

SEDL Letter

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Doing the Right Things

The late, great management and leadership guru Peter F. Drucker once said, “Management is doing things right; leadership is doing the right things.” In education, doing the right things means doing what is best for our students—doing whatever it takes to help them reach high levels of learning and achievement. In this issue of *SEDL Letter*, we discuss strategies that can help education leaders ensure that students are well served.

Mike Schmoker, a former principal who writes frequently about education reform and leadership, presents simple, team-based leadership practices that can help make a difference in student learning. Peter Hall, who is currently an elementary school principal, provides his advice for monitoring and promoting learning. To bring in another leadership perspective, Lesley Dahlkemper writes about how school boards are now concentrating more on student achievement instead of the three Bs—budgets, buildings, and buses. In addition, Pamela Porter reports on the importance of building a shared vision as the way to foster shared leadership while maintaining a focus on student learning.

Because doing the right things for our students includes paying attention to research findings, we’ve included a summary of a recent meta-analysis that examined research related to leadership and student outcomes. Even though leadership is a topic often researched and discussed, there still are not strong, experimental studies that demonstrate a causal effect between certain leadership practices and improved outcomes. The study we discuss, like many others, focuses on practices that are only associated with improved student outcomes and should be considered in that light.

In this issue, we’ve also included an article about Hurricane Katrina’s effects on education in the states SEDL serves. As we go to press, only one public school in New Orleans has reopened, and many of our colleagues and educators with whom we have worked remain uncertain as to what the future holds. One thing seems clear, though: to rebuild schools and communities, to provide the education and social environment that all children deserve, we must do the right things.

We at SEDL wish you a safe and happy 2006.



The New Fundamentals of Leadership

No institution can survive if it needs geniuses or supermen to manage it. It must be organized to get along under a leadership of average human beings.

Peter Drucker, management expert and author

By Mike Schmoker

Most people will agree that principals are the most important leaders in our school system. Most will also agree that effective leadership in schools is still dismayingly, exceedingly rare. The key to improving school leadership begins with demystifying it. We must clarify the most high-leverage routines and procedures for bringing effective leadership within reach of “average” human beings. To do this, leadership must be redefined around professional learning communities: team-based, cooperative arrangements between instructors and administrators.

At the heart of such professional learning communities is a commitment to having all teachers meet regularly with their colleagues for two primary purposes: 1) to determine, in common, the essential standards they will teach in each course on a common schedule, and 2) to prepare lessons and units together, assess their impact on student learning, and refine their instruction on the basis of these assessment results. If administrators focus on and coordinate such work, we will see record proportions of “average” human beings become highly successful school leaders.

A Case History

In “The Learning-Centered Principal,” Rick DuFour describes how he underwent a very deep change that saved time and made him more effective. In painful detail, he outlines his efforts to take the traditional evaluation/supervision model as far as it could go. He conducted an exceptional number of classroom observations, including preconferences and postconferences—a tremendous amount of work. But he found all of this had very little impact on achievement.

Odd as it may sound, he realized he was too focused on teaching and not enough on learning—i.e., on assessment results. As he puts it, he went

from being an “instructional leader” to becoming a “learning leader,” something quite different. He didn’t stop observing teachers, but he began to spend far less time at it and far more time discussing and supporting student learning with his teachers as determined by teacher-selected, short-term assessment results. When DuFour turned his time and attention to monitoring, supporting, and rewarding each team’s ongoing success on common formative assessments, he realized that teachers learn more from each other in teams than from a supervisor running frenetically from teacher to teacher, giving advice. But he also learned that in order for teachers to learn from each other, certain fairly strict conditions had to exist.

First, he provided data to create a sense of urgency—not an easy thing in an affluent school with good scores. He collected data from other similarly situated schools from around the state and country; it revealed that their achievement levels, however high, didn’t compare all that favorably with these schools. These schools also used performance data to set goals and to target specific areas of opportunity where performance was lowest.

The next step was pivotal. For every course in his school’s curriculum, including electives, DuFour had staff carefully review state and district curriculum documents in order to select and teach only the most essential standards. They learned that they had to set strict limits on the number of topics and concepts. Teachers then built their own in-district end-of-course and formative assessments around these selected standards—all of which guaranteed a viable curriculum and were aligned with state assessments, Advanced Placement, and college entrance exams.

He then arranged for same-course teacher teams to meet at least twice a month, on a regular schedule, to prepare and improve their lessons together on the basis of results on their common formative assessments.

All this is great, but it's not enough. To make it all coherent, DuFour met with teams on a regular basis to ask variations on the following questions:

- To what extent were students learning the intended outcomes of each course?
- What steps can I take to give both students and teachers the time and support they need to improve learning? (p. 13)

Finally, he rewarded and celebrated each teacher's or team's progress and accomplishments at faculty meetings.

Simple Practices, Rich Rewards

Such simple, core practices constitute the new fundamentals—a reasonable set of requirements that we should be emphasizing at the school, district, state, and national level. They are a far cry from the feckless, time-consuming distractions that now bloat our accreditation and improvement templates.

As a result of these efforts, which are the stuff of “simple plans” according to Collins (2001a), DuFour's Adlai Stevenson High School went from average to exceptional and from exceptional to world-class. In a 10-year period, the school enjoyed uninterrupted achievement gains and appeared on every list of America's best high schools. DuFour and his school received an array of national and international awards—not for flashy programs but for academic achievements.

Stevenson's rise to prominence demonstrates that fairly simple, reasonable practices will have a dramatic effect on learning (reread the above if you're not sure). A new definition of leadership is needed, one focused on such fundamentals and built on the strength of self-managing teams, which will have an exponentially greater impact on achievement than management as usual

Redefining Leadership: Toward New Fundamentals

In its large-scale study of successful schools, *Beyond Islands of Excellence*, the Learning First Alliance similarly found that school leadership needed to be “redefined” (Togneri, p. 3). How? Along the same simple lines we have emphasized here: cutting through the layers of denial to acknowledge opportunities for better performance and using assessment data to keep it real and monitor progress. Most importantly, the successful schools replaced typical professional development with regular times for self-managing teams to prepare and improve their lessons together.

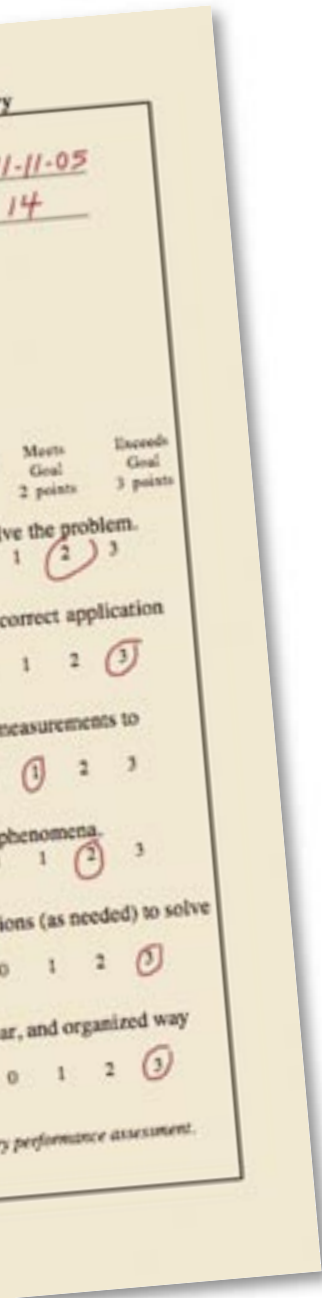
On this last point, the Learning First Alliance is emphatic: these school districts were successful across socioeconomic lines because leaders understood that effective teamwork is fundamental. They “*worked on working together*” (p. 9). This makes leadership simpler; perhaps radical and challenging, but much simpler. The leader's primary task is now to *equip teams* at every level to solve problems, to generate and celebrate the small wins that we now know are so important throughout the learning community.

If this sounds too good or simple to be true, it is actually quite consistent with the theme of team-focused “simplicity and diligence” with the “simple plans” that Collins found to be the hallmark of effective organizations (2001a, p. 177). His hedgehog concept points out how single-minded diligence beats multifaceted complexity any day of the week (2001a, p. 90–91). Similarly, Pfeffer and Sutton point to the “simplicity and common sense” in effective organizations that make teamwork their “core value” (2000, p. 205). Years ago, management expert Tom Peters urged us to “stop rejecting the simple”; the best companies were eliminating entire layers of management and supervision by as much as 40 percent. This unleashed the untapped energy and expertise of highly efficient “self-managing teams,” which exercised their own leadership as they invented, innovated, and refined their practices to produce a steady stream of small, tangible wins (1987, p. 160). In the school professional learning community, the leader's job is not to “mass inspect” every lesson taught but to orchestrate and support the work of teacher teams by meeting with them and reviewing and celebrating short- and long-term assessment results.

In the area of leadership, less is more. We've seen how our misconceived improvement plans complicate, overload, and thus divert leaders from this simple, continuous focus on teams and student learning (Schmoker, 2004).

As management authority Peter Drucker writes, “the easiest and the greatest increases in productivity in knowledge work come from redefining the task and especially from eliminating what need not be done” (in DuFour and Eaker, 1998, p. 151).

This is eerily similar to Collins's advice when he urges us to “focus on what is vital—and to eliminate all of the extraneous distractions . . . stop doing the senseless things that consume so much time and energy” (Collins, 2001b, p. 104). As DuFour's success makes so clear, there are two vital elements above all else that leaders should especially focus on: effective teamwork and a truly “guaranteed and viable curriculum” (Marzano, 2003, p.22–25).



Leadership Starts With a Radical Commitment to a “Guaranteed and Viable Curriculum”

Marzano’s works formalized the colossal importance of a “guaranteed and viable curriculum” (Marzano, 2003, p. 22–25). From Marzano’s perspective, a guaranteed curriculum allows states and districts to “give clear guidance to teachers regarding the content to be addressed in specific courses and at specific grade levels. It also means individual teachers do not have the option to disregard or replace assigned content.” Too often instead of a common or guaranteed curriculum, we have curricular chaos—wildly divergent topics being taught by teachers in the same grade level at the same school (Schmoker & Marzano, 1999).

