

THE LEARNING Principal®

FOR A DYNAMIC COMMUNITY OF SCHOOL LEADERS ENSURING SUCCESS FOR ALL STUDENTS

FRAMEWORK *for* IMPROVEMENT

Effective school leadership translates into increased student learning

BY VALERIE VON FRANK

Olmsted Falls (Ohio) Intermediate School wanted to improve. Start High School in Toledo, Ohio *needed* to improve.

The suburban district of Olmsted Falls

Public Schools earned the state's designation for being high-performing, but wanted continued growth. Toledo Public Schools, on the other hand, had eight schools in "academic emergency" in 2009 and was given a continuous improvement rating. Start High School was designated in spring 2008 as "continuous improvement," the level just above "academic watch" in the state's assessment.

In each of the two schools, changes in the classroom and in instruction are clear since Ohio put in place a framework in 2007 for improving leadership that is making a difference for how

students learn. Supported by The Wallace Foundation and based on research around effective leadership, the framework provides a coherent and cohesive leadership development system. The framework "requires the intentional shift



away from the traditional notion of leader as manager and leadership as an administrative position/role *to* leadership as a set of practices," according to a report on the work of the Ohio Leadership Advisory Council (2008). The system includes standards and training, and works to create

supportive conditions at the state, district, and school levels to help leaders succeed.

Research has found that leadership is second only to classroom instruction in affecting student outcomes (Leithwood, et al., 2004). "There are virtually no documented instances of troubled

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**TYRONE
OLVERSON**

Principal, Licking
Heights High School
Pataskala, Ohio

Grades: 9-12

Enrollment: 770
students

Staff: 56 teachers

Olverson was principal of Lincoln Heights Elementary School in Cincinnati, Ohio, noted for high performance with a student population that was 100% African-American students eligible for free and reduced-price lunch. He was principal at Reynoldsburg (Ohio) Junior High, then at Waggoner Road Junior High, also in Reynoldsburg, both of which improved student achievement significantly during his tenure, with Waggoner recognized by Battelle for Kids with a 2007 SOAR Award for its progress in student achievement.

Q&A Instructional leader creates culture of accountability

BY VALERIE VON FRANK

Q. What leadership skills do principals need?

The principal has to be transformational and set the focus for the school. The role requires being open and honest, being confident in what you know, saying what you mean and meaning what you say, and following up on things people ask you to do. It's also making sure that instructional strategies are appropriate. Going from elementary to junior high to high school, from urban/suburban to rural settings, I've seen the importance of different instructional strategies in meeting students' needs. The principal has to be able to model and facilitate strategies for staff members.

Q. What does it mean to be an instructional leader?

It's providing resources and support to teachers, having in the school a "no blame, no shame, no excuses attitude," looking at the data and not listening to the rhetoric. It's important that teachers understand the difference between teaching and students learning.

Q. How do you make that happen?

Every morning I go to where the kids are and say good morning; I identify students who are having trouble, academically, emotionally, behaviorally, and pull them aside. I don't want those issues going into the classroom. Every morning on the announcements, I go over our expectations. The next thing I do is to pop into every classroom for five or 10 minutes. I talk to students, ask them what they are learning, how it's connected, what evidence they will have of their learning. For teachers, I'm looking for learning indicators — what are their goals for student learning that day and how they will know when students have learned it. Later, I ask them out in the hall what they will do if students haven't learned. At the end of the day, I debrief

via the public announcement system.

Q. What about the rest of your duties?

I could sit back at my desk and wait, and the problems would come to me. If I'm out in the building, I'm creating community and stopping problems before they happen. Students and teachers don't know when the principal is going to stop by.

Q. What does professional development look like in your school?

Teachers work together on common concerns and come up with a better plan than they had the day before. I tell teachers to make mistakes, because that means you're learning. We use the knowledge we have within the building to do the work during common planning times before, during, or after school. We use a standard protocol to focus on our CRAFT: to Collaborate with a common focus, Reflect on what we've done well and what we didn't, Adapt to change and adopt different instructional strategies, Focus on what we're trying to achieve, and try to be Thoughtful and Timely in our work, remembering that we're there to help kids, not make our own jobs easier.

