



# School Improvement Booster

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Iowa School Finance Information Services (ISFIS)

August 2012: Cultivating Leadership

Keith Leithwood, Karen Seashore Louis, Stephen Anderson, and Kyla Wahlstrom, supported by the Wallace Foundation, produced two landmark studies about school leadership, the first in 2004, [How Leadership Influences Student Learning](#) and a second in 2010, [Investigating the Links to Improved Student Learning](#). In the second study they write, “In developing a starting point for this six-year study, we claimed, based on a preliminary view of the research, *that leadership is second only to classroom instruction as an influence on student learning. After six additional years of research, we are even more confident about this claim.*” In other words, SCHOOL LEADERS MATTER.

Just this year, 2012, the Wallace Foundation released the first in a series of reports called The Wallace Perspective in which they looked at their work in leadership and identified five leadership practices that they find as central to effective school leadership.

1. Shaping a vision of academic success for all students, one based on high standards;
2. Creating a climate hospitable to education in order that safety, a cooperative spirit, and other foundations of fruitful interaction prevail;
3. **Cultivating leadership in others so that teachers and other adults assume their part in realizing the school vision;**
4. Improving instruction to enable teachers to teach at their best and students to learn at their utmost; and
5. Managing people, data, and processes to foster school improvement.

This issue is focused on **cultivating leadership in others so that teachers and other adults assume their part in realizing the school vision.** (The Wallace Perspective, 2012) We are reminded of the wise words of a friend who said, “Leadership is everywhere or it’s nowhere.”

## What has historically been the role of school leaders?

Richard Elmore wrote eloquently about the historical nature of formal school leaders and teachers, in 2000, in *Building a New Structure for School Leadership*. While this is a rather long quote from Elmore, Professor, Graduate School of Education Harvard University and Senior Research Fellow, Consortium for Policy Research in Education, it seems necessary to understand the context that schools are working to overcome as new leaders are empowered to open up educational practice to improve outcomes for students. Elmore describes the past:

“The byproducts of this institutional form have been, among other things: relatively weak professionalization among teachers,...(cont’d on page 2)

### IN THIS ISSUE:

School Leadership: Part III - Cultivating Leadership.....	1
The Historical Role of School Leaders.....	1-2
Previous Views Contradictions.....	2
Professional Capital.....	3-4
Professional Development Models Available in Iowa.....	4-5
Sustaining the Well-Being of School Leaders.....	5
Quotes.....	5

(cont'd from page 1) since teaching was thought not to require expertise on a level with other, “real” professions and conditions of work were not conducive to the formation of strong professional associations among teachers; a relatively elaborate system of administrative overhead at the district and school level, thought to be necessary for adequate supervision of the relatively low-skill teacher force; and relatively large schools, thought to be a logical extension of principles of scientific management requiring economies of scale to produce efficiencies.

“By the 1960s and early 1970s, analysts of this institutional structure had converged on a model that came to be called “loose-coupling.” (Weick 1976; Rowan 1990; Meyer and Rowan 1992) Derived from institutional sociology, this view, in brief, posits that the “technical core” of education— detailed decisions about what should be taught at any given time, how it should be taught, what students should be expected to learn at any given time, how they should be grouped within classrooms for purposes of instruction, what they should be required to do to demonstrate their knowledge, and, perhaps most importantly, how their learning should be evaluated—resides in individual classrooms, not in the organizations that surround them.

“Furthermore, the model posited that knowledge at the technical core is weak and uncertain. (Bidwell 1965; Lortie 1975) It cannot be clearly translated into reproducible behaviors, it requires a high degree of individual judgment, and it is not susceptible to reliable external evaluation. Therefore, the loose-coupling argument continues, the administrative superstructure of the organization – principals, board members, and administrators—exists to “buffer” the weak technical core of teaching from outside inspection, interference, or disruption.

“Administration in education, then, has come to mean not the management of instruction but the management of the structures and processes around instruction. That which cannot be directly managed must, in this view, be protected from external scrutiny. Buffering consists of creating structures and procedures around the technical core of teaching that, at the same time, (1) protect teachers from outside intrusions in their highly uncertain and murky work, and (2) create the appearance of rational management of the technical core, so as to allay the uncertainties of the public about the actual quality or legitimacy of what is happening in the technical core. This buffering creates what institutional theorists call a “logic of confidence” between public schools and their constituents. Local board members, system-level administrators, and school administrators perform the ritualistic tasks of organizing, budgeting, managing, and dealing with disruptions inside and outside the system, all in the name of creating and maintaining public confidence in the institutions of public education. Teachers, working in isolated classrooms, under highly uncertain conditions, manage the technical core. This division of labor has been amazingly constant over the past century. “

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## What do we know now that contradicts previous views?

