

Alternative Structure and Best Practices - Research

This section of the report includes the latest body of research regarding the primacy of mission, importance of clarity, teacher-centered approach, and the culture of collaboration, all of which form a professional, learning community.

One component that appeared throughout the research literature and best practices was the interpretation of leadership in organizations. In the past, conceptualizing leadership in a school meant thinking about the principal as the sole repository of authority and power. Current research does not limit leadership by referring exclusively to the practice of principal as we have come to understand that role of a single person holding the “power” in an organization. In contrast, the research which we conducted yielded no such model for a “best practice” in today’s educational environment. Rather, a multitude of empirical studies and theorists conclude that the shared-leadership structure is the “best-practice” for an educational organization. Large and small-scale studies indicate that multiple leadership functions are not best accomplished through the work of one individual. Rather, flatter, organic, team-based models of distributed leadership are preferable to a traditional, hierarchical one for accomplishing such core practices as setting direction, fostering acceptance of group goals, creating high performance expectations, developing human resources, communicating well. Across the country, schools are operating successfully without traditional hierarchy and moving toward superior achievement in student learning.

Just as accountability terminology in public education has been influenced by corporate achievement, the benefits of a “nimble” learning community resonate with business leaders. Distributed leadership is optimal for successful organizations, especially when they are centered on their mission. This rationale was clearly expressed by Donald Kendall, former CEO of PepsiCo: “Complex organizations are best managed on a decentralized basis which works best when there is a central purpose to the entire organization.”

I. Central Purpose, the Primacy of Mission

As suggested by Dr. Thomas Johnson in his March 16 report, attention to the framework places the mission appropriately within a values structure. That is, using a framework of analysis to evaluate the school, the best conceivable structure is one that is subordinate to the school’s values. In our survey results and in the conversations that took place last spring among community members and the consultant, the “values of the charter are powerful and broadly supported by the parents...” Thus, the school’s administrative organization can be effective if its leadership functions actively support its beliefs.

The importance of mission in organizational literature is omnipresent. Peter Senge starts from the position that if any one idea about leadership has inspired organizations for thousands of years, 'it's the capacity to hold a shared picture of the future we seek to create' (1990). Such a shared vision transcends one person's idea of how the organization should look, and it fuses the commitment of everyone in the organization to look for new ways to implement the mission. Senge argues that such a vision is "fundamental to the 'fifth discipline,'" this discipline being an integrated way of managing that encourages long-term prudence rather than short-term solutions.

A communal understanding of the mission is intrinsic to the success of an organization, as a business model demonstrates. International corporate success is measured by an American standard. Many management authors talk about the transformation of ethos that has been necessary for current American pre-eminence; that is, a company's ethos, its core values and purpose, are what distinguishes a "best" corporation from a good one. Collins and Porras' *Built to Last*, Tom Chappel's *Soul of a Business*, Stephen Covey's *Principle-Based Management*, Jim Collins' *From Good to Great* all addressed the same issue. Evaluating the success of the corporation means evaluating how the company is doing in relation to its purpose. A profound understanding of and commitment to the mission, a sense of "who we are and what we stand for," is essential to a corporation's competitive edge. This essence is paramount to sustain a school of choice. "The school improvement literature identifies several functions that are thought essential for instructional leadership, including constructing and selling an instructional vision..." and "When a shared vision or set of ideals is not embedded in a school community, then "Who cares?" and "Why bother?" become the silent mantra..." (Ryan)

Reflection about the mission of the school does not mean stagnation or resistance to change. As Deal and Peterson state in "Shaping a School Culture: The Roles of School Leaders," "When school leaders have reflected and feel they understand a school's culture, they can evaluate the need to shape or reinforce it.... Cultural leaders reinforce the underlying...beliefs. The support the central mission...of the school....Deep, shared leadership builds strong and cohesive cultures." Further, Senge's management model encourages innovation and experimentation within the shared, uniform, vision.

Among the school leaders we interviewed, all averred that a common vision, frequently assessed and applied as a standard for decision-making, was essential to the fundamental success of their school organization:

- "A shared vision leads to effective implementation of programs. Without a shared, frequently communicated vision, you won't have the school you want and there will always be factions. You need to have...custodians of the mission (to be sure) it gets implemented in every decision."
- "This is a most important point: do not settle for anything less than complete endorsement of the mission from new hires."
- "Every decision has to be in line with the mission, and since the staff is expected to make the mission work on a daily basis, the staff has input...to all decisions."
- "You can't trust the mission to be safeguarded....Everything has to have intention."

- “People need to know what’s expected and what is to be expected has to be consistent with the understanding of the mission. There has to be clarity. Someone has to be the guardian of the integrity of the mission.”
- “Everyone is married to the mission. It is delivered every day and with every single parent interaction...”
- “Some people are fine teachers or administrators, but they don’t believe passionately in the mission of this particular school...Fine. They should find a school that matches their philosophy. This one already has a mission and my job is to be sure that our goals constantly reflect it.”
- “If there is a problem with mission mismatch, you’ve got to see where the misunderstanding occurred and go back and correct it.”

Among the characteristics Saphier and King (1985) list for collaborative school culture with norms and expectations that support change and improvement, “Protection of What’s Important” ranks high. At Memorial School in Milford, the mission is visually prominent at the entrance of the school and is drawn to the attention of practitioners in the building at all times. The importance of a crystal-clear mission is addressed in much professional education literature, and it is frequently assigned a patron. Robert Evans says, “The value of a vision is not just to clarify goals and plot strategy, but to inspire followers. To change, people must be moved. This requires not just an idea, but an advocate.” Evans deems personal conviction primary to being able to enlist other members of the school to pursue an agenda that makes the vision live, advocating for patrons to build their practice outward from a core commitment.

Actions must transport the vision into reality. A steward of the mission has to transform mission into actions that “translate” it for all who participate in the organization. With that kind of stewardship to make the mission shared, known and acted upon, the mission is able to outlast any changes in leadership; it becomes the culture of the school, independent of any single person. This mission independence is vital since the mission can be held hostage to a cult of personality in a single leader model. Jerome T. Murphy, an educational theorist, addresses this point repeatedly, advocating setting the success of the organization on shared vision rather than a single image of a “lionized” leader. Michael Folan, a leading educational consultant, writes, “...the answer (to the concern about schools’ performance) does not lie in locating ad hoc charismatic leaders-as-saviors...their contributions do not have lasting effects.”

In “Looking for Leaders,” Susan Johnson reported on the search process of twelve different school districts looking for superintendents. What she found consistently was that the school boards relied not on persistent inquiry and investigation into historical evidence to screen their candidates, but rather on noticing whether there was a distinction between the applicant and the previous incumbent, or a continuity of his or her personality. If the boards liked the previous occupant of the job, they wanted someone just like that person. If they felt the previous occupant had personality quirks that interfered with the general happiness of the district, then they wanted someone with other characteristics. Once appointed, one of the first expectations from the newly-appointed superintendent was an expression of his or her vision for the district, which often was

diametrically opposed to the previous superintendent's. This personality-based bias is antithetical to a mission-driven charter school whose purpose is unique and must be expressed through every activity and operation conducted under its auspices. A charter school's organizational goal of survivability is contained within the viability of its mission; it is not viable when its mission is thwarted, even if its doors remain open.

Thomas Sergiovanni uses the word "mindscapes" to express the repository of values, assumptions and beliefs in a school. "Shared mindscapes provide the context for answers to these organizational questions: What do we value? What are our theories? How do we behave? Differences must be muted by core purposes" in order for the mindscape to function as a road map for the school's endeavors. Carey and Frohnen pin the word community on shared mission, that when a mission is shared in common, as a mindscape is, it sustains "fellowship" that is committed to putting that mission into action. The sheer volume of research supporting this paradigm, that organizational effectiveness is subordinate to the clear identity of mission, leads the task force to conclude that mission visibility is vital to the sustained viability of our school. Imperatively, our best-practice research similarly directs us to the conclusion that it needs its own advocate to assure that mission is constantly renewed through policy initiatives, original activities, and additions to the community.

Many instances of a mission advocate exist in higher education and in mission-based organizations such as health providers. Titles such as "Vice President for Mission Effectiveness" call for candidates that not only commit themselves to the unique identity of the organization, but can also foster collaboration and community relationships around the identity and guide mission projects to completion. "Associate Heads for Mission Integration" are asked to mentor the integration of core values throughout the organization so that roles, policies, practices compliment the mission foundation. One Associate Head in an educational setting advised the task force interviewer: "I am the gate-keeper. Without a gate-keeper the identity is vulnerable. Without our identity, why do we exist?" As Folan concludes from his work on school reform, "When systems are complex and when the tendencies of such systems are toward overload and fragmentation, the need for leadership to forge synergy and coherence (through mission advocacy) is paramount."

