Evidence-Based District Leadership Model

Effective district leadership is evidenced by teams or individuals who:

- Establish and articulate a clear vision with a sense of urgency for change, maintain focus and deliver a consistent message over time
- Focus on schools (districts are successful when schools are successful)
- Create relationships with stakeholders based upon mutual respect and shared responsibility
- Engage in expert problem solving
  - Identify the correct barriers and goals efficiently and effectively
  - Engage in good problem analysis with an understanding that there are many typical barriers to attaining school goals.
  - Know that there are several identified strategies for removing barriers and achieving the vision and apply appropriate strategies based upon school-specific needs
  - Evaluate the effectiveness of implemented strategies
- Invest in professional development

(Leithwood, 2010; Barnhardt, 2009; Crawford & Torgesen, 2007)

Establish a clear vision with a sense of urgency for change, maintain focus and deliver a consistent message over time

What does this mean?

An effective vision includes a coherent description of the district's culture of belief in children as students and as people who are given equitable opportunities to learn with high expectations for achievement. As well, a commitment to improvement in staff performance leading to enhanced student outcomes with accountability for those outcomes shared by all is reflected. The vision is a "living aspiration" that captures current challenges and goals specific to the district's community and articulates how the school system will operate by linking timelines for accomplishing goals and defining corresponding contingencies. The vision is sustained, supported, clearly communicated, modeled and understood by all stakeholders (Barnhardt, 2009; Crawford & Torgesen, 2007; Leithwood, 2010).

Focus on schools (districts are successful when schools are successful)

What does this mean?

District performance will not improve if school performance does not improve, and school performance will not improve unless individual student performance improves.

Focusing on schools entails focusing on students (Leithwood, 2010). This signifies the district's responsibility for helping school principals become stronger leaders, improve instruction in the classroom, and provide access to data management systems that facilitate effective, timely data-based decision-making.

Create relationships with stakeholders based upon mutual respect and shared responsibility

What does this mean?
Leithwood (2010) emphasizes the need for districts to engage parents and other community stakeholder in the "turnaround efforts" and to clarify expectations and standards for the adult members of the school community. Leithwood cites the work of Kowal & Hassel (2005), stating that successful leaders launch turnaround campaigns to ensure that the initiative is welcomed by the wider community. Citing Rice (2007), he emphasizes the need for district leaders to develop collaborative relationships with the local teachers' union. Internal relationships such as those between principals and teachers or district leaders and principals that are founded in mutual respect and shared responsibility have been linked to improved student outcomes. Leadership depends on "collective capacity" so these relationships are critical, not optional – creating relationships based on mutual respect and shared responsibility does not happen quickly or easily and effective leadership understands and acknowledges this.

Engage in expert problem solving

- **Identify the correct problem efficiently and effectively**
- **Engage in good problem analysis with an understanding that there are many causes for school underperformance**
- **Know that there are several identified strategies for school improvement and apply appropriate strategies based upon school-specific needs**
- **Evaluate the effectiveness of implemented strategies**

What does this mean?
Expert problem solvers understand that a problem is best defined as the gap between the goal state and current state, gathering all necessary information to fully understand the problem. They use a strong knowledge base to consider facilitators and barriers to reducing that gap. A strong connection is made between the diagnostic picture created of the district and a matching strategy for improvement. Potential causes of underperformance are often associated with the domains of; schools staff, student characteristics, family conditions, curriculum, instruction, school culture, organizational structures, and leadership. Effective leadership is familiar with the relatively small body of research surrounding district turnaround strategies and applies strategies targeted

to district characteristics. Implemented actions are monitored for effectiveness and are then refined as indicated by the data (Leithwood, 2010).

Invest in professional development

What does this mean?
Effective leadership provides the professional development needed for staff to achieve the district's vision and goals. Training and technical assistance through professional development is job embedded, ongoing, sustained, and is aimed at building capacities directly related to turnaround challenges facing the district and school. Building a comprehensive system for delivering the meaningful professional development of staff must be considered a major priority for the great majority of district leaders since the lack of capacity for high quality instructional teaching and leadership are frequently major causes of school and district underperformance (Leithwood, 2010).

References

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