Q. Why the emphasis on data in our conversation?

Data provide a common talking point. Sometimes, data can be misleading, but data allow conversation. I may see something in the data and you may look at the same data and have a different perception. That's where dialogue begins. Student demographics, for example, help us understand how to develop a culturally responsive practice in our building. In the high school, one of the first things I found out was that many of the students in trouble were Somali. Having that data will help us understand if they're breaking the rules because they want to, or if they don't understand what the rules are.



Pat Roy is co-author of *Moving NSDC's Staff Development Standards Into Practice: Innovation Configurations* (NSDC, 2003).

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Wanted: Instructional leaders

What do instructional leaders do? A new PBS documentary, *THE PRINCIPAL STORY*, chronicles the work of two school principals over a year's time as they lead faculty in improving student achievement and implement school reform. Leading instructional improvement is one of four instructional leadership themes established in the film, and building teachers' instructional capacity is a major aspect of this theme.

The principal's role, as envisioned by the NSDC standards, means **involving faculty in planning and implementing high-quality professional learning for the school** (Roy & Hord, 2003, p. 66). The principal should not plan and design professional learning independently, but should involve faculty.

Instructional leaders then are responsible for **monitoring implementation to ensure student learning**. Professional development is not an end in itself but a vehicle to improve classroom instruction. Good instruction leads to student achievement. Implementing new practices — with *fidelity* — is a necessary component of powerful professional learning. Principals can monitor implementation effectively when they know what best practices look like in operation, descriptions that are captured in Innovation Configuration maps (Hall & Hord, 2001). Principals who are instructional leaders encourage robust implementation of new practices when they **state clear expectations for faculty implementation of new strategies while creating a system of follow-up to support implementation**. Most adults need repeated opportunities for practice to encourage them to persist in using new classroom strate-

gies, along with models of how the new practice can be used. Good instructional leaders are knowledgeable about the change process and can diagnose teacher learning needs.

The instructional leader also **works with the faculty to create a schedule that allows for additional time within the calendar for professional learning**. For professional learning to be effective, it must be continuous and sustained (Wei, Darling-

Hammond, Andree, Richardson, & Orphanos, 2009). *Finding Time for Professional Learning* (von Frank, 2008) describes many ways schools and districts have rescheduled their time to allow for ongoing professional learning.

Finally, the instructional leader **works with the faculty and staff developers to design and implement ongoing staff development based on assessed student and teacher needs**. The desired outcome for professional

development is improved student learning. So the beginning point in determining the focus of professional development is analyzing student data. Along with state assessment data, educators need to analyze student demographic, perceptual, and school process data (Bernhardt, 2009). Using a variety of data helps the school's principal and faculty determine whether faculty need to develop knowledge and skills or whether change is needed in curriculum, assessment, or school process.

We no longer need to debate whether instructional leadership is an essential component of high-performing schools — it is. Our task now is to develop current and future school principals into dynamic instructional leaders who set clear expectations, provide time for learning, monitor implementation, and involve faculty in designing and continually refining powerful professional learning.

NSDC STANDARD

Leadership: Staff development that improves the learning of all students requires skillful school and district leaders who guide continuous instructional improvement.

SUCCESS ANALYSIS PROTOCOL

for leadership teams

Time: 20 minutes, plus 10-12 minutes per team

Materials: Paper and pencils

Purpose: To analyze what makes practice successful and find examples of “best practice.”

Preparation: Designate a timekeeper/facilitator to help keep the group focused on how this practice is different from other team practices. The analysis of what makes this practice so successful is the purpose of the protocol.

“Best Practice” is defined as a process that proved to be highly effective in achieving the intended outcome.

1. Ask teams to discuss and then write a short description of one of the team’s “best practices.” Each team should answer: “What made the practice successful?” and “What made this experience different from other team experiences?” Have each group identify a person to report on the team’s success and the analysis of what made it successful. *(20 minutes)*
2. Have each group’s reporter share a “best practice” and why it was so successful. *(3 minutes each)*
3. Encourage the other team to ask clarifying questions about the details of the “best practice.” *(3 minutes)*
4. All now analyze what they heard about the presenter’s success and offer additional insights about how this practice is different than other team practices. They may ask probing questions, and the presenter’s participation in the conversation is encouraged. *(3-5 minutes)*
5. The presenter responds to the group’s analysis of what made this experience so successful. *(1 minute)*
6. The other team’s reporter shares that group’s “best practice” and what made it so successful. Repeat steps 3-5. *(10-12 minutes)*
7. Debrief the protocol as a whole group. Possible questions to ask are, “What worked well?” “How might we apply what we learned to other team work?” “How might students use this process to reflect on their work?” “What adaptations to this protocol might improve the process?” *(5 minutes)*