Talking to a task force interviewer, a college trustee commented on the added value the Vice President of Mission Integrity brings to the institution through her stewardship of programs for Board members, students and staff. As a college employee who reports directly to the Board, not the President of the College, she has direct access to the Board and can both move on its direction and provide insight for consideration. At every Board meeting she reports soles on the mission and related issues and events, such as speakers' series, mentoring programs, outreach---even to the point of laminating the mission on wallet-sized cards for everyone to carry. At Board meetings, these cards are placed at the Trustees' places and make an obvious visual statement. Recently the Vice President wrote a fifty-year history of the College to include with orientation materials as testament to the continuous integrity of mission implementation through education.

II. Importance of Clarity

Clarity is not only required at the mission level, it is also a necessary quality of the administrative system. People have to have a clear understanding of what they are supposed to do that contributes to the organization's integrity of purpose and practice. At Crossroads Academy, the Principal reported that she took all the jobs that people in the school were doing, wrote them all on sticky notes, and then posted them under a framework that made sense to everyone. From this activity she was able to write job descriptions for each teacher and staff member and circulate the descriptions so that collectively and individually people in the organization knew what they were supposed to do, what responsibilities others had, and where they crossed paths. This specificity helped orient new hires as well as reassure experienced players that their work was known and valued as being important to the success of the school and proceeding from its mission. When organizations are explicit in their expectations, it enables everyone to feel that they are part of a whole, all working toward the same ends. Explicit expectations that are published and shared remove the second-guessing about how everyone else in the organization is spending their time and provide legitimacy to job functions. When the team determines that a position is required, having an explicit description removes all question of task suitability and allows everyone access to the same information and opportunity. "Determining the [leader's] role is not just an abstract exercise. If schools lack clarity and consensus about the [leader's] mission, they may simply add new duties to an already extensive list, creating job overload." (Lashway, 2003)

Clarity is therefore essential for positive communication. When the Consortium for Policy Research in Education investigated how school-based management could be implemented most authentically, it identified "commodities" that successful schools possessed. Specific knowledge was one, and information was second. Looking at twenty-seven schools in three districts, the researchers found that the active schools used "decision-making teams that cut across the organization both vertically and horizontally for communicating and sharing different kinds of information with various stakeholders. Consequently, the schools that dispersed power throughout the organization also tended to be the ones with the most informed school-site participants. Struggling schools, in contrast, tended to have fewer formal mechanisms for sharing information, and the flow of information was often top-down, as in traditional schools. As a result, the teacher grapevine was usually the primary means of communication and unfortunately, the information on the grapevine was often incomplete and tended to breed suspicion."

Rotational assignments of team participants help people communicate clearly, since they have understanding of the resources needed to do the job. In charter schools with alternative management structures in Minnesota, Illinois and Wisconsin, team participants have to take turns in various jobs. Clarity is vital in this kind of arrangement, in which effective communication led to joint diagnoses of the problems teams were working on. The perspective of participants is broadened through such approaches and builds leadership skills. As the superintendent of a California district with a shared-leader team school said, "Having the staff take on many of the administrative

responsibilities I think has really opened their eyes...and created quite a bit of respect. (for administrative duties.)”

III. Shared Decision-Making

The task force sought empirical and anecdotal evidence for administrative and cultural frameworks outside the school as well as seeking internal evidence from the recent survey comments and results to inform its position. There appeared to be several specific functional frameworks (hierarchical, decentralized, cooperative) and combinations thereof to consider for learning communities; and, as previously noted, the notion of “leadership” was not necessarily limited to the persons with functional titles.

In fact, as the founder of the Principal’s Center at the Harvard University Graduate School of Education has said, “School leadership that must be managed by the principal constitutes only a fraction of the leadership available.” (Barth) John Gardner, in “The Nature of Leadership,” says, “No individual has all the skills—certainly not the time—to carry out all the complex tasks of contemporary leadership.” This perception is supported by the words of the BFCCPS’ organizational consultant, Dr. Thomas Johnson: “Whatever accountability tasks are related to operational requirements should be distributed throughout the school on an as needed and flexible basis.” Michael Folan, writing from the University of Toronto in 2000, says explicitly that the answer for schools “does not lie in locating ad hoc charismatic leaders-as-saviors” because “their contributions do not have lasting effects.”

Concurrently, a recent article in the Clearinghouse on Educational Policy and Management, titled “Role of the School Leader” highlights the strengths of school leaders who embrace the “shared leadership model”. Investigation in current education systems has found that school leadership is becoming increasingly difficult and requiring leaders to “wear too many hats”. The school leaders have been asked to be instructional leaders, teachers, compliance regulators for federal, state, and local regulations, tracking “No Child Left Behind” guidelines (thus aligning curriculum to frameworks), oversee daily school procedures, and school community negotiators. Murphy and Datnow found that successful leaders in comprehensive school reform build “dense leadership organizations” by sharpening their own collaborative skills, developing teacher leadership, finding resources to support the growth of professional community, giving teachers the confidence to grow, and managing the leadership agenda systemically.” (Lashway, 2003) Sergiovani also wrote in his book, Strengthening the Heartbeat, “As complexity increases, people become more interdependent, look to each other for support, and are required to pool their intellectual capital to be successful. As a result, learning together and working together is more important.”

Models that promote multiple centers of authority provide opportunities for authoritative balance deemed extremely important in a complex environment such as a charter school. David Marsh writes, “Leaders are effective when they create a culture where practitioners can be successful. The image is one of empowering and building capacity...The role for

the principal as the solitary instructional leader is inadequate ...that view-which emphasizes the directive and clinical view of instructional leadership no longer fits the realities of time and work load for principals. That view also blocks the development of the collective leadership, culture and expertise needed for success..."

Schools with a team model present an environment in which everyone shares responsibility for making education the priority. We see this team approach to task-management in the slogan "All hands on deck!" used by the teacher/administrators at the Mystic Valley Regional Charter School. "Our chain of command is pretty loose, decision-making is never adversarial, and our approach is collaborative. If teaching and learning are the most important things we do, then everyone has to facilitate that. If a kid gets sick, the teacher needs to keep teaching. I'll go clean it up," said the interviewee whose title role was "business manager." The impact of shared decision-making can be measured by the ownership of the "obligation for success" felt by everyone in the organization. This impact is predicted by the seminal work done on management by William Glasser, which involved the participation of workers as leaders. It is also previewed by Dr. Johnson's claim that "When flexibility controls the dance (of a school), the organization has life to it. When control leads, it toxifies flexibility and the organization heads down the road to extinction."

In an interview conducted by Grubb and Flessa on a California school that employs a tri-principal team model, parents of students enrolled there said, "It is quite clear now that no one person represents the school. Parents don't see any one person as the leader." A student teacher said, "Here you have three people on a completely equal footing". One of the co-principals was quoted, "This is definitely a team without a captain, where it's a total team effort and you can lead wherever your strength is, but you are still responsible as a team member". Another teacher-leader summed up, "Here a leader isn't the person at the front any more. For an idea to be successful, everyone has to feel at some time that they are leading it ... its ownership."

This sense of collective ownership, inter-dependence, community and commitment, was also present at the Lyndon School in West Roxbury. This pilot school has operated for almost a decade without a principal, and was founded and operated by three lead-teachers. Retired administrator/teacher Maureen Roache said, on the topic of distributed task-management: "For example, if I thought that the students would benefit from a basal reading program, I would ask the teachers, 'Do you want a basal reading program?' And if they said yes, then we would bring in all the publishers and the teachers would evaluate the various programs until we had a decision. My job as manager at that point was to frame the discussion. The teachers make the decision since they're the ones doing the work and who know what their students need." This leader's practice is confirmed by Coffey & Lashay (2002) when they write, "The rationale is that the people who know students best should have the autonomy to create and implement educational programs." Sergiovani states clearly, "Complex purposes and complex settings require that problems be solved and decisions be made by those closest to teaching and learning as they create their practice in use. As a result, leadership distributed throughout the school and school district is more important."

More and more research is being published that attests to the success of shared decision-making. While publication lags behind actual experience, the results of a ten-year study include the agreement among principals and teacher leadership teams that while their collegial structure reduced isolation, it also provided advantages for the school, including increased skill resources that resulted in better decisions and more completed projects. Our local interviews confirmed the practice. The principal of a Core Knowledge school in New Hampshire cited the decision-making that went on to determine if a topic should move from one grade to another, outside the Sequence: “All the affected teachers had meetings. The teacher who proposed the change to the curriculum made his case and everyone responded to it over several weeks, looking at how their curricula would be impacted, thinking about the effect on testing, vocabulary, etc. We discussed the development issues as well as looking at a variety of empirical data before we arrived at a consensus decision...”