A viable curriculum, Marzano tells us, ensures “the content that teachers are expected to address must be adequately covered in the instructional time teachers have available” (2003, p. 24). Without a guaranteed and viable curriculum, teams can’t succeed; they can’t even work together. Leaders must arrange times for teams to formally map and create a schedule for teaching the standards they select in each course and then ensure that the standards are actually taught. These maps must provide a roughly common schedule that allows teacher teams to coordinate and assess instruction together. They should clearly and explicitly reflect adequate attention (versus inflexible or lock-step conformity) to state-assessed reading, writing, and math standards and to intellectually engaging instruction and assessments—e.g., the “power standards” (as Doug Reeves of the Center for Performance Assessment calls them) that reside at the upper end of Bloom’s taxonomy.

It doesn’t matter what we call this work or its final product. It may be a curriculum map or a pacing guide (perhaps not “curriculum guide” as so many of these wind up collecting dust). At Adlai Stevenson High School, they call this all-important work the curriculum process (DuFour & Eaker, 1998). To accomplish this foundational task, leaders should grant primary responsibility and leadership to teams and departments themselves. However, the maps should be formally reviewed by a savvy curriculum expert to ensure their quality—their viability—including their alignment with state assessments.

But again, creating a curriculum map or pacing guide isn’t enough. Despite the many workshops now offered on curriculum mapping, many teachers continue to report that there are as yet no mechanisms in their schools for ensuring that the most essential standards are actually taught or taught on any kind of agreed-upon schedule. Therefore, we must have . . .



The Courage to Monitor

In this most important area, a radical change is in order. We won’t have a guaranteed and viable curriculum until principals, perhaps with help of teacher leaders, have the courage to meet with teacher teams monthly or quarterly to look at evidence of curriculum coherence. Marzano recommends the same kind of administrative review that DuFour conducted for years. At these all-important meetings, teams must demonstrate that they are truly (1) teaching the agreed-upon standards and (2) ensuring that progress is being made toward annual achievement goals and that ongoing assessment informs adjustments in instruction to ensure that increasingly (if incrementally) higher proportions of students are learning essential outcomes on formative assessments.

Such meetings, though essential, mightily violate the “don’t ask, don’t tell” culture in which we still pretend that we provide a coherent curriculum when we clearly don’t. We must remind ourselves that the stakes are unusually high here and that a guaranteed and viable curriculum is a crucial factor that will make or break our improvement efforts (Marzano, 2003). Without such reviews (or some tough-minded equivalent) we shouldn’t expect serious improvement in our schools.

The Quarterly Curriculum Review

For “average” leaders to be effective, we have to make it easier—more comfortable, if you will—for them to ask for evidence of what standards are being taught and how many students are learning those standards. The following kinds of evidence would make these meetings meaningful:

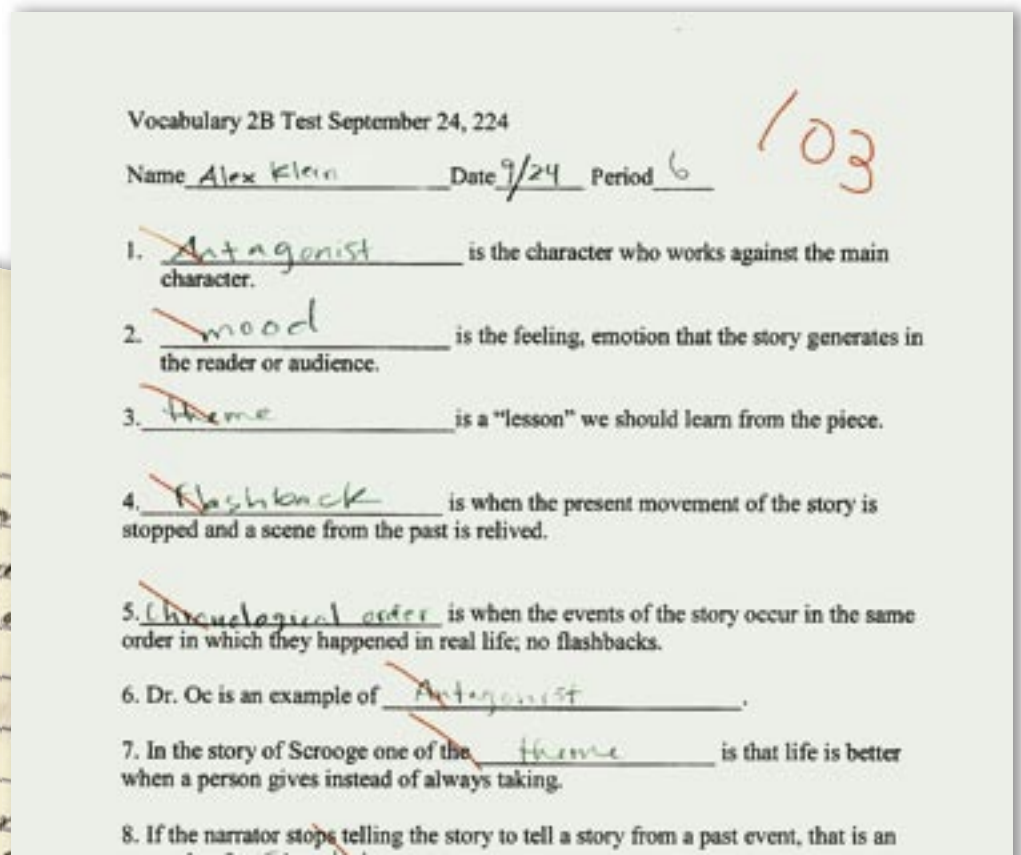
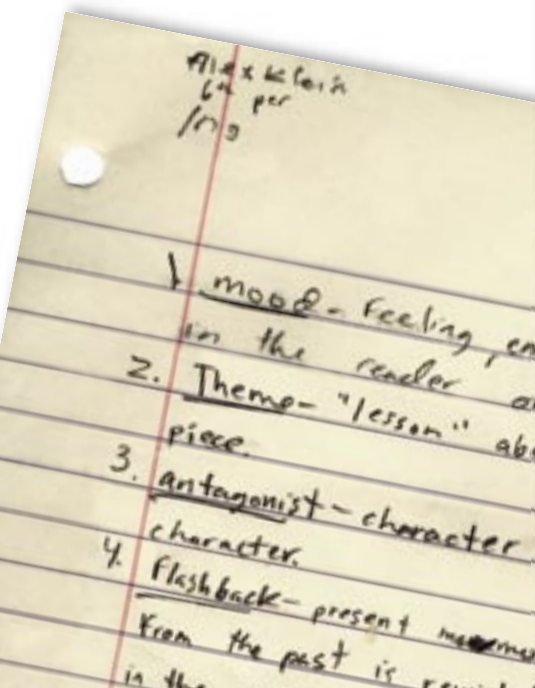
- Team learning/lesson logs: Logs should include evidence that teams are crafting and refining lessons, units, and assessments, along with measurable results achieved on those assessments.
- Quarterly or other periodic or formative assessments: Assessments should show results achieved (e.g., 77 percent of students succeeded on this essay assignment or science inquiry or test on polynomials, whatever the case may be).
- Grade books: Grade books should contain clear evidence that the curriculum is being taught. For some teachers, this may require that columns in their grade books be more clear and explicit about assessments.
- Student work: Student work should include scored samples from key assignments. These samples provide an incomparable opportunity for leaders to acquire the ability to understand and support the quality of instruction and assessment. Leaders are learners, too.

These administrative reviews don't have to be time-consuming or unpleasant—nor do they have to be perfect. Any good-faith attempt by the

average administrator will have a major impact on curricular quality and consistency, especially if leaders, including teacher leaders, help each other improve. Leaders can help each other streamline the procedure, make teacher expectations clearer, and learn which information is most revealing of each team's progress or problems.

I have some firsthand experience here. Years ago, in a middle school where I taught, the principal sat down with each teacher periodically to conduct such a review. We were asked to bring our grade books (a very revealing document, as you'll find). We English teachers brought one sample of student writing for each written assignment along with the student's rough draft. The principal could see lots of obvious things immediately, like the nature and number of our reading and writing assignments. She asked us fairly tame questions: How did this assignment go? What elements of the rubric were kids struggling with on this or other assignments, and how did we intend to improve in those areas? Did we need any help or support? It was a short but exceedingly powerful chat. In addition to these conversations, she made only occasional, quick visits to our classrooms—these have to be part of the leader's repertoire as well. Anyone who has done systematic classroom tours knows that these don't have to be that frequent or time-consuming.

You can't imagine how powerfully these simple, time-efficient rituals influenced the quality of our teaching and ensured a guaranteed and viable curriculum.



This was decades ago before learning communities were common. In a learning community, the principal might have done this with us by team and saved even more time while giving us a chance to learn from each other; she might have met with individuals only if there were indications of a problem or need. In some schools, these team reviews might be conducted by department heads, as is increasingly the case now at Adlai Stevenson High School and the Glendale Union High School District (Schmoker, 2001).

In Johnson City, New York, department head Dan Hendery provided such periodic oversight, which resulted in an increase in the passing rate on the New York Regents exam from 47 percent to 93 percent in a single year. Leadership focused on instructional improvement and guided by formative assessment results led to this incredible improvement without the need for a new program or “strategic plan” (Schmoker, 1999, p. 96).

Wanted: A Simple if Radical Shift in School Leadership Practices

Such simple, flexible structures, combined with quick, periodic classroom tours, can result in astonishing improvements in school leadership. These processes could be mastered by virtually any average leader, especially with the help of department heads or lead teachers—thus distributing leadership, with manifold benefits.

But it will be a difficult transition. Such reviews run right up against the deeply felt but unexamined notion that teachers as professionals are best left alone and don’t need oversight. It will mean making a detailed, long-overdue case—which most educators have never heard—for a guaranteed and viable curriculum. It will also mean making the similarly ironclad case for self-managing teams and for examining assessments results and adjusting practice against assessment results *regularly* vs. annually. There will be details to work out, but in the end, such meetings must become a nonnegotiable expectation for professional educators. Like *any other profession*, we have to put evidence, regularly collected and examined, at the heart of collaboration and leadership.