So here we are in August of 2012, 12 years beyond Elmore’s theorizing, just fresh from the wonderful and provocative SAI conference with the theme of “Learning is the Work,” offering a clear path out of the paradigm than Elmore suggests has been present in the United States for a century. In 2012 we now know:

- Teaching is complex and challenging.
- Knowledge about what works in curriculum, instruction, and assessment (the technical core) is large and constantly expanding; however, practices in the technical core have not caught up with what is known from the research.
- The primary focus of school leadership should be on improving the technical core (curriculum, instruction, assessment).
- Focusing on the things external to that have not resulted in substantially improved outcomes for students.
- Improving the technical core requires collaborative and public work, not left to individual teachers in the privacy of their classrooms.
- Ignoring the technical core has resulted in inequitable outcomes for students and a lack of public confidence in public schools.

## Professional Capital

### What do experts say is the role of leadership in moving schools forward?

At the SAI conference, Michael Fullan spoke at length about building professional capital, a conceptual structure that many believe can transform educational outcomes for all students.

### What is professional capital and what is the role of leadership related to professional capital?

In the [Huffington Post](#), Michael Fullan and his colleague, Andy Hargreaves, note, “The new generation of teachers must be an entire community of professionals who are deeply committed to their work and highly capable of carrying it out.” Since effective instruction is the main path to deep student learning, leadership in public education must work to establish schools where teachers with a rich instructional repertoire and elevated beliefs flourish.

### Elements of Professional Capital as Defined by Fullan and Hargreaves

#### **Human Capital: “Rigorous training and qualifications, as well as high emotional intelligence and proven success in working with young people.”** (Huffington Post)

- Superintendents, other central office staff, principals, and teachers must be recruited and hired for what they know and are able to implement related to improving the instructional core of school and how they relate to young people and each other. Other professions hire for skill and knowledge, as well as the ability to successfully socially interact. Education must do that as well.
- Leaders must insist upon and implement professional development systems that focus on constantly adding to and improving the technical core of curriculum, instruction, and assessment and improving the skills of teachers relating to young people.
- The provision of first rate instruction resulting in student learning must be the focus of coaching and evaluation at all levels and is a non-negotiable.
- Fullan suggests that as teachers continue to develop instructional efficacy and skill to meet the needs of all students, commitment to the moral purpose of education, elevating the life outcomes for all students, will be built. This is contrary to the notion of some school leaders who hope for buy-in before the work even begins. Leaders must recognize this concept and lead with the expectation that commitment will expand only AFTER the competence of the instructional staff expands. Many wonderful initiatives have been derailed by leadership groups that didn’t understand this concept of commitment following competence.

#### **Social Capital: “Schools as communities where teachers collaborate together, are committed to their students and each other, are able to have challenging conversations about their own performance and their students’ performance, and have the benefit of working in the high-trust environments associated with superior performance and results.”** (Huffington Post)

- Leaders (school boards, superintendents, principals, teacher leaders) establish conditions within the school where collaborative work focused on improving instruction and student learning is the norm. The focus here is on adults improving what they do, so students learn more. Richard Elmore notes, “Teaching causes learning.”
- Fullan expands on the actions of principal in this discussion. “In my view, there are also some ambiguities surrounding the so-called ‘instructional role of the principal.’ The meaning of this is vague with almost every principal being able to claim that that is what they are doing. We need to look closely using the evidence as Robinson and Leithwood do. When that is done it turns out that transformational leadership, and one-to-one mentoring, and I suspect, even walkthroughs, are not the main point. Rather, building social capital with teachers focused on learning, monitoring, feedback, and corrective action is what really counts.”

#### **Decisional Capital: “Accumulating and reflecting on sufficient years of practice -- at least eight in most cases -- to reach peak levels of performance in making the effective judgments that are central to all professional practice.”** (Huffington Post)

- Effective judgment comes from experience and learning, allowing practitioners at all levels to analyze situations individually and together and make decisions that best serve students and their learning over and over again.
- Social capital relies on retaining the best people in the field and not losing them to other professions, which suggests attention must be paid to working conditions, salary, and benefits. (*cont’d on page 4*)

(cont'd from page 3)

- Hargreaves notes, “We believe our work points to a new agenda for the future of teaching. It shows that we need to retain as many good teachers as possible for eight years and more when they have amassed the 10,000 hours of practice that turns them, on average, into true maestros of decisional capital in their classroom performance. This has a clear connection to the kind of leadership that nurtures and sustains excellent teachers.”

Developing professional capital is THE role of leadership at all levels of the school, including the school board, superintendents, principals, and teacher leaders.

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## **What Models are Available in Iowa to Begin this Important Work?**

**Are there current models in use in Iowa that have elements of Fullan’s ideas and what is the role of leadership in these models?**

Several models in Iowa lend themselves to the work Fullan describes of focusing leadership on improving culture and instruction. The Iowa Professional Development Model, developed by Iowa stakeholders several years ago, the Instructional Rounds Model currently being used in schools across Iowa, and Authentic Intellectual Work are three we will highlight.

### **The Iowa Professional Development Model (IPDM)**

The [Iowa Professional Development Model](#) was developed by Iowa stakeholders (AEAs, SAI, ISEA, IASB, DE, etc.) in collaboration with Beverly Showers, a premier expert in effective staff development focused on improving instruction and student learning. Several who heard Fullan speak at the SAI conference noted their experiences in Every Child Reads, an initiative in Iowa that used the elements of the IPDM, paralleled Fullan’s remarks.

