

Effective Leadership

“Leaders are uniquely positioned to ensure that amid the busyness and bombardment that all organizations endure, the dream remains central. Leaders nourish the dream by keeping each person fully aware of an organization’s purpose and goals. Individuals also need to know that, without a doubt, their efforts contribute meaningfully to the purpose and goals. By providing brief but regular occasions to observe, recognize, celebrate, and reward meaningful accomplishments, leaders can create a field of dreams where progress and appreciation prevail.”

— Mike Schmoker²²

District and school leaders are responsible for implementing local accountability systems. Leaders ensure that all students are served fairly and given every opportunity to learn. Leaders also establish a human environment in which the adults are willing to be learners, take risks, and assume responsibility.

In establishing an accountable school culture, leaders should align individual efforts toward common goals and offer recognition and support for meaningful accomplishments. To avoid overload and resistance to change, leaders need to cut out nonessential and unproductive activities before introducing innovations. Leaders also should build the capacity to work more effectively and efficiently, and encourage program ownership and leadership among all stakeholders.

Ultimately, the leader is responsible for the quality of the school culture and climate. Is there a clear focus on student achievement? Is the school culture characterized by collaboration or isolation? Do people feel valued? Do the adults want to come to work? Do students feel safe? Do teachers have energy and enthusiasm for school leadership roles or do individual efforts fall by the wayside and go unacknowledged?

District leaders, union representatives, and school board members also must be held accountable for their critical roles within the educational system. Are efforts characterized by a sense of urgency for improving student achievement? Are policies and contracts evaluated for how they support or hinder equitable, high quality instruction for all students? Is everyone monitoring and using data to inform decisions? Is there an appropriate balance between allowing autonomy and holding people accountable for consistent implementation and producing results? Is there a focus on providing high quality support (e.g., professional development, staffing) for teachers and principals to use data and research? ²³

Evaluation of these and other questions helps leaders identify their own learning needs as they too reach for excellence.

The key steps in developing a system of accountability for effective leadership are:

1. Develop the capacity to implement a local accountability system.
2. Identify measurable goals and indicators.
3. Assess stakeholder perceptions and district and school culture.
4. Analyze multiple sources of data.
5. Make continuous improvement decisions.
6. Report results.

Each of these steps is explained below.

1. Develop the capacity to implement a local accountability system.

California Professional Standards for Educational Leaders (CPSELs)

Just as standards guide student and teacher development, the CPSELs are designed to guide the development of administrators. These standards provide a common language that should be used to inform administrator recruitment, preparation, induction, ongoing support, and finally recognition for accomplished leadership.

The CPSELs identify educational leaders as particularly responsible for developing the skills and resources necessary to implement local accountability systems. For example, the standards say leaders should be able to:

- facilitate the development of a shared vision for the achievement of all students based upon data from multiple measures of student learning and relevant qualitative indicators,
- create an accountability system of teaching and learning based on student learning standards,
- utilize multiple assessment measures to evaluate student learning to drive an ongoing process of inquiry focused on improving the learning of all students and all subgroups of students,

- shape a culture where high expectations for all students and all subgroups of students constitute the core purpose,
- guide and support the long-term professional development of all staff consistent with the ongoing effort to improve the learning of all students relative to the content standards,
- monitor and evaluate the programs and staff at the site,
- incorporate information about family and community expectations into school decision-making and activities,
- communicate information about the school on a regular and predictable basis through a variety of media and modes,
- reflect on personal leadership practices and recognize their impact and influence on the performance of others, and
- engage in professional and personal development.

Educational leaders should have an opportunity to self-assess their progress on meeting these standards. The **California School Leadership Academy** (www.csla.org) has developed a *Descriptions of Practice* document (forthcoming) that can be used to guide administrators' self-assessment of the CPSELs. Future evaluation instruments should be aligned to the developmental levels described within this document, when available.

Feedback from stakeholders, compared to individual self-assessments based on the *Descriptions of Practice*, should be used to help educational leaders identify their own learning goals and professional development needs. Self-assessments based on the CPSELs should remain confidential and be used to guide professional learning and collaboration with more experienced peers.

2. Identify measurable goals and indicators.

Both the district and the school will need challenging student learning goals to invigorate the community and to encourage real change. A goal that is too easy to reach may not inspire people enough. An unrealistic goal may limit buy-in from stakeholders. Challenging, measurable goals can drive the local accountability system by creating a vision for progress and a common set of high expectations. These goals, while based on data, will also help to drive the local accountability system and future collection of data.

