

# Issues . . . about Change

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## Leadership: An Imperative for Successful Change

Our society has charged schools with delivering a high quality, multi-discipline education to all students. To complicate this mandate, never before have students come to the public school from such diverse backgrounds, family patterns, and native languages. An increasing array of problems makes life difficult for many of our children and their families. It goes without saying that school, also, is all too frequently difficult for these children and for the educators who try to serve their needs.

Happily, there is no shortage of programs, processes, and school practices deemed effective for students at-risk of failure in schools and, subsequently, in adult life. What appears to be needed, however, is school leadership that provides the knowledge, understanding, and expertise required for working with school staffs to develop and/or transplant promising practices to schools at-risk of failing their educational mission.

In the previous *Issues...about Change* (Winter, 1990), the need to understand and manage the process of school change was discussed. Moving from that discussion, this paper takes a brief look at what leadership does to actively manage the process in order to make schools more successful with all students. Who are the people who supply the leadership, and what do they do in this vital leadership role? These two questions guide the discussion that follows.

### Who Are the Leaders

Leaders and leadership have become the coin of the realm in educational administration discussions (Murphy, 1991). This has not always been so. In the early history of schools, administrators were teachers with additional support responsibilities. As schools became larger and more numerous, administrators became more management oriented, emulating business and industrial models. In the face of growing societal unrest and tensions, school managers were challenged to bring order and stability to schools. In the past decade, however, school and district administrators have been encouraged to move beyond

their stabilizing posture and step boldly out to provide guidance and leadership for instructional change and improvement.

Much has been recorded about the principal's leadership role as change agent and gatekeeper to instructional change (Duttweiler & Hord, 1987). As visible as the principal has been in accounts of change, the superintendent has been nearly invisible and ignored (Crowson & Morris, 1990). Lamenting this situation, researchers have turned attention to district level players and to the contributions of the chief educational officer in the local district (Hallinger, Murphy, & Peterson, 1985, 1986, 1987). Further, the manner in which the superintendent relates to principals and orchestrates change across a district is the focus of a growing body of knowledge (Coleman & LaRocque, 1988; Pollack, Chrispeels, Watson, Brice, & McCormack, 1988).

An additional focus of attention has been on teachers and counselors who serve with principals in roles to facilitate change. The discovery of these "second change facilitators" (Hord, Stiegelbauer, & Hall, 1984) revealed their close association with principals in supporting implementation of new practices (incorporation of new curriculum or instructional strategies into regular classroom use, for example). These change facilitators work as a team, through holding regular briefing and debriefing sessions where implementation is assessed and the needs of implementors (those putting "newness" into place) planned for. Such teams frequently include central office staff who serve as an external assister, a factor identified by Cohen (1987) as a necessary force for change.

The effective schools process, based on the effective schools research and used by many schools as a school improvement vehicle (Levine & Lezotte, 1990), employed such a school leadership team to guide the staff in the preparation stage of change, to support the development of a school improvement plan, and to facilitate implementation of the plan when it had been completed.

Studies focusing on these teams make it clear that while the principal is viewed as a key player in change efforts, and bears responsibility for its success, the principal by no means acts alone. A team comprised of various stakeholders in the school, including professional and non-professional staff, parents and community representatives, carries out the complex and regular demands made of schools involved in the change process.

Thus, many persons in different roles or positions contribute to leading and facilitating change. These can be superintendents, central office staff, principals, teachers, students, counselors, external consultants, parents, school board members and community persons. What these persons, in various configurations, do collectively to provide implementation guidance and support is the focus of the next section.

### What Do Leaders Do?

The literature has included reports about the roles and activities of leaders and leadership teams engaged in effective school projects and school improvement efforts. Typically, such reports focus on the introduction of a change, initiation of the change process, and mobilization of the school and/or district as 1) goals are set, 2) data are reviewed, 3) needs are established, and 4) campus or district action plans are developed. Many educators are relieved when the hard work described above has been completed. Many also assume that somehow the job of school change and improvement has been completed at this point.

Whereas these first four steps in the school change process constitute a preparation stage, it is at the Fifth Step, Implementation, that the changing actually begins. At this point, the new practices identified in the action plan are ready to be put into place in classrooms and the school. And it is at the implementation stage that many improvement efforts fail for lack of attention. This paper draws particular attention to the implementation stage of change and to the actions taken by school leaders who effectively implement policies and practices identified to improve their educational organizations.

