



Research and Best Practices That Advance the Profession of Education Administration

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Editorial

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Let's Delete Rigor and Add Quality

R*igor* is an issue that both legislators and personnel from state education agencies have been known to thrust upon administrators via rules and regulations. The inclusion and frequency of this term in recent legislation and policy is noteworthy. For example, the No Child Left Behind Act included the term *rigor* and *rigorous* 29 times throughout the legislation and it appears three times in the Goals 2000 Educate America Act (PL 103-227). In some cases policy makers and education leaders use the term *rigor* to support proposed education reforms or policy changes.

To this end, former U.S. Secretary of Education Margaret Spellings stated, in testimony before the U.S. House of Representatives appropriations subcommittee on labor, health and human services, and education (Related Agencies Appropriations, 2007), "... our budget focuses on ... increasing resources and rigor in our high schools ..." The idea of increasing rigor was a key component in her request for funds to expand test-driven accountability measures at the high school level.

Likewise, the new secretary, Arne Duncan (2009) commented recently about this year's NAEP reading results, "We're pleased to see some recent progress among all age groups in reading and among younger age groups in math ... Our focus on raising standards,

increasing academic rigor and improving teacher quality are all steps in the right direction." But what is *rigor* and should school administrators really want discussions about education to include it?

First, we need to define clearly the term if we want to have a professional discussion about its use. The Merriam-Webster's Online Dictionary (2008) provides several definitions for *rigor*: (a) stiffness; (b) harsh inflexibility in opinion, temper, or judgment; (c) the quality of being unyielding or inflexible; and (d) an act or instance of strictness, severity, or cruelty. Webster's Online Dictionary (2008) includes the above entries and adds one other definition relevant to the discussion: exactness without allowance, deviation, or indulgence.

Please also consider that rigor is the first step toward rigor mortis. When situated in an educational context, the definitions of rigor do not sound very appealing, as such descriptors as stiffness and inflexibility do not appropriately capture the complexity of education processes; especially when it comes to providing a comprehensive education for all children.

In fact, rigor seems to be a term better suited to a process that is static or that functions to preserve the status quo. It is a term more closely aligned to an essentialist philosophy of

education, a philosophy that supports the idea of keeping things stable and unchanging.

However, static and status quo were not the goals of the foundation of public education, at least not according to the views of one of the original champions of public education—Thomas Jefferson. The Jeffersonian view of education is one of progress, change, and evolution. Jefferson proposed a public education system that would level the playing field between those that came from a more privileged background and those who do not have such advantages so as to help society progress. As the needs of citizens and of society evolve and change, so too must the education system.

While one can never really know the intentions of others, I presume people use the term *rigor* to communicate a message of quality (the adjective), or a message of action, although rigor, quality, and action are not synonymous. Based on the formal definitions of rigor, I am not sure why we educators would continue to use it in our lexicon.

Perhaps we should choose to use *quality* instead of *rigor*, to bring greater clarity and precision to what it is we really seek for children. Merriam-Webster's Online Dictionary (2008) defines quality (the adjective) as: degree of excellence. This definition implies that quality is a continuum and quality practices are not static or inflexible; they can evolve with the growing professional knowledge dynamic (English, 2006), be responsive to social forces, and accommodate multiple designs and methods to meet the needs of the learner and respect what is known about human development (e.g., cognitive, social, and moral).

Now, you may be thinking that the term *quality* is subjective. No more so than *rigor*.

One objective aspect of quality ideas, interventions, and programs in education is whether there is empirical, or scientific, evidence to support their use; this is hardly subjective. Haller and Kleine (2001) defined empirical as, "... concerned with creating facts through experiments, surveys, case studies, or other accepted methods, facts that can then be used to answer a (research) question" (p .2).

The term *quality* allows educators to include other measures of performance and evaluate growth in a dynamic sense instead of a static, finite sense. A focus on quality provides a metric to evaluate ideas and interventions, especially if we accept that one measure of quality is whether empirical evidence exists to support the proposed initiative or intervention. Quality rests upon evidence whereas rigor rests upon rhetoric.

A focus on quality would help the public hold policy makers, educators, and education leaders accountable for implementing demonstrated interventions and reforms based on empirical evidence instead of those based on conventional wisdom (Galbraith, 1958), political expediency, or ideology. After we adopt a quality lens to view education practices we can begin to apply that lens to our initiatives.

For example, the No Child Left Behind Act (No Child Left Behind [NCLB PL 107-110], 2002) as originally enacted would never have passed the quality test because its major premise of driving education improvement through the use of high-stakes tests is not supported by empirical evidence.

In fact, the evidence tells us not to use that type of policy initiative because the high-stakes tests used to carry out the policy directive do not pass the quality test as defined by the *Standards for Educational and*

Psychological Testing (American Education Research Association [AERA], American Psychological Association [APA], & National Council on Measurement in Education [NCME], 1999) and research on the practice (See Koretz, 2008).

The tests used in all 50 states to satisfy NCLB and state accountability requirements have inherent technical flaws that should preclude educators and policy makers from using the results to make high-stakes decisions about individual students, teachers, programs, and schools (Koretz, 2008; Tienken, 2008a, 2008b).

As I noted in the Spring, 2009 editorial, an intrepid group of educators associated with the Eight-Year Study (Aikin, 1942) rejected high stakes testing almost 70 years ago as a bankrupt and empirically vapid initiative.

Similarly, the practices of raising state-test cut-scores to an arbitrary level, large-scale school district consolidation, retention in grade, consistent use of homogenous grouping, or mandating that all high school students take a specific sequence of courses to graduate (as proposed by the American Diploma Project/Achieve Inc (2008), e.g., mental discipline revisited; Thorndike, 1924) do not provide quality.

What are some quality practices (have a demonstrated empirical base) that educators should promote? The following is a short list of examples that have a demonstrated knowledge dynamic in PK-12 education. You will also notice that some of the practices have been known for many years:

(a) class-size reduction in grades K-3, especially for children of poverty (Blatchford, Bassett, Goldstein, & Martin,

2003; Finn, Gerber, & Boyd-Zaharias, 2005; Mosteller, 1995; Word, et al., 1990);

(b) cooperative learning (e.g., Chambers & Abrami, 1991; Hooper, 1992; Nichols, 1996; Slavin, 1986; Stevens, Slavin, & Farnish, 1991; Taba, 1955);

(c) problem-based and activity-based curricula (Aikin, 1942; Jersild, Thorndike, & Goldman, 1941; Wrightstone, 1935);

(d) heterogeneous grouping at the K-8 level (Mosteller, Light, & Sachs, 1996; Zaharias, Achilles, & Cain, 1995);

(e) time on task (Bloom, 1984);

(f) multiple measures of student achievement (Chester, 2005; Smith & Tyler, 1942);

(g) extensive macro-curriculum at the high school level that offers courses for general education, specialized education, enrichment, special interest education, and exploratory education (Tanner & Tanner, 2007);

(h) differentiated instruction, (Commission on the Reorganization of Secondary Education [CRSE], 1918; Aikin, 1942);

(i) developing socially conscious, problem-based curriculum that respects the nature of the learning, nature of knowledge, and acknowledges social forces, especially democratic principles (Bode, 1931; Dewey, 1902; Inglis, 1918; Tyler, 1949);

(j) asking productive questions (Bloom, 1984; Walberg, 1999); and

(k) reducing poverty through progressive tax, housing, health, and economic policies (Galbraith, 1997; Rothstein, 2004).

You might notice that some of the references are somewhat historic, suggesting that we have known what constitutes quality practices for some time now. Therefore, we need not rely on the current system of behaviorist/rationalist control and monitoring

exemplified by the NCLB era and similar state-developed systems.