Once the student learning goals are established, the next step is to select measurable indicators of progress. Performance or accountability indicators are

associated with student achievement, district and school processes, teacher learning, and the quality and efficacy of leadership. These indicators are concise statements about the type of data to be collected in the decision-making process. Typically, one identifies:

- the target group assessed (e.g., school board members, administrators, teachers, classified staff, students, parents),
- the data collection method (e.g., assessment, self-assessment, questionnaire, interview, observation), and
- the measurement statistic (e.g., number, average, percent).

The data should show progress at intervals throughout the year to provide feedback and to encourage mid-course corrections when needed. Summative data at the end of each year should be used to identify individuals, teams, or schools for rewards or recognition. Progress across more than one year will help to show continuous improvement and also should be recognized.

Districts and schools will want complementary indicators of progress. The district accountability system should focus on test scores and other state-reported indicators such as attendance and dropout rate, but the school will want more site-specific indicators that relate to the instructional practices, programs, staff, and leadership within particular schools. The key is to make sure that school indicators provide support for the districtwide indicators.²⁴

3. Assess stakeholder perceptions and district and school culture.

Perceptions of Stakeholders, Including Students

Surveys, questionnaires, focus groups, and individual interviews should be used to learn more about how people view the school and their attitudes toward being a part of the school community. Staff, parents, students, and community members should be asked what they think and feel. Especially in secondary schools, it is critical to ask students how welcome they feel, how they view teaching and learning at the school, and what level of support they perceive. Adding student voices to the accountability dialogue encourages student ownership and validates other kinds of data.

School Culture

Assessing school culture also provides critical feedback on the degree to which a school has become an equity-conscious learning organization. The process below represents one viable strategy for assessing school culture:²⁵

1. Ask school staff to rate their school culture using a rubric, choosing the level that best describes the school. A sample school culture rubric may be found in the Focus on Learning school self-study materials (available at www.acswasc.org/tools/index.html).
2. Tabulate the results for all to see. Discuss individuals' rationales and explanations and work to reach agreement on a common rating. Create a chart showing the School Culture rating for this point in time, leaving space for follow-up ratings later in the school year. Repeat this process two or three times in the first year, and just once per year in subsequent years.
3. Identify school strengths based on language in the scoring guide and record consensus agreements.
4. Identify a challenge to reaching the next higher level on the scoring guide. Pick one or a few related descriptors in a higher level (at least level 3) as the improvement target.
5. Draft a mini-action plan briefly stating what the school staff will do to improve school culture. One or a few sentences or bullet points are enough.
6. At each monthly staff meeting, record on Post-It notes any anecdotes of actions that show an improvement.
7. At the end of the year, ask staff to rate the school culture again, tabulate results, and reach agreement on a common rating. This information can be used in the comprehensive school accountability report.

District Culture

Assessing district culture is also vitally important in understanding the effectiveness of district leadership and the organizational support teachers and others perceive. A rubric may be used, for example, with a group of elementary or secondary school principals or with school leadership teams. Use a process similar to the one described above for assessing school culture.

4. Analyze multiple sources of data.

The ability to manage and use data is really at the heart of maintaining a focus on continuous improvement. This skill makes it possible to generate credible results that people can rally behind and use as a galvanizing force. Skillful data managers ensure that results are timely. Assessment results are presented and reported regularly, each month, quarter, or trimester, depending on the local instructional cycle. Data are analyzed and decisions are made quickly to guide teaching while there is time to impact student learning. Evaluation results of district and school processes, teacher learning, and school climate must also be presented periodically, initially more than once a year, to build and sustain momentum.

An educational leader must manage this information, using technology when necessary. He or she must present it in collegial and supportive environments, allowing different viewpoints and perceptions to arise, and use the information to collaboratively solve problems and make effective decisions. This data process is critical to becoming a learning organization, one in which people feel like professionals who can accommodate change and improve results.²⁶

A general strategy should be to gather and use multiple sources of information to make decisions. Balance quantitative student achievement data with data about effective school processes, including anecdotes and narratives about successes and frustrations. Back up data gathered from students about how they perceive teaching and learning with data gathered from teachers. Compare self-assessments to external ratings from stakeholders or supervisors. When data converge and tell a similar story, one can have more confidence that the results are accurate.

