it turns out, the school a student attends is not nearly as important a factor in that student’s success as whose classroom the student is in. Wiliam (2011) notes that of all the factors that might contribute to student growth, “the only thing that really matters is the quality of the teacher”.

The goal here is to explore teachers’ personal and professional beliefs and practices that are foundational to effective student-centered planning and teaching.

Here’s where teachers can start:

- Establish a positive learning environment that leads to a strong team or community of learners and that operates with a balance of flexibility and stability necessary to foster students’ cognitive, affective, and social development.
- Craft curriculum that feels engaging and relevant to the full scope of learners in a classroom while building a solid understanding of the nature, intent, and fundamentals of the disciplines in which the curriculum is rooted.
- Use formative assessment, both formal and informal, to understand the cognitive, affective, and social growth of each learner in order to plan for and support that learner’s development in those three domains, and to help each learner understand and promote his or her own growth in those three areas as well.

- Craft instruction that focuses students on the critical knowledge, understanding, and skill that characterize a topic and discipline, tap into student curiosity and interest, call on students to use what they learn to address meaningful issues or problems, foster deep thinking, and help students develop a strong individual voice and a commitment to doing quality work.

However, modes of operation are nothing without an ethical compass.

A baseline principle of ethics is that people in positions of power must align their actions with the interests of stakeholders or anyone whose welfare is, to some degree, in the hands of the person who holds sway over them. Lorna Earl (2003), a noted Canadian educator, translates that principle directly into teaching when she says, “Teachers’ overriding moral purpose is to meet the needs of students, even when it conflicts with personal preferences”.

Key ethical concepts for teachers include:

- Accountability
- Beneficence
- Citizenship
- Empathy
- Equity
- Fairness
- Humanity
- Respect
- Responsibility

The next four sections expand on the nature of quality practice in each of the four key components of learner-centered classrooms. They also provide some important indicators of quality practice that reflect both the art and science of teaching and illustrate how the principles and practices spotlighted might look in a classroom and benefit student and teacher alike.

Honoring the Learner

All aspects of learner-centered instruction begin with a teacher whose attention is focused not on himself or herself, or even on the content, but on the student.

Due to external pressures or personal habit, the planning sequence in classrooms often begins with “What do

I have to cover tomorrow?” or “What work will I need to have ready for the students tomorrow?” Learner-centered thinking calls on teachers to begin with a different set of questions: What are the needs and nature of this class as a whole? and What are the needs and nature of the individuals who make up the class at this point in our work? The answers to those two questions drive everything that comes next, including how teachers plan the learning environment, curriculum, assessment, and instruction. This chapter focuses on what it means to honor the learner and all the implications of doing so: how it shapes the teacher’s mindset, how it positions the student to assume increasing ownership of his or her own learning, and how it contributes to a classroom environment that helps each learner recognize and work to develop his or her full potential.

Practices that honor the learner and help them grow:

- Develop affective and physical environments that feel safe, affirming, challenging and supportive to students with a range of learning needs.
- Develop classroom routines with the flexibility required to address students’ varied strengths and needs.
- Create curriculum that is likely to be relevant to students with varied interests, cultures, and experiences.
- Develop and learn from a variety of pre-assessments designed to locate students’ varied entry points into an upcoming unit of study.
- Use ongoing formative assessment information to consistently monitor student progress toward mastery of the knowledge, understanding, and skill designated as essential for a given sequence of learning.
- Use formative assessment information to help students better understand their progress toward targeted goals and to plan more effectively for their own continuing growth toward those goals.
- Provide actionable, student-specific feedback and work with students to create their own plans for next steps in learning.
- Use formative assessment information to create instructional plans designed to meet students where they are in a learning sequence and to guide them in moving forward.
- Mentor students in developing the skills and habits of mind that support success.

- Use information from observation and conversation to link instruction with student interests.
- Provide periodic feedback to students and caregivers.
- Create student work that positions all students as thinkers and problem-solvers, and provide a variety of scaffolds to support individual growth and success with the work.

Creating the Learning Environment

To create a learning environment is to erect an invisible architecture—one that calls on teachers to manifest their ideals, beliefs, and intentions in concert with their students. While the learning environment itself is not visible to the eye, you can see it daily in teachers' actions and reactions. It shapes every classroom element, for better or worse. It affirms or erodes learner self-confidence, builds or diminishes trust in the teacher, fosters or undercuts community, invites or damps intellectual risk-taking, and commends or disparages learning. It's an intangible entity that's powerful to a degree we can scarcely imagine. The truth is, the learning environment largely determines the degree to which a teacher can realize the vision of students developing their own unique voices, working as partners in success, acquiring and using durable knowledge, identifying as learners, participating in a meaningful community, and aspiring to grow continually.

There are at least four pathways through which teachers can lay the foundation for an environment that enlists student commitment to the hard work of learning, cultivates student voice, builds student agency, and contributes significantly to student academic, affective, and social growth. Those pathways are forging trust, building community, establishing partnerships, and modeling and teaching.

When students lack the traits or attitudes that would likely benefit their growth and development, it's important—for both our sake and theirs—to recall that it's a teacher's duty to silence the instinct to blame them. We must instead seek to understand each student's ineffective behavior as an indicator of need—for additional support, for better instruction, or for more opportunities of a kind that will provide both direction and hope.

Curriculum that Honors the Learner and Learning

Curriculum, this book proposes, is—or should be—a design plan to maximize the cognitive/intellectual, affective, and

social capacity of learners. It should help them encounter and engage with the most significant information, ideas, and skills that a discipline or content area affords. As a wise colleague reflected, curriculum is something students use, not something teachers present or cover. It's less the road map or mile markers on a journey to a test or to college and career readiness than the shoes students journey in. Curriculum is not a labyrinth to be navigated but a lantern that students hold aloft to find their way to a richer experience of life.

The two concepts at the heart of quality curriculum (and, therefore, at the heart of quality instructional and assessment practices) are engagement and understanding. They are central to quality curriculum because they are central to learning.

It's important, then, that teachers think carefully about ways in which what they teach and how they teach can lead each learner in the classroom to engagement and understanding. This is a foundational aspiration for student-centered classrooms—something to aim for every day.

Learner-Centered Assessment

Assessment in learner-centered classrooms seeks very different outcomes than the assessment that's common in many schools and classrooms. Like all other elements in learner-centered pedagogy, it's designed not to judge but to help maximize students' intellectual, affective, and social growth. In fact, assessment in these classrooms exists to ensure that student growth escalates consistently rather than stagnates.

It is past time to move away from the test-grade-report model of assessment and to focus instead on assessment that contributes to the process of learning and the progress of the individual student (Burke in O'Connor, 2009).

The linchpin for accomplishing the vision for more promising, equitable, and excellent approaches to teaching and learning is an understanding of assessment that shifts the focus from judging learning to developing the skills of learning.

Formative assessment is, or should be, more a process or a practice than a specific strategy or instrument. It's a kind of sleuthing that involves continual and purposeful hunting for clues about student progress, interpreting those clues, and acting on them in the near term to improve the match between instruction and learners' next steps in learning.

To argue for much broader and wiser use of assessment in schools is not to argue that all grades have to be elimi-

nated; rather, it points to the reality that schools, students, teachers, and parents have become so fixated on grades that actual learning has become secondary. The argument here is to recognize the potential damage of over-grading, which is both well documented in research and clearly visible in classrooms, and to balance the scales in favor of feedback that stems from authentically implemented formative classroom assessment.

Learner-Centered Instruction

Instruction is where it all comes together—or, perhaps more accurately, where determined teachers try their very best to make it all come together. Instruction is the arena in which philosophy, beliefs about learners and learning, ideas about the role of the teacher, plans for building community, curriculum design, and assessment meld into a live-action drama centered on the uniquely human capacity to learn from the past and present in order to contribute to a better future. Wiliam captures the stakes when he writes, “The greatest impact on learning is the daily lived experiences of students in classrooms, and that is determined much more by how teachers teach than by what they teach.”

There are principles and practices of quality instruction that are remarkably stable across contexts from preschool through university levels. Learner-focused teachers tend to ask themselves similar guiding questions as they plan, implement, reflect on, and continue planning instruction. There are also some common classroom practices that reveal misconceptions about teaching and learning that learner-focused teachers must reject based on considerable research over many years and the goals of student-centeredness. The rejection of certain practices and the embrace of others are informed by four philosophical assertions, which should be familiar by this point in the book:

1. The student is at the center of instruction and instructional decision making.
2. The goal of instruction is to make sure that each student has the opportunity and support necessary to maximize their intellectual, social, and affective capacity.
3. Effective learner-centered instruction is necessarily also knowledge-centered, assessment-centered, and community-centered.
4. Effective learner-centered instruction rests with

teachers who are: committed to the development of each learner in their care, invested in contributing to equity and excellence in learning opportunities, eager to learn and grow personally and professionally, and willing agents of change.

Conclusion

Quality learner-centered practices provide a reliable compass to guide the work of teachers. They offer a broad array of approaches to and models for teaching, from direct instruction to inquiry, from academic teams to product-based learning, from workshop-based to community-based learning. The success of any approach to teaching rests on the teacher’s will and skill in applying our best knowledge of what constitutes quality practice within that approach. Combined with principles like equity, excellence, high expectations, teaching up, flexibility, and differentiation, these practices will set the foundation for classrooms—and schools—that help learners in the ways they need most, preparing them for fruitful and fulfilled lives in education and beyond.



At the University of Virginia's Curry School of Education, **Carol Ann Tomlinson** is William Clay Parrish, Jr. professor and chair of Educational Leadership, Foundations, and Policy, teaching post-graduate students, mainly in the areas of curriculum design and differentiated instruction. She is also co-director of the university's Institutes on Academic Diversity, where she strives to help educators understand the principles of differentiated instruction and develop competence and confidence in creating responsive classrooms that meet the diverse learning needs of today's students.