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QUALITIES OF EDUCATIONAL LEADERSHIP



Time: 30 minutes

Materials: Pens and paper

Purpose: To identify and share leadership qualities and develop a pattern of reflection

1. Take a few minutes to think about the most rewarding experiences you have had as a principal. What are the qualities of leadership that made these experiences so memorable? What are the critical characteristics of the leadership experiences for you as a teacher, learner, or leader? Write down three to five one-word descriptors of the qualities that are most important to you as a leader, a teacher, and a learner. *(5 minutes)*
2. Gather in groups of two to three and share one of your most rewarding experiences. After you have each told your stories, reflect together on what elements of respect, trust, and relationship had in shaping the experiences. *(15 minutes)*
3. Take a few minutes to think about a leadership issue that you are struggling with right now. How might you use the elements of respect, trust, and relationship to influence how you will respond to your current dilemma? Make a note of one thing you will do in this situation when you get home based on a new insight. *(5 minutes)*
4. Share your new insights with your partner(s). *(5 minutes)*

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Effective leadership translates into increased student learning

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schools being turned around in the absence of intervention by talented leaders,” Leithwood states. “While other factors within the school also contribute to such turnarounds, leadership is the catalyst.” The state framework emphasizes the importance of improving leadership for superintendents, district leadership teams, and building leadership teams in six areas:

- Data and the decision-making process;
- Focused goal-setting process;
- Instruction and the learning process;
- Community engagement process;
- Resource management process;
- Board development and governance process.

Each area then details essential practices to determine the leader’s level of implementation. Districts and schools develop leadership through forming teams at both levels that disburse authority by including nonadministrative members. According to research, such shared leadership creates stronger school cultures and improves teaching and learning (Kruse & Seashore Louis, 2009; Copland, 2003; Lord & Miller, 2000).

For example, in the area of data, one essential practice of the superintendent is to establish clear expectations for and require the use of data in making decisions. The district leadership team’s responsibility is to establish and implement procedures for using the data at all levels to drive improved instructional practice, while the building leadership team’s essential practice is to establish data teams to implement the procedures.

Olmsted Falls Assistant Superintendent Jim Lloyd said the framework showed leadership in his district that the burden was not on students to achieve more, but on adults to learn how to improve how they work with students.

“We’ve gone from lucky to leading,” Lloyd said of the high-performing district.

OLMSTED FALLS REACHES FOR ITS GOALS

Olmsted Falls’ district leadership team set out four areas members believed would lead to improved student achievement: make learning

targets clearer for students, provide effective feedback, create formative assessments, and create data teams. The team specified tasks under each action.

Don Svec, Olmsted Falls Intermediate School principal, said his school took the concepts and teachers began exploring in teaching teams during regular meetings how to apply them. Once each month, the teams focused on

research. In weekly sessions, they discussed student work and strategies for implementing the district targets.

“I needed a form to use to discuss how we were going to make our learning targets,” he said. “The leadership framework helped initiate goals and action steps. It forces you to look

internally and ask hard questions: Where are we succeeding and why? Is it luck or something we’re doing? Where are we not succeeding? And we have those discussions at the building level, where they haven’t always occurred.”

Everyone from central administrators to teachers can list the district’s targets, and the clarity has led to effect, said Svec. A first-year teacher was concluding a math lesson with 5th graders, he said, when she asked students to flip over their papers and draw a circle face with a smile, a line, or a frown indicating how they felt about the lesson. As she handed out homework, she used that student “confidence scale” to differentiate which students were ready to advance, which needed more practice, and who needed additional instruction. Svec was even more impressed when the teacher shared her idea in her learning team, and he saw teachers with decades of experience discussing how to adapt and adopt the formative assessment to help them adjust their own instruction to meet students’ needs.

“It wasn’t rocket science,” Svec noted. “But it was bringing consciousness to what we do.”

CONDITIONS FOR CHANGE

The state framework is “about teachers and principals connecting together to analyze the data, identify areas of challenge, and to have those become areas of focus,” said Cynthia Yoder,

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NSDC’S BELIEF

Sustainable learning cultures require skillful leadership.

