

CENTER for

## CREATIVE LEADERSHIP and RENEWAL

developing and renewing school leadership

An edited version of this article appeared in the August, 1999 issue of *The American School Board Journal*.

### CCLR REPORTS

This article reviews the issue of entitlement within the culture of our schools. We invite you to think about educational change and the actions needed as our schools strive to improve.

#### *Changing the Entitlement Culture*

Why we need to make performance our top priority.

#### DEFINITION OF ENTITLEMENT

### EDUCATIONAL CHANGE TREMORS

#### **Home schooling**

Over one million children are now home schooled.

#### **Standards**

Forty-nine states are now in the process of writing higher academic standards or are implementing them in their state assessment programs.

#### **School funding**

Issues and court orders abound over how states should fund public schools.

#### **Charter Schools**

States continue to develop programs encouraging charter type schools. Our public schools must begin changing what they believe and acknowledge a new paradigm: public schools must earn the right to provide education by initiating meaningful changes which result in improved performance.

Demands for change are creating new laws, regulations, and programs which are overwhelming our public schools. Forty-nine states have enacted educational reform legislation! With the best of intentions, we've originated hundreds of change initiatives and generated thousands of pages of federal, state, and local mandates, regulations, and related documents intended to improve our schools. It is our position that, although many of these reform initiatives have the potential to help, the vast majority of them do not acknowledge or address the fundamental challenge captured in the following question:

- How do we improve the performance of this large, complex system we call "public education" when its organizational practices and culture are so deeply rooted in entitlement?

We believe looking at the improvement of our public schools through a lens focused on a shift from entitlement to performance will enable us to begin "seeing with new eyes."

Our education workforce operates and negotiates from a perspective that its members have a right to their jobs, know what they are doing, deserve raises and good benefits because they have spent many years in education, have good intentions, care about children, and work hard. School districts, as monopolies, believe that they are entitled to educate the vast majority of students in their cities, towns, or regions; school boards believe a public obligation exists to provide the tax dollars required to run the schools; students believe, if they attend school for twelve years and don't cause any major problems, they deserve a high school diploma; parents believe their child has an inherent right to a good education. Thus, how do we get an organizational system and all of its people to really commit to improving performance when it operates daily from the assumption that it is entitled to its customers, jobs, budgets, facilities, and the other resources it requires?

Lloyd Dobyns and Clare Crawford-Mason in [Thinking About Quality](#) caution: "**Before you can change what you do, you have to change how you think. Before you can change how you think, you have to change what you believe.**"<sup>1</sup> While we are a society which shares a strong belief in the right of all children to an education, more and more voices are challenging the belief that public schools, in their present form, have an inherent right to provide that education.

The emerging expectation for a shift from entitlement to performance is not a dilemma unique to public education. Substantial transformations in this country and around the

world were created by tremors reverberating throughout American business and industry in the late 70s and early 80s. The global marketplace expanded. Consumers began to demand higher quality and service. Investors pursued higher returns. Thousands of employees were displaced via massive downsizing. IBM was no longer entitled to its customers despite years of prior loyalty. Workers were no longer entitled to their jobs despite years of faithful service. Today, these same forces extend unabated into health care, utilities, financial services, the military, and non-profit organizations. We are only beginning to comprehend and live with utility deregulation, HMOs, the privatization of various government services, and even a performance orientation for non-profits.

Organizations and their ways of working are undergoing never imagined upheavals. Employees are learning to respond and perform within a whirlwind of ever shifting events, forces, and trends — an environment in which investors, customers, and employment must be earned on a daily basis and can be easily lost.

Similar shock waves now bear down upon public schools. Education's reform forces demand far greater scrutiny of school practices and are raising expectations for dramatic change. The restructuring and refocusing of many other institutions and organizations away from previous entitlement toward improved performance are shaping the lens through which many now view our schools.