Understandably, the *position* of a leader who is providing supportive action for change could influence the action's effectiveness. However, the relationship of leader position and effectiveness varies from site to site. This report, then, focuses on the actions required by leaders for

successful implementation of change, irrespective of who does them. To describe what is done by such leaders, a short review of relevant literature from change research is reported. This research is followed by the school improvement story of a district that exemplifies what has been learned about leadership for change.

### From Research

Leadership can be defined as providing vision, direction, and support toward a different and preferred state — suggesting change. Thus, leadership and change are closely related, and some would say they are two sides of the same coin (Manasse, 1984). It could be said that leaders are change-makers, and the studies that follow provide insights about what they do to make change happen. Results from Louis and Miles' case studies of five high school change efforts (1990) and Hord and Huling-Austin's synthesis of facilitation activities in nine elementary school stories of change (1986) have been reviewed. The actions of the leaders in these two sets of reports were highly similar, and have been integrated into a concise set of actions recommended for consideration by potential change leaders (see *Facilitative Leadership: The Imperative For Change*, Hord, 1992).

**Articulating a shared vision.** Louis and Miles reported that successful change leaders in the high school study consistently articulated a vision for their schools so that everyone understood the vision; and second, they shared influence, authority, responsibility, and accountability with the staff in shaping the vision so that shared ownership of the vision occurred. Since the studies reported by Hord and Huling-Austin were specifically designed to identify strategies necessary to support *implementation* of change, the starting point of their studies began after the vision had been developed and established. Thus, no attention to vision building was included.

**Planning and providing resources.** Hord and Huling-Austin identified hundreds of facilitators' actions across three years of implementation and organized them in a framework of categories. The first of these was "Developing Supportive Organizational Arrangements," a category that included planning, managing, providing materials, resources, space, etc. Louis and Miles also reported that effective high school leaders engaged in planning. They used an evolutionary kind of planning, based not on an extensive blueprint, but guided by the school's development. Thus, the leaders adapted plans as

a result of the school's experiences of what was working toward the vision and what was not. Additionally, Louis and Miles stated that leaders scrutinized the school's environment in order to access both material and human resources. They did not hesitate to reallocate time, people, equipment, and assistance, and to continually search for new information to share.

**Investing in professional development and training.** Hord and Huling-Austin specified "Training" as a second implementation category. Training included teaching, reviewing, and clarifying new knowledge and skills necessary for implementing the change. Carefully designed staff development and inservice were sometimes delivered by the leaders. At other times, leaders arranged for consultants or specialists to provide training. Louis and Miles included training with the prior category, planning and providing resources.

**Checking or assessing progress.** "Monitoring and Evaluation" was the third category or set of actions identified by Hord and Huling-Austin. These actions represented leaders' continual efforts to "touch base" with implementors, seek input about their needs, and assess implementation progress in a formative mode. Further, these actions also involved more formal data collection, analysis, reporting and transferring data, and included summative evaluation purposes.

**Continuing to give assistance.** "Providing Consultation and Reinforcement" was a fourth group of actions reported by Hord and Huling-Austin; these actions focused on promoting implementation through coaching, problem solving, and technical assistance to individual users. Louis and Miles related to this category by describing leaders' coping skills for resolving emerging problems. Leaders coordinated and orchestrated the change effort, exhibiting enormous persistence, tenacity, and willingness to live with risks. Such individuals, observed Louis and Miles, required a high tolerance for complexity and ambiguity. However, experience with coping led to better coping skills, Louis and Miles assessed, lending encouragement to those school leaders developing their own understandings for guiding change in their schools.

**Creating a context conducive to change.** The importance of this strategy has been emerging over the past ten years. In both the corporate world (Senge, 1990) and education context (Rosenholtz, 1989), it has been clear that engaging staff in continuous learning opportunities, and in decision

making and other authority-sharing practices, increases staff commitment to change. A context that supports the change process has two dimensions identified by Boyd (1992): the "physical" features of the school and district, including facilities, resources, policies, and others; and "people" factors that include staff norms, attitudes, relationships, to cite a few. When trust between the administrator(s) and teachers, and trust among teachers, is present, this context supports a high level of quality by the staff that increases their effectiveness and leads to students' increased successful learning. Staffs in such contexts value change and seek change to enhance their efficacy with students.