The research team of Blase and Blase found that control orientation (dictatorial, authoritarian) emerged strongly in their study as a dimension of ineffective instructional leadership. This orientation included limiting teacher involvement in decision making and unilaterally directing aspects of teachers’ work. Blase and Blase concluded, “It goes without saying that such behavior should be avoided by principals who want to be successful instructional leaders,” since discounting teachers’ thoughts have “devastating” influence on schools. In schools where teachers have taken on positions of leadership, everyone benefits from the creation of a cohesive community. As one of the teacher-principals in a school in California noted, “The morale difficulties come from a very logical question of why are we doing this? When, if we had a principal, I could just teach and go home...but we get to make it the school that we want in this way.” The authors concluded that this collaborative outlook was a powerful benefit.

In an article just published in *Education Week*, these sentiments are re-stated:

“Even if the rational bureaucratic approach were effective, it would not be a desirable model. It denies the expertise of teachers and therefore fails to capitalize on important resources; it is undemocratic for teachers and other staff; it creates an impossible job for the person at the top, one that is often isolating; it often prevents principals from tackling instructional issues; and it does not address the principal’s limited span of control in a complex organization. An alternative approach to finding hero-principals would be to restructure the position itself.” (Reid)

“Form follows function” in art, and it is generally accepted management practice that organizational structure should reflect purpose. Especially evident in states with strong charter school legislation, there are many best practices schools with management structures suited to fit their objectives. In Indiana, the charter school association calls for general meetings of charter school “leaders,” a generic term because there is a such a variety of titles that express the school managers. Depending on the organizational arrangement, executive director, founder, CEO, lead teacher, rotating administrator/teacher, team leader, facilitator, principal, headmaster, dean and director are some of the titles for those in place in these charter schools. While not claiming that

non-traditional structure is a guarantee for making improvement in instruction a priority, the authors of an original study of multiple-leader practice in schools attest that distributed leadership structure “helps clear away the barriers of too many things to do and too much stuff that walks in the door.” This reality allows the three co-principles in a California charter school attend to priorities, such as frequent visits to the classroom that have to be ignored when many tasks are competing for the sole leader’s attention. “In cases...with teachers rotating into the principalship, and Riverside, with eight teacher-principals, those administering the school have deep understanding of the instruction in that school,” says the superintendent of that district. Minnesota has 15 schools where teachers are part of a structure that functions as a law firm does with partners. Community High, a public school in Milwaukee, was featured last year in literature about schools that operate without traditional hierarchy. Fourteen more public schools were opened in Wisconsin since, and in each, the “buck stops” with a peer group of teachers.

In Change Leadership, A Practical Guide for Transforming our Schools, the authors state, “Organizations that engage in ongoing dialogue around goals, priorities and professional standardsintentionally foster the skills and norms that require everyone in the system to work more collaboratively and to be more accountable to each other. Everyone’s work becomes more visible—beginning with the leaders’. The leader models learning, teamwork and openness to others’ feedback—behaviors very different from those that are traditionally associated with school leadership.” Task Force members saw this kind of teamwork in operation at the Lyndon School where curriculum decision-making is shared among the Management Team and the teachers. An Education Committee, made up of all teachers in the school, evaluates recommendations submitted by another faculty member. All teachers meet weekly for 90 minutes before the start of school to jointly review and discuss all ongoing initiatives.

Peter Block, eminent theorist on organizational behavior, whose work was recommended to the task force by the Board’s consultant, uses the word ‘stewardship’ to define the proper orientation of workers to their organizations, since shared power increases professional commitment: “Stewardship is trying to create accountability in the world through the dispersion of power. Distributing power means giving people on the edge as much choice as possible about how to serve a customer and how to serve a business. All the evidence we have says that the nature of high-performing groups and teams is aligned with a deep sense of accountability, commitment, and ownership. It’s not aligned with high control.” This philosophy has implications for distributing resources for developing leadership expertise. Conclusions from a four year study of Chicago schools conducted under grants by the National Science Foundation indicated that focusing exclusively or chiefly on building the knowledge of an individual formal leader in a school may not be the most optimal or most effective use of resources. If expertise is distributed, then the school rather than the individual leader benefits from the development of leadership expertise. These benefits include increased student performance and more involved and satisfied parents. Working against our creating teams of problem-solvers is an underlying culture that remains fixed on the notion that there will be a “silver bullet,” external solution or a single person who can ride in on the proverbial white horse and take control. As Grubb

and Flessa state, “The standard hierarchy of the rational bureaucratic model is the default position, [ignoring] the substantial potential benefits [of] alternative approaches.” Heifetz says, “Instead of looking for saviors we should be calling for leadership that will challenge us to face problems that...require us to learn in new ways.” We learn within the framework of a shared vision that is compelling and inspiring. The results of our learning must be school improvement that is consistent with the purpose of school as articulated in the vision statement and belief structure. Sergiovanni advocates results-oriented, shared decision making in every area of school life: “School restructuring begins with a vision that is compelling and satisfies the values held by those who work in schools. Participatory leadership will be the mode of operation in healthy school districts committed to student success.”

IV. Teacher-Centered Approach

The purpose of all schools is to educate students. Student learning depends on the teachers. The skill of the teacher is paramount to the results of any instruction the child will receive. Research conducted by Lieberman and Miller (1999) found that the connection between the teachers’ workplace and students’ learning was closely related. When schools were simply centered on student activities, teachers felt “overwhelmed and under appreciated.” “If change is to have meaning, it must be related to students and their success in school; and it must acknowledge the needs and concerns of teachers as they change the way they work.” (p.11)

It has been known for more than 50 years that self-managed teams are far more productive than any other form of organizing. (Glasser) and that there is a clear correlation between participation and productivity. Yet rather than rethinking our fundamental assumptions about organizational effectiveness, we have stayed wedded to our control mechanisms. As Pauly (1991) has written, education occurs in the classroom and what happens between the teacher and the student determines whether policies succeed, fail or have to be re-created. Teachers have to be able to develop their own classrooms and collectively build the best supports for those classrooms, whether the supports are financial, structural, informational or developmental. A system has to exist that recognizes the transcendent importance of the classroom and is designed to create the most efficacious result there. That system includes full teacher participation as leaders who can shape the delivery of the mission within the classroom. Teachers need direct, non-bureaucratic access to decision-making about pedagogy, organization of work, and professional development to meet their needs. Minnesota, a leader in the charter school movement, states in its legislation that one of the purposes of charter schools is to create new professional opportunities for teachers.

Providence has been practicing a teacher-center structure since 2000 and its research longevity shows success through the increase of student achievement scores. Their five basic goals were:

- 1) create a common focus for improvement; pick one area to work on as a team
- 2) build school-level leadership capacity; “distributed leadership”

- 3) hold leaders accountable for results; reciprocal role relationships
- 4) emphasize professional development over curriculum development; ‘what would I like to learn or what should I be learning given my strengths and weaknesses’
- 5) create a balance between central direction and site-based needs.”; ‘...recognizing that all district priorities needed to be adjusted and adopted to student-level needs and to the needs of teachers who were working in specific contexts and situations.

Student-centeredness works best when it is embedded in a culture that prizes teachers and their learning. Cohen and Sheer (2003) agree “when teachers are placed at the center of attention and when everyone else and everything else is placed at the periphery” only then will the organization thrive. “For a school to be an intellectual center, for it to have the ethos, the sense of community, and the ‘spirit’ that so many parents and administrators seek, it must celebrate the work of its teachers.” Accountability, a major factor in the development and success of schools, does not in any way reduce the potential of teacher-center schooling.. To the contrary, if teachers are able to work more productively at teaching and learning, all school leadership including boards are going to be more successful too. When everyone assumes the roles of a leader as managers, nurturers of leadership, conflict resolvers and vision builders, there is greater focus on improved teaching and learning. (NAASP)

Roland Barth, the founder of the Principals’ Center at Harvard University advocates for teachers to “become owners and investors in the school, rather than mere tenants.” He concludes, “We are most likely to find rich conceptions of a better school and inventive ways to attain it when teachers step into leadership roles and articulate for the public” their vision of best practice.