Having been made aware and/or reminded of this, we cannot plead ignorance, we cannot accept inaction, and we can no longer promote or “go along with” non-quality practices. It is time to move on and get down to the work of truly educating our children and developing a *quality* system of programs, assessment, and accountability.

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Research Article

An Examination of Professional Goal Plans and Leadership Ethics

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Reports about shifty short cuts to profit, selfish personal schemes, and criminal convictions of corporate executives and elected government officials are both commonplace and all too familiar. The stories highlight a present and consistent lapse in reputable conduct among business leaders.

Unfortunately, such narratives exist within the educational sector as well, with school leaders equally vulnerable to unethical undertakings. Some scholars (Ciulla, 1998) have contended that ethical conflict is endemic in today's society due to the depth of moral conflicts among leaders. Beckner (2004) also recognized this phenomenon in ethical leadership practice, arguing that, "in an earlier more homogeneous society, desirable ethical decisions were easier to discern if not always easy to follow" (p. 5).

Thus, as the plurality of societal morals increases, the ethical development of leaders becomes more complex and imminently more critical to attend to in leadership preparation programs. As Ingram and Brockberg (2008) poignantly posited, "the moral lapses of leadership move our culture to the edge of an ethical morass" (p. 210).

There are few books in education administration literature that address the ethical dimensions of leadership. This trend led Northouse (2004) to conclude "... the theoretical formulations in this area are still in their infancy" (p. 301).

Moreover, empirical studies of ethical practice by educational leaders are rare, resulting in the paucity of quantifiable data that can prove or disprove assumptions about ethical leadership.

Along these lines, Ciulla (1998) noted, “Given the central role of ethics in the practice of leadership, it’s remarkable that there has been little in the way of sustained and systematic treatment of the subject by scholars” (p.1).

Furthermore, such a gap in extant literature raises concern that a lack of ethics training leaves school administrators ill-equipped for the realities of the array of ethical dilemmas they can expect to encounter on the job (Beck & Murphy, 1994).

Johnson (2005) conceptualized ethical development of school leadership as a formative learning process. Hence, the ethical preparation of school leaders cannot be taken for granted or reduced to simple, standardized, empiricist, or logical prescriptions. Rather, leadership programs must utilize an ontological approach, exercising an understanding of the depth of ethics and working to foster ethical development.

As such, an intimate knowledge of ethics and “ethical consequences associated with exercising influence over others” (Johnson, p. 4) represented a mature ethical leadership perspective and praxis. In a leadership preparation program, students who are both non-administrators (emerging) and practicing school administrators should consciously and critically engage in the construction of both ethical beliefs and ethical scaffolding, as well as positioned to self-assess ethical developmental status and praxis.

In sum, these components form an ethical ontology. Johnson suggested that the identification of personal strengths and weaknesses is a good first step in one’s ethical character formation.

According to Starratt (2004) and Rebores (2001) leadership programs have a moral

obligation to bridge the study of ethics to practice because public trust and support for education can only be fulfilled through ethical leadership.

However, graduation from a standards-based educational leadership program does not guarantee one’s ethical leadership knowledge and understanding or ethical behavior and praxis. Rather, a standards-based leadership program that advocates, nurtures and assesses ethical development as a part of the graduation requirement can increase the probability of ethical leadership.

Leadership Program Graduates: Ethical Outcomes

This article presents a mixed-methods study that examined leadership program graduates’ self-assessments as they specifically related to the knowledge, performance, and disposition indicators of the ISLLC Standard 5 (1996). This ISLLC standard is generally referred to as the “ethics standard” by program faculty. The study revealed significantly different levels of ethical development between two program graduate groups: non-practicing (emerging) and practicing school administrators

Purpose

The researchers’ purpose of the study was to determine how two student groups (i.e., non-practicing and practicing administrators) who graduated from the same standards-based Education Specialist (Ed.S.) program, self-assessed their ethical knowledge, dispositions, and performance.

One query guided the investigation: What is the measurable difference between non-practicing and practicing administrator Ed.S. program graduates’ knowledge, dispositions, and performance in terms of leadership practice or planned practice of the ISLLC Standard 5 indicators?

Design and Methods

Volunteer participants included 34 student graduates who were either non-practicing or practicing administrators from an education specialist program at a midwestern university.

As a requirement for the final course in the EdS program, students prepared professional goal plans and self-assessments of developmental growth against the ISLLC Standards 1-6. These standards were adopted by the academic department and had been in use for several years.

The professional goal plans were extensive documents of students' learning experiences, with narration, supporting artifacts, reflections, and self-assessment of final achievement status. A mixed-methods study design specifically tested for differences in achievement status of the ISLLC Standard 5 knowledge, performance, and dispositions indicators that were self-reported by the two student groups, non-practicing and practicing school administrators.

Initially, qualitative methods were used to reveal the understandings, values, beliefs, attitudes, opinions, and applications that students engaged in about leadership practice or planned practice of the ethical indicators of the ISLLC Standard 5.

Using blind review, the professional goal plans and students' self-assessments were scrutinized by the first two authors who were EdS program coordinators with extensive pedagogical knowledge of the program standards and several years' experience teaching and coordinating students in the program under study.

From their investigation, these faculty members determined the extent that the students' narratives aligned with the knowledge, performance, and dispositions

indicators of the ISLLC Standard 5. Using a tally sheet for each professional goal plan and self-assessment, student materials were reviewed for discourse, themes and references relating to the taxonomical area descriptors of the ISLLC Standard 5. A tally of the frequency of referrals based on direct wording or paraphrased meaning of the ISLLC Standard 5 were collected and sorted by descriptor.

Next, the two faculty conducting the qualitative review reconsidered tally frequency totals against the students' developmental rankings paired with faculty knowledge of student mastery. This second review provided a method for formative, authentic assessment of the level of mastery of the ISLLC Standard 5's descriptors.

Last, the third and fourth authors (non-program faculty) employed quantitative methods to statistically analyze the data reported by groups. The data were examined for differences. This was as an investigative triangulation strategy (i.e., use of both qualitative and quantitative methods) used in the aim of increasing validity.

Measures

A taxonomical design of Dispositions, Knowledge and Performance behavior descriptors for the ISLLC Standard 5 had provided the framework for instruction throughout the program. The ISLLC Standard 5 contained eight descriptors for Dispositions, five for Knowledge, and 14 for Performance.

After graduation from the EdS program was completed, the examiners qualitatively reviewed the 34 student narratives against these 27 ethical explications and then further quantitatively categorized each sample as practicing administrators (n = 8, 23.5%) or non-administrators (n = 26, 76.5%). The differences in group size are noted as a limitation of the study.

Design/Analysis

To determine whether significant differences existed in the frequency of referrals of ethical behaviors, an independent samples t-test was used to compare the means of the two groups. An alpha level of .05 was selected to reject the null hypothesis for each descriptor of the taxonomy. A cross-tab analysis was also applied with a chi-square test statistic to analyze the evidence of all 27 ethical descriptors. The analysis compared the observed frequency of these distributions with the frequencies expected by chance alone. An alpha level of .05 was selected to reject the null

hypothesis—namely, that there was no difference in the evidence of ethical development between practicing administrators and non-administrators based on taxonomical descriptors in the ISLLC Standard 5.

Results

Comparing Sums of Standards Between Groups

The independent samples t-tests revealed a significant difference in the evidence of ethical standards between practicing administrators and non-administrators. The results are summarized in Table 1.