In a [video on leadership](#) at the Department of Education website, Beverly Showers speaks eloquently about the importance of shared leadership at all levels of the system. She notes, “...in many cases, the principal has been saddled, if you will, with the entire responsibility for school improvement. There have been pretty strong messages coming from the field saying to principals, ‘It’s on your shoulders. If this doesn’t work, it’s your fault.’ There’s a real consensus in the field now that you can’t put all the responsibility on any one person’s shoulders and that in fact it requires distributed leadership meaning up and down the chain of command from the school board and the superintendent to the teacher leaders in the classrooms to make this work well.” In addition Showers raises the following ideas:

- A leadership team with members from all levels of the system co-leads the work.
- The superintendent is not only helping forge a vision for the district on how they will function for all students but communicating it fluidly to the board, to the community, to the entire staff.
- The board must translate the vision into action with resources and support and by reaffirming the vision regularly.
- Middle management (district central office personnel, AEA, DE) attends to the nuts and bolts of the vision and provides resources and expertise to get there.
- The principal directs the staff development model (with support from the leadership team).
- The principal must make clear to the training staff what the local staff wants out of the training and then follow through to provide what is needed.
- The principal should participate in the training.
- The principal and all teachers are active participants in the collaborative meeting process that carries out the action research cycle of making implementation plans, developing lessons, looking at student work, etc.
- Teacher leaders must lead the implementation efforts by making clear what is expected of the staff (along with the other leadership team members) and then monitoring progress.

If you are interested in the Iowa Professional Development Model, visit the DE’s web page dedicated to [IPDM support](#) and information, or contact your AEA.

### **Instructional Rounds**

[Instructional Rounds](#) is a process developed by Richard Elmore from Harvard Graduate School of Education with some Connecticut superintendents. Elmore was concerned that the leadership in schools was completely divorced from classroom instruction, the core action in schools that causes student learning. (cont'd on page 5)

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“The basic process is relatively simple. A network of superintendents, principals, teachers, and central office staff agree to meet at regular intervals, usually monthly, each time at a different school. They spend the morning circulating around classrooms, observing the teaching and learning that takes place there. Then, in an afternoon meeting, they debrief what they have seen. To prime their observations, they are asked to address a “problem of practice” the school has committed to solve, such as improving math proficiency or literacy, within the context of a “theory of action” the school has identified to achieve the goal. Theories of action might include increasing teacher knowledge, upping the complexity of the material students are asked to learn, and/or changing the way students are asked to learn that material. In the debriefing meeting, members are further asked to take four steps:

- *Describe* what they observed in class
- *Analyze* any patterns that emerge
- *Predict* the kind of learning they might expect from the teaching they observed
- *Recommend the next level of work* that could help the school better achieve their desired goal

If you are interested in the Instructional Rounds work, contact your local AEA Chief Administrator.

### **Authentic Intellectual Work (AIW)**

[Authentic Intellectual Work](#) is a model that is used across Iowa focused squarely on improving instruction. Stressed in the materials available at the AIW Iowa website (linked above) is the notion that this model cannot be implemented regularly and with fidelity without strong principal leadership and the supports necessary for staff to do the work.

In all three of the school improvement models noted here (IPDM, Instructional Rounds, and AIW) leadership focused squarely on instruction from multiple levels (superintendent, principals, teacher leaders, the school board, etc.) is necessary for success.

If you are interested in Authentic Intellectual Work, contact your local AEA or visit the DE’s web page dedicated to [AIW](#).

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## **Be Careful to Sustain the Well-Being of School Leaders**

**It’s important to sustain the well-being of leaders, to allow them to have rich and full lives outside of school.**

Hargreaves noted: (Hargreaves, Andy and Fink, Dean; “[The Seven Principals of Sustainable Leadership](#),” 2003):

“Sustainable leadership systems know how to take care of their leaders and how to get leaders to take care of themselves. Teachers and school leaders who are ‘burned out’ by excessive demands and diminishing resources have neither the physical energy nor the emotional capacity to develop professional learning communities (Byrne, 1994). The emotional health of leaders is a scarce environmental resource. Leadership that drains its leaders dry is not leadership that will last. Unless reformers and policy-makers care for leaders’ personal and professional selves, they will engineer short-term gains only by mortgaging the entire future of leadership. Even the most motivated and committed leaders can only sustain themselves for so long.”

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## **Quotes**

“No one person, no matter how competent, is capable of single handedly developing the right vision, communicating it to vast numbers of people, eliminating all of the key obstacles, generating short term wins, leading and managing dozens of change projects and anchoring new approaches deep in an organization’s culture. “ - John Kotter

“Leadership should be born out of the understanding of the needs of those who would be affected by it.” - Marian Anderson

“If your actions inspire others to dream more, learn more, do more and become more, you are a leader.” - John Quincy Adams

“Leadership and learning are indispensable to each other.” - John Fitzgerald Kennedy

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