V. The Culture of Collaboration: Creating a Professional Learning Community

In recently-published survey of schools with non-traditional leadership models, a school in Riverside, CA was noted for its community. “Where the school becomes a community, responsibility for the students becomes collective. One Riverside teacher noted that the students are aware not of the novel governance but about the culture of a family where all teachers know the students.” This family orientation echoes Dr. Thomas Johnson’s opinion that “the hierarchical model has limitations outside of a manufacturing unit.”

Clarity and communication are dependent on culture. School culture is critical to the change process. Schools achieving instructional change created cultures characterized by an atmosphere of collaboration and trust among staff and a focus on continuous improvement. Greater levels of participation by staff and parents, as well as structures that include all stakeholders in the decision-making process can facilitate improvements in school culture. Sergiovani says,

“...the success of many schools is their ability to organize around and to successfully use collaborative cultures. These cultures are the backbone of dynamic learning communities that bring leadership and learning together. This joining of the two is the strategy successful schools use for working together day by day, for launching changes initiatives, and for continuous improvement.” (pg. 104)

The empirical research has reached many conclusions; most notably that shared-leadership and the “professional learning community” are the future ingredients for the success of educational environments. In the book Professional Learning Communities at Work, Best Practices for Enhancing Student Achievement, Richard DuFour & Robert Eaker lay out the foundation and understanding of these communities. The authors explain that the three words, professional, learning, and community are chosen carefully and deliberately for their meaning. The word “professional” refers to an individual who has advanced training in their field and strives to remain current in its practice. The word “learning” is written in Chinese by two symbols, the first meaning “to study” and the second “to practice constantly.” Finally the word “community” is defined in the *Oxford Dictionary* as “a systematic arrangement for a definite purpose”. In the school structure, “community” is “an environment that fosters mutual cooperation, emotional support, and personal growth as they work together to achieve what they cannot accomplish alone.

The concept of the professional learning community means that the community of teachers, parents, and administrators have the opportunity for continuous learning; an opportunity to share, collaborate, learn, and improve school culture, in sum, providing an environment where challenge and growth are available to all members of the community. Teachers create positive learning cultures in their classrooms. They work with children to help them make choices for themselves; choices which will have positive effect on themselves, the classroom, and the school as a whole. Teachers cultivate a learning community for students to ensure their education is self-motivating and fulfilling. The “best-practice” in education today is student-directed, teacher-facilitated learning. This allows for learners of all levels to learn, not in isolation, but in an environment where all participate in the learning process

Having a strong learning community provides a solid foundation for the consistence in mission, vision, values, and goals. If a community is to thrive, it must embrace the vision of a community of learners; not just for the students but for all constituents of the community. Parents, teachers, school leaders, and students must work to embed this change into their community if shared-leadership, mission-focus, and clarity is to be achieved.

DuFour and Eaker not only discuss the benefits and strengths of a “professional learning community,” but also talk about the obstacles to attaining this environment. Whatever the difficulties of achieving this community, the authors expound the benefits that ensue for teachers, school, parents, and most importantly the students of this environment.

“To put it as succinctly as possible, if you want to change and improve the climate and outcomes of schooling both for students and teachers there are features of the school culture that have to be changed, and if they are not changed, your well-intentioned efforts will be defeated.”

~Seymour Sarason (1996, p. 340)

To understand the issues and contributions of culture in the process of creating a “professional learning community”, one must acknowledge that *change is a difficult and slow process*, especially in schools because of the nature of their traditional organization and emphasis. Any meaningful and successful changes will come from the inside out. John Kotter (2006) of the Harvard Business School identifies common mistakes organizations can make when enacting change. Of those he identifies, there are several that encompass topics encountered in the research on schools:

- allowing too much complacency, trying to change an organization which doesn't sense urgency;
- failing to create a sufficiently powerful guiding coalition, leaving individuals to work alone;
- underestimating the power of a clear and shared vision;
- under communicating the vision by a power of 10;
- neglecting to anchor changes firmly in the culture.

Kotter concludes, “change sticks only when it is firmly entrenched in the school or organization's culture, as part of ‘the way we do things around here’”. This conclusion confirms the presentation above that it is in the culture that any organization finds meaning and stability.” (Schlechty, 1997)

In our interviews with school leaders at Minnesota and Wisconsin schools, teachers said that the resistance to change is almost overpowering. People tend to want to comply with what is usual, even if it means working in isolation. Compliance is a natural enemy of innovation and purpose; without striving toward a clear purpose, a school cannot grow into a learning community. Creating the momentum for creative capacity relies on the very characteristics that effective schools consistently show: high degrees of purpose and focus, engagement, and collaboration around learning and leadership.

Alternative Structures and Best Practices – School Visits and Investigations

In this section, you will find reports about several site visits and interviews of personnel at a variety of schools, followed by additional reports on organizational structures investigated via the school websites. These schools were chosen for a variety of reasons. Most are charter schools; several are Core Knowledge schools; others highlight character development; and a few exhibit non-traditional management structures. Through these and other interviews, we scoured the landscape looking for success stories that could inform our investigation of organizational structure. Following each school or individual interview, the task force member who conducted the interview summarizes the salient points learned from that experience.

Crossroads Academy

Jean is the 6th HOS in 12 years. They have the Core Virtues program, they are a Core Knowledge School, they do community service, and they are in the throes of a 6 million dollar capital campaign.

Mission: “Everyone is married to the mission. It is delivered every day and with every single parent interaction. To safeguard this mission, you have to be explicit in your hiring.” They have a binder for new faculty that goes beyond the details of working in the school and includes the myriad of facets of the mission. The part-time HR person put together that binder with the best practice examples from founding teachers. She and the Head train every new hire for two-three days on what the mission has to look like in the classroom. The curriculum is written down and must be followed, because it is part of the mission. Every decision is made with the mission in mind. The mission hangs in all classrooms and in all administrative areas. It is consulted before any discussion on a topic and before any decision is made. “The biggest problem of my predecessors was mission mismatch. Some people are fine teachers, or administrators, but they don’t believe passionately in the mission of this particular school. Fine. They should find a school that matches their philosophy. This one already has a mission and my job is to be sure that our goals constantly reflect it.”

Administrative arrangement: Jean is the sole employee of the board. There is a curriculum committee made up of the classroom teachers. If any initiative regarding curriculum is to be considered, it has to go before the committee so that all teachers know if they will be affected and can contribute to the creation of the new policy or matter. “The process of decision-making matters greatly. For example, last year the 7th grade teacher wanted to move Tom Sawyer out of the 5th grade curriculum (Core Knowledge, read-aloud) into her class for the students to read themselves. All teachers were involved in this conversation over a period of weeks, plus consultation with the Core Knowledge Foundation. All aspects were discussed. Finally there was a vote by email so that I could

announce the decision.” Jean believes in a partnership with the teachers. The head cannot be effective in a vacuum. “I do more than have an open-door policy. I invite people in purposefully. If I had an idea for change, and it was supported by some kind of evidence (testing, research, etc.) then I would invite everyone in to look at what I see. I would want to validate my initial concern by everyone else’s response. Only then, if my concern were shared, would we begin to move on looking at what might need to be done. These things require consensus to be successful.”

Teacher Job Descriptions: All teachers’ job descriptions look the same except for the particular subject taught. Each lists so many sections to be taught, so many duties such as writing report cards by a certain date. This is information that needs to be public so that everyone knows he or she is working in a collegial fashion, and that no one is “worth” more than another. All jobs that seem to need to be done are inventoried, and job descriptions are written for the tasks. Then a payment is associated with the tasks and offered publicly so that everyone knows what they’re trying out for and what will be required of them. “I started by taking huge pieces of paper and hanging them around my office and listing on them all the jobs that people were doing part-time or formally or informally. Then I listed the jobs on post-it notes and put those notes on the person who should be doing that job, from an organizational point of view. This was part of the dissatisfaction prior to my coming here. No one felt there was legitimacy to what people were doing, and some people who had volunteered to do some things out of the goodness of their hearts didn’t really have the skills to get it done right. You can’t trust the mission to be safeguarded that way. Everything has to have intention.”

Faculty handbook: This instrument defines the role and clearly spells out how all changes are to take place. Protocol has to be written down so there is absolute public communication which builds trust. Once there is trust, you can move forward. People need to know what’s expected and what is to be expected has to be consistent with the understanding of the mission. There has to be clarity. Someone has to be the guardian of the integrity of the mission.

BEST PRACTICES

- Mission adherence is paramount, and new hiring must insure coherence of mission practices.
- Training is essential to model what the mission looks like in practice.
- The integrity of the mission is best protected by a guardian.
- Policy must be public and shared knowledge forms the foundation of trust.
- Jobs must be perceived as legitimate for the organization to flourish.
- Clarity of communication is essential to good working relationships.
- Decision-making is collegial.