5. Make continuous improvement decisions.

An educational leader must evaluate the effectiveness of the accountability system itself. The Center for Research on Evaluation, Standards, and Student Testing (CRESST) presents standards for accountability systems. Data should indicate the degree to which the accountability system builds staff capacity, affects resource allocation, supports high quality instruction, promotes student equity, affects teacher quality, and produces unanticipated outcomes, such as higher dropout rates.²⁷

Below are sample strategies for evaluating the success of the local accountability system, once it is established:

- The superintendent and staff review the accountability system annually regarding its usefulness for making decisions about individual students and the instructional programs. Judging the system's efficacy is based on a review of:
 - o feedback from various stakeholders, especially school leadership teams,
 - o process results indicating the degree to which planned activities were implemented, and
 - o whether student achievement data show improvement.
- An online questionnaire allows school site staff to evaluate the district's accountability system and automatically tabulates summary statistics (e.g., percent of positive ratings) and comments (negative, positive, recommendations for improvement). The superintendent and staff review the results and plan improvements for the next year.
- At the end of the year, school leadership teams respond to a district survey about the effectiveness of the accountability process. They answer questions about the quality of the strategic goals, the usefulness and timeliness of data reports, and their capability and freedom to make school program decisions based on the data.
- The superintendent discusses district and school findings at administrator meetings each trimester. Reports are presented to the board. At a year-end meeting, board members evaluate their roles and practices that contributed to or hindered district and school improvements.
- At the end of each year, all staff evaluate the effectiveness of the local accountability system to report results and plan improvements. The local system is evaluated in terms of its ability to:
 - o identify students in need of intervention using up-to-date accurate information,
 - o monitor individual student progress each trimester and adjust strategies as necessary,
 - o recognize effective practices and celebrate successes, and
 - o pinpoint challenges and solutions to refine the program in the first and second trimesters, and revise the school plan at the end of the third trimester.

6. Report results.

Leaders should generate reports at multiple times and for multiple audiences, ranging from parents to teaching staff to school boards and to the local community.

The district should develop a user-friendly database for access by principals and teachers. School staff might access a database residing on a school computer, the district's central computer, or an Internet site such as that provided by some education software companies and county offices of education.

Database software can give administrators and teachers instant access to student data and links data to suggestions for curriculum and instruction. Report cards can be generated from the database. Student records also can be shared with other districts, a benefit especially for mobile students. Another database may provide a framework for entering information into an easily revised and dynamic school plan. Such a database will generate presentations in a variety of formats, depending on the needs of the audience. Software is available that links various databases to generate local accountability reports.

The Comprehensive Local Accountability Report

A comprehensive local accountability report should integrate data from a variety of sources. The most important indicators of educational success are student achievement results.²⁸ However, it is also important to establish causal links between changes in student achievement and changes in teaching and leadership. Accordingly, an accountability report should also include data about district and school characteristics, organization, and instructional programs. In other words, the elements of a comprehensive local accountability report are:

- Student Achievement Data
 - o percent at/above proficient on state assessments
 - o percent at/above proficient on local assessments
 - o for all students and for sub-groups of students
- District and School Characteristics
 - o facilities
 - o resources
 - o staff and student demographics

- o crime statistics
- District and School Organization
 - o management structure
 - o evaluation of school climate, culture, and leadership
 - o evaluation of professional development
- School Instructional Program
 - o priority standards
 - o alignment of curriculum, instruction, and assessment to standards
 - o quality of assessments
 - o core instructional strategies
 - o school interventions
 - o home-school partnerships
 - o special programs
 - o accountability plan

Such a report is comprehensive, but it does not have to be daunting. The purpose of the report is to show changes in student achievement from one year to the next. The rest of the information provides a context and provides details about the factors that had an impact on any changes in student learning.

Indicators of Effective Leadership

SAMPLE INDICATORS

- stability/mobility of effective leadership
- percentage of supervised staff giving satisfactory ratings to leaders, based on six characteristics from the *California Professional Standards for School Leaders*:
 - o Does the leader facilitate a shared vision of learning?
 - o Does the leader nurture a culture and instructional program conducive to student learning and staff professional growth?

- o Does the leader ensure efficient and effective management of the organization and its resources?
- o Does the leader collaborate effectively with families and community members?
- o Does the leader model a code of ethics and develop professional leadership capacity?
- o Does the leader understand, respond to, and influence the larger political, social, economic, legal, and cultural contexts?
- percentage of students, disaggregated by student group, who rate the school climate as supportive
- percentage of parents, disaggregated by student group, who express satisfactory ratings on home-school communication
- percentage of staff who rate the school as a proficient learning organization
- percentage of staff who rate the district as a having a positive and supportive organizational culture