We’ve seen what has happened in the absence of such a concern with evidence: a disastrous breakdown in two fundamental areas that, together, have more impact on learning than all other factors combined, i.e., what we teach and how we teach (Marzano, 2004; Mortimore & Sammons, 1987; Schmoker 2002). If we lose our nerve here, we are only pretending to want better schools.

Make no mistake: such simple, high-leverage, team-based leadership practices will have a palpable effect on instruction and the achievement gap. Our willingness to implement such eminently simple, *reasonable* new routines will be a crucial test of how professional we are and how much we care about kids and schools.

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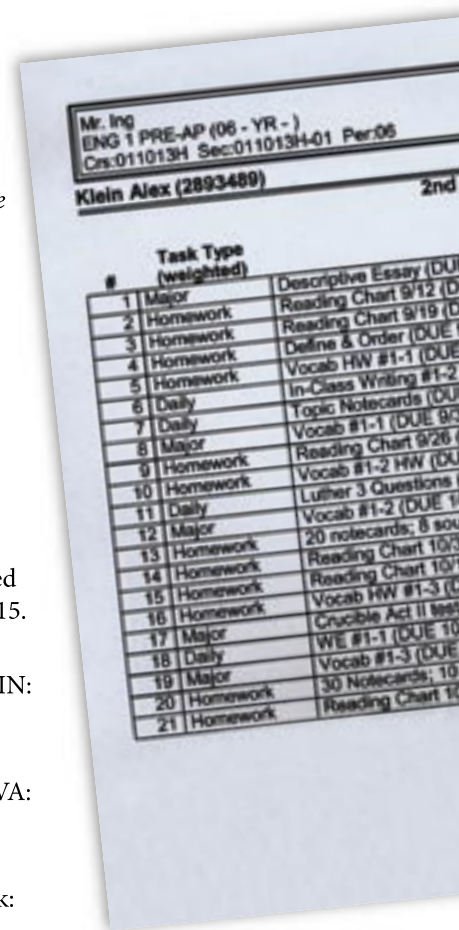
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Mike Schmoker is author of *The Results Fieldbook: Practical Strategies for Dramatically Improved Schools*. This article is drawn from a chapter Mike has written for a new book called *The Opportunity*.

In the Eye of the Storm

Hurricane Season Hits Education

By Geoffrey Alan



Damaged library in Bay
St. Louis Waveland School
District, Mississippi

We all know how the wind, rain, and floods, brought first by Hurricane Katrina and then by her sister Rita, decimated schools, scattered students, and set plans for education adrift throughout the South. But few understand the storms' toll more intimately than Sybil Wolfe, a teacher at Harrison Central Ninth Grade School in Gulfport, Mississippi, which took in students evacuated along the Gulf Coast. Wolfe said that many students made strides toward healing after the disaster by talking about their feelings in the health class she teaches.

"For the first few weeks, they were like little zombies, some of them," said Wolfe, who was able to sympathize, having lost a home herself.

"It's pretty much gone," she said of the house she still owns in St. Bernard Parish, Louisiana, where she taught for 25 years before moving to Mississippi 3 years ago. Wolfe recently visited Louisiana to view the wreckage. Walls were crumbled, she said, and six inches of mud covered everything. "It was like going into a war zone, the way people must have felt going into their homes after a bombing in World War II," she said.

Wolfe is just one of the many educators on the Gulf Coast laboring to make sense of the staggering losses and confusion that the hurricanes have meant for instruction, facilities, funding, books and computers, assessment schedules, meal programs, transportation, student records, services for students with special needs, and—something much needed at such a time—student counseling services.

Most visibly, from Mississippi to Louisiana to Texas, hundreds of school buildings were demolished or severely damaged. The first wave of destruction came in late August when Katrina slammed the coast near New Orleans and produced a storm surge that breached the city's levee system, flooding it with water from nearby Lake Pontchartrain. The most destructive and costliest natural disaster ever to strike the United States, Katrina took more than 1,300 lives and caused damage estimated at up to \$130 billion. The storm also displaced more than a million people, many of them students and school employees.

Rita struck less than a month later. More powerful than Katrina, Rita breached New Orleans levees

and flooded the city's streets again, caused \$8 billion worth of damage throughout Louisiana and Texas, and claimed an additional six lives.

Although they largely escaped Hurricane Wilma, which created havoc in Florida in October, many educators directly affected by Katrina and Rita were still reeling in November. The challenges have been unprecedented. Nevertheless, as winter approached, many teachers, administrators, and education officials described a situation that was not without hope.

Classroom Impact

"The hurricanes have not affected what students are taught," said Louisiana Superintendent Cecil Picard. "We are still holding our schools and districts accountable under state policies as well as No Child Left Behind. Louisiana has a statewide comprehensive curriculum that remains in place."

Throughout the South, such comments were typical of school officials, who insisted that students were not receiving a "watered down" curriculum, although systems had to adjust to harsh realities. "What might change—for some students in some schools—is the timing of lessons," Picard said. Because schools shuttered for weeks by the hurricanes were running behind, he said, they would make up time by, for example, extending the school day or eliminating some holidays. The Louisiana Board of Education also raised maximum class size requirements.

Additional measures have been required, as some districts have been closed for many weeks and entire parishes, such as New Orleans and nearby St. Bernard, might not reopen before the end of the academic year. In Louisiana alone, nearly 200,000 of the state's 730,000 students, as well as over 1,200 teachers, have been displaced. "The main effect of the additional 5,000 displaced students here has been to create overcrowded conditions in our classrooms," said Chief Academic Officer Robert Stockwell of Louisiana's East Baton Rouge Parish School System. "It has also required us to hold classes in some locations in auditoriums, gyms, or cafeterias."

In Louisiana, where even before the disaster three in five students qualified for free and reduced-price lunches, teachers have observed their students suffering. "Many teachers have incorporated this tragedy into their teaching. They are still teaching the standards but are using the hurricane as a theme to do so," said SEDL Program Associate Jill Slack, who works in Orleans Parish. For example, some teachers ask their students to express their feelings on the hurricanes in writing.

Educators struggled in Mississippi too, said Debra Meibaum, another SEDL program associate, who has provided professional development and technical

assistance to Mississippi schools for nearly a decade. "There's a lot of concern about how to cover the required curriculum in the necessary timeframe and get students prepared to meet state assessment criteria," Meibaum said.

Compromises have been made. Mississippi Governor Haley Barbour issued a disaster declaration allowing flexibility in school management, encompassing purchasing, school accountability, enrollment, and board approval. The state board relaxed requirements for school calendars. Much further compromise was not an option, many officials said. "Students cannot afford to lose a year of instruction because of this disaster," said Mississippi Superintendent Hank Bounds.

The surrounding states taking in the displaced students have addressed the crisis in similar ways. Alabama Superintendent Joseph Morton waived customary requirements for students who transfer due to the hurricanes. The New Mexico Public Education Department worked with UPS and Office Depot to hold a Hurricane Katrina State School Supply Drive to collect needed materials, such as pencils, scissors, and spiral notebooks. Oklahoma offered recommendations for counseling students whose painful memories of other disasters, from tornados to terrorist attacks in New York City and Oklahoma City, were stirred by the hurricanes. Displaced teachers were encouraged to apply for jobs in Arkansas, which expedited applications for teaching licensure. Similar efforts took shape in Florida, Georgia, Tennessee, and other states.



Louisiana Superintendent
Cecil Picard

Damaged school in Jackson
County School District,
Mississippi



Texas Toughs It Out

Aside from Louisiana and Mississippi, the state arguably most affected by Hurricanes Katrina and Rita was Texas. Even as the storms uprooted students and shut down dozens of school districts within the state, Texas public schools took in some 45,000 displaced students, according to state education officials.

State leaders worked together on students' behalf. "It is my hope that Louisiana's seniors will be able to receive a Louisiana diploma when they graduate this spring," said Louisiana Superintendent Cecil Picard. "We believe we can logistically work out the details so that our students can take Louisiana's Graduation Exit Exam in Texas and their coursework can be evaluated so they meet our graduation requirements."

To help, SEDL is providing a comparative analysis of the academic standards and assessments used by Louisiana and Texas, said SEDL Program Manager Vicki Dimock. SEDL will offer related training to Educational Service Center staff, who then can train educators in the schools they serve. It is hoped that through the analysis and training Texas educators can tailor instruction to help Louisiana students meet Texas standards embodied in state exams and Louisiana educators can better teach students returning from a temporary stay in Texas. Officials from both states are collaborating to enable students to earn credits toward graduation in the state of their choice.

The training will also focus on helping teachers and administrators recognize signs of distress and trauma and address student needs. Additionally, SEDL is developing guides for recognizing signs of distress and trauma in children and adolescents and information on how to address those symptoms and where to go for additional help.

Testing Accountability

A major concern following the hurricanes was not only how students would learn but also how they would demonstrate that learning on state tests, such as those mandated under No Child Left Behind (NCLB). By late September, U.S. Secretary of Education Margaret Spellings assuaged many worries by granting schools flexibility, saying in a congressional hearing that they must welcome displaced students with "both compassion and high expectations."

Spellings offered two options. Under the first, Louisiana, Mississippi, Texas, Alabama, and Florida, which were declared major disaster areas, may postpone consequences such as corrective action for schools and districts that fall short of achieving Adequate Yearly Progress, or AYP, as required under NCLB. The other option permits a state to request a waiver allowing affected schools to record test scores of evacuees separately from other students, which could make accountability requirements easier to meet.

Many school systems are expected to take advantage of these options. "We are still testing all of our students on schedule this spring because we believe in accountability and want our students, schools, and districts to continue growing academically," Picard said. Picard reported that high school students must still pass the Graduation Exit Exam to get a diploma, but he noted the high-stakes policy for fourth- and eighth-grade students has been suspended because of the impact of the hurricanes.

As in Louisiana, officials in Mississippi and other states endeavored to not only uphold high standards by maintaining their assessment programs but also collaborate across state lines to ensure that displaced students who met specific requirements could earn high school diplomas. Working through such efforts generally was viewed as less of a challenge than paying for them.

Dollars and Sense

"Local economies and tax bases for communities impacted by Hurricane Katrina have been devastated, and this in turn creates a serious financial burden on our schools," said Bounds. "Our school funding system is based on average daily attendance in the previous school year, so school districts that have accepted large numbers of displaced students are struggling with financial issues."