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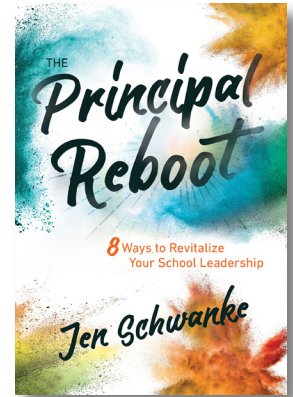
The Principal Reboot

Jen Schwanke

The Principal Reboot

8 Ways to Revitalize Your School Leadership

by **Jen Schwanke**



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THE SUMMARY IN BRIEF

In today's constantly changing landscape, even the most dedicated, talented, and experienced principals can face challenges that leave them feeling lost and overwhelmed. Despite their best efforts and a true belief in the importance of their work, their enthusiasm may begin to diminish as the many demands of the job begin to get in the way of seeing the incredible rewards. Soon, the energy that propelled these principals early in their careers seems nowhere to be found.

In *The Principal Reboot*, you'll discover some of the most important tools, strategies, and inspiration that will help you rediscover your passion for being a principal—and new ways to be more effective than ever before. From creating a fresh new vision for your school to building more powerful and lasting relationships with your staff members and students, to establishing a more meaningful place in your school's community, to improving instruction, leadership, and the use of data, you'll find actionable strategies for rebooting your work as a principal and helping your school succeed as a result.

IN THIS SUMMARY, YOU WILL LEARN:

- How to define your school's values and mission through rebranding.
- How to strengthen relationships with staff, students, and community.
- How to lead renewed efforts to improve instruction.
- How to develop teacher leadership.
- How to use data effectively and innovatively and improve operational procedures.

Introduction

This book is meant to provide ideas, inspiration, and support for principals as they navigate school leadership in an ever-changing world. Together, we'll cover eight key areas to reboot your leadership, including rebranding your school with renewed values and mission; reconnecting with your school and community; reinvesting in relationships with students and staff; revamping instructional leadership; reenvisioning teacher leadership; reframing your approach to growth and achievement data; and revisiting your school's operational practices. In the final chapter we'll look at why taking time for yourself to relax, rediscover, and revive can bring you back to the joyful, satisfied, successful principal you aspire to be.

It's a long career. There's no reason it shouldn't also be fruitful and satisfying.

Rebrand

We've all had that moment when we are working away at a task—alone, with a team of teachers, or with a group of students—and we are struck with this question: What are we even trying to do here?

As any principal knows, it is easy to unwittingly lose focus and purpose—within ourselves, certainly, but also with our entire school community. We may assume we are moving in the right direction, because we are assiduously setting goals and creating improvement plans, but we can't be sure. There's no real way to know—not without an endpoint to guide us.

Why?

Rarely does a restaurant have a published mission statement. There is no need, really; it is obvious to employees and customers alike: *A restaurant's purpose is to provide a comfortable dining experience, good food, and appropriate experience-to-value. A restaurant should also be financially profitable.* Diners come in, order, eat, enjoy their experience, and walk away feeling that they had a good meal for an appropriate price. Restaurant employees cook the food, deliver it, clean up afterward, and care for the diners; in return, they earn tips and compensation. It is an easily recognizable give-and-take. Mission accomplished.

Schools are more complicated. Each teacher carries a differing philosophy and sense of purpose; some have years of experience, whereas others have mere months. Consequent-

ly, a school's teaching staff is comprised of a wide range of college or postgraduate training approaches.

Principals are hired to lasso all these components together and keep the school moving forward toward the same goal. Sounds simple, but *simple* doesn't mean *easy*. It's teaching students to read, write, and compute while developing habits of collaboration and communication. It's developing the social, emotional, and academic health of all students, in spite of their widely differing backgrounds and abilities. It's preparing to launch students into a postsecondary world, to be responsible citizens in cooperation and harmony with one another. It gets complicated very quickly, and there is no single formula for getting it right.

We can save our sanity by revisiting and reinvesting in the *why* behind our work. We can gather input and insight from teachers and staff so that the *why* stays at the forefront of everyone's mind.

How?

Where do we begin in creating and implementing a philosophy-driven, purposeful plan for our school?"

A couple decades ago, there was a great push across the United States for districts and schools to create and write mission statements. School leaders diligently assembled committees, held meetings, and created these statements. After the luster wore off, though, many principals found that their mission statements had grown dusty and rusty, stale and buried beneath new mandates, goals, and committees. For some of us, our mission and vision have disappeared altogether, inexplicably absent from our conversations, our planning, and even our websites.

To address shortcomings in yourself and your school, it may be time to dust off those mission statements and re-communicate your overarching purpose. It is a process that takes extensive planning and a fierce commitment to follow through. The principal is the person best qualified to lead the work, because they are the ones who truly know the teachers, staff, students, and community. The principal has already invested time in observing and absorbing cultural nuances of the building, and thus has a vision of what the school can be.

Communicating the Results

- Creating and agreeing on a common vision doesn't mean the work is done. Next comes the job of sprinkling your mission statement throughout everything

you do. Let's take it beyond the usual steps—adding it to letterhead and putting a banner at the school's main entrance—and think about some unconventional twists. You will want the statement to be a proverbial rooftop shout from every student, teacher, and classroom. Here are a few ways to publicize and advertise your school's new identity with enthusiasm and flair.

- **Create a new logo:** Develop an updated graphic design that represents your mission.
- **Enhance branding:** Communicate the positive stories coming from your school.
- **Use music and videos:** Use student voices and performance to bring your brand to life.
- **Develop a Quality Profile:** Publish a comprehensive, graphic-based summary of your school's successes.

Reconnect

Too often in our role as principals, we rely on repetitive patterns in how we communicate and connect with students, staff, and families. Year after year, we follow the same school calendar, host the same community events, and offer the same experiences for students and their families. Our “resting state” becomes reactionary; we address problems as they come to us rather than eliminate them before they start. When things begin feeling rote and—dare we say it?—boring, or when we aren't preparing for long-standing events with excitement and enthusiasm, it might be time to seek new and refreshing ways to connect with stakeholders.

School and Community: One and the Same

The community within the school walls and the community outside the school walls can't exist without each other, so they can't be addressed separately. The lines are too blurred. It helps to take a comprehensive look at school and community relationships as they truly exist in practical terms. When we talk about a school community, we are referring to students, parents, and teachers who are in the school during the day, and they are all part of a larger community where our students and their families live and work. For principals, it is beneficial to think about the school's roles, expectations, and impact on the larger community, and be mindful of how our leadership can enhance the relationship for everyone involved.

Knowing Your Community

From the onset of public education, schools have often been seen as the hub of an entire community—the reason and anchor for many decisions pertaining to residents. School buildings can be de facto town halls for local community events. Political and social identities of a residential area can manifest themselves in and around the school. The mascot, colors, and motto of the school district are often well known and celebrated with intense loyalty.

This isn't always true, though; in some cases, schools and communities are not so closely tied together, particularly in highly populated areas.

Regardless of how a school fits into the community—through deep, long-established roots, a distant, peaceful co-existence, or somewhere in between—principals can solidify and enhance their school's role in the larger community by considering how the two can flourish together in mutually productive ways.

Reexamining Your School's Programs, Calendar, and Flagship Events

Many schools fall into a rut with the standard, long-running events they host. To remedy the situation, try this: identify an event or a system your school engages in that has you feeling bored or even resentful, then answer these questions:

- How many years has your school hosted this particular event?
- If you're feeling apathetic about the event, might staff and students be feeling the same?
- Is there a better way to accomplish your goals? How might you update your approach?
- What would happen if you proposed eliminating the activity or replacing it with something else?
- If an event is still beloved by your students and their parents but you are not sure you, as the principal, can endure it one . . . more . . . time, what can you adjust to make it more enjoyable and manageable?

Reinvest

Every Monday morning, principals and teachers walk into school, preprogrammed for the same start:

“Good morning,” we greet one another. “How was your weekend?” “Fine. Yours?”

“Fine. Thanks.”

And thus begins another week of similar, predictable conversations and interactions. We check in with staff, often through bland and rote interactions, and sometimes we even avoid people with whom we have tense or awkward relationships. It's easier that way, right?

In this chapter, we will jump out of those constraints, break routines, and offer inspiration to work toward more meaningful relationships with those around us—namely, our students and our staff. Let's begin by reexamining our connection and rapport with our staff.

Connecting with Staff

The adults who work in schools are a complicated mix of personalities, and they hold a variety of philosophies. We have our eternal optimists—teachers who bounce in every morning and greet the day with positivity and a willingness to take on any challenge. Conversely, every staff has those teachers who feel like dead weight. They are negative, cynical, and toxic to the positive mission of the school. And, of course, there's everyone in between.

How, then, can we double down on our efforts to engage staff members without adding more to our workday or sapping our energy? Can we reinforce the positive behaviors of role-model teachers at the same time we improve the efforts and spirits of the ones dragging us down? These are some of the questions we can ask ourselves and ideas we can try to actively reacquaint ourselves with staff, particularly with the successes and challenges facing teachers in their personal and professional lives.

Connect Personally

- Do I know my staff members individually?
- Am I giving too much time and energy to certain people at the expense of others?
- Am I hosting office hours or coffee chats?
- Am I encouraging wellness by supporting teachers' social, emotional, and health needs?
- Am I really listening to staff, or just passively hearing them out until they're finished talking?
- Am I having fun?

Connect Professionally

- Is there a conference or institute we might attend as a team or staff? Could we even plan a team presentation?

- Is there a tough challenge or task the staff could tackle together?
- How can principals connect with teachers through instructional coaching conversations?
- Am I conducting classroom visits with no agenda or judgement? Do I give immediate and positive feedback whenever possible?
- Have I helped teachers formulate quality long-term goals for themselves and our school?
- Does our school come together to scatter seeds for growth and change?

Connecting with Students

Principals can always reinvest in relationships with students, particularly by modeling an enhanced commitment to know (and correctly pronounce!) student names and really understand individual stories. Even better, and more far-reaching, is empowering teachers and support staff to do the same. The effort goes beyond "Student of the Month" celebrations or honoring high-achieving students for their accomplishments; it also goes beyond the natural and traditional "lift up" of the athletes, musicians, and artists in our schools. We also want to ensure we get to know students personally so we can honor and support their hard work, their academic progress, their social growth, and the important role they each have in our school.