Table 1

ISLLC 5 Mean Scores—Non-Administrators/Practicing Administrators

Group	Mean	SD	t – value
Non-Administrators	11.46	3.47	-6.617*
Practicing Administrators	21.75	3.96	

*p < .05

Table 1 presents the mean scores as evidence of the ethics standard for the two groups, the standard deviations (SD), and the t-value comparing the difference in means.

From these results, practicing administrators do portray significantly more evidence of the various ethical descriptors than non-administrators do. This difference is an indicator of significantly different learning

outcomes for the two groups based on the ISLLC Standard 5.

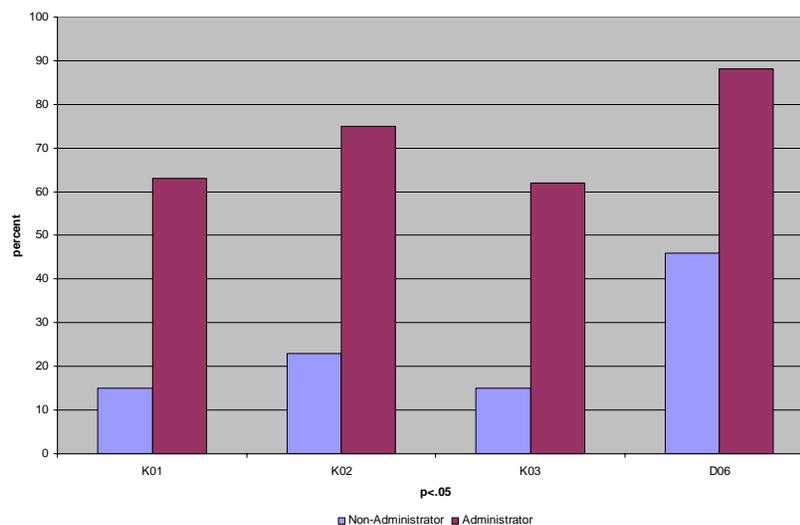
The two graduate student groups' ethical development differences overall mean that the non-administrators are disadvantaged in terms of knowledge, dispositions and performances outcomes of ethical leadership influencing successful student achievement.

Comparing Patterns of Observed Evidence Between Groups.

The team also observed differing patterns of evidence for behaviors according to the descriptors of Knowledge, Dispositions, and Performances. Particular descriptors revealed significant differences ($p < .05$) between the two groups.

The results of evidence for Knowledge and Dispositions of Ethical Behavior are combined in Figure 1 (since there was only Dispositions descriptor) indicating significant differences by percentages between the two groups.

Figure 1. Significant differences in knowledge and dispositions of ethical behavior in ISLLC Standard 5.



- K01 Purpose of education and the role of leadership in modern society
- K02 Various ethical frameworks and perspectives on ethics
- K03 The values of the diverse school community
- D06 Accepting the consequences for upholding one's principles and actions

Figure 1 portrays four significant differences between the two groups (K01, K02, K03, D06) most notably as related to the conceptualization and valuing of ethics and the need for diversity appreciation.

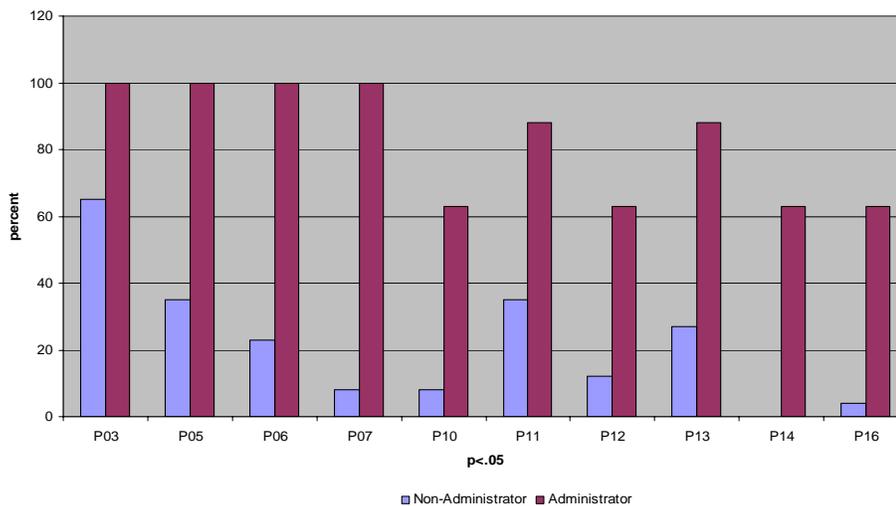
The difference in the Disposition descriptor (D06) entails embracing the challenge of ethical leadership and the willingness to stand singularly for enacted ethical decisions and praxis. The three differences in the Knowledge

descriptors (K01, K02, K03) include significant and systemic gaps in understanding the moral imperative of educational leadership, the theoretical constructs of ethical leadership, and the intention of leadership regarding diversity.

These four descriptor differences for Dispositions and Knowledge represent critical

ethical developmental differences between the two groups. For the non-administrator group, these unattained learning outcome differences are foundational to ongoing ethical leadership development and will affect initial leadership effectiveness. Figure 2 further examines differences by percentages between the two groups in performance descriptors.

Figure 2. Significant differences in performances of ethical behavior in ISLLC Standard 5.



- P02 Demonstrates a personal and professional code of ethics
- P05 Accepts responsibility for school operations
- P06 Considers the impact of one's administrative practices on others
- P07 Uses the influence of the office to enhance the educational program rather than for personal gain
- P10 Demonstrates appreciation for and sensitivity to the diversity in the school community
- P11 Recognizes and respects the legitimate authority of others
- P12 Examines and considers the prevailing values of the diverse school community
- P13 Expects that others in the school community will demonstrate integrity and exercise ethical behavior
- P14 Opens the school to public scrutiny
- P16 Applies laws and procedures fairly, wisely and considerably

Figure 2 displays many significant differences between the two groups as well (P02, P05, P06, P07, P10, P11, P12, P13, P14, P16). While P14 and P16 may be attributed to the limited auspice of non-administrators encumbering organizational transparency and consistency with wisdom in school governance, the remaining eight differences are of concern because they reflect a limited understanding of leadership ethics and how to lead ethically, all areas of learning within the control of the non-administrator.

The remaining eight significant differences in Performance descriptors indicate a lack of ability of the non-administrators to act as ethical leaders. Those descriptors include behaviors demonstrating ethical authenticity, understanding the impact of leadership actions on others, accepting responsibility for the school/district, modeling servant leadership and respect for others, creating shared standards for ethical organizational citizenship behavior, and signifying a commitment to diversity.

Overall, these 10 descriptor differences for Performances represent critical ethical developmental differences between the two groups. The differences in the 10 Performance dispositions learning outcomes disadvantage the non-administrators in inaugural leadership projects.

Discussion

Differences in Practicing and Non-Practicing Administrators

Based on the qualitative analysis of the professional goal plans and self-assessments, the student groups reported significant developmental differences in the mastery of the ISLLC Standard 5. Practicing administrators' referrals to use or planned use of ISLLC Standard 5 occurred almost twice as often as the non-administrators' referrals did. This difference indicated that even though both

groups were in identical programs and shared cohort groups, the practicing administrators were more advanced and self-actualized in this ethics standard.

For this leadership preparation program, given the significant differences in learning outcomes, it is obvious that the achievement level of students is highly differentiated upon graduation. While practicing administrators likely have more opportunities to exercise the ISLLC Standard 5 on all taxonomical levels, use of case study, problem-solving, role-playing and simulation throughout the two-year program would expose all students to scenarios engaging ethical leadership development.