"The overriding question for all districts today is cash flow," said Penny Dastugue, a member of the



Louisiana Board of Education. “These districts are faced with unbelievable challenges in reopening their doors and taking in displaced students, and they have gotten little or no relief from the federal government.”

Eventually, proposals for federal relief abounded. The U.S. Department of Education proposed \$1.9 billion for districts enrolling displaced children. Legislators proposed eliminating 14 of the department’s current programs to free up funds for relief. One bill would have permitted \$15 billion in Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) funding to be rerouted to schools. By early November, the Senate approved \$1.66 billion for schools enrolling evacuees, offering \$6,000 per regular student and \$7,500 per special education student. However, these and other proposals were still awaiting approval by Congress as the urgency for relief appeared to be dissipating.

The crisis led to struggles at all levels of government. FEMA provided only partial relief by sending hundreds of portable classrooms and teams of engineers and construction experts to ravaged districts. State governments fared little better. Louisiana officials, who anticipated a state revenue shortfall of \$1.5 billion, nevertheless planned to ask local school districts for enrollment information monthly to make state and federal allocations as funds were appropriated. Local governments in affected areas generally were too overwhelmed to offer meaningful relief.

Chief Business Operations Officer Catherine Fletcher of the East Baton Rouge Parish School System described the disaster’s impact on education budgets as “devastating.” Despite the relief that she says has come from public and private sources so far, Fletcher predicts that the effects will be felt for many years, largely due to the loss of a substantial portion of the New Orleans tax base.

Big Picture

Still, many education officials expressed optimism. “We do see this as a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity to rebuild schools, especially in Orleans Parish, where they were struggling financially and academically before the storms,” said Picard. “Many of our school leaders are using this opportunity to rethink their schools, and that is a positive outcome from this storm.”

All options appeared open. According to Slack, some suggested cutting bureaucracy and promoting school-level autonomy in New Orleans by replacing the centralized, top-down structure of the school system with a collection of more independent

“pockets of schools.” As longstanding tensions between the state and the New Orleans school board ran high, one Louisiana legislator, Rep. Jim Tucker, was quoted in the press as saying that the state “is getting closer every day to a takeover.”

With the status quo upset by the storms, Louisiana also became a testing ground for controversial innovations such as charter schools and vouchers. Reluctant to provide tax dollars to religious schools, federal lawmakers resisted proposals to provide direct private-school vouchers for evacuees, indicating a preference for channeling funds through public school districts, which then could reimburse private schools enrolling evacuees. Meanwhile, Louisiana was awarded a \$20.9 million NCLB grant in October to create charter schools, enhance existing ones, or revive those wrecked by Katrina. Later that month, in a move widely criticized for a lack of public input, the New Orleans school board approved charter school applications filed by 20 schools.

In addition to the government, the private sector became a player in rebuilding school systems. Cisco Systems, Inc., recently announced an initiative to aid Mississippi schools not only in recovering from the hurricanes but also in using technology to strengthen education. The company committed \$20 million for improvements in targeted Mississippi schools, including educational technology, online curriculum materials, and professional development.

In light of such innovations, by late fall education leaders were expressing tempered optimism. “The silver lining that I have seen in all of this is how it has caused us to all join hands,” Bounds said. “If we can rebound this quickly from the worst natural disaster in our nation’s history, then we can certainly find a way to meet the needs of the boys and girls of our state.”

Sybil Wolfe, the Mississippi teacher who lost her home in Louisiana, offered a grittier appraisal of what educators could offer school-age victims of disaster. “We’re doing everything we can to get them to the point where they need to be,” she said. “We just have to dig in, pick ourselves up, and try to go on.”

*Students
cannot
afford to lose
a year of
instruction. . . .”*

Mississippi
Superintendent of
Education Hank
Bounds

*Geoffrey Alan is a
freelancer who writes
frequently about
education issues.*



By Peter A. Hall

Voices from the Field

The Principal's Presence and Supervision to Improve Teaching

A long time ago, in a galaxy far, far away from the heightened accountability standards, increased public scrutiny, and pressure to improve student achievement, the school principal served primarily as a manager and facilitator. Maintaining order and overseeing the operation of the school facility were of primary importance. Meanwhile, the teachers taught and the students learned. Or not.

Now, in the era of accountability, principals face challenges heretofore unseen, with schools facing sanctions for underperformance, with drastic changes in the education landscape of the country, and with the future of our society riding on each educational decision, the school principal forges a path in uncharted territory. There is nothing simple about the most important position in American education. The principal is arguably the single most influential individual in any given school.

The principal of the 21st century has embraced a new role: educational leader. With the growth and achievement of children as the focal point of all practices and decisions, the principal relies almost exclusively on the school's teachers. And teachers, the principal's most valuable assets, require and deserve more than management; they need strong relationships, individual attention, consistent support, fair treatment, and accurate feedback. In short, they need active supervision based entirely upon their own and their collective improvement.

The following principles and structures offer some guidelines for exacting a measure of coordination between the work of the school administrator and the growth of today's teachers. The school principal is key, and these ideas will show how the principal's presence and supervision can indeed influence and improve teaching.

Be There

Perhaps the most elemental component of an achievement-minded educational leader is the most obvious, yet it remains frequently overlooked in the hectic whirlwind we call the principalship. It is *presence*, physical and otherwise.

The principal's active, engaged presence yields more dividends than would seem reasonable. To wit:

- 1. Awareness.** Here is a defining question: Where is the action, in the office or on the campus grounds? If you answered "the office," you have a better chance of catching a javelin than you do of being a successful principal. The principal should be where the action is, which is where the students are—in the classrooms, around the campus, on the playground, in the cafeteria, and on the swing set. Only by observing the students in their element can one truly understand their experiences, feel their existence, and know the goings-on of the entire school. And there is no substitute for that knowledge.
- 2. Visibility.** A highly visible principal may lose the luster of mystery and intrigue among the constituents—but this is not the CIA. Contrary to conventional wisdom, most people actually enjoy seeing the principal around campus, covering recess duties, walking through classrooms, and loitering in the foyer.

Visibility breeds reassurance and familiarity, while at the same time offering a healthy dose of fear and order. It has been said that when a principal walks into a room, it has the same effect as seeing a state trooper pulling onto the highway—the students straighten up and “take their foot off the gas,” even if they weren’t speeding (er, misbehaving).

3. **Clarity.** As we know from science, increased blood flow and oxygen improves brain functioning. So why stay cooped up in an office all day and diminish the brain’s capacity? Walk briskly down every hallway, check the perimeter fences, kick a soccer ball with a group of second-graders during recess, or scan the entire courtyard for loose change. Move about, and do so frequently. Put ludicrous numbers on your hip pedometer, burn some calories, and clarify your thinking. All the while you will be increasing your awareness and your visibility, so the physical boost of daily exercise is an added bonus.
4. **Relationships.** Naturally, when a principal is on the grounds for a good portion of the school day, the students, staff, and local wildlife will begin to look forward to those daily interactions, no matter how brief. Similarly, the principal will get to know the members of the school community and learn where the hot spots are, which students need a reassuring comment or high-five, and where to intercept a teacher for a brief chat. This is also an opportunity for teachers to snag the principal and ask that just can’t-wait question, to tell about last weekend’s special event, or to check on the status of the Red Sox bullpen. No matter the exact locale, and no matter the content, a present principal is one with whom all members of the school community can build a relationship. And relationships, when dealing with a profession that is (or should be) 98 percent human interactions, are of the utmost importance.

These are but a sampling of the benefits drawn by an active, present principal. Doubtlessly there are many, many more, each carrying significance that extends into many aspects of the principal’s role as educational leader. The key is this: high visibility leads to familiarity and trust, which is essential when we cross the bridge into the land of direct teacher supervision.

Goal-setting and Walk-throughs

Early in the school year, the principal should meet with each teacher on staff to discuss that individual’s goals for the year. Ideally, those goals will match rather closely with the agreed-upon schoolwide focus objectives, but there will inevitably be some distinct variety between Mrs. Orcutt’s goals and Mr. McHenry’s goals, based on their training, experience, grade level, and psyche.

Nevertheless, when the principal and teacher sit down to discuss the areas of emphasis for instruction, management, organization, assessment, preparation, collaboration, or whatever the emphasis may be, it is important that each goal has one major characteristic: it is meaningful and relevant to the teacher in question.



Do not mess with the principal. Principal Pete Hall entertains a group of students at Anderson Elementary School, Reno, Nevada.



Be there or be square. The lunchroom is a great place to find out what is going on at your school as principal Hall finds out.

Many goals are admirable but fail this test (i.e., a reading specialist desires to clear the clutter off her desk, a classroom teacher wishes to become more physically fit, a special education teacher strives to be off campus by 3:15 every day). A meaningful goal is one that the teacher will inherently wish to confront and work on; relevance speaks to the degree to which the goal agrees with the principal and vice versa.

Once a meaningful and relevant goal is established and growth objectives are outlined (growth objectives are smaller, more detailed benchmarks that are easily observed to help the teacher progress toward the goal), the teacher is ready to teach and the principal can prepare to engage in the true art of educational leadership, manifested in a beautiful vehicle called the walk-through.

What is a walk-through? In a nutshell, a walk-through is a procedure undertaken by a principal involving a walk through the classrooms, buildings, and hallways of a school. Formalized in recent years, the walk-through process transcends traditional drive-by, peek-in tours conducted by supervisors by making principals and teachers aware of agreed-upon “look-fors.” These specific items are the vital components the principal looks for while in the throes of a walk-through. This focuses the administrator on noticing improvements in the essential elements of teaching and learning.

Look-fors can be established on an individualized basis (the principal expects to see certain learning activities when entering Mrs. Orcutt’s classroom based upon her individual annual goals) or on a staffwide scale (the principal expects to note that every teacher in the school utilizes a word-wall with high-frequency and thematic-based vocabulary based upon schoolwide instructional emphasis). In the spirit of continuous instructional improvement, the principal can now embark upon the walk-through process.