Hilltown Cooperative Charter Public School

The Hilltown Cooperative Charter Public School (HCCPS) is located in Haydenville, MA, just west of Northhampton. **Their mission** focuses on fostering critical thinking skills and a joy of learning through hands-on activities, the arts and interdisciplinary studies. HCCPS strives to cultivate children's individual voices and a shared respect for each other, the community, and the world around them. A consensus-based governance structure is a key part of their mission. Parental involvement is also an important component of the school's philosophy. All parents and staff are part of the cooperative that run the school and those parents that volunteer a minimum number of hours are granted voting privileges when selecting new Board members.

On the school's website, the history of the school is presented and includes a description of the five elements the founders envisioned for their school. The elements include a child-centered approach to education, family involvement, a thematically unified experiential curriculum fully integrating the arts, and a school experience integrated into the rich fabric of our community and rural environment. The fifth element is an emphasis on a collaborative approach to education:

“To maintain the motivation and self-esteem of teachers, they must be empowered to make their own decisions and trusted to direct their own teaching. A cooperative, interactive school environment, in which teachers are not isolated but are in dialogue with other teachers and administrators, allows for a cross-fertilization of ideas and provides students with a model of teamwork.”

Although HCCPS is about half the size of BFCCPS and they are not followers of the Core Knowledge curriculum, their emphasis on parental involvement and community service are similar to BFCCPS'. Their **organizational structure** drew our attention and made them a candidate for an on site interview. Using a non-traditional division of responsibilities, HCCPS is run by three Domain Coordinators. The Education Domain Coordinator oversees all of the teachers, teaching assistants, curriculum, and testing. The Administrative Domain Coordinator takes care of the day to day operations of the school by managing the building, accounting, budget, and other administrative functions. The Community Domain Coordinator is responsible for insuring that members of the cooperative are involved in the school's functioning and decision-making and that the sense of community is preserved through volunteering and community service projects.

The three Coordinators inhabit a large office space and interact on a daily basis to share problems, solutions, and ideas. All agreed that having a three person leadership team can be a challenge and requires good chemistry between the team members. It can lead to spectacular successes and spectacular failures. The Coordinators stressed that it is extremely important to clearly define the duties of each domain and to communicate them frequently to the full community. At HCCPS, the emphasis on consensus decision making is enhanced by the leadership arrangement and virtually eliminates the possibility of an autocratic leader. Multiple coordinators bring a broader set of skills to the leadership team than can usually be found in a single person, benefiting the school

enormously. An invaluable support structure is provided by having a team of three people that share the same mission and goals.

Because of the distributed leadership model in place, the school implemented a Management Team that consists of two parents, two teachers, one Board member, and the three Domain Coordinators to discuss and address any cross domain issues. The role of this team was similar to that of a principal. Since the three Coordinators have been working so long and successfully together, the Management Team has had less and less work to do. The Board is thinking about redefining or eliminating this layer.

When asked about **the mission and who is responsible for insuring that it is understood**, the three Coordinators reported that if any decision is made by one Domain that is incongruent to the mission, the other two Domains are quick to point it out. This process has worked well and differences are always resolved by consensus.

When **decisions about the curriculum** need to be made, the Education Coordinator takes the lead and involves all 13 teachers in the process. Often subgroups are formed that address specific topics and their recommendations are brought back to the larger group for final acceptance. Teaching staff is included in all decisions that have a broad affect on the school, no matter which domain has the ultimate responsibility. **Human Resource issues** are usually addressed by the Administrative Coordinator, following the policies created by the HR Committee of the Board of Trustees. The school has a Grievance Policy, a Grievance Committee, and offers mediation as a solution if agreed to by both parties. **Decisions about parental involvement** are the responsibility of the Community Domain Coordinator who has defined dozens of specific activities and volunteer opportunities for parents and other community members.

The **past structure of the school** looked different. Originally, the school began with one Coordinator, the Administrator, and a small number of teachers. As the school grew, the Education Coordinator was added next. Finally, several years ago, as parental involvement became more and more institutionalized, someone was needed that could track and manage this aspect of the school and the Community Coordinator was added. The mission, the philosophy, and the needs of the school drove the organizational structures put into place at HCCPS.

At Hilltown, the **Board of Trustees** can have a maximum of 15 members, with parents filling a maximum of 10 positions. Five positions are supposed to be filled by non-parents, but the Board has a difficult time attracting this number of non-parents. As election time approaches, the current Board presents a slate of nominees for all open Board positions. Additional nominees can be added to the slate by others in the cooperative. As mentioned previously, the parents that devote the specified minimum number of volunteer hours in a year are allowed to vote in Board elections and select the new Board members from the proposed slate.

The Board of Trustees focuses on policy development and strategic planning. There are four standing committees – Finance, Personnel, Development, and Site – that include a

variety of types of people from outside the immediate school community who bring needed expertise. Attracting non-parents to committee work has proven to be easier to do than at the Board level. Decisions made by the Board are governed by a documented Consensus Process with specific roles and steps to be followed. If a decision needs to be made by a vote, rather by consensus, they consider that to be a failure of their process. The Board

The budget is not developed by the Finance Committee, but is developed by a budget team. This team is made up of the three Coordinators, the President and the Vice President of the BOT. All groups bring budget needs and priorities to the team for consideration. The final priorities and budget are decided by the budget team. The proposed budget is reviewed by the Finance Committee who verifies the numbers and then is put before the full BOT to be approved.

Hilltown has published a ten year Strategic Plan (2003-2013) which lays out several priorities and estimates when each will be actively addressed. This plan was created by the Long Range Planning Committee through a complex process of committee meetings, focus groups, interviews and community forums.

Best Practices

- The school's management structure is based on their emphasis on shared respect and making decisions by consensus.
- Three leaders work together to run the school and insure that all their actions are consistent with their mission.
- The multi-leader model provides a support structure for school leaders and brings a broader set of skills to bear in addressing school issues.
- There's a formally documented process for reaching decisions by consensus.

Patrick Lyndon Pilot School – Interview 1

Maureen Roache, (retired) co-founder of the Lyndon School

“We three teachers didn’t want a principal, since our experience with principals had been very poor. We wanted a **teacher-led school** from the get-go. There were four of us who wrote the proposal, but the 4th person didn’t want to get involved in starting from the beginning, too many headaches, so she didn’t join the team.” Maureen handled grades k-3; Kate handled K-5 and Sherry was in the office as a site facilitator with a background in SPED. As a city school this (SPED) was a high maintenance area, and Boston gave us two classes of 7th and 8th graders who had four-year-old IEPs, so there was a lot of work to do. Sherry attended every SPED meeting.

At first there was no clarity, and the faculty members didn’t know if they had to go to all three “leaders” in order to get a decision. There was misperception that a teacher-run school meant that is was every-individual-teacher-could-run-the school. Some of the founding teachers were five friends from one school and four unknowns from another school. They opened with a K-5 with two monolingual and one bi-lingual classroom for each grade. The first three years were rough, and ten teachers left in the third year, which almost made the school close. “I had been working from 6 AM to 8 PM, with most of the day in the classroom. Who was supposed to write for outside grants? Who was responsible for the custodians?” Then they invited in advisors from the Edison school project, who “provided the business background that we didn’t have. They showed us how to construct criteria for group decision-making, they taught us about group dynamics, and they helped us understand why we needed a gatekeeper role among us. They even helped us write memos in a language that made things clear.”

After that we had what we wanted: vision, mission, goals to see them through. I did all professional development. Kate did the budget and Sherry continued with SPED. There was integrity of practice and purpose. There was clarity of roles. Integrity is what you want. “There has to be one person on the lookout for making goals congruent with the mission. In our case, there were three of us doing that, and from that time that we realized that kind of gatekeeping was what we needed to keep the mission pure, we were all set because there was integrity.” “I suggest you set the criteria for what you want within each department or job. Then enforce that criteria. Publish it ahead of time so everyone knows what’s involved. Make sure that everyone has contributed to the criteria so they will want to follow it. But those have to be your assumptions, and everyone has to abide by them.”

“You have to have a core that has a culture and an allegiance. Then you build on that by making sure everyone else buys into it.”