Revamp Instructional Leadership

Sometimes leading instruction feels like catching fish with bare hands: it sounds doable and should get easier with experience and patience, but it's always slippery and unpredictable. Being an instructional leader takes instinct, a continual commitment to learn, and ongoing perseverance. But when it works, isn't it fun? Exciting? Immensely rewarding?

The foundations of good instruction stay largely the same over time, but the tools we use when teaching can—and absolutely should—change and evolve. As principals, we are charged with being the instructional leaders of a school, and we can find great energy and excitement by leading teachers out of outdated, mundane learning experiences and toward innovative instructional practices.

Abandoning the Old

So many times, we equate "taking a risk" with daring to try something new. In a classroom, however, taking a risk might

mean having the courage to let go of traditional practices that no longer have value beyond habit or nostalgia and that may, in fact, inhibit progress or innovation. Many teachers hesitate to abandon what feels “safe” and “acceptable” without securing the principal’s blessing, which we can’t offer unless we do some deep thinking. As a good place to start, principals might reassess three traditional teaching practices: packets that are primarily for busy work, homework that has limited instructional or academic value, and vendor-based programs that do not have the capability to provide differentiated instructional experiences.

Embracing the New

What if we approached the evaluation conversation by wondering what classrooms should look like not today, but in 10 years, in 20, or more? Principals usually feel like they are barely keeping up. Teachers feel the same way. But what if our vision extended far into the future? That is the question that should drive us now. Rather than ruminating on how and why things have changed in the past, it helps to wonder: *How will things be generations from now, if brave and strong leaders insist that we evolve the school experience for our students?* If we take some time with teachers to consider a vision for the future, and then set action steps for reaching that vision, it will help us be less worried or stressed about current challenges.

Reenvision Teacher Potential

What’s a great way for principals to reboot? Stop *doing* everything. That doesn’t mean intentionally neglecting responsibilities—quite the opposite, actually. It means re-envisioning what leadership looks like and taking action so the entire weight of a building’s success doesn’t fall on the shoulders of one person.

Why Shared Leadership?

Why should principals share leadership with teachers and staff? Here’s why.

It’s a long career. Especially for those of us who started on the administrator path early in our career, being the type of principal who insists on having a hand in every little thing isn’t tenable for the long haul. Letting go of control will alleviate some of the long-term stress of the job.

Teachers are skilled at what they do. Strong teachers are, by nature, leaders, even if on a smaller scale. Sometimes, though, they can be overlooked and underused

outside their classrooms. In fact, sometimes the best potential leaders are unintentionally slighted or unappreciated. Instead of overlooking them, we should use their expertise and empower them to lead.

Helpers increase efficiency. When we have other people helping clean the house, the work isn’t easier, but it’s distributed among many, so it feels easier. In the same way, having teachers help share leadership responsibilities makes a principal’s load feel a lot lighter.

Sharing improves community and culture. A reverse effect occurs when a principal insists on micromanaging. Far from being a revered monarch on the throne, the principal becomes overextended and begins to drop tasks, forget things, and appear ineffective. Teachers take notice, get annoyed, lose faith, and disengage.

Shared leadership enables instructional mastery.

Teacher leaders should be the curricular masters for the school. They clarify and deconstruct standards, suggest how to approach instruction, and provide professional development for other teachers. Empowering teachers to be the experts will enrich the learning experience for students, allowing the principal to be a true instructional leader without having to be a master of all curricular areas.

Identifying Leadership Potential

Even longtime principals can grow blind to the supplementary talents of teachers. It is easy to miss rising restlessness. Teachers might be bubbling over with potential, but from our perspective, if everything feels steady and solid and there are no surface issues to address, we may overlook the possibilities. We keep doing the same thing and expecting the same output from our teachers, year after year. But as we re-envision teacher leadership, we’ll need to recognize when a teacher wants to be more visible in their leadership. As part of that process, we need to identify what skills they carry and how they could contribute to school decisions and direction.

Eight Areas Where Teachers Can Lead

Here are eight areas where teachers can have a leadership impact on your school:

1. Data and assessment.
2. Staff professional development.
3. Content support, department heads, team leaders.
4. Technology integration in content.

5. Club advisement, extracurricular activities, or academic/ extracurricular liaison.
6. Community outreach.
7. Political activism, lobbying, or educational advocacy.
8. Mentoring new teachers or student teachers.

What Principals Can Do

Now let's address some actionable steps principals can take to grow teachers into leaders.

- Capitalize on strengths
- Identify interests
- Help teachers set long-term goals
- Encourage risk-taking
- Implement structures for accountability partnerships
- Let them know you are watching, and learning, too
- Find ways to allow shadowing
- Don't push too hard. Encourage teachers to lead, but if they resist, let it go.

Reframe Data

Many school districts grapple with how to mitigate the high pressure, anxiety-inducing implications of standardized testing data in the face of significant but untestable factors such as poverty, trauma, absenteeism, apathy, staff burnout, aging facilities, funding inequities—the list goes on and on. For many principals, data review becomes just another thing to manage, another task box to check—which prevents it from being what it could be: the catalyst to motivate a school toward excellence.

Embracing Data

Data can serve many purposes in a school. These purposes remind us why principals should embrace data and make data part of their school's conversations.

Measuring progress and providing answers. Data helps us understand student progress. If students don't grow as we'd predicted, studying projection data to identify specific areas for intervention can provide answers to questions about which concepts or standards need revisiting or reteaching and which need strategies for enrichment. Further, data can help teachers structure conversations with

parents and colleagues.

Holding us accountable. Assessments help us know that teachers are covering the required standards, and they can be mirrors showing us what we've done well and where we need to improve. Assessment blueprints can be the starting point for planning a scope and sequence for an entire year. With consistent assessments and appropriate analysis of results, teachers will be more aligned in what they teach and how best to teach it. Data give us a checks-and-balances system, something to which we can answer, and the scaffolding to know and articulate our rationale for doing what we do.

Revisit Operations

Wise principals constantly adjust, assimilate, and alter how they approach operational decisions, depending on the situation. If I could walk away from this chapter with one goal achieved, it would be for principals to identify when they can—and should—take control and, when they do, to have the confidence to advocate professionally and fiercely for efficiency in school operations.

No one else can take on this responsibility as well as we can; no one else knows our building's needs like we do. Further, if we don't continue advocating and working toward operational excellence, we may feel helpless, disillusioned, and—yes—very weary. There are many facets of our jobs over which we have no control. We are often hamstrung by inefficiency; bad decision-making; archaic practices; and repetitive, ineffective systems. These things can be a primary factor in why principals experience burnout. To be held accountable for a school's operations but to have little voice in the matter is exhausting. That's why taking control over the areas where we can instill change is so important.

Relax, Rediscover, Revive

This final section will offer reminders of why we went into school leadership in the first place, and provide ideas for how to deliberately insert the joy back into our daily routines.

Relax

Here's the truth: being a school principal shouldn't have the power to shake your world. It's not *that* special. After all, there are a *lot* of us doing this work, which gives us a lot of collegial support, should we seek it. That collegial tribe can help us remember that *everything is going to be alright*. It's not a flat and easy path, of course; we have our

missteps and mistakes and our victories and triumphs. There are great days and horrible days. The job gives us fits and fatigue and, simultaneously, immeasurable pride and hope for our future.

Remembering this perspective offers reassurance that we can only do our best—and then, at day’s end, we need to let it go.

Rediscover

Sometimes we find ourselves in a professional rut, even if there’s nothing specifically wrong. We crave projects, something big that would matter to the world. We crave change, shake-ups that can make us see our work and workplace in a new way. When we’re feeling this way, it’s time to rediscover our passion for our work in one of a variety of ways.

- Join, or start, a cool new committee
- Organize travel options.
- Support, expand, or lead extra-curricular options for students
- Immerse yourself in a student activity or experience
- Teach adult learners
- Lead a review of resources so teachers can enhance their students’ experience
- Rethink your workspace so your office is a place that encourages fresh thinking
- Update your resume to remind yourself of the amazing things you’ve done—and what is yet to be done
- Make a bold move with your career—go back to

school, consider a new role, or make yourself an expert on a specific management skill

Revive

Schools should be places where we have fun while we do our important work. That’s why principals are always so proud if there is a culture of joy present in their schools. It’s the feeling that makes visitors remark on the spirit of happiness they feel when they walk through the doors. “We can’t describe it,” they say. “It’s just a *feeling*.” Establishing this culture is a team effort, starting with the office staff, who can prioritize and promote a positive culture by offering heartfelt greetings, sharing stories, and capturing giggle-worthy anecdotes. Make this part of your core mission as a principal, and watch your school be transformed for the better.

Conclusion

Reviving the spirit of the principalship takes work, just as being in a good marriage or planning a good vacation does. When we consider the scope of a career, though, and how many hours we’ll spend in this job over time, the investment of time and energy devoted to the cause will pay off in untold ways. Students and staff benefit from a leader who has energy, spirit, and a genuinely joyful attitude about the job, and so does the leader. It’s a long and exhausting career. We might as well make it a long, exhausting, *fabulous* career.



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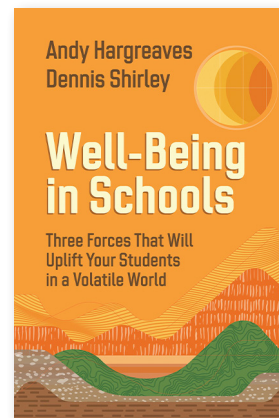
Well-Being in Schools

Andy Hargreaves, Dennis Shirley

Well-Being in Schools

*Three Forces That Will Uplift Your Students
in a Volatile World*

by **Andy Hargreaves and Dennis Shirley**



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THE SUMMARY IN BRIEF

Even before the global pandemic disrupted in-classroom education and led to a well-being crisis for students and teachers alike, students' well being was becoming an emergency concern among educators and administrators. Mental health among young people has been precipitously declining, while global crises and social media have had negative impacts that are impossible to miss. But can teachers really increase students' wellbeing in a meaningful way against such staggering odds? New research findings shows that they can. ***Well-Being in Schools*** is led by that research to present the three forces that will uplift students in a volatile world—prosperity for all, ethical technology use, and restorative nature.