Among all these categories, Hord and Huling-Austin found that more facilitation activities occurred in "Developing Supportive Organizational Arrangements" (*planning and providing resources*) than in any other. Implementation also involved a large amount of "Providing Consultation and Reinforcement" (*continuing to give assistance*) by the change leaders. In the first two years of implementation, one-fourth to one-third of the total leaders' actions were in this consultation category. This category proved to be essential to successful change implementation. Another important category was "Monitoring and Evaluation" (*checking progress*); the number of monitoring activities correlated significantly with teachers' degree of implementation of the change. While leaders' actions in the "Training" category occurred less frequently, they tended to be of longer duration and more complex in design and delivery.

While the studies reviewed above focused on actions by school *and* district level facilitators, Fullan (1991) cited actions required specifically of district level staff for effective change. He noted (p.198) that district staff test the need for and priority of a change and determine the potential appropriateness of a particular innovation for addressing the need. Effective district facilitators clarify, support, and insist on the role of principals and other administrators as central to implementation. They ensure that direct implementation support is provided in the form of available quality materials, in-service training, one-to-one technical help, and opportunity for peer interaction, while they allow for certain redefinition and adaptation of the innovation to local needs. Further, the district staff communicate with and maintain the support of parents and the school board; set up an information-gathering system to monitor and correct implementation problems; and project a realistic time perspective. While the single

school is the center for change, it is nested in a district context, making the actions, or lack of actions, of district implementation facilitators highly influential at the school level.

There are strong parallels in the results of the elementary, high school, and district level studies cited above. Clarifying the vision, acquiring resources, providing training and professional development, monitoring systematically and regularly, and supplying follow-up assistance were typically supplied by the change leaders, persons who understood and were skillful in operationalizing their leadership for change role. More recent studies have pointed to the significant strategy of cultivating a context where change is valued.

Providing these six major categories of activities is quite a task, but is precisely what effective schools and districts do. How do these six sets of activities look in a district trying to improve its educational program for students at-risk? This paper concludes with a description.

### **From Practice**

In Silver Hill School District, Superintendent Gray has always worked to improve the programs and practices available to all students. But in the past several years, he has especially addressed the needs of at-risk students. Gray, a careful observer of the educational environment, is attuned to his state department of education's standards for student learning, to other rules and regulations, and, in addition, to the opportunities the department provides for assistance. Thus, in planning to analyze and respond to the needs of the at-risk student, Gray invited state department consultants to access and organize a wide array of data about the district, past and present, and about its students, specifically students at-risk. These data were explored by a team representing all elements of the district's educational personnel, and community business and service organizations. Knowing the community context and scanning the internal professional education environment, Gray involved all relevant parties: teachers, parents, the Chamber of Commerce, the Bureau of Human Services, the Girl and Boy Scouts Associations, to name a few, in addressing the needs of at-risk students. As a result, the team targeted language development and math competencies for improvement.

Because a district mission statement that promised to address the needs and potential of all students had been developed the prior year, Gray was able to *develop and articulate his vision* more effectively. To all constituents,

he pictured the students, regardless of gender, age, race, or socio-economic class, moving across the gymnasium stage receiving a diploma. To make this dream a reality, he used key staff members, principals, teachers, and parents, to assist in identifying goals and objectives that would guide the district to the vision. The superintendent, at the "visioning" stage, was not an expert on at-risk programs and policies. He learned all he could by asking questions of other administrative and teaching staff, seeking expertise and *resources* wherever they could be found. Additionally, he sought help from external sources, such as the state administrator's association and a local college. In all ways, he demonstrated interest in, commitment to, and a belief in pursuing change in the district to accomplish new outcomes for the district's children.

Over time, Gray helped individual principals in each of the schools to develop shared leadership practices, to develop trusting relationships with the staff and parents, and to organize school improvement teams composed of principals, teachers, and parents (*creating context*). He provided *training* to them to work with their school staff, and campus improvement plans resulted. Each school team and faculty received *training* and support in their change effort so that they might be effectively involved in the improvement process. While each school staff's plans reflected the unique needs of their particular school, they all were guided by the vision of improved outcomes for students at-risk articulated initially by Gray.