Decision-making was done by the school site council. That consists of six parents, six teachers, and the management team, who shares one vote. Decisions are always consensual. Parents are never a detriment; they have the expertise in many cases, and they have the passion. Any time a decision had to be made, you made sure first that everyone knew the criteria and had the training to do the job. For example, the

evaluations were done by parents and the management team by looking at the portfolios of the teachers. The criteria by which a portfolio was to be analyzed was first distributed and analyzed and subject to reflection before being put into practice. Then it was enforced. You couldn't get by because you were charming or well-liked. Your job is always to keep the mission pure by being sure that the decisions flow logically from it. There are some non-negotiables, and the mission is one of those. These should be in writing so that they are not subject to whimsy or personality. The terms were two years, with new parents and teachers sought by asking, "What have you contributed to this community?" Two year terms allowed the reins to rotate and keeps everyone mindful of their real jobs, teaching and learning. This sharing of leadership allows the executive aspect of the personality to function.

The proposal planned a k-5 school, but the parents decided on a K-8 model. The groups were "looped" K-1 and 2-3 and 4-5. Kate taught at first and then came out of the classroom when four sections of grades 6-8 were added. Maureen continued as a full-time teacher. The last two years she worked as a reading specialist, organizing her day to be through with class at 1 PM so she could devote herself to organizational duties from 1 through 5 PM. "When an administrator leaves the classroom, it's bad. Everyone should be in a class even if it's just one math class a day. You lose the context. You don't understand the lingo (what's the rubric for again?.) You're not empathetic with the concern for the issues. At my children's school (the independent Park School in Brookline) the Headmaster teaches 45 minutes a day. He does not permit interruptions during that time, even if what he's teaching is handwriting. There are critical connections that you only make when you're in the classroom with the students. That role diffuses tensions with the teachers, it shows them that teaching is the most important thing we can do in a school. This is part of the school culture and climate."

To facilitate cooperative decision-making, there would be early meetings (late hours) In order to get something on the agenda for the council, you would contact them through the PTA, through the individual who was responsible, or through the chairman. There was a lot of consistent communication about how you bring issues to the council so everyone felt enfranchised. The gatekeeper made the agenda. For example, a parent's complaint that "Miss Jones" was giving too much homework is not a council matter. But if the busses are not running on time, that is a school-wide issue and requires the council's attention. Having 72 hours to answer an email is a reasonable policy and fits with our culture of responsiveness. Make sure your decisions adhere to your mission. For example, for the behavior culture, we chose the responsive classroom model. This fit with our sense of an expectations rubric. The social justice curriculum worked without expectations for students, teachers, and parents. Don't overlay your culture with policies and codes. Make the culture show through what you do, who you are.

Maureen held **meetings for parents** once a month to stress the various points of the mission. Before school opened in September she held open house and went through every single policy so people would know what was expected of them. Then there were meetings on the grade-level curricula to be sure parents knew what to expect and how to help. Constant flow of communication to keep that mission in the forefront of everyone's

mind, so it looks the same to everyone. Lots of training. One of the best things about having multiple managers was their ability to deliver so much of the mission among the three..at every sped meeting, at every budget meeting, at every request for or demonstration of professional development. This is why we're here. Are you here for this reason, too? Ask the question and demand the right answer of your people.

The management team was evaluated by a sub-committee of the Council, two parents and two teachers, according to explicit criteria. (Tom Johnson has the list of standards for principals that they used.) The pre-articulated standards for evaluation made it plain that you can't assign your frustration with your child's SPED progress or the fact that your request for Professional development was denied to the team's evaluation. There was never any problem. There could have been, but there was none. People always kept to their criteria; the self-evaluation done by the management team was always harder on themselves than the parents or the teachers.

It is important to discuss how ideas will be discussed. For example, if someone wanted a basal reader program, as a leader of the professional development I would ask the teachers do they want this kind of reading program.. If the teachers said yes, then we would bring in all the publishers and have the teachers evaluate the various programs until we had a decision. My job as manager is to frame the discussion. I am the gate keeper who is sure that the discussion is not going to be frivolous. Then the teachers make the decision since they're the ones doing the daily work and who know what they and their students need. What's the point of sending them to professional development training if you don't rely on their expertise?

My suggestion is that administrative terms should be limited to 5 years. In the 4th year someone should be identified who will take over, and that year they should shadow the person. This would safeguard the return to the classroom.

BEST PRACTICES

- Vision and mission have to be aligned through the strategy of goals to see them through. Decisions must reflect mission.
- A gate-keeper function provides integrity for the mission to be consistently reflected in all decisions and carried through school programs.
- Clarity of purpose and practice must be articulated through policy, so that there is even a proper way to talk about how ideas are discussed.
- Teachers are the experts; administration should facilitate their expertise.
- Parents must subscribe to the mission and the school should provide frequent conversation to help them do that.
- Teams are the best approach to decision-making.
- Multiple managers is the best organizational structure.

Patrick Lyndon Pilot School – Interview 2

(Note: this interview was done with the two remaining members of the Management Team. The first interview was done with the newly retired third member of the Management Team.)

Under Boston’s pilot school program, four teachers submitted a proposal for a school eleven years ago. Its **mission** is to create a school that focuses on creating a community of learners, emphasizes critical thinking skills and active learning and utilizes differentiated instruction. The Patrick Lyndon Pilot School now serves 480 students and is located in West Roxbury. As a pilot school, it is freed from many of the constraints imposed by teacher union contracts, is given a large amount of autonomy by the Boston School Committee, is intended to explore new approaches to teaching and learning and is expected to share best practices with other schools, giving it many of the characteristics of a charter school.

The Lyndon Pilot School was chosen to be interviewed because of its **organizational structure** and school size. A Management Team runs the school on a day to day basis. Originally, three of the four teachers that were granted the right to organize a pilot school decided to not hire a principal and run the school themselves (the fourth teacher wanted only to teach). They found that having a team of three experienced teachers gave them a real sensitivity to teachers’ issues, led them to recognize the importance of professional development to the success of the school, and provided a support structure for decision making that allowed them to keep afloat during the early years of the school. All three members of the Management Team continued teaching at least one class a day in order to not lose sight of their real objective – helping children learn.

Responsibilities were divided among the three teachers: one was a site facilitator, another covered grades K-3 and the third covered grades 4-8. Other duties that did not naturally fall into one of these categories were distributed among the Management Team based on their particular skills and interests.

At the end of last year, one of the three members of the Management Team retired. The remaining two leaders, with some consultation from Superintendent Payzant, have decided to not hire a third person and to run the school as a pair. One member continues to cover K-3 and the other covers 4-8, and all administrative tasks were split between the two. They expect some confusion until the new roles are well understood by the teachers and parents.

Decision making on curriculum at the Lyndon School is shared among the Management Team and the teachers. An Education Committee, made up of all teachers in the school, will assess any research based recommendation submitted by another faculty member. All teachers meet weekly for 90 minutes before the start of school to jointly review and discuss all ongoing initiatives. They are currently focusing on unpacking the standards that are part of the Massachusetts Frameworks and have divided themselves into subgroups to tackle this particular initiative. HR issues are primarily addressed by the

Management Team, using the established policies. Parental involvement is under the purview of one of the Management Team members and is supported by a Parent Outreach Committee.

A major emphasis is on the professional development of staff. The Management Team believes that a highly trained staff is crucial to establishing a learning community and provides enormous benefits to the school environment. All teachers complete classes during the summer and they all attend a 5 day professional development program just prior to the start of school organized by the Management Team. Funding for professional development comes from multiple sources, such as grants, whole school improvement funds, and the budget.

Similar to a charter school's **Board of Trustees**, the Lyndon School has an elected School Site Council (SSC), made up of five teachers, five parents, two community members, and the Management Team. The Management Team has one vote on the Council. The SSC is responsible for developing a comprehensive school plan, creating all policies, preparing and monitoring the budget, hiring, monitoring communications and evaluations, and continuously assessing the focus areas for the Council. The Management Team is evaluated by the Boston School Committee, however.

Best Practices

- Professional development is a very high priority at the school.
- Teachers are involved in all educational decisions and most other decisions that would affect their classrooms.
- The multi-leader model has worked in an urban setting.
- The school leaders have continued to teach, at least part time, giving them an ongoing awareness and perspective of the issues confronting teachers every day.
- The multi-leader model was not chosen because of specific values that needed to be supported within the school, but because the founding teachers had been dissatisfied with their previous experiences working for principals and they wanted to create an environment that was sensitive to teacher needs.