In this summary, teachers, leaders and policymakers will receive breakthrough insights for how to improve students' well-being in schools—and remarkable proof that such improvements to well-being lead to better performance and long-term outcomes for all students in school and beyond as they progress through society.

IN THIS SUMMARY, YOU WILL LEARN:

- Ideas and research findings that show how to increase well-being in schools.
- How to put well-being ahead of scores—and why you should.
- How to set up effective well-being policy and practice by focusing on prosperity for all, ethical technology use, and restorative nature.

Introduction

Even before US President Joe Biden was elected in 2020, he pledged that his administration would “build back better” after a raging pandemic that claimed more than half a million US lives and led to unemployment and poverty levels that were unprecedented in modern times. The phrase “getting better,” of course, has a double meaning. It refers to recovery of health after being sick and to improving over time. Building back better has to mean more than mere recovery, important as that is. All was far from well beforehand. Building back better, in the US and everywhere else, must therefore also see a determination to improve people’s health, compared to how it was before the pandemic.

The global pandemic didn’t just make people sick. It exposed how sick many aspects of modern society were already. Think of the under-resourced, for-profit care homes, or nursing homes, as they are variously called, that placed seniors in thinly disguised waiting rooms for their final journey to the funeral home. Consider the care staff in these homes, living a gig-economy existence that required them to move from home to home, picking up and carrying infection with them, as they tried to hold down multiple jobs to make ends meet. What about the migrant farm laborers, huddled together in little more than shacks, with no rights or protections, earning pitifully low wages, just so the rest of us could get our fresh fruits and vegetables? What about all the essential workers on zero-hour contracts, who, we have learned, are often living in a world with no security, just one paycheck away from destitution?

The world has reached a parlous state when starving children tear open deliveries from the local food bank because school closures mean that their schools can no longer feed them. At the same time, we have seen that some children were relieved to be learning at home, because this meant that they no longer had to endure taunts and bullying at school. It is shocking to discover that schools and school districts in the United States and the UK were threatened with fines or withdrawal of funding if they didn’t open up their schools again—even when infection rates that governments were failing to control remained perilously high.

Let’s hope that after the pandemic, the predictions of epidemiologist Nicholas Christakis, in *Apollo’s Arrow*—that we will relive the Roaring 20s that followed the 1918 pandemic—will turn out to be wrong. Let’s extend the inspiring spirit of community that arose at times during the pandemic to offer one another help and solidarity. Let’s

not forget that one of our prime directives in schools is to help young people feel safe, cared for, fulfilled, and thriving, so that they prosper in the school and beyond it. Let’s bring the public good, in equitable schools for all, back to the fore. Let’s not go back to the worst of what we had before, but instead build back better for all young people’s well-being for the future. As a start, in this book summary, we now turn to what the best of well-being can look like, and to how we can set about developing it.

What is Well-Being? Why Does It Matter?

Well-being is a big deal. Even before the COVID-19 pandemic, it was already moving closer to the forefront of policy priorities in education. Then the pandemic cruelly reminded us that health and wellbeing must come before everything—in society as well as in our schools. But it is not just viruses that threaten our well-being. War, conflict, environmental devastation, intolerance, prejudice, and division also harm our well-being. So do loneliness, isolation, and living in a virtual world at the expense of the physical world.

Learning to be and learning to live together are not just abstract ideals. They are achievable in real programs and policies that help us connect our own health to the health of the world. Yet opportunities to be healthy and to be well are not distributed evenly. Well-being does not mean the same thing for everyone, in every culture. It may be “loud and proud” in Texas, “as bold as brass” in Northern England, or humble and self-effacing in East Asian cultures with Confucian heritages and Buddhist associations. There is a lot to learn about what well-being is, what it looks like, how we can recognize it when we see it, and how it is affected by inequality and diversity. These are some of the big questions we raise in this book.

Theories of Well-Being: Evidence and Influence

Because of the onset of accountability-driven policies such as No Child Left Behind and Race to the Top, approaches consistent with whole child philosophies have been scattered and sporadic. For that reason, in 2007, ASCD launched a Whole Child Initiative to “change the conversation about education from a focus on narrowly defined academic achievement to one that promotes the long-term development and success of all children.” It asserted a

humanistic philosophy of learning and development that is about the importance of the whole child now and not just those parts of the child that might be economically useful in the future or that would comply with accountability demands in the present.

ASCD's five Whole Child tenets, based upon Abraham Maslow's hierarchy of needs, have underpinned ASCD's framework:

1. "Each child enters school healthy" and is taught how to develop "a healthy lifestyle."
2. "Each child learns in an environment that is physically and emotionally safe."
3. All students are "actively engaged in learning and connected to the school and broader community."
4. Every student "is supported by qualified, caring adults" with proper professional qualifications.
5. "Each student is challenged academically" and is poised for "success in college or further study and for employment" as well as for "participation in a global environment" after completing high school.

How has the Whole Child Initiative played out in practical terms in its partnership schools? One example is Hamilton Elementary School in Port Angeles, Washington, where principal Gary Pringle and his staff wanted to create an environment "where high performance, kindness, self-responsibility, and playfulness are the expectations." This promotion of play led to the integration of "health, nutrition, and physical fitness into school activities and the curriculum," with parents and caregivers also encouraged to participate in a Families in Training after-school program that established "monthly challenges" pegged to "Healthy Fitness Zone Standards." In another case, Butterfield Trail Middle School in Arkansas promotes its students' well-being by cultivating a sustainable garden and by revising its curriculum so that it now "incorporates science and nutrition into instruction while promoting long-term health education."

Questioning Well-Being: The Quest to Do Better

It's important to raise some questions about aspects of well-being that psychologists may have misinterpreted or missed altogether. These questions establish a firmer foundation for understanding why well-being has assumed such

importance today and what particular forms it takes in the dynamic and diverse societies in which we live.

The questions we raise are as much about what's missing from our data and from what we've seen in schools as it is about what is problematic. This means that we don't just report what educators have told us, but we also probe deeply into things they left unsaid that may matter a great deal.

The four questions are:

1. Does the well-being agenda wrongly claim to be able to solve massive social problems with individualistic, psychological solutions?
2. Might well-being advocates unintentionally end up producing a generation of self-absorbed narcissists?
3. What's the point of having initiatives in well-being if other parts of the school system are perpetrating ill-being?
4. Are our ideas about well-being culturally biased?

If well-being is perceived as being unconnected to learning or achievement, if it is seen as self-indulgence, if it is undermined by other policies that actually create ill-being, or if the approved ways of being well do not fit with some of the cultures to which children belong, it will attract criticism and undermine public confidence. Well-being is a part of our cultures and societies that in turn help define who we are. Well-being, in this respect, is affected by changes and variations in our cultures. For this reason, we examine two social changes that have brought the well-being agenda into prominence, and in the chapter after that, we look at three ways in which that agenda can and should unfold in the near future.

The Rise of Well-Being: Between GERM and VUCA

For at least 30 years, nation after nation pushed whole child education to the margins of their policies. A burgeoning movement put data and measurement at the center of school reform. It was obsessed with maximizing economic growth and improving performance numbers in everything from industrial assembly lines to health targets and flight times. Inevitably, raising students' test scores got caught up in the same surge.

GERM and related "results-first" programs have lingered, like a stubborn virus that has not yet met up with a vaccine or a cure, in spite of growing evidence of its incalculable

damage. Meanwhile, another age has now started to surface alongside it: one that business and policy specialists call “VUCA.”

Arising from business management theory in the 1980s but increasingly used in military strategy, business, politics, and organizational studies since the early 2000s, VUCA is an acronym for four new states of social and political life:

1. Volatility of change that occurs at accelerating speed in shifting directions.
2. Uncertainty of evidence, information, and capacity to predict the future.
3. Complexity of intersecting forces.
4. Ambiguity regarding what events and circumstances actually mean to people of different identities and perspectives.

Not surprisingly, this convergence of forces has created a mental health crisis among young people of global proportions.

Beyond COVID-19, young people’s well-being will depend on more investment, not less, because many of them will be in particular need of extra counseling and support. Children need to be in school for economic, educational, and mental health reasons. But given all we have learned about the primacy of child well-being, the economic consideration should not ignore, override, or undermine the other two. We must find a better way to connect the big picture of social and economic change before, during, and after the pandemic to the protection and promotion of young people’s day-to-day wellbeing and quality of life.

Prosperity for All: The Social Economics of Well-Being

Many of the skills and dispositions that are identified with and influenced by social psychology serve a valuable purpose in schools and are tools that teachers can use to help their kids to be healthy and to thrive. Teachers can take care of basic needs for security and safety. They can help students build themselves up to become resilient and bounce back from setbacks and adversity.

We can have classrooms and schools where children develop an irrepressible, Dolly Parton–like sense of buoyancy, so they are hard to push down in the first place. Schools

can teach kids language and strategies to be calm and quiet when their emotions run out of control. They can provide opportunities for exercise, breathing, and stretching, so that children’s bodies are not at odds with their minds. Schools can also cultivate growth mindsets, so that students do not become downcast or feel defeated when they cannot understand or accomplish something at first. All these are invaluable things to teach everyone—especially those who are most vulnerable.

Research in social psychology provides teachers with evidence-informed approaches to enhance their students’ well-being. It has given teachers tools and insights that go far beyond the old adage of setting high expectations. Now there is a body of research and practice that shows exactly how those high expectations can be acted upon to improve learning and well-being.

Yet well-being still comes down to more than individual behaviors in individual classes and schools. States of well-being vary across social groups. The coronavirus crisis affected practically everyone’s mental health, but teenagers were more vulnerable than most. Suicide is always a personal tragedy, but in 1897, the French sociologist Émile Durkheim was the first to point out that suicide rates varied depending on how socially integrated or not the societies were in which suicides occurred. Today, youth suicide rates are much higher among vulnerable groups in Indigenous communities, among students who are LGBTQ, or in countries where school examination pressures operate at extreme levels and create cultures of anxiety and perfectionism. Educators must look beyond blaming and shaming individuals for mental health issues, and look at their social determinants instead.