Since similar learning outcomes are desirable for all program graduates, differentiating instruction based on career application opportunities may be an appropriate strategy for program improvement.

ISLLC Standard 5 Disposition Indicators

Of the eight Dispositions identified in ISLLC Standard 5, evidence on only one component registered as statistically different between non-administrators and practicing administrators. This component specifies, "*Accepting the consequences for upholding one's principles and actions*" (D06).

While the total number of differences in Dispositions are much less than the other two taxonomical areas, the nature and impact of this one particular descriptor, D06, is substantial. The percentage differences for D06 are nearly twice as high for practicing versus non-administrators.

This finding indicates that more than half of the non-administrator group does not embrace the combination of valuing ethics in leadership and taking responsibility for such a belief. Clearly, a lack of consistent values

development exists for the non-administrator group in this study that allows them to believe in ethical leadership, but not maintain personal or professional responsibility for such a belief.

In the qualitative analysis of the student professional growth plans and self-assessments, references to descriptors in use or planned use were identified. For the non-administrators, the connection between valuing ethical leadership and “paying a price” for that ethical belief or decision was missing.

ISLLC Standard 5 Knowledge Indicators

A greater portion of the Knowledge descriptors in Standard 5 showed significant differences for non-administrators and practicing administrators.

On three of the five knowledge descriptors, practicing administrators showed evidence of a greater sense for the purpose of education for modern society, identified a broader array of perspectives and frameworks for ethical decision making, and demonstrated more knowledge about the importance of diversity.

While there is a significant difference in knowledge of “*the values of the diverse school community*” (K03) between the groups, it is important to note that only 63% of practicing administrators demonstrated this knowledge component and only 15% of non-administrators showed evidence of this knowledge—not an impressive program result for student outcomes overall for either group.

The same significant differences and percentages of evidence existed for the “*purpose of education and the role of leadership in modern society*” (K01).

These differences highlight a lack of internalization by non-administrators of ethical leadership theory, but also indicate that the

same developmental problem occurs with almost 40% of the practicing administrators.

ISLLC Standard 5 Performance Indicator

For 10 of the Performance indicators, significant differences exist between non-administrators and practicing administrators and the same low percentages of evidence persist for “appreciation for and sensitivity to diversity” (P10) and “considers the prevailing values of the diverse school community” (P12).

Only 4% of non-administrators and 63% of practicing administrators demonstrate appreciation for and sensitivity to the diversity in the school community.

Furthermore, only 5% of non-administrators and 63% of practicing administrators examine and consider the diverse values of the school community. These 10 Performance differences emphasize a large developmental gap between the two groups on the strategies, methods and impact of ethical leadership practice.

Findings do show that practicing administrators are developmentally more accomplished in ethical performance. In addition, the low percentages of planned or in use performance related to diversity is problematic for both groups given the issues of student achievement related to diversity issues.

Conclusion

Synonyms related to ethical leadership used to describe “matters of the heart” and qualities that “distinguish” the individual (Combs, Blume, Newman & Wass, 1974) surfaced in these summary narratives of non-administrators and practicing administrators.

However, the finding that significant differences existed between the non-administrators and practicing administrators on some of the descriptors, especially when

considering differences on 10 of the 16 descriptions of ethical performances for school leaders, is an important focus area of improvement for this leadership program. A plausible explanation for the differences may be that practicing administrators serve as the chief moral stewards of the school and make decisions that affect students, teachers, diverse stakeholders, and the ethos of the school environment.

Clearly, the non-administrators have not actualized ethical leadership to the extent that practicing administrators have.

Nonetheless, in considering graduate student outcomes for this program, these results highlight a significant learning gap between the non-administrators and practicing administrators.

In terms of school district hiring practices, this suggests that employing a graduate from this EdS program from the practicing administrator group is generally less risky in terms of internalized and actualized ethical leadership practice than hiring an emerging (non-practicing) administrator is.

The results of this study support the notion that one cannot practice what is not known or valued. Theory and practice of ethical leadership are more fully developed as scaffolding and ontology for practicing administrator graduates than for emerging administrator graduates. Hence, emerging

administrator graduates of this program are disadvantaged on learning outcomes for ISSLC Standard 5.

In addition, this study highlights that a missing element in the preparation of the study's participants in both groups has been the fostering of diversity awareness and appreciation.

Findings specifically revealed that both groups did not transfer dispositions and knowledge to performance regarding issues of diversity. Given that diversity competencies are vital, this finding may increase programmatic concern over how to address the broad purposes of education vis-à-vis the role of diversity.

Since developmental results for these two groups are significantly different, consideration for improvement of instructional delivery and learning experience design for non-administrators is warranted for the graduate program.

One way for emerging administrators to gain greater knowledge of real day-to-day practices performed by administrators may be through problem-based, field-based and simulation-based learning in the program of study. Further, criteria in the selection of mentors and determining measures that support mentors' capacity to involve emerging administrator mentees in authentic environments must be advocated for more strongly.

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Research Article

Full-Day Kindergarten Results in Significant Achievement Gains

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In 2004, after an in-depth review of student achievement data for over 4,000 students, the administration of a school district in southern Minnesota identified the following challenges:

- (a) above-state-average number of special education students,
- (b) increasing number of English as Second Language (ESL) students,
- (c) increasing number of students qualifying for the federal free and reduced lunch program, and
- (d) 2004 dropout rate of 22.08% in comparison to the state average of 11.04% (Minnesota Department of Education, 2008).

The district's responses to these challenges were fragmented and reactive. Acknowledgement of these challenges resulted in a re-examination of school district practices. Specifically, the re-examination included an analysis of resource allocation and decision-making practices in relation to student achievement. By aligning resource allocations

and decisions with student learning, these administrators identified three key patterns:

1. Connections were not evident between allocation of resources (i.e., money and people) and their impact on student learning.
2. The district did not have an accountability system for insuring student-demonstrated mastery of the grade level content; in many situations, grade level outcomes were unarticulated and unmeasured.
3. Professional development practices were not aligned to district challenges.

The examination of these patterns in conjunction with a mindset placing a focus on impacting student learning *prior* to failure, made it possible for the district to determine what programs to prioritize and support. The first priority which the district identified was full-day, daily kindergarten.

The benefits of full-day, versus half-day, kindergarten programs have been well demonstrated in past research (e.g., Fromberg, 1992; Gullo, 1990; DeCesare, 2004; Nielson, & Cooper-Martin, 2002; Watson & West, 2004). Full-day kindergarten has been viewed as a means for diminishing the achievement gap between different socioeconomic and ethnic groups, thus ensuring that more students are ready for the increased rigor of first grade (Koehler, 2005).

Veteran kindergarten teachers in the district indicated that they believed that full-day programs provided additional time for meaningful learning opportunities, increased instructional time for reading and mathematics, and time for social development—an area reduced or eliminated in half-day programs due to increased academic demands.

Engaging the Stakeholders

Securing a commitment from key stakeholders in a era of declining resources and facility limitations became crucial in making full-day kindergarten a reality. As a result, numerous steps to engage stakeholders were taken:

1. A task force was created that included building-level administrators, teachers of all grade levels, and facilities personnel. The charge was to conduct a cost-benefit feasibility study of a full-day kindergarten program.

2. After a year of work, this task force delivered a clear message that full-day, daily kindergarten was needed. Task force members also provided options for how this could be achieved.
3. The superintendent hosted community meetings to inform, gather support from, and gain feedback from parents and community members.

Over time, and as a result of the aforementioned steps, a plan was established. However, facilities, curriculum, leadership, and funding remained sizable barriers in making the program a reality.