As outlined by Rick Harris, director of the Principals’ Academy of the Washoe County School District in Reno, Nevada, any given walk-through can last from 3–15 minutes, which is long enough for the administrator to get a feel for the

classroom environment and learning activities but not so long as to begin to grow roots. Once inside a classroom, the principal seeks an unobtrusive spot to roost (depending on the students' reception, this can be at the back of the room or at the teacher's desk—the more frequently the walk-through process is used, the easier it will become to sit with a group of students on the floor or at a table in order to get the participant's point of view while maintaining discretion). Scanning for look-fors and making note of aspects related to the teacher's individual annual goals, the principal records items or activities worthy of mentioning, such as answers to the following questions:

1. What are the teacher and students engaged in? What is their level of engagement?
2. What is the format of the lesson (whole-class instruction, small-group work, individual study, etc.)?
3. What higher-order thinking processes are the students asked to undertake?
4. What is the goal of the lesson, and is it clear to determine?
5. Do the students know what the ultimate learning outcome will be?
6. What instructional aids is the teacher employing? Are they appropriate?
7. What background knowledge must the students have to be successful at this task?
8. How will the teacher assess student progress at the completion of the lesson?

These questions, in addition to more precise probes more pertinent to the individual teacher, school, class, and/or lesson involved, should guide the principal in providing immediate and appropriate feedback. Using a simple form with duplicate-NCR paper, the principal can record observations, offer suggestions, share praise, and pose queries to the teacher. Upon leaving the classroom, the principal gives the teacher one copy of the form and takes the other for reference and/or record-keeping.

The walk-through form, like a love-note passed across the aisle in a seventh-grade English class, is a highly underrated component of the walk-through process. Teachers appreciate immediate feedback, whether it is positive, negative, or neutral. There is not always time—in fact, there is rarely time—to engage in a productive discussion with every teacher every day. This tool, however, provides an avenue to open discourse without the burden of matching schedules. The teacher can respond to the walk-through note, ignore it, accept the contents, refute it, or seek clarification at a (later) time that suits everyone involved.

Suggestions from administrators who have utilized the walk-through process are summarized as follows:

1. Begin with several all-positive, all-supportive notes the first few weeks.

This establishes the walk-through process and the written notes as a nonthreatening, teaching-and-learning-focused tool for improvement.

2. Avoid generalizations and assumptions. As in all comments and feedback given to professionals, base the written note on actual observations and indisputable facts. When in doubt, leave a question (“Do your students always sing ‘Down by the Bay’ when they sharpen their pencils?”) rather than a judgment (“Your students make too much noise while working on nonacademic tasks”).

3. Have a focus. Whether it is a list of look-fors or work related to a teacher's annual goals, have a purpose for the walk-through. Aimless visits can lead to rambling, irrelevant feedback, which nobody really values. Refer to the goals and/or look-fors in the written notes.

Time management will play a role in the successful implementation of classroom walk-throughs as effective walk-throughs with meaningful feedback take time. Dr. Paul Rozier, the superintendent of schools for the Kennewick Public

Schools in Kennewick, Washington, led every administrator (building-level and district-level) in making a “2/10 pledge”—to be in the school buildings, walking through classrooms, for 2 hours per day or 10 hours per week. Such was their level of commitment, and it served as a powerful statement as to the importance of the walk-through process.

A realistic goal may be for a principal to conduct five high-quality walk-throughs per day, thereby ensuring a certain level of precise, individualized feedback to each teacher over the course of a week or 2, depending on the size of the school. In addition to the daily rounds of ducking into each classroom, this walk-through goal should provide enough impetus to get into the classrooms without setting an unreasonable expectation for consumed time.

Walk-throughs, needless to say, assist tremendously in the formal evaluation process for each and every teacher. The process gives the principal ample opportunities to observe authentic instruction in every classroom. It also provides a framework for offering precise, specific feedback and professional development to the teacher when, how, and as often as it is needed or requested. Often we wait too long to provide professional assistance, or we attempt to box it up during workshops for the entire staff when only a handful truly need that certain knowledge boost or intervention.

In short, the entire supervision and evaluation aspect of the principalship should be designed around the unwavering support and development of every individual teacher on staff. Individually. Principals can tell their teachers, “I am here to help you grow and improve as much as I can. I will not treat you all equally, for you are all unique carbon life forms and you all have different skills, strategies, strengths, and weaknesses. However, I will treat you all fairly.” That is an important distinction to make, for as we ask our teachers to differentiate instruction for each of their students, we too should differentiate our supervision and evaluation of teachers.

Conclusion

The school site administrator, with special emphasis on the building principal, has a remarkable responsibility to assume the role of educational leader. Establishing a presence as an active, involved member of the daily school routines can help build relationships among the key stakeholders of the school community. Benefiting from those strong relationships with staff members, the principal’s supervision and evaluation of teachers becomes a valuable process when using appropriate goal-setting and walk-through techniques. In this way, the principal can have a running head start in the race to improve instruction, increase student achievement, and make a difference in the world.

*Pete Hall is principal of Anderson Elementary School, in Reno, Nevada. He is the author of *The First-Year Principal*, published by Rowman & Littlefield.*



The world according to Hall: Teachers deserve more than management. The need strong relationships, individual attention, and consistent support.

Making the Grade: School Board Members Navigate Education Challenges

George McShan remembers well his early days serving on the Harlingen, Texas, school board. Back then, he says, the board's main focus was to protect taxpayer dollars—or, as others have put it, budgets, buses, and buildings.

“We did not focus on student achievement,” recalls McShan, who has served on the board for 17 years now. “Some 25 percent of students went on to college and the others didn’t, and that was OK.”

McShan and his colleagues were not alone. Historically, board members have not seen themselves as change agents, according to Don McAdams, head of the Center for Reform of School Systems, a Houston-based group that promotes reform-minded school board leadership.

“Districts early on were modeled after the factory system and not designed to educate all children,” says McAdams. “High schools were designed in effect to sort children. We didn’t need everyone to get a high school diploma.”

All that has changed as the demand for a knowledge-based work force in today’s global economy has increased. The standards and assessment movement in the early 1990s and No Child Left Behind (NCLB) have focused national attention on school improvement. The expectations of parents and community members have also changed. And the implications for locally elected school boards are great.

“The local public looks at their schools in terms of how well students are achieving, and they are looking to elected officials for answers,” says McShan, past president of the National School Boards Association (NSBA). “You can no longer just sit on a board. You have to bring a vision.”

LillieMae Ortiz, who is the president-elect of the New Mexico School Boards Association, says the community is more interested, involved, and educated about what schools can do for their children. “It keeps us on our toes,” she says.

Ortiz says in years past, school boards were more focused on local issues and reacting to state-issued guidelines. “Now [as state and federal governments have grown increasingly involved in public education], boards are beginning to play a more

proactive role in advocating on behalf of legislative initiatives focusing on education,” Ortiz says.

The jury is still out on whether this more proactive role is taking hold.

A survey conducted by the Center for Reform of School Systems shows less than 25 percent of the nation’s largest school districts were implementing anything that wasn’t purely reactive

“Most districts viewed their role as maintaining the system or changing it [only] as the state dictates,” says McAdams, a former Houston school board member. “There is a big opportunity for school boards to lead. NCLB has put a lot of requirements on districts, and they could go well beyond NCLB by setting higher targets and measuring performance in different ways.”

As schools wrestle with closing the achievement gap and operating in a new environment of high-stakes accountability, school board members are reexamining their role and seeking more targeted help along the way.

“We have to redesign school districts, and that requires the active leadership of the board,” says McAdams. “School boards have to get deeply involved in policy leadership ranging from a focus on managing instruction more effectively to measuring performance accountability, and this work must have deep community roots.”

The Changing Role of Today’s School Boards

As the world of public education has grown more complex, so too has the role of locally elected school board members. Many come to the board with little background in education. Often new board members find themselves thrown into a highly public and complicated arena for which they may have little or no training. Some run for the board as single-issue candidates and later find themselves working in teams on multiple issues for the first time. Others may struggle to understand data-driven decision making or to grasp intricate district budgets.

A 2002 survey of board members in 2,000 districts commissioned by NSBA shows that student

By Lesley Dahlkemper

In a new environment of high-stakes accountability, school board members are reexamining their role.

achievement and funding for public education are universal concerns among boards—urban and rural, large and small. The study found that the emphasis on student achievement increased significantly during the 1990s.

“When you look at the number of children in our public school system, the demographics are bringing us more challenging children, not less challenging children,” says NSBA executive director Anne Bryant. “The big question is, how do we raise student achievement for all kids?”

Staying on top of cutting-edge trends and research is challenging, says Ortiz, who serves on the Pojoaque Valley School Board of Education in New Mexico. “I find myself reading a lot, asking lots of questions, and visiting other school districts. I bring that information back to our local community. It’s a continual learning and educational process to be as informed as I can.”

NSBA launched *The Key Work of School Boards* to help boards better understand their role in improving student achievement. *Key Work* addresses several issues, including visioning, standards, assessments, accountability, alignment, and continuous improvement. (Go to <http://www.nsba.org> for a copy of the publication.)

Key to this effort is using data—instead of guesswork, emotion, or speculation—to drive decision making. Bryant points to Aldine, Texas, as an exemplary district using data to improve student achievement. “The school board was really the driving force in all of this. It was a group of clearheaded, thoughtful citizens who said, ‘We want to improve achievement in our district.’” The Education Trust in Washington, D.C., has recognized Aldine with its “Dispelling the Myth” award for narrowing gaps in student achievement.

Another critical role for boards is engaging their communities. Public dialogues with parents, community members, students, and others can result in a common vision and shared responsibility for how to improve schools, attract high-quality teachers, or close the achievement gap. Local school board members’ decisions are often better informed because they are shaped by public input.

NSBA developed a community engagement initiative called “What Counts?” to learn more about what indicators of student performance matter most to stakeholders in local communities. The community feedback influences state testing and accountability policies. State school board associations in Maryland, Colorado, Connecticut, and Minnesota are piloting the program.

Similar community engagement initiatives are under way elsewhere. The Arkansas School Board

Association (ASBA) facilitates a series of study circles to better understand what local communities want from their schools. This work began in the late 1990s when ASBA collaborated with SEDL to conduct study circles in seven communities. “We saw major changes in two of those seven districts after the community conversations,” says ASBA executive director Don Farley.