An essential concept behind this shift from entitlement to performance is that this effort will require changing a large complex organizational system\* and include possible changes in elements of leadership, processes, goals, workforce, strategies, cultures, and structures. It is mis-directed for us to keep blaming individuals or groups for the shortcomings and failures of our public education system or that just focusing on symptomatic issues will change the underlying system. Our school reform efforts must be guided by thinking and actions more systemically focused! Known as the father of the quality movement and revered for his contributions in design and quality manufacturing, W. Edwards Deming, concluded in his life's work that, "Ninety-four percent of the problems in organizations are problems of the system and only six percent are the fault of individual actions."<sup>2</sup> Deming's reflection implies that the majority of the time and resources we invest in change must be focused on the system issues. [\*in this case, simply means a series of elements which have a common purpose.]

The good news is that many of the educational reform initiatives, in their myriad of changes, do reflect some understanding of the many elements that are interrelated and have an impact on student learning and achievement. The problem, however, is many of the strategies such as higher standards and expectations, more assessment, different school schedules, more time in the classroom, new curriculum, school councils, and site-based management are being implemented within a system whose fundamental beliefs and practices are based upon entitlement. The risk becomes, once again, that as long as schools are in compliance with the new directives and mandates and care about students, they cannot be held accountable if they do not improve learning and achievement. Good intentions, hard work, and being in compliance with education laws and regulations may be necessary, but they will not be sufficient in a world requiring continuous improvement, the ongoing capacity for change and adaptation, and a high responsiveness to customers.

Some school districts have recently increased their focus on improving performance in terms of raising student learning and achievement. Even with those districts in mind, the over-arching and unaddressed issue for the existing public school system is: How do we develop and implement reform strategies which actually assist our schools in finding ways to move from organizational cultures and systems of entitlement to ones of performance? One of the authors, while part of a team doing research on factors influencing transformations within organizations, interviewed a senior vice-president of an international corporation who, when asked what had been his major learning in the successful transformation of his company, said, "The most important work is changing the culture, the underlying beliefs of the institution that are woven into its very being. This is the hardest work of all."

- The following chart offers several initial comparative characteristics of entitled and performing organizations. Use this chart as a starting point in weighing where you and your school are along an **entitlement — performance continuum**. Consider, too, the implications to your leadership and how you might begin to develop a focus on performance.

<b>Entitled Organizations</b> – reflect –	<b>Performance Organizations</b> – reflect –
<b>Individuals who:</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• focus on good intentions</li> <li>• talk about how hard they work</li> <li>• think about how many hours they work</li> <li>• mention how many years they have been here</li> <li>• feel they deserve certain things as a result of the above</li> <li>• believe the organization is responsible for their well-being</li> <li>• generally feel little need to change their behavior or approach</li> </ul>	<b>Individuals who:</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• focus on accomplishments</li> <li>• talk about effectiveness</li> <li>• think about what they are achieving</li> <li>• communicate their present goals and objectives</li> <li>• know that their value and future is primarily based upon accomplishments</li> <li>• believe that they must demonstrate and add value</li> <li>• feel a need for ongoing learning and change</li> </ul>
<b>An organization which:</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• focuses generally on the number of activities</li> <li>• measures the amount of effort</li> <li>• talks about what they deserve</li> <li>• doesn't like the term customer</li> <li>• does selling and not marketing</li> <li>• pays people based upon years of service, education, or title</li> <li>• primarily pays attention to the amount of input and the process of doing work</li> <li>• feels that others should stay out of their business, tolerates their help</li> <li>• primarily focuses on maintenance of the existing system</li> <li>• tends to discount the value of data gathering and outcomes</li> </ul>	<b>An organization which:</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• focuses on outcomes and improving results</li> <li>• measures impact related to goals</li> <li>• talk about what they are learning</li> <li>• embraces the concept of customer does marketing and selling</li> <li>• pays people based upon performance, type of experience, and knowledge</li> <li>• primarily pays attention to goals and objectives, and outcomes</li> <li>• welcomes people who help improve their effectiveness</li> <li>• constantly adapting and changing the system to be more responsive</li> <li>• invests in data gathering, analysis, and learning as key to improvement</li> </ul>

## MOVING FROM ENTITLEMENT TO PERFORMANCE

### BENEFITS and RISKS

Reorienting our public education system from entitlement practices to those of performance, offers benefits and risks. What might we anticipate as some of the benefits? How do we acknowledge the risks and fears?