Memorial School, Milford, MA

Robert Tremblay has been the **Principal** at Memorial School for the past 5 years and one of only five Principals since the school was established in 1958. His assistant, Francis Anderson, is also his predecessor and mentor as he was the Principal for nine years prior to Robert arriving and now fills the role of **Assistant to the Principal**. A few years prior to Robert arriving at the school, the **structure consisted of a Principal and Head Teachers** who taught part-time and took on other administrative responsibilities. Eventually, the positions of Head Teacher were eliminated and the Assistant to the Principal position was incorporated. The title of the position was carefully chosen as it, “does not imply that the person who is in this position is certified as a teacher or as an administrator.” Rather, the person who is the assistant has “leadership experience and able to wear many hats.” The title also facilitates hiring while dealing with Teachers’ Union Constraints and certification requirements

The great reputation of this school within Milford and the surrounding communities is reflected in the very low attrition (3 out of 61 staff members left last year due to retirement) and the number of applicants they receive when a position becomes available (120 applicants for the 3 vacancies mentioned above). Not only did I have the opportunity to talk with Robert at length about his school, but I also had the opportunity to shadow him throughout the morning, attend an administrative staff meeting, and talk with a teacher in the afternoon. All three encounters reinforced that the school’s structure is an effective model for this school.

Mission: The Mission is posted at the front entrance of the school and in the parent and teacher handbooks. It is embraced by everyone who works for the school as it is explained to all candidates and then used as a guide when making daily decisions. **Core Values are incorporated into the Mission** and the staff are continuously reminded about how these values should be incorporated into all that they do both in and out of the classroom. While the Core Values are part of the school’s approach to education, the next step that Mr. Tremblay would like to take with his school is to formally establish a Character Education component as he believes that this will further enhance the school’s environment. For Example, when Bob first arrived at the school, students were recognized for demonstrating Core Values through the “Good Citizenship Award.” Bob soon realized that these awards became “watered down” so he eliminated the program until a more credible one could be established that would truly create a better learning environment.

Although the “buck stops” at the Principal level when it comes to **making administrative decisions**, the Principal makes every effort to include everyone in the process who is effected by the outcome of the decision. The administrative staff meeting included the Principal, Assistant to the Principal, School Nurse, Director of SPED, Adjustment Counselor and Robert’s Administrative Assistant. I witnessed this first hand in the staff meeting during which the administrators were trying to resolve an issue involving staffing needs. Robert’s approach was to have the staff discuss it and come up

with a solution by a certain day and if they couldn't resolve the issue he would resolve it for them. He has a high level of trust in his staff and in the Superintendent who always backs up his decisions. Robert equated the Superintendent in his district with the Board of Trustees at a Charter School. Robert did not discount his Administrative Assistant's opinion as she often seemed most knowledgeable of all the issues in the school as they effect the daily operations. In fact, at one point I said to Bob, "if I really want to know anything about this school I could ask Lori and she really has her finger on the pulse here."

Curriculum decisions are made at the district level by the **curriculum council** comprised of teachers who are selected by their principals for their expertise in their subject area. The structure supports this approach as all teachers are required to attend three in-service days per school year and those teachers who are part of the curriculum council meet with their "**curriculum teams**" so that from K through 12 there is continuity within the subject matter.

According to Massachusetts Department of Education every public school is required to have a **School Council**. This group of parents, teachers, administrators and community members **give parents an opportunity to be involved in decisions that effect their children's** education including goal setting, review of annual school budget, formulating a school improvement plan and identifying educational needs of the students. The members of the Council are voted by parents of the school community and can nominate themselves for this position. The Principal of the school can decide the composition of the Council which at Memorial School is a proportionate number of Staff and Parent Representatives and community members who cannot exceed the combined total of staff and parents. **The Council is co-chaired by the principal and a parent representative.** Of the 506 students at Memorial school, approximately 180 parents are actively involved at the school either through School Council, Parent Teacher Organization, Room Parents or classroom volunteers. Parents are encouraged and welcome to volunteer and all events are easily accessible on the website for the school.

Since Robert has been principal, not one grievance has been filed as he is able to anticipate individual's needs and is constantly visible and available to his staff. If a staff person did have a valid concern, however, there is a **grievance process** in place that staff must follow so as to not undermine authority. Robert recommends to the Superintendent who should be hired for the school but he involves many staff and administrators in the process and requires that the candidate teach a lesson in the classroom while be observed by the interview committee.

While the leadership structure of Memorial School is a single person in the role of Principal, the method by which he leads reflects a more cooperative approach to decision making and leadership than a dictatorship. At this school, the School Council together with the individual department leaders and administrators, are responsible for ensuring that the Principal does not abuse his powers. The first group is comprised of parents, staff and outside community members and the latter are those individuals who are affected by the decisions. Additionally, because the Principal involves all the key players

in decisions that are made through the use of weekly staff meetings at which all constituents are represented, that there is little opportunity for the principal to abuse his leadership powers. This school is a clear example of how a single head of school model is an effective leadership model where each group has an opportunity to be involved in the final decision.

BEST PRACTICES

- The mission of a school must be visually obvious to everyone not only by the written words put into brochures and posters, but through the actions of all those in that community.
- In order for a leader(s) of a school to be effective, they must have a formal system in place that requires collaborative decision making. This is to ensure that all members of the school community who are affected by the decision are involved in the process.
- A leader of the school may make the final decision when consensus cannot be reached, but should always look for input from those who are affected by the decision.
- A leader sometimes has to make unpopular decision, but should be well informed of all the options and be prepared to explain how the decision is made.

Mystic Valley Regional Charter School

Unique Mission: “A shared vision leads to effective implementation of programs. Without a shared, frequently communicated vision, you won’t have the school you want and there will always be factions. You need to have someone, or several someones, being custodians of the mission and being sure it gets implemented in every decision.”

Direct Instruction model leads itself to Core Knowledge. Year-long lesson plans codified out of Baltimore. Now grants an International Baccalaureate to 12th graders. This year (2005) was the first 12th grade graduation.

Organization is collegial, collaborative decision-making model. Dr. Biegler has been the Director since he was a founder 12 years ago. Chris has been a part of the team since the beginning, too. Between them they develop the collaborative culture that allows decisions to be fully participatory and then implemented. There is communication and coordination throughout the school because that is the most effective way for teachers to implement the “curriculum,” that is, what we think is important for the students to learn. Cooperation is a determinant of children’s achievement.

The mission is supported by the fact that they have had the same director since day one, so the school has stuck to its founding principles. Dr. B sets the tone and models the walk he wants for everyone to follow. Academic achievement can only be accomplished through control in the classroom. They use a universal model of behavior and classroom expectations from kindergarten to grade 12, so there’s no doubt as to what is expected. The mission is supported through two full weeks of new teacher training. This is a most important point: do not settle for anything less than complete endorsement of the mission from new hires. In order to hire, they use a predictive index to test applicants against a composite baseline for their founding teachers, whom they consider “expert” in the school’s mission and in teaching. The mission statement hangs in every classroom and every administrative office. People look at it before they announce a decision. Every decision made has to be in line with the mission, and since the staff is expected to make the mission work on a daily basis, the staff has input and access to all decisions.

Decision-making is done through a team approach. There are lead teachers who also act as mentors and quasi-administrators. Everyone floats in and out of classrooms. They consciously want to avoid what they consider to be the “public school model” of the principal being in the office; rather, their administrative team is constantly in the classroom, both working as teachers and helping other teachers with student management. They want to avoid any kind of “adversarial” management structure. The groups are K-3; 4-6; 7-8; and then there are department chairpeople in the high school. The lower school has 4 classes of each grade, with one of the 4 teachers being a lead teacher. Lead teachers work with all the teachers in their group, cooperatively, and also have a Professional Development Coordinator for their grade team. These PDCs are in charge of the placement of children since all groups are ability-based, and there has to be constant evaluation of the children’s progress in order to place them properly. Every K-2

class also has an instructional assistant who is a teacher trainee; in grades 3-6 the team shares one per grade. There are an additional six full-time “floating” teachers who are the resources for absences, since daily substitutes may not guarantee the continuance of the mission. These teachers are also resources for conversation and for team-building. The ethos of the school is “all hands on deck.” Just because you are a business manager, you are still expected to contribute to the job of the school, and that is teaching and learning. Everyone teaches at least one class per day. There is a collaborative culture of service. “If a kid gets sick, I can go clean it up so the teacher can continue to teach if the custodian is busy. My job is to facilitate the teacher. When I’m the teacher, others will facilitate my teaching.”

Many functions are outsourced and the internal personnel are in charge of making sure that the external companies are doing what they have been hired to do. Evaluations, bookkeeping, MTRB, Human Resources and accounting are all outsourced to give the Business Manager the time to teach. “Let the experts do the education. That is the crucial job done around here.” They want only like-minded people to work at the school. “It is very important to keep the lines clear and make all the decision-makers approachable. This is a team. Since we don’t have a union, we are able to act quickly. We owe it to our teachers, then, to treat them the best not because they have a union, but because they don’t. Trust is built on even-handed policies that everyone contributed to making so they know it’s fair and equitable and helping to build our school.