The study circles became a model for a statewide event in 2002 when 6,000 people in more than 90 locations turned out for “Speak Out Arkansas.” Participants were asked one question: What do we want Arkansas schools to look like to educate our children? The conversations informed the work of the Arkansas Blue Ribbon Commission on Public Education. Farley says the state legislature acted upon many of the commission’s recommendations, which drew from the community conversations.

In some cases, school board members in Arkansas help facilitate community conversations, participate in them, or encourage others to attend. “It’s more and more apparent to me that if we don’t get communities involved, all of our efforts will be for naught,” says Farley. “Boards must use their role as conveners of the community to create conversations so they can get public support to do good work.”

Others who work closely with school boards echo Farley’s sentiments.

“Real dialogue between the board and targeted public groups can achieve a greater degree of understanding about the work of the board and district,” says Aspen Group International president Linda Dawson, who works with school boards across the country, including boards in Texas, Louisiana, Oklahoma, and New Mexico. “It is a constructive opportunity for the community to communicate its needs and expectations to the local board.”

Providing School Boards With Better Training

Today’s board members face a steep learning curve: multimillion-dollar budgets, curriculum and instructional programs, complex student achievement data disaggregated by subgroups, and other facets that make up the workings of a school district. Helping school boards navigate these challenging issues to make good policy decisions for their communities requires more sophisticated training.

States are recognizing this need, and some have mandated school board training. According to an issue brief published in 2003 by the New York State School Boards Association, about 17 states require training. Arkansas, Louisiana,

Oklahoma, New Mexico, and Texas—states in the Southwest Educational Development Laboratory region—mandate school board training, according to data compiled by NSBA. The training in these states focuses on topics such as the roles and responsibilities of school board members, school finance, ethics, legal concepts, policies and procedures, and team building.

In Arkansas, the legislature passed a mandatory school board training bill this year. New board members must undergo 9 hours of training in the first 15 months and 6 hours of training each year after that as long as they serve on the board. Under the law, each district must publish the names of board members who achieved their training goals and those who did not in its annual report. The Arkansas Department of Education must approve the training.

Increasingly, state associations representing school board members are stepping up the quality of their training. ASBA began a 2.5-day comprehensive leadership institute for teams of school board members in 2001 that was 2 years in the making.

The institute, modeled on the NSBA's *The Key Work of School Boards*, helps boards set a vision about who and what participants want their board and district to be. Participants also deepen their understanding about standards, assessments, accountability, and community engagement. Key to this work is understanding data's role in making policy decisions.

"It's more important than ever that boards read data, make decisions based on the data they have, and collaborate with the community," says Farley. "If boards and districts aren't performing, they could see themselves taken out of existence. It's a matter of survival for districts that they improve the results of their work."

Others who provide leadership training for school boards hold similar views, especially as state governments and the federal government grow increasingly involved in what some would argue was once the work of the local school board. "[Boards] will be legislated out of existence as had been done in Detroit or as is being done in states like New Hampshire [if they don't improve]," says Dawson.

Are Local Boards in Jeopardy?

Increased efforts to provide board members with higher quality training and leadership development come too late for some who question the value and relevancy of local school boards in today's educational environment. Some critics maintain school boards are the biggest barriers to school



improvement. They point to state policymakers and local voters who are replacing locally elected school boards with appointed boards in some large urban districts as proof that the local board's time has come.

In the 2004 issue of *Education Next*, Chester Finn, Jr., president of the Thomas B. Fordham Foundation, and Lisa Graham Keegan, the former chief executive officer of the Education Leaders Council, point to three trends that they argue "obviate" the need for school boards: state centralization of funding, statewide accountability systems, and expansion of choice.

Finn and Keegan note that once states issued annual data reports on schools' academic progress, safety, and teacher qualifications, families were able to make their own decisions about where to send their children. The authors argue, "This kind of information and consumer power means there is no need for a locally elected board to advocate for better curriculum or more money at the municipal level."

Advocates of locally elected school boards disagree, saying their role is more relevant now than ever before.

"I can't tell you what's going on in Chicago or other cities, but I can tell you what's going on in Harlingen, Texas," says McShan. "The local school board has the best interests of the community at heart."

Farley agrees. "Take boards away from the community and [citizens] have no voice left in decisions schools or the district might make. I don't think boards are passé. There is simply a greater and different role for them. They are still the embodiment of representative democracy in America."

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SEDL Wins Proposals

to Help Texas and Southeastern States Meet NCLB Goals



Marie Kaigler

The Southwest Educational Development Laboratory (SEDL) has received two 5-year awards to help low-performing schools meet the goals of the No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB). The U.S. Department of Education made the awards through cooperative agreements with SEDL to create two comprehensive centers: one for Texas and one for the Southeast, which includes the states of Alabama, Georgia, Louisiana, Mississippi, and South Carolina.

“SEDL is excited about establishing new comprehensive centers,” said Wes Hoover, SEDL’s president and CEO. “The centers’ overall goal is to help ensure that each state they serve has an educational system with the capacity and commitment to eliminate achievement gaps. We look forward to helping educators fulfill their commitments to NCLB, improve student achievement, and meet new challenges created by the devastation of Hurricane Katrina.”

SEDL will work closely with the departments of education of each state to address their priorities. The two centers will provide training, technical assistance, and high-quality, research-based instructional resources.



K. Victoria Dimock

Hoover announced that Marie Kaigler will lead the Southeast comprehensive center and K. Victoria Dimock will lead the Texas center. “Both Dr. Kaigler and Dr. Dimock have strong leadership and public school experience, which make them ideal candidates to lead the work of the centers,” he said.

Kaigler has been with SEDL for 8 years and was the program manager for the Southeast Assistance Comprehensive Center, which served the states of Alabama, Arkansas, Georgia, Louisiana, and Mississippi from 1995–September 30, 2005. Prior to joining the SEDL staff, Kaigler held various positions in the New Orleans public school system, including teacher, assistant principal, mathematics supervisor, and principal.

Dimock previously led SEDL’s Eisenhower Southwest Consortium for the Improvement of Mathematics and Science Teaching and the SouthCentral Regional Technology in Education Consortium, both of which served Texas educators. Before coming to SEDL in 1991, Dimock served as an education specialist at the Region IX Education Service Center, a coordinator of a program for gifted students, and a K–12 teacher.

The U.S. Department of Education will fund a total of 21 comprehensive centers. Sixteen regional centers will provide technical assistance to states within defined geographic boundaries, while five content centers will provide expert assistance to benefit schools and districts nationwide on key issues related to the goals of NCLB.

Learning to Lead

Educators Use Their Summers for Research as Part of SEDL's Fellowship Program

By Debbie Ritenour

According to the New Mexico Public Education Department, 4,500 of the 93,000 students enrolled in the Albuquerque public school system are American Indian. This number could be much higher; studies show that three out of every 10 American Indian students drop out of high school, a figure twice the national average. These students also tend to drop out at a younger age than students of other ethnic groups and score lower on standardized tests in New Mexico than any other ethnic group.

Kara Bobroff, a former middle school principal at a Navajo reservation who has also worked as a teacher and assistant principal in Albuquerque, witnessed the difficulties the public school system has in reaching out to American Indian students. She formulated a plan to create a charter school that will serve grades 6–12 and address the needs of the urban American Indian student population. This summer, she spent a month in Austin, Texas, as part of SEDL's Education Leaders Fellowship Program in order to study available research and data to help her with the application. She hopes to open the school in Fall 2006; the application is currently pending approval.

SEDL fellows are educators who use their summer vacations to deepen their knowledge of research findings related to student achievement. The fellows work on individual projects with SEDL staff members at the organization's headquarters.

"As a principal, you get so busy in day-to-day work," Bobroff says. "Having a solid month to dedicate yourself is a good opportunity."

Meeting Students' Needs

Bobroff has served as a SEDL fellow twice. Two years ago, as assistant principal at Newcomb Middle School in Shiprock, New Mexico, she spent her fellowship in Austin developing a data management plan for a reading intervention program at her school. This year, she focused on designing the critical components of the proposed charter school. With a focus on both academic and social/emotional needs, the school will incorporate cultural awareness and wellness issues while including the community as a whole.

"There's a real need to teach American Indian kids about the culture and about the languages that are spoken around them," says Sebastian Wren, a program associate at SEDL who worked with Bobroff during her fellowship. "Schools need to connect to and embrace the surrounding culture."

One of the founding principles of the school is the idea that students must be skilled readers in order to succeed. Bobroff worked with Wren to develop a reading program designed to help struggling readers. The school will address other issues affecting the American Indian population, such as obesity and diabetes. The overall framework of the school focuses on four different aspects of wellness: physical development, intellectual development, relationship development, and social/emotional development. Bobroff plans to involve the community in each aspect.

"Everything needs to have a community connection," Wren says. "If they don't have a good connection to the community, kids have a tough time developing into healthy students and healthy citizens."

Bobroff found her experience as a SEDL fellow beneficial at this stage in the planning. She says that being able to bounce ideas off other people made her think about things in new and different ways.

"It's a way to do some concentrated work with a mentor who's a specialist in the area," Bobroff says. "It takes you out of your element for some in-depth study."

Mastering Leadership Skills

Annesa Thompson, principal of Marked Tree High School in Marked Tree, Arkansas, also came to Austin this summer as a SEDL fellow. Thompson, who was accepted in the state-sponsored Master Principal Program last year, worked with SEDL staff to develop her portfolio in order to apply for the second phase of the program. The research-based program is designed to develop the leadership skills of principals.

"The fellowship gave me the opportunity to assess where my school was on an improvement continuum and allowed me to network and develop next steps for the school as well as for myself professionally," says Thompson, who worked with SEDL staff for 4 years as part of SEDL's intensive site work in Marked Tree.

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A Vision for School Improvement

by Pamela Porter

Any journey begins with just one step. But without a clear picture of the destination, that step is likely to be in the wrong direction. The journey to school improvement and student achievement is no different.

Everyone involved—administrators, teachers, students, parents, and members of the community—need to develop a focused image of the goal and create a map that will lead them there together. This concept, known as *shared vision*, fosters success because everyone becomes part of the process, understanding and believing in his or her role in the day-to-day pursuits of helping students learn in productive ways. All have ownership in that ideal and are committed to change.