#### Benefits:

- A much higher level of agreement, clarity, and commitment to what it is that we intend to accomplish in our public schools. Getting beyond what someone called, "the eduspeak of creating lifelong learners and the centrality of the classroom."
- Better systems for assessing whether we are accomplishing our goals and, where we are not, then making further modifications to improve our programs.

- An increased confidence and trust on the part of taxpayers who are investors and provide resources at the federal, state, and local levels.
- A higher level of success and sense of satisfaction for teachers resulting from an improved focus and greater clarity of expectations for staff and students.
- Increased support and involvement of parents as they become more informed of what is expected from their children and how they can be of assistance.
- Increased effectiveness on the part of school administrators due to greater clarity and agreement regarding how they personally, their schools, and school systems will be measured.
- Increased student success as they gain greater knowledge and understanding of what they need to know and to be able to do to advance and achieve.

## Risks — Fears:

It is essential to acknowledge the initial fears of educators. They often suggest that a performance orientation is just another in a long line of gimmicks or that it will reinforce the public's "lack of trust" in schools. The most common refrain is that education will become like business, only caring about the "bottom line" as measured by test scores. School staff worry that performance efforts will result in schools simply teaching how to pass the test and they will be the "scapegoats" for poor results and unfairly held accountable. In one system where we have worked, the schools repeatedly say and state in writing that "all children can learn." When we suggested they take a risk and change their message to state: "all children will learn," their response was there was no way they could guarantee children will learn. Moving to a position indicating students will learn is a commitment to improving performance. This change of orientation from learning is possible to committing that it will happen is a huge risk and fear for many educators. We believe the potential benefits far outweigh these risks. Moving our public schools from entitlement to performance provides an opportunity for improved focus and clarity on: deciding what is most important to us; demanding we agree on selective evidence to judge our progress; and providing insights as to where we need to make modifications for further improvements. Our worst fear is that to stay on an entitlement path will result in the dismantling of public education.

## GETTING TO PERFORMANCE

Rather than inundate our schools with more conflicting and tedious dictates, let us, instead, build upon their strengths. The collaborative efforts of all concerned — teachers, administrators, legislators, communities, and businesses — need to be marshaled toward creating conditions which establish performance improvement as the keystone of all other efforts.

It is time to acknowledge that true educational change is much harder and more demanding than creating additional tests or rules. We have much to gain from those organizations and programs which have learned how to focus on performance resulting in improved services and products [ie: health care, business, non-profits, and some aspects of government operations]. It is time to support and provide our schools with the practices which initiate and sustain meaningful reform and engender performance. Our legislators, business leaders, and educational policy makers need to realistically advocate for and support the following:

Effective and strong leadership for improving performance. This means looking inside and outside the present culture and systems of the organization for those who can lead change, finding sufficient time for this work, and establishing an effective collaborative process.

Relationships with organizations which have achieved recognized change and improved performance. These talents and strategies must be evaluated in terms of their value to school issues and change efforts.

The development and maintenance of a different relationship between central office administration, school committee, and unions. Trust, understanding, and communication are the building blocks for this change which must include new contract designs.

Creating a powerful alliance among educators, parents, businesses, and the community for improved learning and achievement. Fresh, imaginative, and workable ideas are key.