A comprehensive approach to student and teacher well-being must therefore consider social as well as psychological dimensions. We have to take an interdisciplinary stance and address the social, economic, and political conditions in the societies and communities in which students are educated and how they optimize or interfere with young people’s prospects of being well. We have to engage our students with learning how to contribute to their communities and societies, now and in the future, in ways that support their own and others’ physical and mental health, alongside academic success.

Students and educators are whole human beings. Their lives and their work are part of the world and are not set apart from it. They are all affected by the bigger picture of social, economic, and environmental change. We believe they should also be responsible for contributing to and help-

ing to shape that big picture in a conscious and deliberate way, through how students learn, what educators teach, and how they all live their lives.

Ethical Technology Use: The Moral Side of Screen Life

Before the pandemic, one of the issues that most divided opinion among teachers and parents was the use of technology in schools. Enthusiasts embraced and advanced the idea of digital learning taking place anytime, anywhere. Digital technology, they believed, would engage students, ignite innovation, and put an end to the “factory schools” that belonged to a bygone era. Opponents, meanwhile, regarded digital devices as instruments that trivialized learning, undermined the professionalism of teachers, distracted students, and threatened their well-being. Although some systems provided laptops and other devices for every child, others imposed total bans on smartphones on school premises.

What can we conclude from this collection of divergent research and opinion about digitally based learning and its relationship to student well-being? What deliberations and decisions should teachers and schools make about the use of technology in relation to learning and well-being?

The future of digital technology will have a huge societal influence on student well-being. How far schools and school systems are willing to take an evidence-informed and ethically seamless approach to its use will determine whether that influence turns out to be positive or negative. An ethical and seamless approach to digital technology use urges all of us to address equity and inclusion of access. It enhances quality of use in terms of benefits for learning and well-being rather than just expanding delivery through hybrids and blends. Last, it supports strategies for combating risks related to addiction and screen use. Technology should not be presented as a shining knight that comes to rescue students and teachers from the (so-called) “dark ages” of schooling. Instead, technology should be a shining light that brightens up teaching and learning practices that are already pedagogically strong.

Restorative Nature: For People and the Planet

If we are to get children out of their concrete and metal boxes, we must think outside the box ourselves. We need to

do a lot more than add a few outdoor camping trips or field excursions to the regular curriculum. Children need to be in touch with nature every day, not just as an add-on or a special treat.

We can start by adopting the common practice in Nordic countries to get children outside for some playing time every 50 minutes or so—not just a choreographed body-break in class, but free play in the open air, outdoors. Then we can learn from what many teachers and schools did during the pandemic (and what many teachers in less developed countries have been doing forever) and teach parts of the curriculum outside.

The capacity to teach one’s subject or curriculum in an outdoor environment should become part of all teachers’ training and ongoing professional development. Outdoor learning options should also be included in online curriculum guides for potential activities across the curriculum. Natural, physical, and environmental competences should be accorded as high a priority as digital competence. People’s lives and the future of the planet may well depend on it.

Well-Being and Success: Opposites that Can Attract

Well-being and achievement shouldn’t exist in two different worlds, with different specialists populating them—mathematics and literacy people on one side, mental health specialists on the other. At every level, from the school up to the whole system, it’s important to establish clear structures that unite those who have portfolios and responsibilities in curriculum and learning with those who have expertise in well-being and mental health. Leaders themselves need to create, articulate, and repeat clear and compelling narratives that bring achievement and well-being together.

Well-being is needed to support achievement, especially when children come from backgrounds that present them with great challenges. Achievement and accomplishment are also sources of well-being. Our challenge is to find just the right ways to integrate well-being and achievement so that they are mutually reinforcing for each and every student.

Conclusion: Getting Better

Only when we integrate the three uplifting forces of social prosperity, ethical technology use, and restorative nature will we develop schools and societies that allow everyone

to flourish. It's not too late to follow the injunction of the 1996 European Commission report and to learn not only how to be as individuals but also how to live together. Supporting the development of the whole child means we also have to address the development and transformation of our whole world.

Universal well-being must be an ethical imperative. Academic achievement detached from well-being must become a thing of the past. The single-minded pursuit of economic growth without regard for social welfare or environmental sustainability will soon be joining it. Well-being as the solitary attainment of an individual detached from school and society cannot be our ultimate aspiration.

More than any other profession, teachers and other educators are in a prime position to influence the young. We can and must become the champions of a world and its educational systems that advance and integrate the hard work of learning and accomplishment with the deep fulfillment of well-being and social prosperity. We must educate the whole child in and for the whole world. This aspiration is the true meaning of what it must take to build back better for the well-being and success of all students everywhere, now and in the future.



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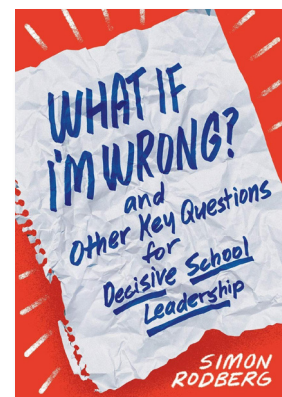
What If I'm Wrong?

Simon Rodberg

What If I'm Wrong?

and Other Key Questions for Decisive School Leadership

by **Simon Rodberg**



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THE SUMMARY IN BRIEF

Principals and administrators, by definition, are in the business of making difficult decisions based on a wide range of questions, demands, information, and often competing priorities. Even a minor mistake can lead to negative effects on staff, faculty, and most devastatingly, students.

What If I'm Wrong? shows that, by focusing on a small group of key questions, principals and administrators can find a clear path through the many complex challenges they face to become better leaders that oversee more effective schools. By helping leaders overcome their snap judgements and think more carefully about outcomes, avoid groupthink, and stop unthoughtfully following convention, this book is an effective resource to help principals and administrators benefit from the latest research in cognitive science and organizational theory.

IN THIS SUMMARY, YOU WILL LEARN:

- How to see what you're missing and how to make decisions on what to do next.
- How to break down big missions into small, manageable steps.
- How to see trade-offs in every decision and look for the best option rather than perfection.
- How to challenge existing conventions and find new paths to successful leadership in schools.

Introduction

Thinking is not the point of school leadership. The point of school leadership is to make things happen. To make a great school; to graduate happy, intelligent, productive lifelong learners; to retain satisfied, engaged, highly effective teachers; to organize a supportive, active parent community; to produce high test scores, great sports teams, a school play that's both Broadway-quality and has a part for every kid who wants one.

People who become principals want to make things happen. The problem, as every principal knows—as I found out, over and over again, during my own time as principal is—what things?

That's where thought comes in. Thinking is crucial for good school leadership, because figuring out a path through the relentless complexity of our roles is a huge part of school leadership. Thinking is crucial for principals who need to decide—or need to lead their community to decide—what a great school is, how to foster happiness and productivity in their students, who their highly effective teachers are, and when to give in or hold firm with parents. Thinking is crucial to get those high test scores and understand how much to care about them, and to decide whether to attend the school play or the sports championship, to go home to your own children, or just to take a nap!

As with any path, you should start this work from where you are! Reflect on your experience with tough decisions.

- What dilemmas are hardest for you—discipline, staffing, budget, curriculum, or some other area? What makes them hard?
- How do you make decisions currently? Do you use a formal or conscious process? If not, what are the informal or subconscious steps you usually take?
- What major decisions do you face now or have coming up? What makes them major? How will you approach them?
- What past decision do you feel you got wrong? What parts of your thought process led you down the wrong path?
- What past decision do you feel you got right? If it was difficult, what helped you move ahead?
- What decision do you remember that you just didn't make? Why did you avoid deciding? How did that work out?

What Am I Missing?

Making a good decision requires knowing the landscape well; to know where to go, you have to know where you are. You can better learn your landscape through regular practices that move you beyond your (often mistaken!) gut—practices that show you why what you thought you saw isn't all there is. Tools for doing so include surveys, focus groups, and stack audits.

How are teacher–student relationships? What locations in your school are hot spots for bullying? Did Back-to-School Night work for parents? You can guess; you can hear from the most outspoken stakeholders, who have important things to say but are usually not representative. Or you can survey. Free tools like Google Forms make it almost negligent not to survey whenever the opinion of a large group matters to the decisions you'll make. If you want to improve relationships, prevent bullying, or have a successful Back-to-School Night next year, why would you not survey? Design your own or use one of the commercially available surveys from groups like TNTP (to survey teacher attitudes), Panorama Education (for student surveys about teachers and school), or Making Caring Common (for school climate surveys). These come with a price but offer comparisons to other schools and easy tools for analysis.

Surveys do take time and effort, especially if you want a large number of representative responses. Emailing parents a link after conferences, for instance, won't usually do it; you'll get a much better response rate if you place tables with computers by the exit.

Once you've gathered information, the challenge is to keep it all in mind. Remember the availability bias: what's easy to think about (and more available to our minds) seems more representative than it actually is. So a particularly well-articulated statement, or an unusual expression, will stick in your mind, but that doesn't mean that it's the one to listen to. One student who says something outlandish in a focus group makes for a great story but not for a great sense of the overall opinion in the group. Daniel Kahneman, the Nobel Prize winner who taught us about availability bias, also warns us about the peak-end rule: along with outliers, it's easier to remember the end of an experience than the rest of it. If you do classroom walk-throughs, for instance, you should know that the last classrooms you saw, along with the best and worst, are much likelier to stick in your head than the earlier and more typical examples. Don't sit down after a walk-through and immediately write down,

or even talk through with others, your conclusions. Expand what you see by taking notes or ratings along the way, then review them afterward before you analyze the whole picture. This is what's called a memory prompt: when you know about the peak-end rule, you can prompt yourself to remember the rest of what you've seen. Memory prompts enable you to see the whole landscape for your decision.

Don't Forget

Psychological research shows that human beings miss a lot of what goes on around them without realizing they're missing anything at all. When you gather information for decision-making, you miss less if you humbly accept that you don't know it all. Look for ways to expand your thinking.

- Get outside your own head: use surveys, focus groups, and stack audits.
- Avoid the peak-end problem: use memory prompts to review information you gather.
- Beware your own identity-based perspective. If you're white, accept that race is likely at play in ways you don't see. If you were a teacher, expect that non-teaching staff have their own ways of thinking that are valid too.
- Beware of magical thinking: explicitly state your theory of action without skipping steps. That way, you'll check whether you have a realistic idea of how to get the outcome you want.