SEDL program associate Tara Leo Thompson defines shared vision as “clear direction and expectations of what the district leaders want in terms of student achievement, derived from a dialogue with all stakeholders.” She stresses that while parents and community members should be involved, it is up to the district to concentrate on the task at hand—making sure all students achieve. “The direction and expectations are operationalized. In other words, you know exactly what you are supposed to be doing on a daily basis and how you are progressing toward your goal,” Thompson says. The top administrator in a district or school guides the process and perhaps even introduces his or her own mental image of what students can achieve and what the school could become after its implementation.

The first question that Linda O’Neal, professor of Leadership and Education Studies at Appalachia State University, asks administrators who are being introduced to the concept of shared vision is, “What does success look like?” O’Neal says, “If they can answer that, then they have a mini-vision right



Shirley Hord, SEDL scholar emerita, discusses the concept of shared vision with a group of workshop participants.

there; they’re getting somewhere! They are no longer circling around and around like a dog trying to get settled on his bed.”

O’Neal is enthusiastic about shared vision—she believes it can lead a school to improved student achievement. Developing a shared vision is not an instant process, however. Superintendents and principals must dedicate the time and energy to become familiar with the idea. “One cannot articulate or develop a vision unless he or she has some knowledge on the topic and an understanding of what is possible,” O’Neal says.

Novices are often convinced they have the perfect solution for improving their learning communities and then expect their staff to embrace the plan and do whatever is necessary to make that personal objective come to fruition. “Savvy veterans know it is far better for you to plant the seeds and let the ‘us’ grow that vision—to go into it like a gardener,” O’Neal explains. This requires administrators to develop skills in communication and leadership and instill those qualities in their staff, remembering that individuals affected by decisions need to be a part of making them.

In her experience of working with low-performing schools, SEDL scholar emerita Shirley Hord has found that a school’s shared vision of change or improvement enables teachers to be more effective and students to be more successful. But before developing a shared vision, Hord believes it is mandatory to involve the entire school staff in

Mapping the Vision

SEDL scholar emerita Shirley Hord suggests that schools use Innovation Configuration Maps (IC Maps) to make clear what everyone in the school should be doing in order to reach the shared vision. IC Maps are valuable in that they can be created for teachers, students, principals, and even parents, to help all stakeholders see what everyone’s role is in reaching the vision and what every stakeholder should be doing. However, creating an IC Map has quite a few steps. Readers interested in developing such a map should refer to the suggested reading list at the right.

The partial map shown here is an example of what an IC Map looks like. Let’s suppose that Jones Elementary School has as part of its vision that families will be involved in their children’s education. Before developing an IC Map, faculty and staff must come to agreement about what everyone needs to do to reach that vision. They would even have to agree on what they mean by the term “involved.” Once they have done these things, they could then create a map.

In this example, the IC Map shows what teachers will be doing to reach the shared vision of having every family involved. The practices shown on the map, from left to right, range from the ideal to least desirable practice.

Suggested Reading

Alquist, A. & Hendrickson, M. (1999). Mapping the configurations of mathematics teaching. *Journal of Classroom Interaction*, 34(1), 18–26.

Hall, G. E. & George, A. A. (2000, April). *The use of Innovation Configuration Maps in assessing implementation*. Paper presented at the annual meeting of the American Educational Research Association, New Orleans, LA. (ERIC Document Reproduction Service No. ED 445099)

Hall, G. E., & Hord, S. M. (2006). *Implementing change: Patterns, principles, and potholes* (2nd Ed.). Boston: Allyn & Bacon.

Hord, S. M., Stiegelbauer, S. M., Hall, G. E., & George, A. A. (2005). *Measuring implementation in schools: Innovation Configurations*. Austin, TX: Southwest Educational Development Laboratory.

Innovation Configuration Map—Jones Elementary School Family Involvement

1. Teacher implements strategies to increase family or caregiver involvement.			
a	b	c	d
Provides parent education workshops about child development and home conditions that support learning. Offers suggestions about strategies that parents can use to support student learning at home. Communicates with families about school programs and student progress (e.g., information about report cards, grading practices, school events, student work). Encourages families to attend school functions, yearly conferences, and school performances.	Offers suggestions about strategies that parents can use to support student learning at home. Communicates with families about school programs and student progress. Encourages families to attend school functions, yearly conferences, and school performances.	Communicates with families about school programs and student progress. Encourages families to attend school functions, yearly conferences, and school performances.	Encourages families to attend school functions, yearly conferences, and school performances.
2. Teacher uses technology to increase communication between school and home about student learning.			
a	b	c	d
Creates a classroom Web site where families can view school and classroom news, classroom assignments, and special notices. Uses e-mail and voicemail to communicate with families. Communicates with parent or caregiver by phone during and after school.	Uses e-mail and voice mail to communicate with families. Communicates with parent or caregiver by phone during and after school.	Communicates with parent or caregiver by phone during and after school.	Does not use technology to communicate with families.

looking at data “very, very early on” so that teachers and principals know where they are in relation to student learning and together can decide where they want to be.

The Devil Is in the Details

Hord encourages teachers and administrators to understand how to achieve their vision by helping them generate a detailed word picture called an

Innovation Configuration (IC) Map. “Frequently schools will select a program, and then they develop a very sharp and specific vision of what the classroom will look like when it is implemented,” she says. Hord says an IC Map can be developed for “everything under the sun.” For example, an IC Map can be created for math or reading curriculum or a whole-school reform program. The map portrays major components of a program and the highest ideal of implementation of those components, illustrating exactly what the approach should be. It also identifies levels of implementation of a program or innovation to describe what implementation may look like at different stages (see page 23) for different people involved. It may show what the teacher, principal, and/or students should be doing, for example.

Lynette Thompson, principal of Western Oaks Middle School in Bethany, Oklahoma, utilized a mapping process and reports the results were “awesome.” First, she and her staff conducted data analysis on students’ criterion-referenced tests. “We wanted to find out what was wrong and how our kids could improve,” Thompson says. “After looking at blueprints from the state, we came up with mapping guides that helped us figure out what we needed to be covering [in the classroom] and how to go about it.” As a result, Western Oaks, which was previously ranked near the bottom of the district, now shares the top spot with another middle school. Thompson has seen another unexpected benefit: discipline problems in the classroom have declined markedly as instructional strategies changed.

Sally Mendez, principal of Rio Grande Elementary School in Hatch, New Mexico, also has been working with SEDL staff on improvement issues. Her school’s vision is “for teachers to value education for every child at school.” Mendez and her faculty found a great disparity between students who are English Language Learners (ELL) and students who speak English. They discovered ELL students were not really literate in either language. Rio Grande Elementary teachers are working toward their vision by changing instruction to make sure all students learn to communicate effectively and by setting high expectations for all students.

For example, Mendez says, “after a lot of dialogue, we changed curriculum, getting away from worksheet teaching and toward problem solving in math. Students need to understand the concepts and be able to apply those concepts.” The goal of building vocabulary for improved reading comprehension, which supports learning in all subjects, is within reach as well. “Seeing children start to believe in their abilities is what makes this work rewarding,” Mendez says with a smile.

Tips on Developing a Shared Vision Statement

It is often helpful for those involved in the process of developing a shared vision to think about the type of school they would like their own children to attend. Providing unfinished statements for these individuals to consider compels them to focus on what they believe this ideal setting would look like. Some good examples include the following

- “I believe a school should teach . . . ”
- “I want my school to become a place where . . . ”
- “A successful student is one who . . . ”
- “The kind of school I would like to teach in . . . ”
- “An effective classroom is one in which . . . ”
- “A productive school faculty is one that . . . ”
- “A quality instructional program includes . . . ”

Tara Leo Thompson, a program associate with SEDL’s Regional Educational Laboratory who works with several schools, maintains there are several ways to reach a shared vision and many activities that are helpful. “Mainly, you want to focus on student achievement and what it is going to take to make sure that all students achieve. In our current work, we push districts and schools to align their curriculum, instruction, and assessment to their state standards,” she says. “How are they going to ensure that all their students achieve on their state assessment, which is based on the state’s standards? They have to be clear about expectations around instructional coherence—how and what teachers teach and how the administration supports and monitors that.”

A past issue of SEDL’s *Issues . . . About Change* (which can be accessed online at <http://www.sedl.org/change/issues/issues23.html>) offers these steps in how schools can develop a shared vision statement:

1. Know your organization and clarify the nature and purpose. This includes everything about a school or district as it exists in this moment in time, from its physical size and makeup to its attitudes, relationships, and value to its community.
2. Involve critical individuals or those who will be affected. These are people interested in the school or those who have a stake in its success, such as educators, major businesses, community leaders, and parents—even those who find fault with the system.
3. Explore the possibilities and consider various futures. Participants in the process examine imminent trends in students’ and parents’ needs, expectations of employers or universities, and shifts in social, economic, political, and technical areas likely to impact the organization.
4. Put it in writing—vision is committed to paper. Using information gathered in the previous steps, a carefully worded statement is developed, with faculty agreeing on its final form.

Continuously Communicate and Articulate

Hord agrees that a shared vision of improvement for schools that establishes expectations is an essential step for creating meaningful change. “The sharing part is what makes it difficult,” she says, maintaining it is up to the leader to continuously communicate, articulate, and remind others of what that vision is and then assess how well they are reaching that ideal.

Hord contends failure occurs in implementing any type of vision when there is no clear focus of what the school wants to improve, when schools are “woefully lacking in leadership,” or when educators, vulnerable to marketers and “do gooders,” fail to concentrate on the vision and start going off in a different direction. In Tara Leo Thompson’s experience, pitfalls in the process can happen when the school’s path is envisioned in isolation with little input from all involved and no effort to bring all staff onboard. “Also, it is easy to write it down and put the vision away. It must be something you believe in and practice everyday,” she says.

Hord, O’Neal, and Tara Leo Thompson all agree that it is necessary for school leaders to continuously remind staff, students, parents, and the community of the shared vision. It may be necessary for principals and superintendents to encourage, push, persuade, and support all involved to move toward the shared vision.