In tandem with the above efforts, and as part of a sustained emphasis on performance, schools must take the lead in establishing organizational systems, practices, and structures focused on **three factors**:

#### **To know...**

School districts need to build local agreement and understanding of what their students must know and be able to do by the completion of each level of schooling. It is essential that the process to achieve this involve parents, community members, and educators.

#### **To assess...**

There will need to be agreement upon:

- 1) the evidence to be used to assess the actual learning
- 2) the process by which to analyze this evidence
- 3) embracing this analysis to enact strategies to further improve teaching and learning
- 4) the core beliefs and values that guide our schools

#### **To build the organization's...**

- 1) processes, relationships, structures, leadership, staff learning, and responsibilities
- 2) allocation of resources to ensure improved achievement and ongoing organizational learning

Any effort to make our public schools truly more performance oriented rests in large measure within the present leadership of local schools and communities. As Tom Payzant, Boston's Superintendent of Schools, has suggested, "Educational leaders have a special responsibility to create the catalysts for change."<sup>3</sup> We must, however, now recognize this as a catalytic partnership among school, community, state, and federal leaders.

The most critical factor in moving our public education system and local school districts from entitlement to performance is leadership. One of our favorite definitions of leadership is "bringing a group of people together to accomplish or achieve something that they probably wouldn't do on their own." Peter Drucker, the renowned management expert, once said, "Leadership is doing the right thing, management is doing things right. The problem we have in most organizations is that we have managers doing the wrong thing really well." The school change we advocate will require leaders who are teachers, school committee members, parents, superintendents, legislators, and members of local government to be in alignment about doing the right things. All parties must bring their

The improvement of schools' abilities to collect data and information, analyze and synthesize the results, and articulate its meaning. Administrators will also have to establish time for all staff to understand, internalize, and utilize this data to create responsive and improved programs.

Increased clarity and focus regarding outcomes that are essential. Schools and teachers will require greater freedom and flexibility to build and implement strategies for improvement of student learning and achievement linked to their community.

The creation of processes created at the school district and school level for reflection and organizational learning in order to continuously review strategies, their impact, and required modifications.

communities and schools to do things that they probably would not do on their own.

School and community leaders must work together to create a long term vision and direction for local education. They must serve as the catalysts to bring people together to define, articulate, and create the building blocks we need to move all our students toward higher levels of learning and achievement. For far too long, our school leadership has based its lack of performance improvement efforts almost completely on the issues of too little funding, limited time, or various societal issues which prevent us from realizing really meaningful change. It is time to acknowledge that this leadership needs to work in different ways. We must recognize it is this same leadership that enabled our current system of entitlement to develop and flourish. It is this leadership that maintains this system today and could sustain it into the future. At times it appears that education leaders have abdicated the responsibility to others for improving the performance of our schools. Legislators and other interest groups "outside" our schools have taken much of the initiative. They now define how educators must react. They give us more tests, mandates, charter schools, and a smorgasbord of requirements. Many of them, due to their grave doubts that public schools can improve, propose dismantling public education as we have known it and turning the job over to charter schools, privatization, or vouchers!

Education and community leaders need to bring a passionate and fresh advocacy to improving the performance of our public schools by motivating and inspiring school principals, teachers, parents, students, and taxpayers to overcome major political, bureaucratic, and resource barriers. They must build teams and coalitions who can understand and appreciate the systemic nature of the challenges facing public education and have the courage, commitment, and empathy to create meaningful change and results. Let us not forget, also, that over the years our education system has conditioned and trained those who work in schools to be managers not leaders. Administrators have been rewarded primarily for keeping things "under control," budgets as low as possible, and, as necessary, reacting and responding to problems that are ever present in an entitled system. This entitlement culture is maintained today and will be sustained into the future unless leadership significantly changes.

