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FEEDBACK

SCHOOL LEADERSHIP

THE TIME HAS COME

This draft article offers a review of one essential CCLR perspective. If our public schools are to flourish, their leaders must be the first to deeply embrace change.

OVERVIEW Discussing the United States and Canada, a Canadian colleague said, "I've always had great admiration for the aspirations of the United States (i.e.: equality, freedom, individual rights, democracy), but I'm continuously disappointed with what you do with them." What an elegant differentiation between intention and impact. We believe the time has come to rethink our experiences with "education reform." What were the **intentions**? What has been the **impact**?

Our experience is that there are admirable intentions within the efforts to improve schools. We also find considerable disappointment and disillusionment with these attempts at many levels of our public education system. In too many places reform is neither what we expected, nor honoring what we intended.

What is becoming clearer is that school change is not a simple addition, subtraction, or multiplication problem. Instead it poses a perplexing equation permeated with variables, each of which is influenced by legislative mandates, national reports, education research, state departments of education, and professional education associations. These variables include: higher expectations, common standards, parent involvement, technology, integrated curricula, assessment, professional development, funding, teaching methodologies, and facilities. The thinking is that if we just create common standards, improve the curriculum, hire better teachers, test everyone, and stir in dollops of funding, legislation, and time, then everything, ultimately, will be all right. It's time to challenge this way of thinking, which, to date, is shaping reform.

Is the missing link in effective fundamental school change the lack of investment in the necessary leadership? Is the system in denial about the capabilities and capacities required to weave these variables together at the local level in ways that inform, inspire, support, and energize improvement in learning? We suggest that our inability to distinguish the need for critical leadership is the primary factor underlying the disappointing results. The dynamic of meaningful school change is ever more complex than just extra curriculum, tests, time and money.

LEADERSHIP

A few years ago Harvard's Richard Elmore reminded us that we could help our efforts to reform public education by admitting that we do not know how to bring about such a

transformation of public education on a broad scale. "*The dirty little secret is we're asking people to do something we don't know how to do.*" said Elmore at a September 14-15th gathering at Teachers College, Columbia University. His insight makes school change inherently a leadership challenge. The requirements and demands of communities, society and our economy demand a transformation of public education. We cannot just manage or administrate our way through school change, for its complexity requires a process of adaptive learning at the school, district, state and federal level.

Let's start by thinking differently about public education's administrators. They are often considered as a requirement, rather than as an essential variable for success. A developer of this article remembers, as a school committee member in Massachusetts during the early 1990s, the emphasis on identifying the number of administrators in each school and school district. The bias was that the ratio to teachers be as low as possible and the fewer administrators the better. This is just one example of an attitude that must change, if we believe leadership matters!

In moving from such long-held views of administration to new ones of leadership, let's recognize, too, that this shift must include school committees, teachers, students and parents. Effective leadership is demanded throughout all levels for genuine school change.

We propose a new design within the reform process - one that develops education leaders who can cope with conflict, set direction, align resources and inspire stake-holders. It means a leadership effort empowering a range of people to create long-term vision, defining and clarifying problems and opportunities, creating and committing to improvement strategies, and, finally, acting. Such leadership requires courage, commitment, risk and empathy. It builds upon deep participation and constructive engagement. There can be no "safe harbors" for school change leaders.

THE TIME HAS COME

The sign on the bulletin board at Bill Clinton's election headquarters almost nine years ago said, "It's the economy, stupid." While this may not have been a great piece of prose, it had a powerful message.

A similar message comes to mind when looking at all the dollars, time and effort invested in education reform and the often-disappointing results. It's time we say, as we rethink our pursuit of improving public education, **"It's leadership, stupid!"**

John Kotter, author of *What Real Leaders Do*, reminds us that research shows when the pace of change in organizations speeds up, the need for leadership also goes up. Based on what we've experienced to date, all the efforts to change schools have reinforced that Kotter is right. Unfortunately, we have done little to increase the needed leadership for our efforts to be successful.

Building upon Kotter's perspective, consider Peter Drucker's clear sightedness, which applies to our schools' administrators:

"Management is doing things right, **leadership is doing the right things.**
The problem is that we have a lot of managers doing the wrong things very well."

Advocating leadership development in public education in times like these might, we admit, sound crazy. Everyone is trying to tell schools what to do! Yet, the paradox is that now, as public education struggles to reform, leadership from school committees, administrators, parents, teachers and students is more critical than ever.

This leadership, moreover, must be local for that's where the rubber meets the road. It's where authentic leaders can help people make sense of what is happening, deflect fear and criticism, engage all stakeholders in efforts to improve, and inspire people to construct more effective strategies embracing change toward truly improved schools.

MOVING FORWARD . . .

In creating a new perspective and actions on school leadership and change, we suggest, using Drucker's critique, the importance of differentiating between management and leadership. Consider this:

M A N A G E M E N T	L E A D E R S H I P
<p>SCHOOL ADMINISTRATION TENDS TO FOCUS ON</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • maintaining existing relationships and order • working within the existing culture • problem solving • using tried and proven ways of doing things • working within what people think is desirable • working even harder and longer 	<p>SCHOOL LEADERSHIP IS ABOUT</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • taking risks • striking out in new directions • creating visions • tapping imaginations • changing the way people think about what is desirable • creating excitement about working with children and communities • building new relationships and structures • changing the existing culture

Keep in mind that public education trains, reinforces, and, indeed, expects its superintendents, principals, coordinators, teachers, union officers, and directors to be administrators, but not leaders. The skills, competencies and capacities are far different between administration (management) and leadership. A management focus, skills, and time are necessary aspects of these jobs; yet no longer are they sufficient for the escalating challenges and demands within public education.