Addressing Barriers

Facilities

Transitioning to a full-day, daily kindergarten program would require additional space. After the task force identified several options, a closed private school facility was leased and early childhood and community education classes were moved to this facility. This move allowed the district kindergarten program to be housed in one building, hence creating a kindergarten center.

Curriculum

Kindergarten and first grade teachers met and identified 18 essential learner outcomes in reading and mathematics that kindergartners needed to master in preparation for first grade (see Table 1).

Table 1

Essential Learner Outcomes for Transition from Kindergarten to First Grade

#	Reading Essential Outcomes	#	Mathematic Essential Outcomes
O1	Writes first name	O12	Counts to 100
O2	Writes last name using model	O13	Names patterns
O3	Recognizes colors	O14	Extends patterns
O4	Reads color names	O15	Recognizes shapes
O5	Recognizes upper case letters	O16	Draws basic shapes
O6	Recognizes lower case letters	O17	Writes numbers 1 – 10
O7	Beginning consonant sounds	O18	Recognizes numbers
O8	Reads high frequency sight words		
O9	Gives a word for each consonant sound		
O10	Vowel sounds – short		
O11	Vowel sounds – long		

Mastery of the 18 outcomes became district policy. Students who did not demonstrate proficiency were required to attend summer school or repeat kindergarten. A curriculum was developed that focused on the 18 outcomes (e.g., report cards tailored toward outcomes, monitored implementation of the curriculum).

Furthermore, students receiving special services (i.e., special education, ESL) were included with appropriate support in regular kindergarten classrooms, thus receiving the same curriculum and expectation for demonstrating proficiency of the outcomes.

Leadership

The kindergarten center opened with approximately 400 students under the leadership of a shared principal and three

skilled kindergarten teachers. Each of the three teachers was paid a stipend to lead one of three teams. The leadership provided by the principal and the three teachers played a critical role in ensuring consistency of curriculum implementation.

Funding

The task force led conversations centered around the adjustment of resources to support early interventions such as the full-day kindergarten.

A portion of the funds used to hire additional teachers for the kindergarten center came from changes at the middle and high school level (i.e., teacher reductions, reduced course offerings, and increased class sizes). Funding from an excess levy referendum was also accessed.

Measuring Student Success

An assessment plan was created to measure the impact full-day kindergarten had on student achievement. A three-phase plan was

developed that compared and monitored performance of half-day and full-day students through the third grade (see Table 2).

Table 2

Assessment Plan Comparing and Monitoring Performance of Full-day Students through Grade 3

Phase	Student Assessment Points	Assessments
Phase 1	First grade	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Fall First Grade Gates MacGinitie Reading Assessments
Phase 2	Second grade	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Fall Second Grade Gates MacGinitie Reading Assessments
Phase 3	Third grade	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Minnesota Comprehensive Assessments II (MCA II)—percentage of students meeting proficiency in reading and mathematics

The district selected the Gates MacGinitie Reading Test to assess academic performance. Data was collected each fall from during the 2004 to 2008 academic years. District-wide data was reported in stanines using both district and national percentages.

The purpose of the Phase 1 analysis was to determine if the collective reading scores were higher among first graders who completed full-day kindergarten (2006, 07, 08) when compared to those who completed half-day kindergarten (2004, 05). Based on the reported stanines, percentages and proportions were calculated for the four lowest stanines and the highest five stanines. Statistical significance is reported at $\alpha = .05$ and $\alpha = .01$ for all analyses.

Results

The last two years of half-day kindergarten in the district were 2004 and 2005. The Gates MacGinitie Reading Test scores were used to establish a baseline proportion. In 2004, 58% of

288 students scored in the lowest four stanines (42% in the top five). In 2005, 54% of 311 scored in the lowest four stanines. The combined 2005 baseline proportion was 335 of 599 or .559.

Next, proportions were calculated for 2006, 2007 and 2008. These proportions were then compared with the 2004/05 baseline to determine if the proportion of first grade students in the bottom four stanines significantly decreased and the proportion in the top five stanines significantly increased.

The proportion of students in the lowest four stanines for 2006, 2007 and 2008 were .360, .400 and .267 respectively. These proportions were then compared with 2004/05 baseline percentage which was .559. A test of significance between proportions was performed. The difference in proportions was converted to a Z score and then significance as determined using a one-tailed hypothesis (Kuzma & Bohnenblust, 2005).

The results are as follows:

20004/05 compared with 2006. $Z= 6.01$, $p<.001$. Results are significant at $\alpha = .05$ and $\alpha = .01$.

20004/05 compared with 2007. $Z= 4.73$, $p<.001$. Results are significant at $\alpha = .05$ and $\alpha = .01$.

20004/05 compared with 2008. $Z= 8.85$, $p<.001$. Results are significant at $\alpha = .05$ and $\alpha = .01$.

In sum, there is evidence that the proportion of students in the lowest four stanines significantly decreased, and correspondingly, the proportion of students in the top five stanines significantly increased after the introduction of full-day kindergarten.

Conclusions

This full-day kindergarten implementation is one example of the district responding to challenges in a unified and proactive manner. Other changes in organizational patterns also emerged:

1. The dedicated kindergarten staff is working under a more structured leadership system, and more students are meeting proficiency.
2. Kindergarten teachers are raising the standard of accountability for student mastery of grade-level content.
3. Kindergarten level outcomes are clear, measured and reported.
4. A stronger connection is evident between allocation of resources (e.g., money and people) and their impact on student learning.

The program also reinforced the importance of aligning decisions, resources, and practices with student learning via a focus on foundational support *before* students begin to fail. Additionally, it represented the district's shift towards carefully measured student achievement and thus ensured a level of confidence in students' progression through grades based on that achievement.

The preliminary results from the full-day kindergarten program indicate that these deliberate changes may pave the way toward positive achievement results for all students.

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Article on Best Practice

Freeing Students to Succeed by Changing Classroom Space

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Introduction

As school administrators search for empirically-based ways to facilitate student learning, their efforts are confined and constrained by decreasing budgets. In short, doing more with less is their charge.

This article describes a no-cost, evidenced-based best practice to raise student achievement and engagement in the elementary grades based on the results from a randomized-controlled experiment.

The practice is rooted in the belief that the way in which a teacher organized classroom space can significantly affect student achievement and based on positive empirical results.

Some teachers need help organizing their classrooms to maximize student engagement and learning. A common concern voiced by some teachers in traditional classrooms is that “my room is cramped and I don’t know what to do about it,” (J. Flanagan, personal communication, May 18, 2008).

Paradoxically, teachers are often trapped in these ‘old style’ classrooms while simultaneously being expected to deliver effective instruction that requires significantly more open space. Speaking to this point, it had been echoed that, “students pursue their education in largely traditional settings, taught by teachers who stand before row upon row of desks” (NASSP, 1996, p. 4).

Part of the problem lies in the fact that teachers were never taught in pre-service programs how to arrange a classroom to promote engagement and learning (Tanner, 2000a). Lacking any direction, teachers copy the misdirection of others without understanding the consequences.

Yet, the environments that teachers create can effect and influence student output. According to Ouchi (2004) “structure must change before culture can change” (p. 18). Thus, teachers who understand basic elements of classroom design can plan their classroom organization to affect student learning (Duncanson & Achilles, 2007).

In the aim of organizing classrooms to best help students, teachers will first need to plan space before the placement of furniture. Administrators can support teachers in these space planning efforts with little to no time or cost commitment. However, prior to the administrators being efficacious in this task, they must possess a working knowledge of the research and supporting theory

Space Counts

It has been noted by researchers (Achilles, 1999; Simpicio, 1999) that better use of space provides nurturing, learning environments. Fortunately, tasks that determine the nature of the environment—arranging the furniture, distributing materials, and decorating the walls—are all within the control of teachers (Bickart, Jablon, & Dodge, 1999).

