



## June 2012: School Leadership

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### School Leadership, Shaping the Vision

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.

Summer is an important time for school leaders to recharge and reflect on their own leadership actions. We hope this newsletter helps you do just that. We are focusing on one practice at a time, so that you have time to consider it carefully. This week that practice is about shaping the vision.

## Shaping a Vision of Academic Success for All Students, One Based on High Standards

We are all sometimes frustrated by people who've never worked in a school thinking they have the easy policy answers to our challenges. There have been times I've wanted to say, "Until you walk a day in the shoes of an educator . . ." ☺ But most days I understand very clearly that an external, unbiased view of what is possible is extremely important. Educators see the daily issues of hunger, exhaustion, and dysfunction the families and children that we serve bring to school. And we see it up close. Some days, it seems almost impossible that those challenged students can deal with all of the external forces and still learn well. But there is this data out there that cannot be denied. There are schools with more challenging demographics than almost any school in Iowa where nearly every student learns well, virtually all of the kids shine on the state test and graduate, and go on to college; these schools beat the odds in every way imaginable. It reminds us that one of the primary challenges we have as educational leaders is to preserve the vision – keep it in front of us, even in the most challenging times. Even when people are making, what we might perceive to be in a moment of frustration, unreasonable demands.

This brings to mind the old Ron Edmunds quote made almost 40 years ago, "We can whenever and wherever we choose, successfully teach all children whose schooling is of interest to us. We already know more than we need in order to do this. Whatever we do, it must finally depend on how we feel about the fact that we haven't so far." While I love the quote, sometimes people read it to suggest that we aren't interested in teaching kids who are challenging. I don't believe that's what he meant. Some might look at the results of the last 40 years, when masses of poor children haven't done well in public schools and conclude we don't care enough. I think virtually all educators want to teach all kids – most of us went into this business to save the world, for heaven's sake. In order to do that – teach all kids - we have to have the will, we have to have the structures, and we have to have the instructional skill sets. We thought you might appreciate some support in building those elements. So we're starting this series of newsletters with support for building the will – the vision.

As a leader, how do you shape that vision for academic success? How do you get people to "buy in" to the concept that more is possible, even with hard-to-teach kids? That concept of "buy in" is one that has frustrated educators for decades. But here's a hint – no one really "buys in" until they see results from their own work. So if we wait for "buy in," we'll never get started on the actions that will make a difference for our kids. Of course to be able to teach more students, teachers need additional skills and school systems must provide the support to develop those skills. But while you work hard to build the skills of the educators in your district and the structures to support them, it's important to revisit the mission, vision, and goals compelling your leadership action. A good first step is to reflect on the mission, vision, and goals that you have. Do these written statements influence how people really behave in the district? Are they timely or were they written so long ago they no longer make sense in the context of today? When you get together as an administrative or school team, ask everyone to write down

district or building actions and practices that support the mission, vision, and goals and also those that don't. Get a real conversation going. Examine what you do. Start to think about how your mission, vision, and goals may be in conflict with your practices. Find examples of actions moving the district forward and celebrate them.

Building urgency without providing the hope that improvement is possible can be damaging to morale and certainly doesn't drive improvement. Share stories of places where, despite demographic challenges, all students have learned well. Staff can start to form a mental image of what might happen, what is possible, what it might look like.

Below are stories about high poverty and/or high diversity schools, often places where academic achievement is low. But in these special places, it turns out they've beaten the odds. Here are some stories you can share with your faculty. But, as you are well aware, sharing the stories is only the beginning.

### **Elmont Junior Senior High School by Karin Chenoweth, Education Trust**

The school culture in this school near New York City is remarkable. Imagine working in a place where these kinds of things are the reality:

- 75 percent of the students are African American, 12 percent Latino, and 24 percent are low-income. In 2004, Elmont Memorial had the nation's highest number of African-American students who received college credit on the Advanced Placement World History exam, and in June 2005, Elmont Memorial had a 99 percent graduation rate, with 88 percent of students earning Regents diplomas. Contrast that with the Humanities and the Arts Magnet just down the street a few blocks in Queens, where only about half the freshman class graduates within four years, only 23 percent of the graduates earned a Regents Diploma, and fewer than a dozen kids scored above an 85 in math and English.
- No problem is insurmountable – there is a culture of supporting kids so they can be successful.
- Teachers have heard about Elmont and want to work there.
- The school's schedule is built around opportunities for teachers to work together – plan lessons, score student work, engage in planning for student success.
- The staff and the administration are intensely committed to providing the highest quality instruction possible and everyone focuses on that – through classroom observations, planning time, interventions with teachers, etc. Instruction is scrutinized by all and that is the norm.