It's one thing to talk and dream and plan; it's another thing to take action and actually get people to change their behaviors and beliefs. Superintendent Gray became a student of implementation, and a model for the school-based administrators to follow.

Through monthly meetings with individual team members, he reviewed and assessed (*checking progress*) the knowledge and skills of the district improvement team that included central office supervisors and the principals of the six schools in the district. At bi-weekly meetings with principals he shared information, reviewed resources needed and available. Together they clearly articulated expected outcomes along with long range and short term goals, and established timelines and anticipated stages of development (*planning and providing resources*). At these meetings, expectations for change-related roles and responsibilities were defined. Ample opportunities were provided for discussing the procedures and process. Principals reported on progress, problems, and concerns

with their own school-based teams (*assessing progress*). As time progressed, the meetings became trouble-shooting and problem-solving sessions. Periodically, principals brought other members of their campus improvement teams for sharing and to report.

The district and campus improvement teams received *training* in using change process tools and techniques (see Winter, 1990 edition of *Issues...about Change*) to support implementation of their campus improvement plans; these plans addressed a new district-wide mathematics problem solving curriculum, plus language development strategies selected by each school. Faculties and administrators designed a system of ongoing *professional development* to learn the new curriculum and instructional strategies. School improvement teams became skillful in conducting training sessions with the staff. In addition, they modeled and demonstrated the new behaviors required of the change. They addressed openly the staff's initial fears and the setbacks they all experienced as they prepared for and began implementing the new practices (*continuous assistance*).

Importantly, Superintendent Gray had engaged the Board of Trustees in the goal and mission statement development for the district, and had shared a summary of the disaggregated data that identified areas of need in the district's program. Thus, when a columnist for the community's weekly newspaper attacked the superintendent because of the *resources* required to support the improvement efforts, the Board stepped in to "help the media understand the important activity underway" and to support the effort. The Board had been involved in the process from the start and was an active supporter of the proposed school improvement efforts and changes.

The media incident was not the only disruption of Silver Hill's improvement effort. The manipulative materials for developing mathematical concepts and problem solving skills, due to be delivered to all of the schools, were delayed due to a shipping problem at the production location. Several weeks elapsed while principals, improvement teams, and central office *monitored* both classroom practice and resource needs. When it was determined that implementation was on hold awaiting the math manipulatives, the administrators decided it was time for serious "coping." Canvassing the community, they found an abandoned lumber yard's stack of "widgets and gizmos," excellent substitutions for the materials needed. Instruction resumed, monitoring continued, and progress resulted.

When the leaders noted frustration mounting or a lack of focus with the new materials, *continuing assistance* activities or celebrations for accomplishments would occur. Superintendent Gray might appear in a school to encourage staff, or write a note of appreciation. During such difficult times, he would restate the vision and its expected outcomes. Periodically, principals visited classrooms to ask students to explain their work, and to thank teachers for their effects on children. Gray and the principals were supportive and noticeably visible throughout the process of change.

The superintendent regularly requested feedback and debriefing from the district team and encouraged principals to solicit reactions from their teams (*assessing progress*). Over time, ultimate responsibility was shifted to the school teams, empowering the members with the job of monitoring the staff's change efforts, followed by coaching and technical assistance to the teachers. The teams became known as collegial cheerleaders, coaches, and counselors to their peers.

Three years have passed and the district leadership have developed understandings and skills for guiding and supporting change. The district's capacity to change itself has increased as its leaders have learned to apply persuasion and press for change, along with assistance and support to the staff. These two elements, pressure and support, have been specified by numerous researchers (Fullan, 1991; Hord & Huling-Austin, 1986; Huberman & Miles, 1986; McLaughlin, 1987) as the "bottom line" for accomplishing change. Providing this delicate balance is one of the absolute necessities of leaders' involvement in planning and implementing change.

As the research and practice have shown, leaders bring about change by

- developing and articulating a shared vision of improvement,
- planning and providing resources and needed organizational arrangements,
- investing in training and ongoing professional development,
- monitoring progress and needs,
- providing continuous assistance, and
- creating an environment supportive of individuals in the process of change.

Through these major categories of actions, leaders fulfill the requirements for successful change.

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