Yet what advantages does creating space result in for students? Past empirical findings from Duncanson, (2003a) indicate that simply changing arrangements to create more open space in experimental classrooms resulted in measurable increases in Grade 4 science test scores.

In this quasi-experimental study with a sample of 120 students, a very high, positive correlation between grades achieved in hands-on skills of the New York State Grade-4 Pupil Evaluation Test and the number of square feet per student in each classroom was found ($r = .91, p = .03$).

In classrooms that have greater amounts of open space per student, on average, student scores are higher on questions dealing with hands-on science skills and questioning. Duncanson (2003a) reported an effect size (Cohen's $d = .69$) between medium (.5) and large (.9). This means that in classrooms that had greater amounts of open space there were

higher average standardized test grades than in classrooms with less space by .69 of the standard deviation (Zakzanis, 2001). Given these data, the next question intuitively becomes how does space create a better environment for students?

Duncanson (2003a; 2003b) demonstrated that the behavior of teachers and students changes when teachers arrange the room for collaboration and learning. Teachers make choices that move beyond the desks.

For example, learning centers appear around the sides of the room and teachers begin introducing challenging and open-ended activities that typically involve (a) problem solving, (b) cooperative learning, and (c) open communication. Such higher level thinking activities would not be possible if students were not allocated adequate space to work together.

Furthermore, open lines of communication (i.e., between teacher-students, and student-to-student) are established as students begin to voice and test their ideas. This intellectual engagement enables students to create and reinforce knowledge together. In addition, classroom space facilitates learning for both general and special education students. Hence, everyone gets an opportunity to demonstrate and contribute their unique talents and perspectives. In sum, joy returns to learning.

Traditional Classrooms

A classroom is the sum of the architectural facility and the arranged environment. The room's fixed architecture influences where moveable furniture can be placed. Electrical outlets, projector screen, computer outlets, windows, heaters, fixed cabinets, and countertops dictate room arrangement to a great extent.

Classrooms arranged for teacher-centered instruction have hindered the minds-on learning required of new curricula. Space per student is simply too small. Tanner (2000a) recommended 47 ft² of space per student to provide “ample spaces that allow students to circulate” (2000b, p. 2). Therefore, a typical classroom of 850 ft² should contain about 17 students.

However, actual class sizes in the U.S. typically exceed that figure by 4-6 students or more in many urban centers. Specifically, full class size is commonly described as 22-26 students (Finn, et al., 2005) with average K-5 class size by state ranges from 17.1-24.3 (United States Department of Education, 2007).

Given these numbers and the paucity of space already evident in U.S. classrooms, the significance of this article is further strengthened. Furniture and the way teachers arrange it further diminishes the already scant amount of open space per student. Among the 15-30 pieces of furniture teachers spread out around the room are cabinets, book cases, extra student furniture, stuffed chairs and sofas, A-V equipment stands, planters, etc. It is clear that all of these classroom fixtures occupy space that could be potentially used by the students.

This dearth of classroom space leads to deleterious consequences for student learning. One way to suppress learning is to “limit opportunities for students to receive help from their peers and teachers in how to make their work better” (McNeil, 2008, p. 25).

In traditional classrooms teacher-directed activities are accomplished with students working alone at their desks. Students know exactly what to do; primarily, sit down, be quiet, and follow instructions. There is a strong tendency for students to work alone when seated at tables or desks, even when

desks are placed in clusters. Hence, an academic culture of silence is created and collaboration leading to meaningful discussion is stymied.

Creating Space

Because it has been demonstrated that increasing open floor space promotes student thinking, then administrators and teachers should collaborate in the improvement of classroom arrangements.

In many classrooms, moveable furniture and teaching supplies take up too much valuable space. Thus, reducing the amount of each can create an inviting and productive place to work. As stated by Berkus (2005) “the rewards of creating an organized environment are a sense of peace and calm—and who doesn’t crave that” (p. 155). Next, we offer a plan for classroom reorganization.

Interior Design for Learning

First, start with the teacher’s desk because it is anecdotally noted that many teachers only utilize their desk before and after the regular school day. Some teachers use a table as their primary work area, as they need more space than a desk top offers. For storage, some teachers find a small cabinet to suit their needs. When required materials are the same as those needed by students, combining them in the center of a worktable parsimoniously serves everyone’s needs.

A teacher who needs a desk to define a personal area should consider carefully how much space is sacrificed. It is not uncommon for some teachers to claim 20% or more of available floor space.

Because space between the front of the desk and the wall behind the desk becomes “teacher space,” that area should be subtracted from the classroom work area because students

only enter this space when invited. Teachers can minimize “teacher space” by placing one end of the desk against a wall and the back of the desk fairly close to a wall.

Classrooms typically contain a place for each student. However, some teachers hang on to student desks even when a student leaves the school district. To maximize available space, the desks of these students should leave when the student departs.

Turning our attention away from desks, teachers additionally have roughly 15-30 ancillary pieces of furniture in the classroom (Duncanson, 2003a). The aggregate of these pieces is space taken away from students who sorely need room to function as learners. Clayton (2001) offers the following statement to guide teachers and administrators in making decisions about classroom furniture: “all furniture should be actively used for some part of each day” (p. 46).

In addition, unused audio-visual equipment, extra student desks, and chairs, etc. can be eliminated; they do not enhance the classroom experience but rather potentially retard student achievement. To reiterate, less furniture translates into more space for teachers to interact with students in new ways.

A second space issue is the storage of classroom materials. Teachers who change grade levels tend to keep materials they used in their previous assignment, often packed in dusty boxes stored on valuable floor space. Nostalgia is not a good reason to keep boxes of unnecessary materials in the classroom.

We suggest that such material is relocated or discarded. Furthermore, materials stored for over a year become temporally

outdated. Teachers are wise to remember, that if such materials are again needed in the future, they can easily be replaced in most cases.

Planning Pathways

Teachers and administrators should adopt the practice of looking at classrooms through the lens of what will help students most. This perspective requires teachers to plan and value space before they place furniture.

Teachers should imagine and consider where students will gather (e.g. soft reading area, large-group meeting area, instructional area) as these areas must be connected with easy access pathways.

Civil engineers and highway planners recommend that educators begin their classroom plan by adapting design guidelines for parking spaces at a shopping mall. Teachers can create a main artery parallel to one side of the room that also accesses the classroom door.

Next they can plan secondary pathways perpendicular to the main artery for easy access to seating areas, learning centers, and workspaces (Duncanson, 2003c). Teachers use space in new ways after it is created. “That meeting space you helped me create in the back of the room has been great. We now do fun reading as a group. The kids love it! We needed a larger space when a speaker came in so we just moved the tables. It was easy” (J. Tobin, personal communication, October 24, 2008).

Next, the selection and placement of furniture relative to the pathways should be carefully planned. Teachers should consider seating needs relative to the tasks students are asked to do. Student desks or tables come in different sizes and shapes. Large tables provide space for activity centers.

When the primary interest is gaining space, teachers may opt for circular tables; small reading groups may require ‘kidney’ shaped tables.

Clusters of 3-8 desks eliminate narrow pathways, and open large floor spaces. Additionally, clusters create space that long rows obscure. Open pathways extending from side-to-side in the room allow the teacher to move quickly from one student group to another.