Some faculty and staff refuse to take on the challenge of the change that is required for a school or district to achieve its vision. It is rare when 100 percent of those involved will be working in concert at any given time. However, it is important for administrators to listen to the naysayers because they may express some valid concerns. After that, “you can’t always let the squeaky wheel get the grease; it’s not a good investment of your energy,” O’Neal says. Effective administrators realize they cannot take on everyone’s problem and still be able to focus on what is most important. O’Neal notes that a helpful communication tool is knowing how to intervene and sever the damaging “drama triangle” of persecutor, rescuer, and victim before even more valuable time is wasted. She also says that recognizing and celebrating success is always beneficial in building morale and positive energy.

Sharing the vision can also mean sharing leadership roles. Western Oaks principal Lynette Thompson advises that teachers who are excited about learning new ideas and methods of instruction to achieve the school’s vision can be a tremendous resource. “They can role model what the instruction looks like,” she says. They can also generate the positive energy that O’Neal values.

While the concept of the original shared vision may remain the same, its implementation will most certainly evolve over time. Instruction should be refined as activities are evaluated, determining which work well and which need to be tweaked or replaced. “We should always be in the change process,” says Shirley Hord.

Linda O’Neal agrees. “It’s a law of nature,” she says. “Entropy, which means regression or decline, has already started the moment you develop any plan.” That demonstrates how essential it is for the school and district to become a community of learners, always open to new ideas and willing to take risks to realize the best possible outcome for their students. Patience is mandatory in this process, however. There is no magical transformation overnight, with noticeable results often taking 3 years to achieve in this trial-and-evaluate cycle.

“Take baby steps,” advises Lynette Thompson. “And don’t give up on people. Change is hard on everyone, and some people you’ll never get on your ship. But you have to keep sailing!”

Pamela Porter is a freelance writer and photographer who lives in Las Cruces, NM. She is also journalism instructor at New Mexico State University.

Learning to Lead, continued from page 21

Program associate Ann Neeley says Thompson has made great strides under the Master Principal Program. She noted that the students’ test scores increased over the course of the year.

“It’s a very intensive program similar to our work,” Neeley says. “What’s so exciting is everything seemed to accelerate. Annesa was putting many things into action. The faculty meetings became professional development sessions where everyone could collaboratively share and learn.”

According to the Arkansas Department of Education, test scores rose in every area. The school also met adequate yearly progress requirements in both areas tested (math and literacy).

“I credit much of our improvement to the partnership formed with SEDL and especially through the individual efforts of SEDL staff members. They helped me understand the components necessary for improvement and supported me as I began to lay the foundation,” Thompson says.

Thompson spent her time in Austin studying how she could continue this progress over the course of the next year. She consulted various SEDL staff members in order to obtain their input and ideas.

“One of the things about school improvement is you cannot isolate yourself. You have to network,” Neeley says. “Annesa took full advantage of the people here. Being a principal can be lonely even though you’re surrounded by people. You need people with whom you can respond.”

Her work paid off. Thompson was one of 18 Arkansas educators accepted into the Master Principal Phase II program.

“The fellowship was the most valuable professional experience I have ever had the opportunity to participate in,” Thompson says. “My knowledge of school improvement and systemic change catapulted through the rich conversations and networking with the individuals there.”

Leadership and Student Outcomes

In recent years there has been much talk about changing the paradigm of principal as instructional leader. This is even seen in Mike Schmoker's article in this issue of *SEDL Letter*.

The term "instructional leader" has been used for decades, though there hasn't been a clear consensus as to what it means precisely and as to exactly what activities it entails. Many perspectives, theories, and ideals have been discussed, written about, and taken to heart by principals everywhere. Other forms of educational leadership have been suggested—including transformational, sustainable, moral, and participative. These new forms encompass many of the same characteristics and activities that some instructional leadership models tout.

The truth is, the terms we use to describe leadership really aren't so important. It is what a good leader actually *does* that makes a difference in student outcomes—it isn't dependent on whether the leadership is instructional or transformational or sustainable. But just which activities and strategies a leader should use to make a difference in student outcomes is not entirely clear. Although thousands of studies have examined the relationship between leadership and student outcomes, few have been experimental studies. The best we can do at the present time is look at the correlational evidence to see which leadership strategies are more highly correlated with student outcomes. Recently, researchers at the Mid-continent Research for Education and Learning (McREL) conducted a meta-analysis on studies that examined the relationship between leadership and student achievement.

Balanced Leadership Study

There is a positive relationship between leadership and student achievement according to *Balanced Leadership: What 30 Years of Research Tells Us About the Effect of Leadership on Student Achievement* by Tim Waters, Robert J. Marzano, and Brian McNulty.

This working paper, published by McREL, is a result of a meta-analysis of 5,000 studies published since the 1970s. The studies all examined the relationship between leadership and student achievement. Waters, Marzano, and McNulty based their work on 70 of those studies that met the following criteria:

- Quantitative student achievement data was provided.
- Student achievement was measured on standardized norm-referenced tests or some other objective measure of achievement.
- Student achievement was the dependent variable.
- Teacher perceptions of leadership was the independent variable.

The McREL team identified 21 leadership responsibilities (shown in the table on page 27) that are significantly associated with student achievement. Waters, Marzano, and McNulty also organized the literature into four types of knowledge that can be applied to the 21 leadership responsibilities and associated practices:

- Experiential knowledge—knowing why this is important
- Declarative knowledge—knowing what to do
- Procedural knowledge—knowing how to do it
- Contextual knowledge—knowing when to do it

They created a framework, which they call the Balanced Leadership framework, to organize research findings in a way that makes the findings accessible to practitioners. The reader should keep in mind, however, that due to the nature of the studies and the meta-analysis, one cannot say for certain that if the leadership strategies described are adopted, there will be an increase in student achievement. Instead, the findings may help practitioners think about and evaluate the strategies and issues related to leadership. They also provide a way to organize the knowledge that education leaders need to be successful.

While studies such as this meta-analysis conducted by McREL examine a number of important leadership issues, they reinforce the need for future experimental research that focuses on leadership and student outcomes.

To read more about the meta-analysis, the *Balanced Leadership* working paper may be downloaded at www.mcrel.org. The work has also been discussed in more detail in a book published this year by the Association for Supervision & Curriculum Development (ASCD), *School Leadership that Works*.

Principal Leadership Responsibilities: Average r and 95% Confidence Intervals

Responsibilities	The extent to which the principal . . .	Effect Size Average r	N Schools	N Studies	95% Confidence Intervals
Culture	Fosters shared beliefs and a sense of community and cooperation	.29	709	13	.23-.37
Order	Establishes a set of standard operating procedures and routines	.26	.456	17	.17-.35
Discipline	Protects teachers from issues & influences that would detract from their teaching time or focus	.24	397	10	.14-.33
Resources	Provides teachers with materials and professional development necessary for the successful execution of their jobs	.26	570	17	.18-.24
Curriculum, instruction, assessment	Is directly involved in the design and implementation of curriculum, instruction, and assessment practices	.16	636	19	.08-.29
Focus	Establishes clear goals and keeps those goals in the forefront of the school's attention	.24	1109	30	.18-.29
Knowledge of curriculum, instruction, assessment	Is knowledgeable about current curriculum, instruction, and assessment practices	.24	327	8	.13-.35
Visibility	Has quality contact and interactions with teachers and students	.16	432	11	.06-.25
Contingent awards	Recognizes and rewards individual accomplishments	.15	420	7	.05-.24
Communication	Establishes long lines of communication with teachers and among students	.23	245	10	.10-.35
Outreach	Is an advocate and spokesperson for the school to all stakeholders	.28	478	14	.19-.35
Input	Involves teachers in the design and design and implementation of important decisions and policies	.30	504	13	.21-.38
Affirmation	Recognizes and celebrates school accomplishments and acknowledges failures	.25	345	7	.14-.35
Relationship	Demonstrates an awareness of the personal aspects of teachers and staff	.19	497	12	.10-.24
Change agent	Is willing to and actively challenges the status quo	.30	479	7	.22-.38
Optimizer	Inspires & leads new and challenging innovations	.20	444	9	.11-.29
Ideals/beliefs	Communicates and operates from strong ideals and beliefs about schooling	.25	526	8	.17-.33
Monitors/evaluates	Monitors the effectiveness of school practices and their impact on student learning	.28	1071	30	.23-.34
Flexibility	Adapts his or her leadership behavior to the needs of the current situation and is comfortable with dissent	.22	151	2	.05-.37
Situational awareness	Is aware of the details and undercurrents in the running of the school and uses this information to address current and potential problems	.33	91	5	.11-.37
Intellectual stimulation	Ensures that faculty and staff are aware of the most current theories and practices and makes the discussion of these a regular aspect of the school's culture	.32	321	5	.22-.42

Source: *Balanced Leadership: What 30 Years of Research Tells Us About the Effect of Leadership on Student Achievement*. Reprinted with permission from McREL.

Bill Sommers, SEDL's Newest Program Manager, Explains Why Communication is Key to Effective Leadership



“Administrators cannot expect results if they cannot communicate what they want and how they want it done in a way that encourages others to listen and act,” writes Bill Sommers in *Being a Successful Principal: Riding the Wave of Change Without Drowning*, which

he wrote with David Schumaker. “Trust is built through open and truthful communication. It is a two-way process.”

Sommers, who joined SEDL in July, knows what he’s talking about. As a former junior high and high school principal, he is speaking from experience. In fact, he and Schumaker used the journals they each kept to write *Being a Successful Principal*; they point out that the book is not theory but rather reality based on personal experiences.

“As a principal, you have two responsibilities when it comes to communication: (1) lead conversations on instruction and learning, and

(2) keep hope alive,” he says. In other words, principals must make sure teachers discuss and understand what is meaningful about teaching and learning, and they must keep morale and spirits high.

Sommers spent 35 years in public education as a teacher and principal in both suburban and urban schools. He has also served as an adjunct professor at the University of Minnesota, Hamline University, the University of St. Thomas, Capella University, and St. Mary’s University of Minnesota. He has written five books. Currently, Sommers is the incoming president of the National Staff Development Council.

In his new role as program manager for the Regional Educational Laboratory, Sommers manages educational grants and provides research and implementation strategies to educational sites in SEDL’s five-state region. Although this is a departure from his role as an educator, he welcomes the challenge.

“I’m a practitioner. The appeal of this new position is making research come alive in the daily lives of teachers and principals in schools so students are better served,” Sommers says. “It’s always about the kids for me.”

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