Parents are involved on the Board of Trustees. It is a small board, but very good at raising money to provide the kinds of support that is needed to make the mission a reality. The idea of keeping the ideology “pure” (we only want like-minded people working here and being a student or his family here) is fully embraced by the Board. For example, they only accept students in grades K-5 (except siblings) because they feel that the mission of the school needs to be understood in a way that would be difficult for a newcomer to the 6-12 grades to internalize it. Therefore, the Board accepts the financial burden of a full, but not maximized enrollment. They have hundreds on their waitlist. The board backs us 100%, and we are blunt with families about our expectations for their involvement and their children’s behavior. “We have a uniform policy, a virtues program, a family pledge. You have to take the whole package if you want this school for your kid.” Our board and teachers are well-known to each other.

They have never looked at other kinds of organization. There has been stability from day one, since the founder is the leader and has the kind of style that encourages complete participation. The curriculum and academics are set, given the Core Knowledge frameworks and the IB frameworks and the behavior model. Anyone with an idea is encouraged to share it at any level, but usually the lead teacher will share it with the PDC where it will then be discussed in full meeting as an agenda item with everyone participating. That way, if the idea isn’t voted for, everyone understands why and what criteria needs to be met in order for that idea to succeed next time.

BEST PRACTICES

- A shared mission, frequently discussed and referred to, leads to effective implementation of programs.
- Hiring, even of substitutes, conforms to mission and all new hires receive intensive, prolonged training so they can infuse their teaching with mission practices. In this way the purpose of the school and the practices in it are consistent.
- The leaders of the school support the philosophy that teaching is the heart of the school, and everything that is done in the school is done to facilitate the teaching and the learning process.
- Trust is viewed as essential, and ways to cultivate it are honored.
- Some functions that are not teacher-centric are outsourced..
- Decision-making is best done by a team, so that those closest to the teaching are involved in its management.
- Parents are consulted and involved in the highest level of decision-making.

Using online resources, the following schools were also investigated.

Massachusetts Charter Schools:

Abby Kelley Foster Charter Public School, Worcester, MA
(508) 854-8400; www.akfcs.org

Administration: (BOT has 7 members) Referred to as School Leadership: Superintendent of Schools; High School Principal; Middle School Principal;; Elementary School Principal; Director of Special Education; Director of Government Relations; Director of Enrollment; Assistant Director of Enrollment; Controller; Technology Coordinator; Human Resources Coordinator

Marblehead Community Charter Public School, Marblehead, MA
(781) 631-3165 www.marbleheadcharter.com

Administration: (BOT has 13 members) Head of School; Asst. HOS; Special Education Coordinator; Asst to the HOS; Business Manager; Health Services Coordinator; Director of Nutrition Services; Technology Coordinator; Fitness Coordinator; Community Partnership Coordinator; Kitchen Manager

Seven Hills Charter Public School, Worcester, MA
(508) 799-7500 www.sevenhillscharter.org

Administration: (BOT n/a) Special Services Coordinator; Bookkeeper; Administrative Assistant; Interim Principal; Business Manager; Administrative Assistant; Executive Assistant; Superintendent; Student Info Manager; Director of Buildings & Operations;

Colorado Charter Schools:

Schools in Colorado were looked at because of the large number of charter schools the state has; many being Core Knowledge Schools, some with Character Education as part of their mission. All the following charter schools were similar in size and mission.

Academy Charter School, Castle Rock, CO (303) 660-4881

Administration: (BOT has 6 members) Dean, Assistant Dean, Business Manager, Office Manager, Secretary, Volunteer Coord., Home School Coord.,

Academy of Charter Schools, Westminster, CO (303) 289-8088

Administration: N/A

Alta Vista Charter School, Lamar, CO 81052 (719) 336-2154

Administration: (BOT has 7 members) Superintendent; Superintendent's Secretary (student count/school board secretary/ food service/end of year report; Receptionist (monthly all-school calendar/substitute coordinator/staff newsletter/leave requests/districts record/mail); Technology coordinator, Personnel Director & Personnel Secretary; Supervisor of Financial Services (payroll/employee benefits); Purchasing Secretary (purchase order processing/accounts payable/accounts receivable); Curriculum Secretary; Special Services Secretary.

Aspen Community, Woody Creek, CO (970) 923-4646

Administration: Executive Director; Comptroller; Administrative Assistant; Buildings and Grounds. Then each of the three schools just has a Principal & secretary.

Aurora Academy, Aurora, CO (303) 367-5983

Administration: Administrator; Asst. Administrator; Volunteer Coordinator; Enrollment Coordinator; Administrative Assistant.

Challenge to Excellence Charter School, Douglas, CO (303) 841-9816

Administration: Governing Council Members: 8 members

Cherry Creek Academy, Englewood, CO (303) 779-8988

Administration: Director, Assistant Director, Operations Manager, Administrative Assistant (Office Manager), Administrative Assistant (Lunchroom Supervisor), Receptionist. (CCA Parent Senate; 9 member)

Cheyenne Mountain Charter Academy, Colorado Springs, CO (719) 471-1999

Administration: (BOT has 6 members) Principal, Assistant to Principal, Administrative Assistant

Alternative Structures and Best Practices - Conclusion

“Shared leadership” is a term used throughout this report that requires definition. Shared leadership can be exemplified in different ways, through multiple organizational structures, including team structures, single head of school structures, parent cooperatives, etc. For the task force shared leadership means that quality of relying on participatory methods to address concerns and opportunities that require decisions, as contrasted by a authoritarian, controlling mechanism that precludes the collaboration necessary for a constructive work environment.

While some experts may argue shared-decision making is ill-fated in the initial stages because of the training costs and confusion, many more experts argue the opposite and offer research to prove that long-term benefits outweigh the problems associated with the initiation stage of change. Deal and Peterson use the metaphor of a potter to illustrate how school leaders need to shape the elements of school culture as a potter shapes clay—“patiently, with skill, and with an emerging idea of what the pot will eventually look like.” Implementation takes time, but the proper shaping involves working backwards from intended results in a way that builds on the strengths of a school as a learning organization rather than an empty hole to fill with programs.

From the school visits and investigations, it is clear that a variety of organizational strategies are working successfully. We found most charter schools use the traditional principal structure. In so many cases, the common success factor among all of these schools was leadership that recognized the value and the power of sharing decision making with their teachers. The DOE recognizes the worth of collaboration between principals and teachers in its website standards for principals. It is very encouraging to see that actual experiences in the field reinforce what has been found in the research and literature.

In summation, according to Riehl & Leithwood in their brief entitled “What We Know about Successful School Leadership”, there are three important practices which are critical to the success of leadership in any educational organization. These are “setting directions, developing people, and developing the organization.”

Setting direction is: developing the school’s vision; creating shared meaning of the vision with all invested partners; creating a bridge that connects vision to reality, raising participants’ expectations; fostering teachers out of the isolation of the classroom and establishing group goals; continuously monitoring the performance of the school; communicating.

Developing people is: offering continuous professional development in order for teachers to remain current with best-practice teaching strategies; engaging in mutually respectful dialogue and feedback on teaching practice; modeling constructive leadership.

Developing the organization is: managing the school's partners both within and outside of the school's environment; "...establishing productive inter-organizational relationships. To effectively position their schools within their environments, and to respond to legitimate concerns from parents and others, educational leaders are client-centered, proactive, and focused." (2003)

Developing the organization is also the idea of allowing staff to collaborate on issues which directly affect them, building the structures that allow them to achieve their goals. Not only does the staff achieve its goals, but the school also benefits by retaining its staff over the long term. Studies show that teachers are more likely to remain at institutions in which the culture is teacher-centric and they feel that their opinions and professionalism are valued. Developing the organization is synonymous with strengthening the school culture or maintaining a positive environment to foster the values, goals, mission, and attitudes of partners of the organization.

At the Lyndon School in West Roxbury, getting the school started and moving in the right direction of a team-led, shared decision making organization was not easy. However, the team had a vision and worked slowly, effectively, collaboratively, and patiently to reach the vision. Reaching the goals identified by the vision required dedication, learning from experience, flexible participants, and a culture of trust. David Marsh says, "Giving up the futile search for the silver bullet is the basic precondition for overcoming dependency and beginning to take actions that do matter.(There is) the very clear research finding that student achievement increases substantially in schools with collaborative work cultures that foster a professional learning community among teachers and others..." Similarly, at the Memorial School in Milford a school with a traditional principal at its head, decisions are made through a collaborative approach whereby those who are affected by the decision have input into the process.