Matching the furniture arrangement to the activity facilitates achievement of different educational goals. Some results (e.g., Rydeen, 1999) include deeper student-teacher and student-student conversations. A spacious classroom provides flexibility for class groupings of different sizes and better accommodates students with special needs.

Closing Thoughts

When we face difficult tasks or changes in life, it helps to be mindful of what is within our control.

Thus, when we make strides to improve the learning experience of our children, it is first reassuring to acknowledge that both “space and time are in the control of educators” (Duncanson & Achilles, 2005-2006, p. 26).

Removing unnecessary furniture from the classroom is one fairly easy step for teachers to take to improve the educational milieu of their setting. This action alone can add over 100 ft² of open space.

Educators should consider discarding such furniture and material as:

- (a) the teacher’s desk,
- (b) excess student desks, and
- (c) seldom used AV equipment.

When such changes are made to the classroom environment, students notice and utilize the increased space immediately.

Gaining space will support student learning and make it easy for teachers to access materials to be used that day (Table 1).

Table 1

Reconfigured Classrooms and the Advantages of Space

Space

- Classroom environment improves (e.g., air quality, materials availability, space, crowding, noise).
- Large open spaces create a 'roomy' atmosphere.
- Pathways are broad.
- Variable room arrangements are possible.
- Students self-select space suited to the task.
- 'Rug-rats' use floor space for projects.
- Increased teacher/student morale/energy.
- Classrooms become teachers.
- Joyful atmospheres are produced.

Students

- Favorable environment for students with special needs.
- Students challenge the ideas of others.
- Students engage in deep thinking to test ideas.
- Students engage in problem solving.
- Students construct knowledge.
- Students understand the material.

Teachers

- Teachers can move around the classroom freely.
- Teachers interact with small groups.
- Mentoring and coaching are enhanced.
- Classroom management improves.
- Teachers use challenging open-ended activities.
- Clutter is eliminated.

Instruction

- Variety of effective teaching methods can be used.
- Purposeful learning activities are utilized.
- Student-centered instruction is possible.
- Cooperative learning is fostered.
- Group dynamics are encouraged.
- Cross-age events are encouraged.
- Time on task increases.
- Students teach each other.
- Several activities occur at one time.

However, rearranging furniture to optimize space takes careful planning. Therefore such practices should occur after due consideration,

collaboration between teacher and administrator, and a working knowledge of extant literature.

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Article on Best Practice

School District Mergers: What One District Learned

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One School District's Story

Throughout the planning process for a school district merger in a northwestern Pennsylvania school district, effective communication proved to be a challenge. Formed in 1932, this school district of approximately 1400 students was part of a utopian community; one established by a transportation system's corporation that was a major industrial presence in the United States and northwestern Pennsylvania. Hence, the corporation provided an ideal community for its employees and their families.

However, the significant social and economic changes that occurred on a global level over the past 75 years, ultimately spared neither this corporation, nor the school district.

That said, the corporation generously supported both the community and the school system until the early 1980s when the effects of a downturn in the economy, and associated factors (e.g., the impact of high labor costs, the decline of the rust belt manufacturing business) were felt.

Between 1982 and 1998, the corporation's proportion of support for the district dropped from 40% to 9.5% of total tax revenue. Subsequently, these circumstances forced the school district to confront ensuing short- and long-term problems.

Threat of Merger and Community Response

The economic and fiscal situation forced this district and its community to examine alternative ways to sustain their educational programs, including the possibility of merging with another school district.

During a strategic planning process aimed at shaping the district's future, it was insisted that a contingency plan be implemented to define the immediate structure of the educational program. Despite the aforementioned close relationship between the school and community, administrators found that actively engaging the community in the planning process for school district merger proved difficult.

In order to begin the communication process, a town hall meeting was held to inform the community about the possible ramifications of the school district's dilemma. During this meeting, the district invited community members to serve on volunteer advisory committees—organized for solution planning.

Challenges in Engaging the Community

An analysis of community comments at the town hall meeting revealed a belief that misinformation existed concerning a merger with a specific school district and how decisions would be made by the district. It was proposed that information should be disseminated to counteract this misinformation

Given that only 15% of the community members attended the town hall meeting to hear the known facts, the school district's need to establish effective communication systems became apparent. That is, as the remaining percentage of the community looked to other sources for information, further misinformation regarding the state of the district might exist.

Information dissemination efforts were largely directed toward one-way communication strategies and involved printed sources of information including newsletters, press releases, and online announcements. As a result of this communication strategy, stakeholders were not able to provide feedback, ask questions, or otherwise actively participate in the merger planning process.

At this time, a community survey showed 79% of respondents disagreed or strongly disagreed that the merger planning process was providing accurate, convenient, and timely information for all stakeholders. Polarization within the community began to increase.

Causes Contributing to Difficulty Engaging the Community

Throughout the planning effort, district administrators gave little thought to how to best disseminate information to the larger community. More importantly, no two-way communication strategies (e.g., sharing opinions, asking questions, and networking) were developed by the committees, vis-à-vis the rest of the community.

Thus, it is not surprising that a communication plan to facilitate the accurate and timely flow of information using a variety of media and technology resources was not in place. Nor were there established, systematic procedures for communication with those who were not part of the school system network. Extant research has emphasized the notion that affective systemic change is contingent upon the development of communication efforts, which truly engage the public (Millennium Communication Group, 1994).

Typically, districts view communication plans as involving the mere dissemination of information. However, getting people genuinely involved in purposeful activity to find solutions to real problems must be the focus of any communication plan.

Public Relations or Public Engagement

Although the school district's intention to provide information was a positive and worthy one, the approach used to deliver said information was developed on an ineffective communication paradigm unsubstantiated by empirical research.

When attempting to affect change, school districts typically use public relations strategies rather than public engagement models (Cohen, 1998). Public relations

methods try to persuade citizens to agree with a particular position or decision, whereas public engagement actively involves community members in the decision-making process. Using Yankelovich's (1993) model of the seven stages of public opinion, Wadsworth (1997) posits that although public relations techniques may be effective in the early awareness stage of change, they fall short when resistance arises to change. This is the point in which collaboration, understanding, and responsiveness are most effective.

Thus, when people are confused regarding competing solutions, school district and community leaders must develop and communicate realistic options and associated costs and benefits. The district must be mindful not to solely advocate its favored solutions.

Public engagement demands an interactive approach that involves listening, responding, and educating—not merely getting the word out. True public engagement efforts are rooted in diversity, inclusiveness, participation of all stakeholders, commitment to creating dynamic partnerships, and reaching consensus (Cohen, 1998).

Research on school consolidation and mergers primarily addresses the resistance of communities, individuals, and groups that can stymie reform initiatives. Ward and Rink (1992) concluded that resistance is often the result of decision-making processes that do not address the critical sets of forces within the community. Ward and Rink posited that while public decisions generally result from interplay of self-interest, ideology, and information, self-interest and ideology have a much stronger influence on decisions unless the information is self-derived and gained first-hand (1992).

Public Engagement Models Using Technology

Despite several historical difficulties (e.g., failure to make large-scale change, the increasing complexity of achieving effective engagement of citizens), an exciting and potentially powerful catalyst has emerged to aid school districts in public engagement. That is, using technology for community building and developing community networks (Guy, 1995).

The potential for technology to provide a tool for communication and collaboration among diverse groups has become a leveler that gives everyone equal power and influence within the community. Roberts (1995) cites the greatest benefit of online applications as the ability to bring organizations and institutions closer to citizens by giving voice to each individual. Thus, the power of traditional communication hierarchies to control information is circumvented.

Most districts have acquired the capacity through state and federal funds to use online resources to engage students through interactive learning. Districts must now develop processes to use available online resources to engage the community by bringing groups together to discuss issues.