## A FRESH ADVOCACY

As leaders wanting to improve our public education system, we have the ability to initiate more systemic and systematic steps within our schools and community. To do so, we shall:

- ▶ Create usable and measurable action plans that serve as benchmarks for our schools to focus on improving performance.
- ▶ Honor and apply the significant research on student learning and organizational change.
- ▶ Act upon the realization that our schools require different and imaginative staffing practices based on new needs.
- ▶ Create and sustain learning and development programs for all employees, school committees, and parents.
- ▶ Define steps to be taken toward performance and create the process essential to responsibility and accountability.
- ▶ Initiate new long term collaborations with organizations willing to serve as mentors in our change efforts.
- ▶ Create a focus on those whom schools serve through a variety of data which continuously assess needs, school performance, and the results of change efforts.
- ▶ Establish new communication patterns with clients that acknowledge successes and problems.
- ▶ Implement new configurations of the school day and year more closely attuned to learning, community needs, and changes in family work patterns.
- ▶ Dismantle the outmoded grade level configurations which inhibit student and staff learning and teaching.

## RETHINKING HOW OUR SCHOOLS MIGHT WORK

## Organizations moving toward performance emphasize:

- A clarity of purpose and goals - service and response to clients' needs and interests
- Working practices and structures designed to initiate and support teamwork
- Focused responsibility and accountability
- Risk taking — is valued and understood as necessary to growth
- Engaging all employees in the organization's efforts
- Creating higher quality in the service, product, or performance
- Constant assessment through all types of data
- Improved and on-going learning opportunities for all employees
- The premise that within each part of the organization there are unique talents and strengths to be used in new ways
- The establishment of new collaborative arrangements with other organizations
- Continuous review of practices and programs and a willingness to make changes swiftly.

## Summary...

The caliber of America's public education system will shape its future. New dimensions in the world community, personal lives, and the economy are demanding that all young people and many more adults continue to acquire new levels of knowledge, confidence, and skill. Moving schools from a system and culture of entitlement to one of performance is the essential step toward ensuring not only that reform has a chance to take root, but also to establishing a renewed confidence in schools, honoring the nation's expectation of public education of high quality.

We need to remember, too, that public education is not alone on this journey. Utilities, health care, business, religion, government, and social services are being transformed by this same fundamental shift. The understanding and internalization of this dynamic can position us to learn from the experiences of others in order to develop appropriate and effective performance strategies for our schools.

A performance orientation offers a new lens through which to view the true potential and importance of our public schools and the students they serve. Let us begin "seeing with new eyes."

---

### ABOUT THE AUTHORS

**Paul McGowan** is the founder of Education Associates which consults with state departments of education and local schools and school systems on how to create and sustain change and improvements resulting in improved student learning and achievement. Education Associates is located in Ogunquit, Maine and can be reached at 207-641-0870 or [paul@edleader.com](mailto:paul@edleader.com).

**John Miller** has served as a teacher, Director of a Teachers' Center, and as school principal of an award winning elementary school on Nantucket, Massachusetts. He is presently working with Drs. Tom and JoAnn Shaheen of Rockford, Illinois on *The Principal's Advocate*, a book for school leaders. He may be reached at 508-228-4138 or [john@edleader.com](mailto:john@edleader.com).



### For further reading:

- 1 Lloyd Dobyns, Clare Crawford-Mason, [\*Thinking About Quality: Progress, Wisdom and the Deming Philosophy\*](#)
- 2 Rafael Aguayo, *Dr. Deming: The American Who Taught the Japanese About Quality*, p58
- 3 Thomas W. Payzant in the Forward to: *Invisible Forces* by Julian Prince, page vii.



## ENTITLEMENT

This term describes organizations in which people's attitudes and behaviors, as well as organizational practices, reflect a high value on input and processes with little attention to output or results. In schools, this means a primary emphasis on: a staff's good intentions, how hard they work, and how much they care about educating children. It also means that the organization's processes underscore such things as the curriculum, budget, negotiated contracts, schedules, technology, and facilities. Thus, despite our best intentions, over time this subtle entitlement milieu has resulted in ways of working which are unable to significantly respond to new requirements and expectations.