What's One Small Step?

One strategy to deal with the overwhelming nature of big problems is named after a Nobel Prize winner, this one in physics: Enrico Fermi, whose investigations in nuclear reactions helped lead to the atom bomb. (Don't blame him for the bomb, though nuclear explosions are a good example of relatively small steps leading to very big change!) Fermi was known for his ability to figure out hard questions outside physics. The classic Fermi question is "How many piano tuners are there in Chicago?" To Fermi-ize a question like this, as Tetlock and Gardner (2015) explain in *Superforecasting*, is to find the smaller, solvable problems in overwhelmingly complex challenges. At first glance, there is no way on earth to figure out how many piano tuners there are in Chicago!

But you can . . .

- know how many people there are in Chicago

- estimate how many people live in a house and what proportion of houses have pianos
- guess how often pianos have to be tuned and what the workload of a piano tuner might be

. . . and come up with a decent estimate. A Nobel Prize winner, it turns out, doesn't always think bigger thoughts than the rest of us. The winning strategy can be to think smaller.

The superforecasters Fermi-ize questions about the future. Your job is to Fermi-ize the problems of your school. Start by asking yourself, "What's one small step?" It's OK if the problems are big; the task is to break them into tractable subproblems.

To break down big problems, look for the observable. A general sense that culture is bad is hard to act on. When students are congregating during class time in the back hallway, you can see that, which means you can do something about it. Fermi-izing issues in a school requires isolating where and when those issues happen, finding a time and place that can then be intervened. Is a teacher's classroom management poor? If by November it's ten minutes past the bell without class really having started, and four students are asleep, six are looking at their cell phones, three have their hoods over their heads, two pairs are whispering, and the rest are vaguely waiting to learn, and the teacher's shoulders are slumped and she alternates between a murmur and a shout with nothing in between—well, you've seen this classroom, and you know how overwhelming it feels. But just by looking for specifics you've started to Fermi-ize. The teacher can greet students at the door with a ready-to-go Do Now. She can fix her body language or her tone of voice or enforce the cell phone policy. To observe for specifics is to find a place to start.

Don't Forget

Too often, our impulse is to figure out, through an extended process, how to solve everything at once. Instead, we should look for small steps we can take to move us quickly in the right direction—or at least, help us learn from small mistakes. How can we move forward?

- Break down overwhelming problems into bite-size subproblems. This process, called Fermi-izing, helps you make educated guesses about where to take action.
- Test multiple options and gauge which gets a better response. It's a marketing strategy applicable anytime you want stakeholders to say yes to an aspect of your school.

- Small steps give you permission to accept imperfection through experimentation. If you don't know what will work, try something. Small steps will mean no big mistakes!
- Be sure to plan how to assess your small steps. Just don't mistake assessment for action!

Where's the Trade-Off?

Schools are, inherently, places of optimism and hope. We look at children and see the adults they could become; and we wouldn't be here, with the fluorescent lights and the cafeteria food and the tween-boy body odor, if we couldn't see a better future. But optimism shouldn't prevent us from seeing that our decisions come with trade-offs. Everything can't be done in the ways all our staff members, parents, and students want; if everyone could be happy, school leaders' jobs would be a lot easier!

The ability to see trade-offs is key, and it distinguishes the principal from other members of the school community. A hard fact of life for principals is that their staff members don't tend to acknowledge trade-offs. Teachers want smaller classes, period. The special education coordinator wants an aide in the support classroom (and so does the athletic director in the gym). Do faculty want the paid version of the math software, an additional planning period, a summer stipend, a release from lunch duty? If you ask them, yes. Yes, of course they do.

They're not doing anything wrong. Teachers and other faculty members should argue for what they want. It's not that they don't like to acknowledge trade-offs. It's that they don't need to. Teachers see the big picture in their classroom, and good teachers know their students' individual needs—one student needs to learn phonics, another needs to learn poetic devices, a third needs to throw out her chewing gum—plus the overall mood and long-term goals of the class. But they don't have to see the big picture of the whole school. Trade-offs aren't their job; they're the principal's.

The principal who fails to see the big picture inevitably fails their school. The principal's key responsibility, the reason the position exists, isn't to evaluate teachers, to mollify parents, or to manage bus schedules; it's to make hard decisions with the big picture in mind. Successful school leaders train themselves to look and ask, "Where's the trade-off?"

Don't Forget

In a school, there's no such thing as perfection. Trade-offs are inevitable. The challenge is to consciously make the trade-offs you want.

- It's possible things will go wrong. Use a premortem — if your initiative fails, what will have gone wrong? — to imagine the path toward failure and avoid missteps to imagine the path toward failure so you can avoid missteps.
- Use a mental simulation strategy to play out how others will react to your decisions and how those reactions will lead to other reactions. Remember the limits of your control.
- The outside view can be more realistic; compare your situation to other, similar situations to understand likely outcomes.
- Frames have power. When considering trade-offs, your decision will be shaped by what factors you include in the trade-off, so use as broad a frame as possible. For instance, if a discipline decision is just about a few students, that's a different trade-off than if you frame the decision within the larger climate of your school.
- The hardest trade-offs are with time and energy. For teachers, remember they likely feel at their limit; move them forward with the directive to do this, not that. For yourself, satisficing can help; your standard for most smaller matters should be what's acceptable rather than the best they can be. If the buses are a few minutes late, if the field trip is a little scattered, as long as no kid gets lost, it's okay.

Does It Have to Be This Way?

To ask, "Does it have to be this way?" is to open up your vision. It is both an announcement of and a push toward freedom, removing blinders and loosening mental chains. The school is an artificial structure, our society's current best guess at how to grow human beings from early childhood to adulthood in a reasonably economical and systematic way. We confuse that artifice with nature's laws, and "Does it have to be this way?" rejects such confusion. In practical terms, to ask this question is to open up decisions for your school driven not by how schools operated in the past, but by what's best for kids now.

How can we see outside the limits we've known? How can

we exchange our hypercolor T-shirts for a new outfit, not one that matches current fashion trends but one that best meets the needs we see? So much of principals' thinking is restricted to the daily grind of getting our schools through to the last bell. Think differently.

We can see past today's structures if we look for the reasons they exist—not the ways we do things but the why behind them. When we get down to core values, we can rebuild from a stronger foundation. For instance, is recess a problematic point in your school day? Well, does recess actually need to exist? Or are there other ways to get at, and recombine, the core values of outdoor time and physical activity? Another way to conceptualize this form of questioning is to think from first principles—not principal as in school leader, but rather, the kind of values you work from.

Getting down to core values can be an answer to trade-offs, which are sometimes about surface structures rather than the core values beneath them. In *Creating Great Choices* (2017), Jennifer Riel and Roger Martin describe what they call integrative thinking: identify the principles underlying each side of a trade-off and look for ways to integrate those principles to eliminate the trade-off. If lead teachers find planning time during recess, but lack of supervision means playground games get rowdy and some kids are excluded, that looks like a trade-off. If you make the lead teachers supervise recess, those teachers will resist (and you might violate a union contract); if you eliminate recess, parents and kids will revolt. But the parents and kids aren't revolting because they like recess as a structure; it's because kids like running around outside! Some schools have implemented structured games led by classroom aides or parent volunteers; it's not quite recess, but these structures can actually respond better to the core value of physical activity if more students start to play. They don't, though, fulfill the core value of child-directed play. What are the core values of your school's recess?

Don't Forget

People created our approach to education, and people can create it anew. The school as we know it is only one of many possibilities. You can open your mind to other possibilities when you look at any aspect of your school and ask, "Does it have to be this way?"

- Opening your mind is hard to do because of the pressures to conform to what everyone else is doing. Beware of social legitimacy; just because it's how others do it doesn't mean it's the right thing to do.

- One way to expand your possibilities is to look beyond current practices and see the core values at stake. Use integrative thinking to create new structures that avoid some trade-offs.
- You can also see learning through an anthropological lens. How would a society without schools approach this challenge? What's actually constant across human history, and what have other societies done in other ways?
- Look for ways education is likely to change (for the better!) in the future. Then take small steps to make that future happen now.

What If I'm Wrong?

Our unconscious minds often, automatically, with the best intentions, lead us wrong.

They don't lead us wrong all the time, of course. But we as school leaders often face especially difficult problems, so remember what Daniel Kahneman (2011) said: "when faced with a difficult question, we often answer an easier one instead, usually without noticing the substitution" (p. 12). By definition, when we are wrong, we have no idea that we are wrong. If we did, we'd change our minds, and we'd now be right! Instead, when we make a mistake, we tend to plow forward, unaware of how much deeper into the woods we're getting, unaware of when the cliff edge is right in front of us.

You're wrong more often when you're tired. You're wrong more often when you're hungry. You're wrong more often when you're frustrated or depressed or overwhelmed—anytime you don't have top-notch deliberative resources to bring to a problem. And sometimes you're wrong even when you're rested, well-fed, happy, and thoughtful. Invariably, sometimes you're just wrong. You can ask all the right questions, follow all the right steps, and still make the wrong decision.

So what if you're wrong?

As educators, we should be more OK with wrongness; we face it all the time with children. The best teachers see wrongness as foundational and see error as an exemplary teachable moment. They know trying is good, a sign of an active mind; only the withdrawn student who refuses to engage is unable to be wrong. Error, when made explicit, is useful; it's an opportunity to understand misconceptions, to lay bare thinking, to move forward with a new analysis. While good teachers know it's important to call error what it is, to clarify for both individual students and the class as

a whole what's actually true, they do so without criticism or shame. "We all make mistakes," these teachers say, and in the best classrooms, the students know it too.

We are ready to laugh at know-it-alls when they are children; we recognize how impossible it is to get all that much right. So how have we, as adults, arrived at the mental place where we subconsciously equate excellence with infallibility?