The time has come to focus our efforts on emphasizing and developing educational leadership capacities and capabilities. We submit that the lesson we've learned from existing reform is that until we are able to find ways of not managing, but vigorously leading, little significant school change will ever occur.

Our perspective, of course, presents some daunting challenges, such as how to:

- Develop leadership capacities and capabilities in veteran administrators, school committee members, teachers, students, and parents in school cultures that do not value leaders?
- Develop local level leadership in such a highly decentralized system with hundreds, if not thousands, of people to be influenced?
- Convince people to invest precious time and dollars in local leadership development when there isn't enough time or dollars to implement all the mandated requirements and programs?

We believe that we can overcome these challenges through a commitment to leadership development and renewal as the center of school change efforts.

We submit that current efforts within the reform movement and the existing public education system are not doing this job. Effective, meaningful change can only come about through:

- Acknowledging that local education leadership is an essential variable to improvement.
- Emphasizing that leadership is different than management and requires different skills and behaviors. There are inherent leadership capabilities to be developed and supported at the local level, yet this approach requires a substantial change in and a refocusing of the public system's beliefs, priorities and investments.
- Understanding that the opportunities created by increasing funding, constructing new facilities, establishing common standards, improving instructional practices, and integrating technology will only be realized by how well we deepen and support leadership capabilities and capacities at the local level.

SO, WHAT DO WE DO?

It is one thing to identify and elaborate on an issue. The critics of schools seem to excel at finding fault, yet rarely offering realistic plans or next steps.

With this in mind and based on our earlier review of present school leadership and change efforts, what will it require in order to improve our leadership capacities and capabilities at the local level?

To begin, we offer [three principles](#) that serve to ground the leadership change effort. We must:

PRINCIPAL I

Be willing to understand this issue at a systemic level (the education culture, funding, legislation, union constraints, and patterns), but be able to act at a local level. We must raise everyone's awareness and understanding of the leadership issue and build commitment at the local level to investing in systematic leadership development. This will require all the local level stakeholders to increase their understanding and appreciation of what their real leadership challenges are and how these relate to student learning and achievement.

PRINCIPAL II

Work from the understanding that leadership development is different than management development. People can be appointed to positions of management and authority, but leadership can only be earned. We cannot develop improved leadership in public education by simply teaching everyone better techniques or by giving them more knowledge. Colin Powell, the current Secretary of State remarked that, "*Leadership is the art of accomplishing more than the science of management says is possible.*" A key step in leadership development is about helping Superintendents, Principals, School Committee Chairpersons and other education leaders to understand who they are, what they believe, what their vision is for the future and what values they hold dear.

A critical aspect of leadership change is working from the "inside out." A few of the key qualities of effective leaders are courage, commitment and empathy. These are not qualities that we can teach people, but we can develop the kind of organization culture and systems that encourage and support them. Crucial to this "inside out" effort is helping individuals and teams assess their current effectiveness prior to encouraging them to improve certain skills, practices or behaviors.

PRINCIPAL III

Customize leadership development work to be effective at the local level with individual leaders and leadership teams. Such customization should be thought of in the terms of action research, i.e. first gather some data, do a diagnosis, identify some alternative strategies and finally decide which strategies to pursue and then implement them. It must be customized for both different individuals and organizations. We must resist simplistic cookie cutter type prescriptions.

GUIDED BY THESE PRINCIPLES, WE SUGGEST IMPLEMENTING SIX ESSENTIAL ACTIONS:

1. Raise awareness and build commitment to leadership development at the local, state and federal level. We must get beyond the myth that if we just train teachers to teach better everything will be fine. This will require some investment of time and dollars.
2. Broaden all stakeholders' understanding of what the real leadership challenges are at the local level.
3. Provide tools and processes to help assess the effectiveness of existing leadership structures, practices and behaviors throughout school districts and schools. We must create informal and formal process to get meaningful information and feedback to leaders on their effectiveness to ensure that they invest in their on-going learning and development.

4. Provide the development experiences, resources, expertise and support that will enhance the effectiveness of local leadership capacities and capabilities. We must look at these both at the individual and team level.
5. Change the culture of public education that at an underlying level appears to think of administrators as more of a "necessary evil" than an essential component of success.
6. Help school systems build real alignment of leadership with school committees, central office, school administrators, teacher leaders and parent leadership.

It is very popular today to ensure that your school district or school has a statement of Mission, Vision and Values or, even better, a fully developed strategic plan — often representing form with little substance. The work of leadership is to ensure that these statements have real meaning, that there is commitment and passion behind them and a daily pursuit to achieve them.

"Real leaders are ordinary people with extraordinary determination" is one of our favorite anonymous quotes about leadership. This is what our leadership development efforts must recognize in education. When we uncover skills, knowledge, and behaviors that are needed to complement that determination, then we need to help people develop them.

Leaders are not just spokes in the wheels. They are the hubs of the wheels. The time has come to move forward from intent to having an impact through the commitment of resources and practices designed to develop and support leaders focused on authentic school reform.

ABOUT THE AUTHORS

- Paul 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.
- John has served as a teacher, Director of a Teachers' Center, and as school principal of an award winning elementary school on Nantucket, Massachusetts. He recently completed work with Drs. Tom and JoAnn Shaheen of Rockford, Illinois on *The New Principal's Advocate*, a book (on CD) for school leaders, and presently serves as a whole school change coach. He may be reached at 508-228-4138 or john@edleader.com.



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