This is a [PDF file of the story of Elmont Jr/Sr High School](#). Elmont won Ed Trust's Dispelling the Myth Award; [here](#) is more information about the award.

### **Learning Forward Conference in California**

This [Power Point presentation](#) from the Learning Forward conference in California in 2011 by William Parrott at Boise State provides not only information about schools of poverty that have broken the cycle of failure, but also tells you how they did it: High

Poverty...High Performance, Leading and Learning Together. Dr. Parrott begins by challenging us to focus on learning and ask these questions:

- Do we have a common instructional framework to guide curriculum, teaching, assessment, and the learning climate?
- Do we provide job-embedded opportunity for professional learning?
- Do we have common assessments and embrace assessment literacy?
- Have we ensured that all students are proficient in reading?
- Do we provide targeted interventions?
- Are we working to eliminate mindsets, policies, structures, and practices that perpetuate underachievement?

He quotes Karin Chenoweth, ““The traditional organization of schools, which relies on isolated teachers doing their jobs with little interference and less support, means individual students are totally reliant on the knowledge and skills of their individual teachers. Because middle class students bring more social capital than students of poverty, this tradition of isolation, on average, hurts them less...low-income children are often completely reliant on their schools for their education...”

### **Doug Reeves: 90/90/90 Schools and Beyond**

In 2000 Doug Reeves wrote about schools in Milwaukee, Wisconsin, where 90% of the kids were poor, there was 90% diversity in the student population, and despite these two factors, which more often than not are the precursors to poor academic performance, 90% of the students in these schools were academically successful. This article is a compilation of the research of what’s going on in those high poverty, high diversity, high achieving schools.

- A focus on academic achievement
- Clear curriculum choices
- Frequent assessment of student progress and multiple opportunities for improvement
- An emphasis on nonfiction writing
- Collaborative scoring of student work

Read more detail about [Doug Reeves’ research](#).

### **Kentucky Study**

This [study](#) compared 8 high achieving/high poverty schools to low achieving/high poverty schools in Kentucky. They found several differences in a school audit. The high achieving schools scored significantly higher in these areas:

- Review and alignment of curriculum
- Individual student assessment and instruction tailored to individual student needs
- Caring, nurturing environment of high expectations for students
- Ongoing professional development for staff connected to student achievement data
- Efficient use of resources and instructional time

One quote is particularly relevant to this topic, “**High expectations** that were communicated

in concrete ways. Principals held high expectations for faculty and staff, who held high expectations for themselves and the students. There was a strong belief that all students could succeed academically and that faculty and staff were capable of making this happen.”

## Good Educational Apps

eSchool News just released another list of [10 great Apple apps for education](#).

Remember that junior high frog dissection? Kids can experience the event without the slime (or the smell).

### Frog Dissection

**What is it?** 3D imaging; step by step instructions with voice over; accurate simulation of the wet lab dissection procedure; content validation by subject matter experts; anatomical comparison of humans with frogs; comprehensive information on frogs’ organs; classification, lifecycle, and organ functions of frogs; interactive quiz on frogs; information on types of frogs.

### Motion Math

**What is it?** Motion Math HD follows a star that has fallen from space and must bounce back up, up, up to its home in the stars. Moving fractions to their correct place on the number line is the only way to return. By playing Motion Math, learners improve their ability to perceive and estimate fractions in multiple forms.

## Quotes

“Don't lower your expectations to meet your performance. Raise your level of performance to meet your expectations. Expect the best of yourself, and then do what is necessary to make it a reality.”

Ralph Marston

“Education is the key to success in life, and teachers make a lasting impact in the lives of their students.”

Solomon Ortiz

“To Mrs. Derby... who first told me I could be a chef.”

On a menu at a restaurant being opened by one of Mrs. Derby’s former students