As leaders especially, why do we care so much about how right we are? In her book, *Being Wrong*, Kathryn Schulz (2010) describes our equation of error with death: "Certain mistakes can actually kill us, but many, many more of them just make us want to die. That's why the word 'mortify' comes up so often when people talk about their errors. Describing the moment of realizing certain mistakes, we say that we wanted to crawl into a cave, or fall through a hole in the floor, or simply disappear. And we talk about 'losing face,' as if our mistakes really did cause us to disappear—as if our identity was rubbed out by the experience of being wrong" (p. 26). In this way of thinking, if you want to exist, you have to be right. To buy into this mindset is to be the mark in a confidence game you're playing on yourself; when the card trick is played out, the game is over, and you have nothing left. If your identity as a leader, and your argument for why others should trust you, is contingent upon mastery, then neither you nor those you lead have any reason to trust your leadership once you, inevitably, stumble.

Know Yourself

When people are wrong, they describe the feeling as wanting to hide, disappear, or even die. None of those are a good option for school leaders! Consider how you can deal with the possibility, and inevitable reality, of your own wrongness.

- When you picture a confident leader, what do you see? Where does that confidence come from?
- When you picture a humble leader, what do you see? Would your colleagues describe you as humble? How would you feel if they did?
- How much do your own mistakes affect your emotional stability? How much do you display emotional stability to others? What would happen in your school if your own emotional stability increased or decreased?
- When was the last time you took responsibility for a mistake? What happened? What would happen if you did so more often?

- Have you changed your procedures to reduce the likelihood of being wrong next time?
- Would you describe your decision-making process as democratic? How do you foster useful dissent? When others disagree with you, do they feel procedural justice has been achieved?
- If you are a new leader, how can you learn from your mistakes? If you are an experienced leader, what situations have you been able to treat like repetitions of those you've seen before, and when has that approach gotten you in trouble?
- How much compassion do you show for others when they are wrong? Can you try to feel more compassion for yourself?

You're Not Alone

Good leaders make good decisions. Great leaders teach others to decide for themselves. This is some of the core work of coaching a leadership team. And it's not different from the core work of coaching yourself to make better decisions. The work is to ask your team members, over and over, until the neural pathways made by these questions become the new normal:

- What are you missing?
- What's one small step?
- Where's the trade-off?
- Does it have to be this way?
- What if you're wrong?

You work with your team to build the humility implied by these questions in a way that still allows, and requires, a decision to be made. By doing so, you build confidence for action while encouraging self-awareness about inevitable limitations.

This shift, from asking yourself these questions to asking them of others, requires attention to tone. Imagine asking a supervisee, "What if you're wrong?" (Or imagine your boss saying it to you!) Depending on the relationship, it might sound confrontational or even accusatory. It might prompt defensiveness or hurt feelings. Helping others learn to make their own path requires a distinct approach; it calls on trust and vulnerability. If a supervisor admits that she is sometimes wrong, and clarifies that the world won't end if you are, then the question "What if you're

wrong?” feels a lot different than being asked it by an all-knowing taskmaster. And when asked that question by a supervisor who offers confidence enough to empower you with decision-making authority, such confidence changes the tone and even the relationship.

Decision-making should be a shared burden. Collective responsibility is a lighter weight to carry, and it's a better path when built together.



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Your Students, My Students, Our Students

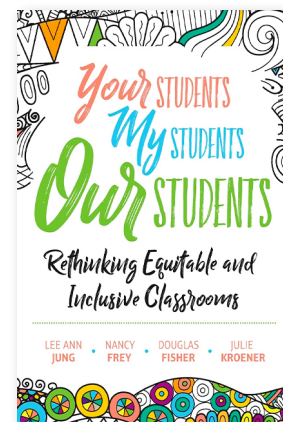
Lee Ann Jung, Nancy Frey, Douglas Fisher, Julie Kroener

ASCD® LEADERSHIP SUMMARIES for EDUCATORS

Your Students, My Students, Our Students

Rethinking Equitable and Inclusive Classrooms

by **Lee Ann Jung, Nancy Frey, Douglas Fisher, & Julie Kroener**



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THE SUMMARY IN BRIEF

Current special education practice is defined by dedicated, well-meaning educators and administrators who are nonetheless faced with overcoming a status quo that's outdated and far less effective than it could be. In ***Your Students, My Students, Our Students***, four expert educators help you discover five essential disruptions to the prevailing “wisdom” directing many special education efforts.

The overall goal of this book is for everyone—not just “special educators” or “general educators” but all educators—to be able to address the challenges, discover the solutions, and uncover the tools and inspiration that will help serve those students who have special rights (the book's preferred term over “special needs.”) Along the way, you'll establish a more inclusive school culture, rethink the structures that have long dominated special education but which don't lead to success, leverage the strength of your educators more effectively and collaboratively, and help each and every student pursue their goals and aspirations.

IN THIS SUMMARY, YOU WILL LEARN HOW TO:

- Establish a culture of equity and inclusion while challenging the status quo when it comes to established special education systems.
- Leverage the skills of all your teachers in a unified effort that trades silos for a collaborative approach to education.
- Honor and support student aspirations, even as they evolve and grow over time.
- Achieve true inclusion through the persistent pursuit of real change.

Introduction

This book is for school leaders and any educator for whom people with disabilities are people first: family, neighbors, part of the community, and students in the classrooms and hallways of our schools. All educators have a circle of influence in their capacity as professionals, and you can use yours to work toward creating equitable and inclusive learning environments for all students.

The work of transforming school practices and organizations to improve the learning lives of every student begins with educators and relies on our ability to increase our own efficacy. Yes, you are likely to encounter some ideas in this book summary and think, “I can’t change that. I’m just one person.” Perhaps you aren’t in a decision-making role as it applies to some of the programmatic, fiscal, or human resources recommendations. But you do have a voice. You can advocate for incremental changes. You can influence one, who can influence others, to spark the change. After all, it was a groundswell of many voices that brought about two monumental pieces of legislation: the desegregation of schools based on race and the mandate that children with disabilities receive a free and appropriate public education. These events fundamentally changed the education landscape in the latter half of the 20th century. Now, well into the 21st century, it is past time to build on these foundational principles.

This book focuses on areas that must receive attention in order to realize the promise of providing an equitable, meaningful educational experience for all students, including students with disabilities. Toward that end, there are five identified disruptions to the status quo that are needed to move inclusive schooling practices to the next level—Inclusion 2.0, if you will. These areas of focus build on the work that others have done to open doors for students with disabilities:

Establish an inclusive culture that champions equity and inclusion.

Reimagine the long-standing structure of least restrictive environment and resulting service delivery.

Leverage the strengths of all educators to benefit each student.

Collaborate on the delivery of instruction and intervention.

Honor the aspirations of students and plan accordingly.

Our work in schools charges us with solving problems. Only by addressing issues of equity for students with disabili-

ties—a historically marginalized group—is it possible to build a system for creating equitable solutions for all students. And it’s only by relentlessly pursuing change that we can realize true inclusion.

The real stories of discrimination and failure, of empowerment and success in the pages ahead will appeal to your sense of social justice. Ultimately, this book summary will inspire you to take up the charge and advocate for a stronger education system that values the contributions of every member of society. Your voice matters.

Establish a Culture of Equity and Inclusion

The drive for truly inclusive education is a critical part of the broader effort aimed at achieving equity in education. It means reimagining systems to expand every student’s access to both the general education curriculum and intervention supports and services. It also means building a culture in which this expansion is the expectation and the norm, in which everyone agrees that there is no such thing as “good teaching” that leaves some students unserved and unsupported.

Creating this new and better model of education begins with taking action to adjust the language used in schools, the services provided, and the expectations set for students with disabilities and those at risk. Doing so establishes a climate in which students can achieve outcomes that might once have been considered unrealistic.

Challenges and Solutions for Changing Culture

Challenge

School staff have not examined their beliefs and values related to students with disabilities and their ability to design and deliver supports to ensure that students with and without disabilities are educated together.

Solution

Build the belief among school teams that every student has value as an individual and is worthy of time, attention, and membership in every opportunity schools and society have to offer.

Challenge

Students with disabilities are seen as belonging primarily to special education teachers. Students without disabilities are seen as general education students.

Solution

See students with disabilities as general education students. Provide all students access to specialist-designed strategies. Ensure all students belong to all faculty.

Challenge

Students with disabilities and those at risk are explicitly or implicitly tracked and must earn their way out of the lowest track.

Solution

Do not assign any student to a “track”; deliver instruction to students with disabilities in the general education classroom.

Challenge

Students’ struggles are seen as a problem with the individual rather than a problem with instruction.

Solution

Ensure every student receives quality core instruction every day. When students don’t respond to instruction, consider changes to the instruction itself.

Challenge

Only students with IEPs receive accommodations and modifications.

Solution

Provide every student with access to accommodations and modifications when these are needed.

Challenge

Students with disabilities receive homework help or alternative assignments in segregated settings for part of the day.

Solution

Supply students who need support with evidence-based interventions that support the skill and help them achieve meaningful growth.

Reimagine Special Education Structures

After taking steps to grow the vision and culture for inclusion, educators should turn their attention to the long-standing special education structures that guide

services and supports for students with disabilities. The least restrictive environments (LRE) provision of the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) requires that students with disabilities receive their instruction alongside their typically developing peers, in general education classrooms, with the general education curriculum—unless they cannot satisfactorily meet their goals there.

Too often, however, a reverse decision-making process is used. Rather than first trying to meet a student’s goals in earnest within the general education curriculum, the IEP team decides on a more restrictive setting and justifies this setting in the IEP they create. In some cases, placement decisions are made primarily according to a student’s disability label. But, disability labels actually reveal little about the individual child’s specific needs; disability labels should be used to obtain supports and services for students, not to determine these students’ educational trajectory.

Although the authors of IDEA were forward-thinking in their day, it’s time for us to aim higher.