Read more about the Ohio Leadership Development Framework at www.ohioleadership.org/up_doc/70532ODEOLAC.pdf

For a digital library of publications on education leadership, visit the online Knowledge Center at www.wallacefoundation.org

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THE IMPORTANCE OF DEVELOPING LEADERSHIP

The Wallace Foundation's director of education, Richard Laine, stressed the importance of developing leadership in his address to the National Conference of State Legislatures in July.

"Many states and districts don't make clear the important role of leaders in ensuring and supporting teacher effectiveness — so investments and changes in teacher quality may lead to classroom by classroom improvement, but typically not schoolwide or districtwide improvements," Laine stated. "The role of the principal has changed. The job description has not kept up."

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executive director of the Center for the Teaching Profession of the Ohio Department of Education.

The state must work with practitioners to identify policies that support their efforts, Yoder said, involving them in decisions as Ohio did in developing the framework itself. The Ohio Department of Education and the Buckeye Association of School Administrators brought together a group of leaders from all regions of the state and a variety of roles to create the framework.

"The role of the principal is to provide leadership and engage staff within the building, provide opportunities for staff to become directly involved," Yoder said. Recent research using professional learning community as a variable has shown powerful associations with teacher practice (Bryk, Camburn, & Louis, 1999; Louis, Marks, & Kruse, 1996; Pounder, 1999; Scribner, Cockrell, Cockrell, & Valentine, 1999; Toole, 2001). Leithwood (2004) said school administrators, in particular, help develop professional community through their attention to individual teacher development and by creating and sustaining networks of conversation in their schools around issues of teaching and learning.

FRAMEWORK AIDS TURNAROUND

Elizabeth Kiss Wray was a new principal

at Start High School when the "abysmal" test scores arrived. Sick of in-services with no follow up or support, she said she dreaded more of the same. However, working with the state for professional learning around the framework, she formed a building leadership team and "embarked on a year-long journey of both professional and personal learning."

"We wanted to transform our school through team work," she wrote in a reflection.

Wray took action, turning faculty meetings into time for examining data in detail, working with the team to set SMART goals, and using protocols for the first time in meetings to build stronger collaborative relationships among staff.

In July, the school saw new Ohio Graduation Test (OGT) scores arrive, and a new rating: Excellent. The school was the first comprehensive high school in the city to achieve that rating, leaping two levels.

At Start, Wray has created a new way of working.

"Just in one school year, the building leadership team has brought life to a school that merely existed," Wray wrote. "We were invigorated to realize that the skills were in all of us ... we just had to grow those seeds correctly.

"Each person in the building has begun to realize just how powerful he/she is." ■

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Designer: Sue Chevalier

BUSINESS OFFICE

504 S. Locust St.
Oxford OH 45056
513-523-6029
800-727-7288
Fax: 513-523-0638
NSDCoffice@nsdc.org
www.nsdc.org

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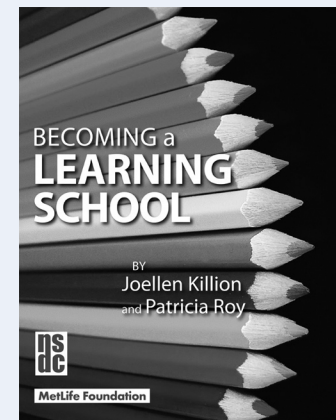
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Learning communities take work to create and sustain

“Effective professional learning communities do not just happen because we convene or assign educators into groups of learners,” NSDC Executive Director Stephanie Hirsh writes in the foreword to *Becoming a Learning School*, by Joellen Killion and Patricia Roy. “They take focused effort to build and sustain.”

NSDC’s newest resource begins with details to help readers understand NSDC’s Definition of Professional Development. Killion and Roy then describe how to set the stage for collaborative professional learning through culture and promoting change; the roles of groups involved, including central office, the principal, and the coach; strategies for success, from planning to using data to reporting results and evaluating effectiveness; and how to engage the community. Designed for educators to use in team and staff meetings, each chapter includes reflection ques-



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tions to help users guide discussion.

This book is the Sears catalog of collaborative professional learning — offering what any educator can imagine needing to create enduring learning communities in schools.