The School District's Story 10 Years Later

In 1998, the school district was unsuccessful in its efforts to merge with a neighboring school district. Yet, two small elementary schools in serious need of costly repair were consolidated into one new elementary school. As a result, there was a resurgence of pride and optimism in the district and community as well as a sense of victory.

However, 10 years later, in 2008, the wolf is again at the door. While the district was successful in recovering from the immediate financial challenge, the long-term picture is uncertain. Enrollment now stands at 1272 (SchoolDataDirect, 2007). Teachers have been without a contract since June, 2007 and are threatening to strike. Salaries are low, teacher turnover is high, and students and parents alike are concerned about inadequate course offerings, limited curriculum materials, and a paucity of extracurricular opportunities.

As this district and others face ongoing fiscal challenges, several developments at the state level are providing renewed interest and financial incentive for districts to consider voluntary mergers.

For example, the Pennsylvania General Assembly passed a resolution in June 2006 directing the Legislative Budget and Finance Committee to study the cost-effectiveness of consolidating school districts in the Commonwealth. Of the current 501 individual school districts in Pennsylvania, 211 of them serve fewer than 2,000 students and 65 others have fewer than 1,000 students (Bard, Gardner, and Weiland, 2005).

While research is varied regarding the optimal size of a school district (Bard, Gardner, and Weiland, 2005), and enrollment has not been shown to be predictive of academic proficiency rates (Standard and Poor's, 2007), many educators believe that the ideal district enrollment is 2,500 to 3,500. This number is agreed upon to be large enough to justify special programs and to use resources and buildings efficiently, but small enough to not overwhelm individual students (Wenfan, 2006).

Recent budget shortfalls at the state level caused Pennsylvania Governor Rendell to include a proposal to eliminate 400 of the

state's 501 public school districts in the 2009-10 budget in order to make public education more efficient. He requested that lawmakers fund a new commission to plan for consolidation (Erie Times News, 2009).

Pennsylvania Education Secretary Dr. Gerald Zahorchak is hopeful that the recent merger agreement between two struggling school districts (the first in 31 years) will lead to similar deals between other districts. Recent media suggested "it's going to show others the reality that you're dealing with issues not just of education and finances, but of people and community. It's a very real process with real people involved" (Pittsburgh Post-Gazette, 2008).

Change is imminent for school districts, and those districts which are prepared to engage their stakeholders will be more effective and successful in the process.

Recommendations

Gain commitment for public engagement

Facilitators of public engagement efforts must gain commitment and support from key people who are in positions of leadership and influence within the district and community. Establishing a committed group of "key communicators" who become part of the community network will serve districts and communities well during planning for major district changes such as school consolidation or merger.

Develop and implement a public engagement plan

The plan should be based on public engagement principles and include various strategies based on community members' preferred communication modes. A needs assessment can identify those preferences and help establish a plan that includes multiple ways for people to engage in two-way communication.

To facilitate implementation of the plan, districts and communities should recruit people with expertise in media relations, Web design, writing, and multimedia production.

Develop a public engagement website

A website will increase communication and collaboration during the consolidation or merger. Use of interactive mediums such as discussion boards, blogs, wikis, listservs, electronic polls, and social networking sites help facilitate engagement and allow districts to “take the pulse” of the community. Linking the site to other community interest sources such as district websites, local news blogs, alumni

networks, business forums, early childhood centers, and senior citizen organizations will help diversify involvement in the process.

Conclusion

The current economic environment increases the likelihood that more states and school districts will face significant challenges and may consider school consolidation or merger. School districts that engage their communities, rather than merely communicate with them, will find more success in achieving sustainability for their educational programs and will keep their communities engaged before, during, and after a merger.

Author Biography

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Book Review

Closing the Leadership Gap: How District and University Partnerships Shape Effective School Leaders

by Teresa N. Miller, Mary Devin, and Robert J Shoop

Reviewed by:
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The preparation of school administrators (principals and vice principals) has been and continues to be in the forefront of discussion about reformation of America's public schools. The discussion is particularly important because of evolving and definitive insights derived from recent research on effective leadership practices (Elmore, 2000; Spillane, 2003), as well as criticisms of and recommendations for revisions of university preparation programs (Hale & Moorman, 2003; Achilles, 2004; Levine, 2005; Fry, O'Neill, & Bottoms, 2006).

The focus of the discussion has been directed on four aspects of that process; licensure; certification and accreditation; principal preparation; and professional development (Hale & Moorman, 2003).

The "general consensus is that principal preparation programs are too theoretical and totally unrelated to the daily demands on contemporary principals" (Hale & Moorman, 2003, p1). An approach that has gained in currency is one that involves university and school district partnerships (Jackson & Kelley, 2002; Ferrigno, 2007; Black & Murtadha, 2007; Bruner, Greenlee, & Hill, 2007).

In general, university and public school partnerships have a long and diversified history. It is difficult to categorize the structures and context of the relationships, but in recent times, 1990 to the present, some generalizations emerge. One type of partnership is a formal, codified relationship that usually has a primary purpose and involves a structured agreement.

Examples of the formal, codified approaches are partnerships that establish professional development schools and those that involve the actual operation of a school by the university. A second approach is more limited in nature, generally excludes a formal agreement, and serves a limited scope and purpose.

Recently, partnerships between local school districts and universities, designed to enhance school building leadership practices, has expanded the historical dynamic of the formal, structured relationships between school districts and universities.

In the recent publication, *Closing the Leadership Gap* by Miller, Devin & Shoop (2007), there has been an enhancement in the understanding of how such partnerships may

meaningfully improve school leadership preparation, in a way that may answer Hess & Kelly's (2007) question, "do these calls for change represent a wave of reform, washing away the gatekeepers that dictate permissible programs, skills and personnel, or a tiny wavelet nudging ashore a variety of new practices while leaving institutions and networks largely untouched" (p 136).

The authors identify a possible model for university and local district collaboration that benefits both partners and includes elements of many of the recommendations for the reform of leadership preparation programs. The critical variables in their model are the professor (university), chief school administrator (district leader), building administrator (school building leader) and atypical of many other models, a teacher as a prospective leader in training.

The structure for this model is the Professional Administrator Leadership Academy (PALA). The recommended model builds on research that suggests a more focused, coherent curriculum that is organized around a philosophy that creates collaboration systems linking stakeholders vertically and horizontally and one that stresses building leadership capacity of the organization and its members.

One of the more useful presentations is a table of examples of partnership models that have been followed by other universities. It provides an in-depth analysis of each approach. The reader has a clear understanding, by following the matrix in the table, what each approach includes. The table is also useful in providing a comparison of the elements of the Professional Administrator Leadership Academy, advanced by the authors, and the other university partnerships.

Although the authors discuss the research leading to the creation of the model they advance, the strength of the presentation is the description of the PALA. The authors offer a "how to" insight regarding the PALA. The description of the curriculum revision process is a template of how other potential partners might undertake a similar partnership.

The resources in the appendix also provide valuable tools in structuring and assessing the partnership within the PALA context.

Closing the Leadership Gap is a valuable addition to the emerging literature on improving leadership preparation and one those serious about reform should consider in developing possible approaches.

Closing the Leadership Gap: How District and University Partnerships Shape Effective School Leaders by Teresa N. Miller, Mary Devin, and Robert J. Shoop is published by Corwin Press, Thousand Oaks, CA, 2007, 161 pages; softcover, \$28.95.

Reviewer Biography

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Mission and Scope, Upcoming Themes, Author Guidelines & Publication Timeline

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