The Bottom Line

Qualifying for an IEP is not justification for receiving services in a segregated setting. The LRE provision of IDEA requires that students be moved to more restrictive settings only if they cannot accomplish their IEP goals within the general education setting. Often, though, focused conversation around where services and supports are to be delivered is nonexistent. Over and over again, we have seen teams make the decision to put “resource room” onto a student’s high school schedule with the purpose of helping the student to stay afloat with assignments. For these students, disability status is used as the justification for reserving a generic, catchall space in the day for pullout services. This is a convenient arrangement for the school, but it misses the entire point of special education services. The mission is not to drag kids through assignments; it is to change their lives and give them a solid foundation of skills that will maximize their success in school and beyond. Students are cheated out of this opportunity when special educators are shunted into the role of playing proverbial whack-a-mole as homework helpers—a waste of their expertise. To ensure that there is purposeful attention to teaching students skills (and to be in compliance with the LRE provisions of IDEA), conversations must shift away from disability categories and assignments to skills, the type of support that is needed to develop those skills, and the natural settings where that support can be delivered.

Leverage the Strengths of All Educators

Preservice special education teachers do not share courses with those studying general education, and at many colleges and universities, the curriculum is delivered by separate university departments. This traditional arrangement has serious consequences. Special education is governed by the principle of the least restrictive environment (LRE), but how can special educators support this without understanding what general education is? How can general educators embrace educating students with disabilities when they have had little preparation for and experience with this part of their job?

Establishing Schoolwide Inclusive Practices

Job descriptions alone do not create the symbiotic, collaborative atmosphere needed for this new vision of inclusive education to succeed. School leaders must work to create the conditions that enable staff to function as high-performing teams.

This begins by setting the tone of the school. School leaders identify the topics, activities, and processes that will be the staff's focus. In school after school, we have seen principal support for increased inclusion be the key to realizing the change. Of course, the teachers and staff have to implement the support systems, but the site administrator plays a pivotal role in creating and maintaining a vision of schoolwide inclusive practices (Villa & Thousand, 2016).

Administrators can guide policies on using the infused skills grid and lead decision-making regarding under what conditions students receive instruction outside the general education classroom. They also develop and implement grading and assessment policies that support all students. Principals establish the culture of the school and clearly communicate the values and vision of the school as a place of inclusive learning. To be effective, school leaders spend time in classrooms, observing but also offering guidance on instruction, assessment, accommodations, and modifications. And they hire the right people (those who are true believers in fully inclusive schools), provide incentives and support, and recognize the efforts and successes of their staff members to achieve their shared vision of inclusion.

There are primarily three core things school leaders can do to make this team-based approach to inclusion a reality:

- Foster collaboration through common planning time.

- Provide appropriate professional learning opportunities.
- Improve accountability systems.

Outdated thinking of discipline-specific roles in schools hinders efforts to realize a more inclusive environment that capitalizes on the collective expertise of the faculty. Department or grade-level meetings that do not include special educators reduce the likelihood that student needs will be addressed in a responsive manner. Responsiveness is further compromised when general and special educators lack the common planning time and professional learning that will foster collaboration. In addition, supervision models that assign special and general educators to different administrators, or that shift supervision to the district level, further distance special educators and related services providers from the flow of the school day. The divisions are further exacerbated when paraprofessionals are assigned to individual students as “shadows” or “one-on-one aides.”

By redefining the roles of the adults, we can streamline and strengthen efforts to ensure that we go far beyond physically including students with disabilities in the general education classroom. Physical inclusion is basic. Purposefully promoting student independence, growth, authentic belongingness, and ultimate success has to be your aim as you shape and mold these roles as a school.

Collaborate on the Delivery of Instruction and Intervention

It's hard to be part of a team when you behave as if you are a solo act. Arndt and Liles (2010) call this the “separate spheres framework;” it's the “You do your job, and I'll do mine” mindset. Collaboration is key to the success of inclusive classrooms. Co-teaching models allow more students to experience more success because they have access to more expertise. Students without disabilities enjoy a number of incidental benefits when they are prompted, cued, and questioned by a knowledgeable special educator. And students with disabilities benefit by accessing content expertise with appropriate support.

In addition, Response to Intervention (RTI), Multi-Tiered System of Support (MTSS), and the Gradual Release of Responsibility (GRR) framework provide general and special education teachers with a structure for working productively with one another. Instituting truly inclusive practices requires redefining the roles and responsibilities of

educators. Educators need to collaborate. There are systems that allow this new team dynamic to flourish. These systems allow an instructional team to focus on each student's needs, providing quality instruction and interventions as needed. Importantly, it is the means to the ends we really seek, which is for all students to develop skills and habits that they can use beyond the classroom rather than simply earning passing scores on the tasks they are assigned.

Challenge

Students with disabilities receive instruction within a general education setting but through a restrictive service delivery model.

Solution

Have classroom teachers use service delivery models that include group support along with individual support to realize benefits for all students, with and without disabilities.

Challenge

The school relies on one-on-one paraprofessional support to help students participate.

Solution

Have paraprofessionals promote the natural support of classmates to provide opportunities for students to grow academically.

Challenge

Special education teachers in “inclusive” classrooms are relegated to an assistant role, with general education teachers responsible for most instruction, communication with families, and student assessment and grading.

Solution

Use a “zone defense” framework to ensure support is provided to any student who needs it. Employ a variety of co-teaching models to build capacity in all teachers and limit interventions that remove students from general education classroom.

Challenge

Interventions and supports focus on task completion.

Solution

Focus interventions and supports on the skills students need to develop.

Challenge

Instruction is fragmented and piecemeal. The GRR model is not implemented regularly.

Solution

Design learning for all students using the GRR model. Vary the order of the phases to ensure that learning expectations are met.

Honor Student Aspirations and Plan Accordingly

People start dreaming about their future careers and the lives they want to live in early childhood. Given that, we wonder why planning for the transition to life after high school is seldom a focus until high school. What if educators prompted students to talk about and explore their aspirations at an earlier age? Would this affect their interest and engagement in school? Would they graduate from high school better prepared to follow their dreams? What would their outcomes be later in life? We will now look at what it means, and what it takes, to honor students' aspirations.

A Need for Reform

Students with disabilities don't have “special needs”; they have special rights. You could effectively argue that every student deserves an individualized education plan or at least an opportunity to clarify who and what they want to be. But for students with disabilities enrolled in U.S. public schools, this process is mandatory. The whole idea of the IEP goal-setting process is to identify a student's aspirations and then identify the learning they need to realize those dreams.

At IEP and similar meetings around the world, teams often start with the present level of performance, with goals emerging from the needs highlighted in the present-level review. Where is the student in all of this? Students don't benefit when they are only described in terms of their grades and what they can't do. It's virtually impossible to get at what really matters to a student and set in motion a life-altering plan when a deficit model is the default mode. Their hopes, dreams, likes, dislikes, and passions should have far more weight than their test scores.

Starting Transition Planning Early

Asking the right questions to shed light on the student's aspirations without stifling the student's dream can be challenging, but this is extremely important to the dreamer.

With a shared understanding of what is driving students' dreams, the team can mobilize resources and opportunities to allow them to further explore and understand their aspirations.

Focus on the Student

Investment in students' aspirations is the ultimate expression of equity-driven schooling. It communicates to students, "We see you." It signals to families, "We are here for you."

Unfortunately, expectations for students with IEPs can be undermined by inherent inequalities that have persisted over time, the result of institutional blindness. Comments like "That's how we've always done it" or "They told us that this is the procedure we should follow" or "They said this is the best choice for those kids" basically sends the message "I just work here"—distancing the speaker from any direct responsibility. Policies and procedures that are inherently unjust and inequitable are sustained by people who are "just doing their jobs." As Paulo Freire (1985) said, "Washing one's hands of the conflict between the powerful and the powerless means to side with the powerful, not to be neutral."

Where do you stand?

Relentlessly Pursue Change to Realize True Inclusion

An inclusive education system is not created through a single action but through many ongoing ones. The key to sustaining the work is a commitment to enact positive change. The only way to conclude this book is to look a little closer at what this commitment entails.

Building Social Capital

In an effort to close the achievement gaps among various targeted groups of students, schools often look for new interventions and curricula while overlooking the power of social capital. Social capital describes the norms, relationships, collegiality, and level of trust within an organization. The members of a school include not only the paid professionals who work there but also its students, their families, and the surrounding community. To put it another way, a school organization with high social capital has all its oars in the water, rowing in synchronicity.

High organizational social capital is predictive of improved achievement scores for students in reading and mathematics and higher graduation rates. Further, schools with high

organizational capital ameliorate other demographic school factors such as socioeconomic status, school size, and urbanicity (Salloum, Goddard, & Larsen, 2017). Conversely, when school organizations are divided into camps that must compete for scarce resources, social capital falls. And that is too often the case with special education; it's an isolated entity standing apart from the rest of the school.

Establish Mechanisms that Support Inclusion

Even a well-intentioned support mechanism can sabotage the best change efforts. Inclusive schools thrive on communication, and they must establish, monitor, and clarify the mechanisms that enable it. Creating inclusive education requires maintenance, monitoring, and a willingness to engage responsively with colleagues to continuously improve. Like the restorative practices work at Nancy, Doug, and Julie's school, the work to achieve equity and true inclusion is ongoing, never "done." It requires systematic, ongoing attention and support.

Making plans is one thing; implementation is another. Monitoring the plan is crucial to its success. Students with and without IEPs deserve more than their teachers and school leaders simply attempting implementation. They deserve a system of support that focuses on the seamless inclusion of students with IEPs in all settings, challenge and support for all students, progress monitoring of student learning, and rapid responses when changes are needed. They deserve for their teachers to have high expectations for their success.

Conclusion

The actions outlined in this book are underpinned by a set of values and beliefs about the kind of schools that students deserve. The widespread experience of inequitable schooling results from a host of institutional and sociocultural factors that require systemic change. While individual teachers might make changes to their own classrooms, these efforts in and of themselves are not enough. And it's true that many students have been fortunate enough to encounter individuals who have had a positive influence and have altered the trajectory of their young lives in a positive way. But too many students, especially those with IEPs, have not benefited in the same way. Their aspirations are not intentionally and purposefully nurtured, and over time, they fall short of their potential—if their potential is ever even recognized.

This book summary's call to action is for every educator.

Every student belongs to all of us, and this realization is where we start. Change begins with the individual, but it doesn't end there. Talk about issues of inclusion and equity whenever you can. Make it known that this is something of primary importance in your professional life. You will be surprised at how quickly your allies will reveal themselves.



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