Endnotes

- 1 *Improving Districts: Systems that Support Learning* (San Francisco: WestEd, 2002), p. 15. This document describes key practices in award-winning districts that continually improve student achievement.
- 2 John Carr, *A Map for Teaching and Assessing California's English Language Development and English Language Arts Standards for English Learners* (San Francisco: Northern California Comprehensive Assistance Center at WestEd, 2001).
- 3 *Aiming High* (Sacramento: California Department of Education, 2001).
- 4 "Scoring Rubric for Grade 4 and 7 California Writing Standards Tests" (available from <http://www.cde.ca.gov/statetests/star/Rubric4and7.pdf>).
- 5 Douglas B. Reeves, *Accountability in Action: A Blueprint for Learning Organizations*, Chapter 20, (Denver, CO: Center for Performance Assessment, www.testdoctor.com, 2000).
- 6 John Carr and Elaine M. Artman, *The Bottom-Up Simple Approach to School Accountability and Improvement* (Norwood: MA, Christopher-Gordon Publishers, 2002), p. 101. Adapted with permission from the publisher and authors.
- 7 Carr and Artman, p. 71. Adapted with permission from the publisher and authors. Definitions of criteria for a high quality assessment:
 - Validity: The content of the assessment and how it is measured aligns with what and how students were taught.
 - Consistency: A student's score accurately reflects the student's true achievement level.
 - Equity: All student's scores accurately reflect their true achievement level. Each student has an opportunity to both learn (equitable instruction) and show what they have learned. Accommodations in test administration and alternative instruments are used when appropriate.
 - Credibility: Teachers and students believe the test is accurate and everyone is encouraged to give their best effort.
 - Meaningfulness: Administrators, teachers, parents, and students all believe the test is worth the time, cost, and energy it takes to prepare, administer, score, and analyze results of the assessment.
- 8 Carr and Artman, p. 147. Adapted with permission from the publisher and authors.
- 9 Robert Barr and William Parrett, *Hope at Last for At-Risk Youth* (Needham Heights, MA: Allyn and Bacon, 1995); Richard Allington and Patricia Cunningham, *Schools that Work* (New York: Longman, 1996).
- 10 Carr and Artman, pp. 35-40. Adapted with permission from the publisher and authors.
- 11 Douglas Reeves, Appendices C and D in *Accountability in Action* (Denver, CO: Advanced Learning Centers, Center for Performance Assessment, 2000).

- 12 Douglas B. Reeves, "Six Principles of Effective Accountability," *Harvard Education Letter* (March/April 2002): pp. 7-8.
- 13 Kati Haycock, "Good Teaching Matters: How Well-Qualified Teachers Can Close the Gap," *Thinking K-16* (Washington, DC: The Education Trust) 3, no. 2 (1998).
- 14 Peter Senge, *The Fifth Discipline: The Art and Practice of the Learning Organization* (New York: Doubleday, 1990).
- 15 As described in the prepublication edition of the CDE Professional Development Task Force Report, 2001, Linda-Darling Hammond and Lionel Meno, Co-Chairs, p. 31.
- 16 B. Joyce, J. Wolf, and E. Calhoun, *The Self-Renewing School* (Alexandria, VA: Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development, 1993).
- 17 *Designs for Learning* (Santa Cruz, CA: ToucanEd Publications, 2000). This publication was developed as part of the California Professional Development Reform Initiative sponsored by the California Department of Education with support from the California Professional Development Consortia, the Center for the Future of Teaching and Learning, the California Staff Development Council, and the New Teacher Center at UC-Santa Cruz.
- 18 Adapted from the prepublication edition of the CDE Professional Development Task Force Report, 2001, pp. 35-6.
- 19 See Thomas R. Guskey, *Evaluating Professional Development* (Thousand Oaks, CA: Corwin Press, 2000). He describes five levels of evaluation, depending on the goals and purposes of the professional development.
- 20 *A Developmental Continuum of Teacher Abilities* (Santa Cruz, CA: New Teacher Center at the University of California-Santa Cruz, 1998).
- 21 Kati Haycock, *Dispelling the myth: High poverty schools exceeding expectations* (Washington, DC: The Education Trust, 1999).
- 22 Mike Schmoker, *Results: The Key to Continuous School Improvement* (Alexandria, VA: ASCD, 1996), p. 107.
- 23 *Urgency, Responsibility, Efficacy: Preliminary Findings of High-Performing Texas School Districts* (Austin, TX: Charles A. Dana Center at the University of Texas at Austin, 1999).
- 24 Douglas B. Reeves, "Caught in the Middle," *American School Board Journal* (December 2000): p. 27.
- 25 Carr and Artman, pp. 127-33. Adapted with permission from the publisher and authors.
- 26 Senge, *The Fifth Discipline*.
- 27 Ann C. Lewis, "A Second Chance for Policy Makers," *Phi Delta Kappan* 83, no. 9 (May 2002): pp. 648-649.
- 28 Carr and Artman, p. 240. Adapted with permission from the publisher and authors.